
Report to CABINET



High Needs Provision in Mainstream Settings Capital Works (Brian Clarke Academy & Blue Coat School)

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mohon Ali, (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills)

Officer Contact: Paul Tinsley (Director of Education, Early Years and Skills)

Report Author: Jason Hudson (Schools Capital Project Manager)

23 March 2026

Reason for Decision

This report seeks cabinet approval for 2 capital projects that will offer additional places and enhance provision for pupils with additional needs who are based within the Cranmer Trust

It also seeks approval for the allocation of funding from the HNPCA and Basic Need Grant towards the schemes

Executive Summary

This report relates to 2 projects that will enhance existing provision and provide additional provision for pupils with additional needs. These proposals are now developed sufficiently for costs and proposals to be placed before Cabinet for a final decision.

These projects will create a total of 50 new places in mainstream secondary schools for children with additional needs

Currently the Local Authority has around £2.7m of Basic Need funding and £7.1m of High Needs Capital Allocation Funding. It is proposed that where projects will generate additional places these projects are funded from the HNPCA Grant provision

These developments reinforce Oldham's commitment to an inclusive system where specialist support is available earlier, within mainstream settings, reducing escalation of need and delivering better long-term outcomes for children and young people. This aligns directly with the government's vision that schools should be inclusive by design, with dedicated inclusion bases forming a core component of the future school estate.

Project Outlines and Recommendation

PROJECT ONE - Brian Clarke C of E Academy

Brian Clarke C of E Academy is an inclusive, co-educational, Church of England secondary school situated in Oldham Town Centre. The school caters to pupils aged 11–16. The existing capacity of

the school is eight forms of entry (8FE) equating to 1,200 pupils. As part of the Cranmer Education Trust, this academy is committed to inclusive education and already demonstrates strong SEND practice (Ofsted June 2025) and is a school of choice for families where children have SEND.

This proposal seeks funding to establish an Autism Education Resource Base (ERB). The ERB will address the increasing need for specialist, inclusive support for secondary students with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) in the borough. The base will provide a structured, nurturing environment within a mainstream secondary setting, enabling students with autism to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally while accessing a high quality, inclusive education close to home

This project proposal aims to deliver a new 2 storey extension which will include a dining extension and a **25 place Specialist Resource Provision (SRP)**, without major alterations to the existing building. The new RP will sit above an enlarged dining area and provide two classrooms, group and sensory spaces, staff areas, and necessary non net spaces.

The total cost of this project is estimated at £2.6m. It is proposed that **£1.5m** of this project is funded from the LA High Needs grant provision, the remaining costs will be funded elsewhere by the Cranmer Trust.

Attached: 5896 - RIBA Stage 2 Feasibility Report dated November 2025 (revision P01)

PROJECT TWO – Blue Coat School

Blue Coat School is an inclusive, co-educational, Church of England secondary school situated in Oldham Town Centre. The school caters to pupils aged 11–18. The existing capacity of the school is eight forms of entry (8FE) equating to 1,692 pupils, of which, the number on roll in the sixth form is 434. As part of the Cranmer Education Trust, the academy is committed to inclusive education and already demonstrates outstanding SEND practice as evidenced by Ofsted and also by the positive outcomes young people with SEND achieve year on year. The school already fully integrates the largest cohort of young people with EHCPs across all Oldham secondary schools into a fully inclusive and diverse curriculum. Therefore, the school is well positioned to develop a specialist ERB that is fully integrated with the life of the school.

This project proposal seeks funding to establish a Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) base (ERB). The ERB will address the increasing need for specialist, inclusive support for secondary students with SLCN in the borough. The base will provide a structured, nurturing environment within a mainstream secondary setting, enabling students with SLCN to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally while accessing a high quality, inclusive education close to home.

This project proposal aims to replace the existing 'Toothill Block' and deliver a new 2 storey stand-alone building which will include mainstream teaching areas and a **25 place Specialist Resource Provision (SRP)**. The new RP will provide classrooms, small SEN group area, staff areas, and necessary non-net spaces.

The total cost of this project is estimated at £3.2m. It is proposed that **£1.5m** of this project is funded from the LA High Needs grant provision, the remaining costs will be funded elsewhere by the Cranmer Trust.

Attached: 5895 - RIBA Stage 2 Feasibility Report v4.. dated February 2026

1 Background

- 1.1 Demand for resource based provision in secondary schools has risen substantially in recent years. The option recommended in this report provides an opportunity for the Council to provide funding to enhance SEND provision in line with its Corporate Priorities, to provide a great start and skills for life. The proposed provision at Brian Clarke and Blue Coat directly supports this national agenda by developing high-quality inclusion bases within mainstream settings.
- 1.2 In line with the government's 2026 Schools White Paper *Every Child Achieving and Thriving*, Oldham is committed to ensuring that children who have previously been sidelined are included and able to thrive within their mainstream communities. The White Paper sets out a national ambition to shift experiences "from sidelined to included" and ensure that all children can access high quality provision that meets their needs earlier and more effectively. This commitment is further reinforced by the government's 10-year plan to revitalise schools and colleges, which expects every secondary school to have an 'inclusion base', a safe, dedicated space enabling targeted support that bridges mainstream and specialist provision.

2 Procurement Implications

- 2.1 There are no procurement implications arising from the report.

3 Risk Assessments

- 3.1 The Council will require confirmation that academies have appropriate insurance in place before releasing funds for the works.

4 Current Position

- 4.1 The LA has a statutory obligation to create suitable school places for all children, including those with SEN and EHCPs. It is an ambition of the LA's SEND and Inclusion Strategy to increase places in mainstream settings for children with additional needs. This enables children to have their needs met within an inclusive education offer, leading to better outcomes and reducing reliance on costly independent provision outside the borough.
- 4.2 To ensure the long term sustainability of these inclusion bases and maintain effective control over admissions and associated costs, the Local Authority will establish clear Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with the Cranmer Education Trust. The SLAs will set out admissions criteria, placement processes, expected outcomes and financial responsibilities, enabling consistent oversight of demand and ensuring placements remain appropriate and cost effective. This approach aligns with the national expectation that every secondary school will develop an 'inclusion base' as part of the 10 year plan to strengthen inclusive provision and improve outcomes for children and young people. Establishing robust SLAs will ensure Oldham delivers high quality, sustainable provision that supports our ambition for all children to thrive in mainstream settings wherever possible.
- 4.3 Oldham is ambitious for all children and young people, and we are determined to secure better outcomes through earlier, more effective support within mainstream schools. The creation of these inclusion bases strengthens local capacity, enabling children with complex needs to access tailored intervention while remaining part of their school community. This approach is aligned with national reform, which emphasises inclusive

education as the foundation for improving life chances and increasing engagement in school. By expanding high-quality, specialist support within mainstream settings, the council reduces reliance on costly independent placements, ensuring more children can have their needs met close to home

5 Options/Alternatives

- 5.1 Option 1: Approve the above capital investment for the projects listed above to deliver the ambitions of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2027.
- 5.2 Option 2: Do not approve the projects and risk not fulfilling the above strategy.

6 Preferred Option

- 6.1 Option 1.

7 Consultation

- 7.1 All Primary and Secondary schools including all MATS (Multi Academy Trusts) that operate in Oldham.

8 Financial Implications (Capital)

- 8.1 The cost of works for both schools is circa £5.8m and the Council will fund up to a maximum £1.5m for each school by way of a grant agreement. This will be a charge to the Educational Capital Programme which will be funded from the Basic Needs and/or HNPCA Grant during 2026/27 and 2027/28. Both projects are part of an Academy Trust and as such can reclaim their own VAT, therefore any repayments to the school will be paid net of VAT. Only irrecoverable VAT will be funded by the grant payments.
As the works will be commissioned directly by the schools, there will be a need for a grant agreement to detail the amount of funding awarded and the drawdown arrangements as the scheme progresses. Release of funding will be in interim periods

The cost breakdown analysis of both schemes has been included in the Appendix Document RIBA Stage 2

Paula Buckley – Finance Manager

8.2 Financial Implications – (Resources)

The revenue costs for the proposed Specialist Resourced Provisions (SRP's) at Blue Coat and Brian Clarke Schools will be funded from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant effective from when the 2 units are operational. The High Needs Block covers funding to support provision for pupils and students with SEND who require additional resources to participate in education and learning, from their early years to age 25 in a range of provision including special schools, mainstream schools, alternative provision, and independent specialist provision. The funding also contributes towards council centrally retained expenditure for High Needs.

The opening of the SRP's, creating 50 additional places would result in £847k of required revenue funding per annum from the High Needs Block, split between base and high needs top up funding will in the first instance increase the pressure on the block which, pre any mitigation from the recently announced High Needs Sustainability Grant is currently forecast to be overspent by £32,919k at the end of 2026/27. This would be offset, in part, by savings in other areas of the High Needs Block where the pupils may be currently accessing funding.

Vicky Gibbons - Senior Accountant

9 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The proposal will benefit the students at the schools and further demonstrate the ongoing commitment by the Council to the education of the children of the Borough with particular emphasis upon the most vulnerable children in the borough.

Alex Bougateg - Borough Solicitor and Monitoring Officer

- 9.2 S1 of the Localism Act 2021 give Local Authorities a general power of competence to do anything which an individual may do for the benefit of the authority, its area or persons resident or present in their area.
- 9.3 The Council must be satisfied it can meet the objectives and terms and conditions and milestones of the funding imposed by the funding authority including any obligation to provide match funding and to monitor, keep any necessary records and file any necessary returns. Officers must also check the terms do not conflict with other funding conditions for the scheme/s or project/property already in place and ensure compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty and obtain any necessary Environmental Assessments.
- 9.4 Any works, services and goods procured by or on behalf of the Council must be procured in compliance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and all other relevant regulations including, where applicable, the Financial Procedure Rules and Land and Property Protocol. Officers must work with legal colleagues to approve and formalise the terms of any grant agreement or MOU in conjunction with Finance and Audit colleagues.
- 9.5 The Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) and Project Manager must ensure that Subsidy Control is considered in consultation with Legal Services and that all relevant assessments are made and recorded, all relevant notices are published, and all relevant regulations and legislation is complied with to the satisfaction of the Section 151 Officer and in compliance with the Financial Procedure Rules of the Council. External advice may be needed to support these activities which will be a cost to the Project. A grant can amount to a subsidy under the Subsidy Control Act 2022. Therefore, a subsidy control analysis of the grant funding and what it will be used for is essential before payment of the grant. This process will be undertaken by the Project Team led by the SRO with support and input from Legal Services, Finance and other relevant officers.
- 9.6 In awarding any grants or passporting grant monies it is incumbent on the Council to consider the Subsidy Control regime and to comply with the relevant provisions. In the event that any grant is determined to be a subsidy, details regarding the same must be published within three months of award for all subsidies in excess of £100,000 and the Report Author and SRO will need to liaise with Finance and Audit colleagues in this regard.

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- 9.7 The Transparency obligations of the Council must be complied with together with any Framework and procurement related obligations.
 - 9.8 The terms of any proposed MOU/Grant Agreement must be reviewed and agreed by the SRO along with legal and finance colleagues. Provisions of note and/or provisions with associated risk should be highlighted to officers for consideration.
 - 9.9 If any grant funds are to be spent on supplies, works or services, the Council must undertake any commissioning activity in accordance with Contract Procedure Rules, incorporating relevant national procurement legislation.
 - 9.10 The Report Author has confirmed compliance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules.

Rebecca Boyle – Corporate Group Solicitor

10 Equality Impact Assessment, including implications for Children and Young People

- 10.1 There are no negative implications for vulnerable groups or children and young people.

11 Key Decision

- 11.1 Yes

12 Key Decision Reference

- 12.1 EDS-02-26

13 Background Papers

- 13.1 SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2023-2027

14 Appendices

- 14.1 5896 - RIBA Stage 2 Feasibility Report dated November 2025 (revision P01) - BCA
5895 - RIBA Stage 2 Feasibility Report v4 dated February 2026 – BCS
