

# **New primary school for North East Didcot**

## **School specification document for potential sponsors of a new primary school in Didcot, Oxfordshire**

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## Section A: Introduction and process

Under section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the ‘free school presumption’) where a local authority identifies the need to establish a new school it must, in the first instance, seek proposals to establish an academy. Oxfordshire County Council has identified the need to establish a new primary school in Didcot, currently planned to open in September 2023 (this date will be kept under review, informed by the speed of delivery of the associated housing development).

The new school will chiefly serve a permitted new housing development of 1,880 homes in north east Didcot, construction of which is underway. This school forms part of the strategic planning for additional school capacity to meet the expected growth in pupil numbers arising from housing growth both permitted and planned in the South Oxfordshire Local Plan.

**The authority is therefore seeking proposals from appropriate providers to sponsor this new school. This new school would be deemed a free school.**

To inform the selection of a sponsor, Oxfordshire County Council conducted a public consultation on this educational specification for the new school from 16 June to 14 July 2021. The consultation resulted in one response. The consultation has informed this specification, which was approved by the Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet Member responsible for Education on 21 September 2021.

Oxfordshire County Council runs a two-stage application process, first inviting outline expressions of interest from potential sponsors, and then shortlisting up to three applicants to submit a detailed proposal. *This specification guides applicants in the information that should be included in the expression of interest and detailed proposals, and should be read in conjunction with the relevant application forms.*

### **Key Dates (subject to change):**

- 6 October – 3 November 2021: Expressions of Interest (EoI) invited from potential sponsors.
- November 2021: Shortlisting of EoI received, with reference to how well they meet the specification for the school.
- December 2021 – January 2022: Shortlisted potential sponsors develop detailed bids for submission by midday on 10 January 2022.
- w/b 14 February (tbc): Interviews and presentations by shortlisted bidders.
- February 2022: The county council’s choice of preferred sponsor is communicated to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC).
- April 2022: RSC makes the final decision on the sponsor for the new school.
- May 2022-August 2023 – the county council works with the approved sponsor to establish the new school
- September 2023: New school opens.\*

\* The timing of the transfer of the school site is related to the number of housing occupations in the legal agreement attached to the north east Didcot development. At this stage, we cannot confirm whether this trigger will be met in time for a 2023 opening; if the development makes slower progress than previously forecast, the opening of the school may be deferred.

Please note: it is essential that by the time of presentation, proposers have achieved DfE approved sponsor status. Without this, their application cannot be considered. Information about this process is available from [www.gov.uk/government/collections/academy-sponsorship](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/academy-sponsorship) .

In the first instance, Expressions of Interest should be submitted using Part 1 of the Oxfordshire County Council New School Proposal Form. The New School Proposal Form and this Specification Document will be available from the county council's website once the application period has opened.

Further information is available from, and Expressions of Interest should be sent to: [academies@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:academies@oxfordshire.gov.uk):

*In completing the Expression of Interest (Section A) applicants should summarise their experience of providing high quality education of a type relevant to this specification, as well as of delivering complex projects on time and to budget.*

## **Section B: The school and its context**

The adopted South Oxfordshire Local Plan plans for significant housing growth across Didcot, totaling 6,300 houses between 2006 and 2027, with further growth planned immediately to the west of Didcot in the Vale of White Horse Local Plan.

Oxfordshire County Council is planning school capacity strategically across Didcot to meet the needs of recent and planned housing growth. This includes a number of new schools:

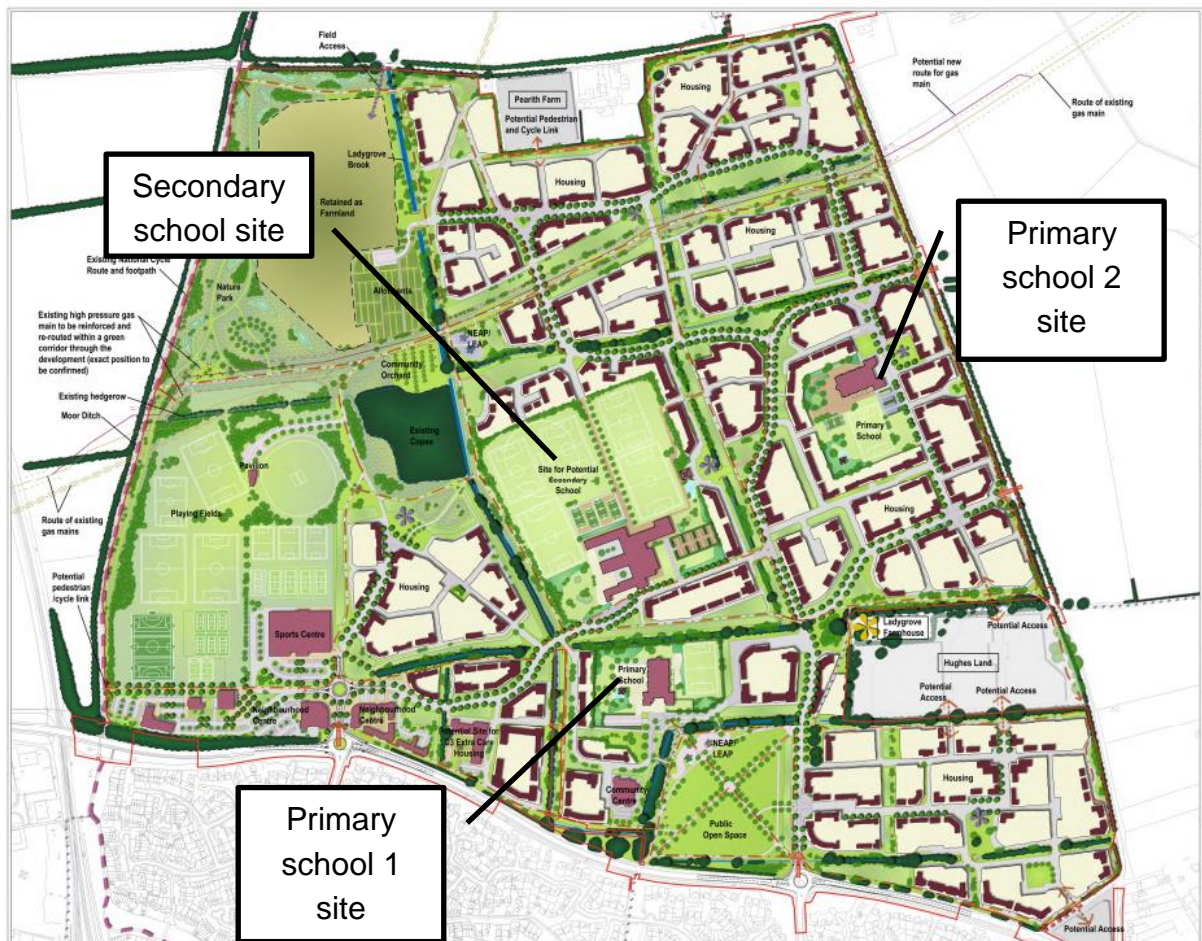
- Two new primary schools, a secondary school and a University Technical College opened between 2015 and 2018 in the Great Western Park development to the west of Didcot.
- North East Didcot is planned to include two new primary schools (including the one covered by this specification) and a secondary school.
- Up to three primary schools and a special school are included in plans for further development to the west of Didcot.

As well as the new and planned schools in Didcot, there are a community nursery school, six other primary schools and two single-sex secondary schools within the town, with further primary school capacity provided in surrounding villages. Together these form the Didcot partnership of schools, which includes a variety of governance

structures: three community primary schools; one voluntary controlled and one voluntary aided Church of England primary school; two single academy trust primary schools; with five multi-academy trusts (Activate Learning Education Trust, GLF Schools, Omnia Learning Trust, Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust and Ridgeway Education Trust) responsible for the remaining schools.

The host site for this new school is the 1,880-home development permitted in 2017 as application P15/S2902/O. The first phases of development, which include the location of the school site, were granted Reserved Matters approval in 2018 and 2019, and are underway. By the planned opening date of the school, 400-500 houses are projected to be completed within the development.

The illustrative masterplan below was submitted as part of the planning application, and shows the location of the two primary schools and the secondary school planned for this site.



This specification covers the first primary school, to the south of the development.

The planned opening date of the school is September 2023, subject to the progress of the associated housing development.

There is not yet a confirmed timescale for the secondary school and second primary school, which will also serve other housing developments planned for the surrounding area. These are expected to open in the mid-late 2020s.

The approximate postcode is OX11 7SB. The site for the new primary school is 2.22ha. The school site will be owned by Oxfordshire County Council, and is expected to be made available to the academy on a 125-year lease, with the usual terms pursuant to the 2010 Academies Act. The school is being designed and built by Oxfordshire County Council.

Design work for the new school is already underway. It will be a 2-storey building, with Key Stage 2 classrooms upstairs and Nursery/Reception/Key Stage 1 classrooms downstairs. The provisional site layout of this school is shown below:



This school will be:

- A 2 form entry school.
- Age range: 2-11.
- Admission number: 60
- Total places provided for Reception to Year 6: 420 places.
- Nursery places provided: 90 full-time equivalent nursery places. At least 12 fte of these places should be for funded 2-year-olds.
- Co-educational.

The school will need to be flexible in how it organises classes to respond to the growth in local school-age population, including children who move to the development after the normal age of starting school. Proposers will be expected to demonstrate how they will ensure the needs of new residents of the development are met without promoting or encouraging a large-scale relocation of existing pupils from other schools.

It would be expected that the school initially opens with an admission number of 30 Reception places; a mixed aged Year 1 and Year 2 class may also be appropriate in the first instance, depending on how the local population is growing. The school would then be expected to increase its Reception intake to 60 in line with the local population growth, with the rate of growth being agreed with the local authority.

The school should provide nursery places from the outset, in line with the local need for provision, as advised by the county council's Early Education Sufficiency & Access team. Termly intakes should be admitted until the nursery provision is at full capacity. The school will also be expected to contribute towards meeting local needs for wraparound care and childcare.

The school's catchment is expected to be primarily the north east Didcot strategic development area, but may draw from a wider area to meet population pressures in the north and east of Didcot.

The new school will be included within the county council's coordinated admission scheme, but the successful sponsor will be responsible for consulting on, and publishing, its specific admissions policy.

Information about Oxfordshire's school admissions and home-to-school transport is available at <https://www2.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/public-site/school-admission-rules-and-policies>

*In completing the Expression of Interest (Section B) applicants should clearly and succinctly set out how their knowledge and experience, including of the local area, would be used to inform their plans to establish and grow this particular school.*

## **Section C: Educational Vision**

Oxfordshire County Council's vision is for an autonomous and self-improving education system; we are committed to enabling schools and settings to promote excellence and lead their own improvement. This is set within the context of a well-planned continuum of provision from birth to 25 that meets the needs of children and young people in Oxfordshire. Our ultimate purpose is to improve attainment, achievement and well-being, including the progression into employment for young people, by developing collective capacity in the county.

An academy sponsor is sought to work with the county council to achieve this vision.

*In completing the Expression of Interest (Section C) applicants should clearly and succinctly set out their educational vision for the new school. As a minimum, this must include the following:*

- *A strong educational vision and a curriculum delivery based on high standards of attainment for each key stage;*
- *Groups and organisations seen as being key partners, and plans for engagement and joint-working with those partners both during the pre-opening period and after opening;*
- *Excellent support facilities to meet the needs of all children, including looked after children, those with Special Educational Needs, etc;*
- *A commitment to excellent outcomes and high quality of teaching and learning.*

## **Section D: Education Plan**

*Applicants shortlisted to submit a detailed proposal will be required to fully explain and evidence in Section D of the proposal form how the school will achieve its educational vision under the following headings. Applicants should take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance, which provides more detail on the evidence which should be provided.*

### **D1 – Curriculum**

*Applicants will need to demonstrate an ambitious and deliverable curriculum plan which is consistent with the vision and pupil intake.*

The school should:

- Have a clear rationale for the proposed curriculum, demonstrating understanding of the needs of the expected intake, and an ambitious approach to meeting those needs.
- Provide sustainably good or outstanding education with an exciting and inspiring, broad and balanced curriculum across the key stages which is deliverable with the resources which will be available.
- Rigorously focus on educational standards to ensure that every child achieves their potential, and goals and national expectations are met or exceeded.
- Have strategies in place to support pupils to be successful when they enter and leave the school.
- Develop a strong moral and caring ethos, ensuring care and support for the whole child.
- Seek out and share best practice within and beyond the school, promoting innovation and creativity in learning and teaching.

There should be a particular focus on support for vulnerable learners and children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities.

The school should:

- Ensure an inclusive learning environment in which all pupils, including those with special or additional educational needs and those with disabilities, are supported and enabled to make appropriate progress.
- Promote inclusive opportunities for the most vulnerable children and have a strong focus on equalities, early intervention, and supporting the needs of the local community.
- Provide specialist support to address each learner's specific needs and to improve their progress.
- Provide a learning environment for learners to benefit from specialist small group teaching and interventions as part of a personalised learning programme.

## **D2 – Measuring performance**

*Applicants will need to demonstrate their approach to measuring school and pupil performance effectively and setting challenging targets.*

The school should:

- Have ambitious and realistic targets for pupil performance, behaviour and attendance, with a clear strategy to achieve them.
- Instil rigorous processes of self-evaluation and continual improvement, including recognising the importance of pupil and parent input in these processes.
- Identify baseline measures of pupils' attainment and put in place an assessment and data tracking system that will allow pupil performance to be monitored and continuously improved.
- Review success measures and targets regularly to improve the school's performance. This could include benchmarking assessment data with other relevant schools.
- Use appropriate data to inform teaching and drive progression and attainment for all pupils.
- Implement strategies to ensure that attendance of children matches the attendance rates of the highest performing authorities.
- Engage parents/carers in supporting and encouraging their children's learning, including through regular reporting.

## **D3 – Staffing structure**

*Applicants will need to set out a staffing structure that will deliver the planned curriculum within the expected income levels with a focus on outstanding teaching (including strategies for effective performance management).*



The school should:

- Have an appropriate balance of roles, experience and expertise e.g. senior leadership team, middle managers, SENCO, subject leaders, teachers, support staff, etc.
- Maintain outstanding and dynamic leadership, management and governance.
- Attract, retain and develop the highest quality teachers and support staff to ensure good or better teaching and learning, and effective and motivated workforces.
- Ensure suitably qualified and trained staff to advise and support the local workforce to deliver quality teaching and learning experiences for children with special educational needs, and support for their families.
- Plan the growth of staffing within the funding available, until the school is at full capacity in line with planned pupil numbers, and have credible contingency plans to adapt the staffing structure and still deliver a sufficient curriculum if income were less than expected.

#### **D4 – Ensuring inclusivity, safeguarding and strong communities**

The school should:

- Ensure that the needs of all children are fully provided for, and that the school will be fully inclusive.
- Ensure safeguarding and well-being responsibilities are met.
- Aim to attract pupils from different backgrounds and different communities so that they all feel welcome and play a full and active role in the school.
- Be welcoming to pupils of all faiths/world views and none.
- Encourage pupils from different communities, faiths and backgrounds to work together, learn about each other's customs, beliefs and ideas and respect each other's views.
- Prepare children for life in modern Britain including through the teaching of spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) education. Consideration must be given to relevant issues, for example how the school will teach PHSE, adhere to the Prevent Duty
- Promote fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.
- Meet the needs of its pupils and local community through enrichment and extended services, for example, breakfast clubs, sports clubs, homework clubs and music/art clubs.
- Work in partnership with the county council and other educational providers to contribute towards meeting the collective responsibility to secure the best for all Oxfordshire's learners, including participating in school-to-school support; a strong commitment to cooperating with Fair Access protocols; and supporting

the strategic responsibilities of the county council to ensure sufficiency of high quality school places and improved educational outcomes through agreed sharing of data and information.

- Support the county council in delivering effective early intervention services, ensuring school readiness and supporting our most vulnerable learners and families.
- Work in partnership with wider services such as social care services, health and police to keep children safe, support families and build stronger communities.
- Be outward facing, playing a key role within its immediate community and the wider local economy, for example through opening up facilities to the community, and participating in community activities.
- Develop strategic alliances, partnerships and networks to better meet the needs of children and families in Didcot.

## **Section E: Capacity and Capability**

*Applicants shortlisted to submit a detailed proposal will be required to demonstrate in Section E that they have the capacity and capability to set up and run the new school, and that they have access to appropriate educational, financial and other expertise. As a minimum, this must include the following:*

- *The resources they would draw on and/or deploy to support the development of the new free school by the opening date*
- *Clear evidence that they have the range of skills and abilities necessary to set up and then run a school effectively, including: managing school finances; leadership; project management; marketing; human resources; safeguarding; and health and safety*
- *How the school would be organised and what the governance arrangements would look like, including a diagram of the proposed structures*

### **E1 – Experience and credentials**

Applicants will need to demonstrate:

- Appropriate roles, responsibilities and relevant experience to support the pre-opening and post-opening phases of the school's opening.
- A clear understanding of missing skills and experience (if any) of the team and a strategy to fill these gaps.
- Strong, relevant education expertise, for example strong school improvement experience, or substantial experience of delivering high quality education relevant to this specification.

### **E2 – Governance**

Applicants will need to demonstrate:

- A governance structure, and roles and responsibilities, that will ensure accountability and effective decision-making, and drive improvement in the new school.
- An understanding of what changes, if any, they would need to make to the existing governance structure.
- An assessment of any conflicts of interest and how they will be managed, including any financial transactions that are likely to take place between any member/trustee and the academy.
- A strategy for securing independent challenge to members and trustees.
- A plan to recruit and train high quality individuals to fill any gaps.

## Section F: Funding and Costs

Under Section 106 of the Town and County Planning Act, 1990, the county council has secured a 2.22ha site. The new school will be designed and constructed by the county council. The estimated cost of building the school is £12.9m, which will be fully funded from developer contributions secured by Section 106 agreements.

The local authority is required by the Department for Education to provide revenue funding towards pre-opening and post-opening costs of new schools.

The new school will qualify for the following financial support from the local authority:

- A pre-opening grant of £97,500.
- A loose furniture and equipment budget of £250 per pupil.
- A post-opening grant of £283,000.
- Guaranteed revenue funding for pupils in the first three years of opening, through the APT, in line with the local authority's projection of pupil numbers.

In addition, the Department for Education will provide a one-off grant payment of £25,000 to the successful sponsor to cover the legal costs incurred in establishing the new free school.

*Applicants shortlisted to submit a detailed proposal will be required to submit a robust financial plan for the school, covering the period until the school is operating at full capacity. They should detail their contingency planning should pupil intakes grow slower than expected, given the inevitable unpredictability of future housing delivery. This plan could be in the form of the DfE's School Financial Template, or similar tool.*

## Section G: Impact and Equalities Assessment

As prescribed by section 9 of the Academies Act 2010 and section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the local authority must assess the potential impact of any new school on existing educational provision in the area. The local authority must also consider whether the new school would impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

The provision of a new school in north east Didcot is necessary as the scale of local housing and population growth is expected to generate more pupils than could be accommodated at existing nearby schools, and a new school in the heart of significant new housing developments is considered to be an important element of community building. Taking into account the high level of housing growth in Didcot, the impact of the proposed new primary school is not likely to be significant in the medium to long term. In the short-term, there may be some turbulence in pupil numbers at local schools, as patterns of parental preference shift in reaction to the new provision. However, it is not considered that this would be sufficient to threaten the viability of any existing schools.

The county council has sought to minimise any risks to the existing schools by writing into the school specification that the eventual sponsors will manage school growth in such a way as to not adversely affect existing schools, and will work closely with the existing partnership of schools. In the first instance the school would operate at below full capacity to minimise any impact on existing schools. The county council will keep under review data on the need for school places, and if the local population grows more slowly than expected, would consider delaying the opening of the school.

The new school is not expected to have an adverse impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

The new school is expected to have a positive impact on two specific groups with protected characteristics:

- Children and young people: the new school will help to minimise travel distances to school, and increase choice. If sufficient primary school places are not available within the heart of the community this can affect access to out of school activities, social contact with peers, travel patterns and community cohesion.
- Children with special educational needs: the new school will be expected to deliver high quality education for children with SEND, through a fully inclusive approach.