



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
3 MARCH 2026

OAKFIELD SHORT STAY SCHOOL

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee about the changes to the Oakfield Short Stay School, and how the Council will meet its statutory duties to ensure that there are sufficient high-quality places in Leicestershire for excluded pupils or pupils who are at risk of exclusion from mainstream education.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Local authorities have a statutory duty under section 19 of the Education Act 1996. S.19(1), states that local authorities must arrange suitable and (normally) full-time education for children of compulsory school age who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not receive suitable education without such provision being arranged. This duty is referred to as 'the S.19 duty'
3. Placement Planning: Local authorities have a duty to ensure there are sufficient school places for all children, including those in need of alternative provision. If the local authority identifies a shortage of alternative provision places for children, resulting in a significant number having to travel considerable distances to a suitable placement or being placed in inappropriate provision, local authorities should consider creating or expanding provision.
4. Local Policy Statement: Local authorities should have processes or policies in place which support a child in getting the right and appropriate type of provision and a good education. Local authorities should also have processes and policies in place on how they support children and young people under and over compulsory school age to access appropriate education.
5. Local authorities should have robust criteria, shared and agreed with all local schools, on how and why they would place children in alternative provision. Strategies should clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of each partner involved in the placement to ensure there is rigorous oversight and a continuum of support surrounding every child placed in alternative provision.

6. Alternative provision and the framework surrounding it should offer good quality education equivalent to that provided in mainstream (or special) schools. The provision must be suitable to the child's age, ability and aptitude, and any Special Educational Needs they have. Provision should also support the child to overcome any individual barriers to attainment and achievement, giving equal consideration to their pastoral needs, and enabling them to thrive and prosper in the education system. Provision should address a child's physical or mental health needs as well as personal, social and emotional needs, alongside their educational needs. For example, ensuring that the child feels like they belong to their home school community, and are able to stay in contact with classmates, and where reasonably practicable have access to the same opportunities enjoyed by their peers. The education offered by alternative provision settings should be of a good quality, delivered by high quality qualified staff who have undertaken suitable training, and have relevant experience and safeguarding checks.
7. Oakfield Short Stay School's satellite site locations are aligned to the ambitions set out in the Children and Family Services Department Plan 2024-26 by wanting 'children to have access to first-class local childcare and schools' and the County Council's Strategic Plan 2022-26 through both the 'best start in life' agenda and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
8. Oakfield Short Stay School will also ensure that the Council is able to deliver the mainstream inclusion aspirations of the Government's imminent Schools White Paper.
9. The Secondary Education Inclusion Partnerships ceased operation on 31 July 2025, after Headteachers gave notice in December 2024 to Leicestershire County Council. In March 2025, the Cabinet approved the commencement of a consultation on an age range change for Oakfield School. The Cabinet also agreed to give delegated authority to the Director of Children and Family Services to approve the age range change for Oakfield School following the consultation subject to no significant issues/concerns having arisen. The change was implemented and extended the age range of the Oakfield Primary Short Stay School (the Leicestershire Pupil Referral Unit - PRU) to also provide education for Secondary aged pupils. The Primary phase of Oakfield Short Stay School already operated over two provisions in the County, providing a five-day provision for excluded pupils alongside an outreach model for pupils at risk of exclusion.

Background

10. During the transfer process referred to above, the council conducted a review of the buildings that the Secondary provisions operated out of, and due to the recent changes in Alternative Provision guidance and the changing educational landscape, it was recognised that the sites would not meet the growing and changing demands that would be required to meet the needs of Leicestershire pupils. In August 2025

temporary arrangements were put in place to replace these sites. Additionally, Oakfield were served notice on one other site in December 2025. All these provisions have consequently been rehoused in temporary accommodation. The Secondary Oakfield estate is currently being reviewed to ensure children have access to high quality buildings that serve the needs of pupils now and into the future.

11. During recent years, an increasing number of children and young people in Leicestershire with SEND have been supported by Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), with significant numbers requiring a special school place or enhanced resource bases/Special Education Units. This reflects the national picture and is reflected in the changes that the DfE and wider government are making, in relation to policy and the upcoming Schools White paper. Place sufficiency, locally and nationally has struggled to keep up with demand. 23.41% of pupils that attend Oakfield Short Stay School have an EHCP with Special School named. 48.8% of pupils who attend Oakfield Short Stay School have Special Educational Needs.
12. Under the previous Secondary Partnerships model, pupils at risk of exclusion, or pupils who had been excluded, attended a mix of provisions across the school week. Due to updated statutory guidance, this model was no longer fit for purpose and consequently a new way of supporting Secondary pupils across Leicestershire was developed.
13. Across all Secondary sites the Council has reviewed staffing, capital and education resources required to deliver a high-quality education to ensure that the provisions are able to meet the changing requirements as set out in the Ofsted Framework, Alternative Provision Frameworks and Keeping Children Safe in Education Framework.
14. Previously, each of the distinct (five) partnerships operated independently of each other, with different Academy Trust schools acting as the lead and employer for the single secondary partnership cluster. This meant there were no common and agreed practices across the County and pupils had different experiences depending on their postcode.

The Oakfield School Offer

15. The Council aims to provide high quality school places for children and young people within their communities, close to where they live, and to support re-integration back into mainstream education.
16. The Oakfield Short Stay School will ensure Leicestershire meets its statutory duties by delivering the right number of high-quality school places within Oakfield Short Stay School, in the right place, at the right time, delivering interventions that support children to remain in education or return to a school in their local area. Developments are informed by robust data analysis incorporating demographic trends and predicted

growth, alongside impact measures that clearly set out, how each layer of the Graduated Offer of support enables children to remain in mainstream education.

17. The Oakfield Short Stay School has developed a graduated approach, that delivers preventative advice, outreach, two-day a week placement and a five-day provision for pupils who have been permanently excluded from mainstream education. This is a consistent offer across Leicestershire, ensuring equity for all pupils across Leicestershire, which is responsive to changing patterns of identified need.
18. Data systems have been developed that draw together data metrics for all pupils across Primary and Secondary phases across Leicestershire who are at risk of exclusion, or who have been excluded from mainstream education. This will inform actions, targeted schools-based work and build intelligence to support the delivery of education services.
19. A staff model has been developed, and a successful recruitment drive has been conducted that has established highly qualified and experienced workforce, to deliver a formal education that provides breadth and depth of curriculum and closes gaps in learning, supporting pupils to return to a permanent educational placement.

Consultation

20. Chief Executive Officers from Leicestershire Multi-Academy Trusts, Headteachers, Senior Leaders and Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCo) have attended several face-to-face sessions as part of the development and consultation process. This sought to confirm that the Oakfield Graduated Offer reflected local needs and enabled stakeholder feedback to be considered before adoption. These took place between the dates of 2 June and 14 November 2025.
21. The strategy was developed and presented in paper form and through presentation to colleagues across the Council, Senior Management Team, Directors Management Team and stakeholders in mainstream education settings.

Resource Implications

22. The core funding for the school element of Oakfield Short Stay School is £5,482,674 each year, combined with the Average Weighted Pupil Unit costs for each pupil and any additional funding that the pupil receives because they are in receipt of either an Education Health Care Plan or Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund. The additional cost of the outreach and preventative offer to schools has been met through the additional money allocated through the Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST) £574,396 and the SEN Investment Fund, £1,640,000.
23. The sites within which the Secondary provisions operate within are no longer fit for purpose. Changing demands on the school and the outreach service continue to grow because of new statutory guidance, such as the recent changes to the Ofsted framework brought in in November 2025, the updated Alternative Provision Statutory

guidance and the ongoing changes being announced, linked to the upcoming White Paper such as the changes to Suspensions and Exclusions announced on 29 January 2026. Consequently, the onward provision will require investment from the capital programme to deliver the property resources needed to deliver the school places in the locality areas around Leicestershire. Utilising property within the Council's estate will support cash flow whilst minimising additional pressure on available capital.

24. Funding for the outreach and preventative work, delivered by Oakfield Short Stay School has been met in part by the SEN Investment Fund. Impact measures have been agreed with Headteacher representatives in relation to the Oakfield outreach offer. Future financial contributions will be developed through a per pupil contribution model, which is being developed in conjunction with Primary and Secondary Headteacher representatives. The ongoing need for the Oakfield Graduated Offer is reflected in the current and growing demand from schools. In January 2026, Oakfield Short Stay School had 252 pupils on roll. 19.8% of pupils are single registration, compared to 55.9% who are dual registered with another school. An additional 22.2% of pupils are supported in their schools as part of the outreach and preventative work with schools. Data for Leicestershire for this academic year indicates that there have been 2536 less suspensions in the period from August 2025 to January 2026 when compared to the same data point from August 2024 to January 2025. Permanent exclusions in the period from August 2025 to January 2026 are 3 fewer than at the same data point from August 2024 to January 2025. The greatest demand for the support from Oakfield Short Stay School for pupils, is in Year 11, whereby 33.7% of the cohort is in this year group, compared to 16.2% in Year 10, 13.4% in Year 9 and 8.7% in Year 8. Oakfield will monitor the impact on the cohort statistics, to support targeted work at an early entry point, to prevent the breakdown of education placements for children.

Background papers

25. Report to the Cabinet on the 18 March 2025 'Proposed Expansion of Age Range Destination for Oakfield Short Stay School'
https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s189169/oakfield_cabinet_report_27_Feb.pdf

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

26. This report has been circulated to all Members of the County Council.

Equality Implications

27. The work of Oakfield Short Stay School actively seeks to reduce inequality and improve outcomes for pupils.

Human Rights Implications

28. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Other Relevant Impact Assessments

29. Health implications: The Strategy supports access to education, which is a key determinant of health and wellbeing.
30. Environmental implications: The Strategy considers the location of new sites and travel arrangements to minimise environmental impact.
31. Partnership working: The Strategy has been developed in partnership with schools, academies, and other stakeholders.
32. Risk assessment: Risks associated with school place planning, funding, and delivery are identified and mitigated within the Strategy.

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