

Supporting Statement for Friars Academy (NN8 2LA)

Friars is a special school for pupils aged 11 – 18 and converted to Academy status in November 2013. It was inspected by OfSTED in June 2015 and is outstanding in all categories. All the students have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan for either moderate learning difficulties or severe learning difficulties. Increasingly, the academy is admitting students with more complex needs and over half have autistic spectrum disorders.

There are currently 147 pupils on roll and there will be additional pupils in September 2016. Special schools do not have published admission numbers and operate with some flexibility across the year groups depending on the needs of pupils on roll in each cohort. The school has a formal capacity of 145 places in the Funding Agreement with the Education Funding Agency, comprised of 139 main school plus six in the Sixth Form. Most students at Key Stage 4 attend alternative providers for part of their education, spending some of their time at either Northampton College of Further Education, Moulton College or Tresham College.

The Local Authority has the responsibility to determine all admissions in accordance with the 'SEN and Disability Code of Practice' (July 2014) if the pupil has an EHC plan or in accordance with the 'SEN Code of Practice' (November 2011) if the pupil has a statement of SEN. There is a growing demand for places at special schools across the county and the local authority is addressing this through extensions at a number of schools plus seeking new provision. The Education Funding Agency has given approval for three new Free Schools for pupils with special educational needs and / or disabilities. A new special school opens in Daventry in September 2016, in Northampton in 2017 and in Corby in 2018. It is intended to bid for another new secondary special Free School to serve the Wellingborough, Rushden and East Northants area.

In the meantime, the school roll at Friars in September 2016 will be at least 152 and there is pressure on the current facilities. 30 pupils are leaving the school, but it is anticipated that at least 35 will be joining in September, as these pupils have all had Friars named in their statement or care plan. Longer term it is expected that the school will revert to its capacity of 145 places, as new provision comes on stream, but until then Friars is being asked to admit a few extra pupils.

In order to ensure sufficient and suitable accommodation, the local authority is proposing some small scale adjustments on site:

- The installation of a single classroom mobile (with toilet) to offer an additional class-base from September 2016
- A more efficient car-parking layout that will add spaces and improve the circulation and flow-through for minibuses entering and exiting the school site

- A small extension to the dining hall, currently at feasibility stage, to increase the space available at lunchtimes. This will be subject to a separate submission when details and budget have been agreed.

The proposed building is of standard single storey mobile classroom construction; as used throughout the county. The elevations are perpendicular surmounted by a low pitch roof. The roof is finished in grey felt with a small overhang, discharging rainwater into black PVC gutters and down pipes. The height of the roof is approximately 3.m from ground level. The walls are refinished in a stippled weatherproof coating, all to be painted in Burgundy (RAL 3011) colour. All windows have white uPVC frames and are double glazed in clear float glass. A wooden slatted skirt is fitted between ground and floor level, the slats being horizontal.

The location of the mobile classroom on the rear grassed area adjacent to the fence surrounding the rear car park area has been chosen to enable efficient access to services (drainage, power etc). It has been set back close to the fence to reduce its impact on the playing field. The existing fire exit door has been relocated from the side elevation facing the playing field to the rear elevation as to not interfere with the running track. The adjacent area also allows for amending the fence around the proposed position for two of the additional three spaces required by the inclusion of the mobile classroom.

Planning Justification:

Section 38(6) of the 2004 Act requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Therefore, the enclosed proposal should be judged against those relevant policies from the Wellingborough Local Plan (2007) and the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy, as well as the content of the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) where applicable.

The Wellingborough Local Plan Proposals Map confirms that there are no designations relating to the element of the site where the proposed mobile is to be located. The area does not sit within a conservation area.

The NPPF sets out those roles which planning system is required to perform in order to ensure the delivery of sustainable development. The application contained herein will enable the improvement of the education offer in Northamptonshire.

The proposal is clearly line with the Core Planning Principles set out at Para 17 of the Framework. The Government attaches great importance to ensuring that a sufficient choice of school places is available to meet the needs of existing communities. In addition, Para 72 of the framework encourages local planning authorities to take a pro-active, positive and collaborative approach to widening the choice of education. Para 72 also requires LPA's to afford great weight to the need to expand, create or alter schools, the proposal is therefore in conformity with the Governments planning and education objectives.

To supplement the North Northamptonshire Core Spatial Strategy, the respective local authorities published a Sustainable Design SPD (2009). The content of this document has been carefully considered through the design of this proposal and it has been concluded that the proposed mobile will clearly not change the amenity enjoyed by those properties which neighbour the site.

Conclusion:

It is clearly important that the school's facilities meet today's modern educational requirements and provide a safe and attractive learning environment for pupils and teachers alike.

It is therefore considered that the enclosed application, which conforms to both national and local planning policy, should be seen favourably and approved without delay in line with the presumption as set out at Para 14 of the Framework.