

Willowbrook Mead Primary Academy DSP (Designated Specialist Provision) Proposal to close DSP from end of 2025-26 academic year Consultation 15 May to 12 June 2026

Overview

In 2021 the DSP at Willowbrook Primary Academy was opened for 10 Key Stage 2 children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. (See page 2 for further information on DSPs.)

The DSP was opened with support from Leicester City Local Authority (LA) to meet demand for such places in the City. This was a five-year contract to meet a particular need at the time. The LA manages admissions for the DSP.

In 2024, due to the demand for places, the DSP capacity was expanded to 12 children, and the age range was expanded from Key Stage 2 to Key Stages 1 and 2.

We are planning to close this DSP at the end of this academic year because we are coming to the end of the five-year contract with the LA and because this particular DSP is no longer considered the most appropriate structure to effectively meet need.

Rationale

The DSP was originally established in response to a significant LA need for SEMH specialist places within Leicester City. Since that time, the wider SEND landscape across the city and Trust has evolved considerably.

Over recent years, The Mead Educational Trust has expanded its wider specialist provision, including the development of additional DSP capacity focused on autism, communication and interaction needs. This has helped release capacity within city special schools.

As part of this wider sufficiency planning, pupils currently attending the Willowbrook DSP have undergone long-term assessment and review processes with the LA. This has identified that their needs are more appropriately met within city special school provision rather than through the current DSP model.

The SEMH profile and complexity of need for pupils currently accessing the Willowbrook DSP means that the co-located DSP model is no longer considered the most appropriate long-term structure to effectively meet need.

All children currently placed within the DSP will continue to receive appropriate specialist provision through carefully planned transition arrangements led collaboratively with the LA, families and receiving settings.

It is worth noting that this is not a reduction in SEND capacity overall, but part of a reshaping of specialist provision across the Trust and city in response to changing patterns of need.

Further information on DSPs

DSP is a model for offering a co-located specialist facility in a mainstream school which allows pupils with SEND who have needs which would normally be beyond the capacity of the mainstream environment to have those needs met whilst still being able to access a mainstream curriculum.

The intention of a DSP is that pupils can still access some mainstream lessons but will also have the support of the DSP for certain aspects of their learning and for other needs. Many children with special needs can be successfully included into a mainstream school. Maintaining a place in a mainstream setting gives access to a broader curriculum for pupils with SEND and attainment is typically higher for pupils where this is an option. In addition, educating pupils with SEND alongside their peers in mainstream has significant benefits both for the pupils with SEND, who have access to the wider social life of the school, but also for the wider school community, as it creates a more diverse and inclusive culture.

Special Schools provide a significant degree of specialism and intensity of provision to pupils with very high SEND. DSPs provide an environment for pupils with SEND for whom the combination of specialist support and access to the mainstream school provision is appropriate.

DSP admissions go through the City Council Pupil Allocation Panel so are open to pupils from all over the City, not just from the school where the DSP is located and not just from The Mead Educational Trust.

The LA provides the funds for the development of DSPs and for the pupil places.