



£1.1 million special investment in Epsom school

More than 20 primary school places are being made available for autistic children in Surrey, with 12 from this September. A special educational needs (SEN) unit will be created at **Epsom Primary and Nursery School**, using existing classrooms.

The county's existing specialist provision in state schools – over 3,700 places – is full and the council wants to reduce its reliance on the independent sector. The most common additional needs of Surrey children who need a specialist placement are autism and communication and interaction.

The SEN unit was approved on Monday (July 4) by Councillor **Denise Turner-Stewart**, cabinet member for education and learning, who said: "There was very good support for this proposal in the consultation. This contributes to our £139million capital investment programme providing new school places in our local community and also reduce the reliance on home to school transport. I'm very happy to approve this decision."

Epsom is a £1.1m investment that will make 12 places available in September 2022 rising to its full capacity of 21 in September 2026. The 21 places will save the council £630,000 every year, by avoiding having to pay for the places at non-maintained independent schools. This will contribute to bringing down its multimillion pound dedicated schools grant deficit.

By 2030-31, the total number of Surrey pupils aged 4-19 with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) is forecast to be more than 2,500 higher than the 2020-21 total of around 11,000. The growing need for SEN places among primary pupils is expected to increase by 160 in the four years to 2024-25, when the council projects it will peak and then reduce.

Commissioning manager Jane Keenan said: "The most prevalent primary needs for pupils aged four to 11 who require a specialist school placement are autism and communication and interaction needs."

Refurbishment will take place over the summer and Epsom's SEN unit will open at the start of September in time for the new academic year.