

Worcestershire County Council

New Worcester Secondary Free School

Background Information and School Specification



Figure 1 Concept art by ADP Architects

Section A - Introduction

Worcester is a growing City in the heart of the West Midlands, well connected by road and rail to the rest of the UK. As a result, the City has seen its population increase over the last decade, and with it, the need for additional school places.

The number of children seeking a year seven place in Worcester has been consistently increasing over the last decade. Despite expansions at four out of the five existing secondary schools in the City, in Autumn 2020 there were fewer than 10 spare places in year seven across the City. The population of Worcester continues to grow, with increasing cohort numbers due to enter year seven over the next six years, and significant housing developments planned for the City and surrounding area as part of the South Worcestershire Development Plan.

The growth of housing will be particularly focused on the South and South East, which is supported by two secondary schools: Nunnery Wood High and Blessed Edward Oldcorne Catholic. The rise in population in this region is expected to continue with significant housing developments approved on the South Worcester Urban Expansion. Provision in the South is currently below the forecast need for the next five years, with demand approximately four forms of entry (120 places) higher than these two secondary schools can currently support.

As a result, we see fewer young people being offered a place at their preferred secondary school, and more pupils needing to travel across the City for their education. Therefore, the delivery of a new secondary school for the City was agreed at Cabinet in February 2021, and this specification endorsed for Consultation in October 2021.

The location of the proposed school will enable more pupils within the East and North East of the City to access a secondary school within their local community, whom at present are least likely to receive an offer of their preferred secondary school. It will also release pressure on demand for school places elsewhere in the City and enable those schools to support more pupils from proposed new housing.

Under section 6A of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the ‘free school presumption’) where a local authority identifies the need to establish a new school it must, in the first instance, seek proposals to establish an Academy. This specification is designed to guide Academy Trusts in submitting their application to sponsor the new school as outlined below and has been informed by engagement with the local community and stakeholders for which it will serve.

Proposers must submit an application via Worcestershire County Council’s [In-tend portal](#)

Section B - The School

Overview

Age Range:

Secondary, 11-16

Gender:

Mixed

Proposed Opening Date:

September 2026

Capacity

600 places (four forms of entry)

The school will open initially with a Year Seven cohort only, which will gradually feed through the school until reaching all year groups, allowing the number on roll to grow organically to reach capacity in 2030.

The school site is of sufficient size to accommodate an eight forms of entry school. The school will be designed to enable future expansion when required.

Special Provision:

It is possible that we will seek to open a 12 place Mainstream Autism Base (MAB) as part of the school, following the Worcestershire MAB specification. This will be subject to local need and the usual consultation process for opening such a facility.

Area/Community to be Served:

The need for the school has arisen from growing demand for local places in the South East area of Worcester which is resulting in more pupils located furthest from secondary schools in the City (in the East and North East of the City) being most at risk of not being offered a secondary school place at a preferred school in Worcester. The location of the school is proposed to the East of the City, to serve the community in the East and North East. This

will in turn release pressure from existing schools to support pupils from new housing proposed around the City. The school will be located on land at Newtown Road on the eastern edge of Worcester, identified on the map below:



Figure 2 Map demonstrating the location of the proposed Secondary School

Admissions Arrangements

The school will have a published admission number of 120 places. The overall capacity of the school will be 600 (four forms of entry from Years 7 - 11).

The school will need to cater to local demand, and therefore admissions arrangements will be expected to align with that goal. The Academy Sponsor will be required to abide by the Codes of Practice on admissions and admissions appeals and also participate in the Local Authority's co-ordinated schemes for admissions and the In-Year Fair Access Protocol.

It is expected that the oversubscription criteria will ensure that CYP living within the local community of the school will have priority for places, therefore it is the preference of the Local Authority that priority will be given to siblings of pupils at the school, children of staff and then subsequent allocations based on distance.

Once a preferred Academy Sponsor has been identified discussions will take place to

agree an Admissions Policy. Please note that the preferred Academy Sponsor will need to prepare and submit this to the DfE promptly once notified. Please refer to the external guidance on Admissions for further information of requirements¹.

It is expected that the Academy Trust will be part of the co-ordinated admissions scheme of the Local Authority from the year of opening, unless exceptional reasons arise. This is to ensure we are able to work closely on arrangements for opening, and to ensure the process is clear and streamlined for families wishing to apply for a place at the school. All endeavours must be made by the preferred Academy Sponsor to be a part of the co-ordinated admissions scheme from the first year of admissions to provide clarity and consistency for applications.

Transport

The school will be accessible through walking and cycling routes from the community it serves and will be close to major bus routes. A Traffic Impact Assessment will be carried out by the Council as part of the planning process for the build project. The appointed Academy Sponsor will then be required to develop a School Travel Plan encouraging safe travel to school which promotes walking and cycling.

Facilities

It is expected that the chosen Academy Sponsor will build an ongoing holistic understanding of their pupils and their needs, and facilities must reflect an ethos of inclusivity. The Academy Sponsor must have an Inclusivity Policy which highlights ways in which this will be achieved.

It will be expected that the Academy Sponsor will have a strong IT Policy that seeks to utilise technology to support inclusivity and accessibility for all pupils, including children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) including children with Dyslexia or hearing impairment.

¹ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/389813/Free_School_Admissions_Guidance.pdf.

Moreover, the management of other facilities such as bathrooms and staff facilities must link to the Inclusivity Policy of the school in particular gender and self-identity.

The community use of core facilities such as sports halls and libraries can have a positive effect on the local community, support in community cohesion and integration, and enable these facilities to be used most effectively. It is expected that the Sponsor will establish a Community Use Agreement to ensure facilities are available and accessible for community use. Fees and charges for the use of such facilities must be in line with other facilities in the City. A link to the Worcester City Council fees and charges is available here: [Worcester City Council Fees and Charges 2020-2021](#)

Section C – Vision

Accessibility and Inclusivity

It is expected that the chosen Academy Sponsor must have a strong ethos and evidence of effective practice to ensure inclusivity of all pupils and staff, and ensure all pupils are able to access the curriculum, quality first teaching (QFT) and high-quality teaching. This must include making appropriate adjustments for pupils with SEND, vulnerable learners and Looked after Children. This must be linked to facilities management, the Inclusivity Policy and practice, and behaviour management. The school must fulfil its duty to have the relevant SEND Information Report, SEND Policy, Accessibility Policy and other policies relating to vulnerable learners written and published on the school's website. During engagement with parents and the community, ensuring the school is responsive to children with SEND and has ingrained values of inclusivity was highlighted as being of key importance for the new school. This is to ensure that pupils feel safe and are able to access their education in a positive and welcoming environment which meets their needs.

It will be expected that the Academy Sponsor can show an approach to education that includes:

- In addition to QFT the school must use carefully selected and evidence based small group and one-to-one targeted intervention when needed.
- The school must deploy teaching assistants and support staff where needed – these staff will also have access to specific training in regards to: SEND, Vulnerable Learner, Young Carers, and Looked after Children. This deployment must reflect what is known about evidence-based practice and there must be clear plans and arrangements in place to review outcomes achieved on a regular basis.
- The school must actively engage with the SEND teams in Worcestershire Children First (WCF) and other professionals to support all areas of SEND and Inclusion. This

will include proactive working as well as fulfilling statutory duties for pupils with SEND (including those receiving SEND Support and those with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs)).

- In addition to provision for children and young people (CYP) with an EHCP who have a diagnosis of autism through the Mainstream Autism Base, the chosen sponsor will be expected to evidence a strong approach to supporting pupils with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and those with social communication difficulties in particular supporting them to access mainstream lessons and ensuring provision is available to all pupils.
- The school must actively engage with the Worcestershire Children First (WCF) Vulnerable Learners team to support the needs of vulnerable pupils and must be compliant with all legislation focused on this cohort of CYP.
- The school must engage with the Virtual School to meet the needs of LAC pupils where needed and must be compliant with all legislation focused on this cohort of CYP.
- The school must have a behaviour policy that does not discriminate against pupils with SEND or vulnerable learners and achieves good outcomes for these CYP in line with evidence-based practice.
- The school must pay full regard to understanding and implementing good practice from the national context such as the:
 - SEND Code of Practice 2015 [SEND code of practice: 0 to 25 years - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/551022/SEND_Code_of_Practice_2015.pdf)
 - Equalities Act 2010 [Equality Act 2010: guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/551022/Equality_Act_2010_guidance.pdf)
 - Reasonable Adjustments for Disabled pupils – Guidance for schools [reasonable adjustments for disabled pupils 1.pdf \(equalityhumanrights.com\)](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/education-reasonable-adjustments-for-disabled-pupils-1)
 - Supporting pupils with medical conditions at school - [Supporting pupils at school with medical conditions \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/551022/Supporting_pupils_at_school_with_medical_conditions.pdf)

The school will pay full regard to the local context and guidance for SEND and follow the:

- WCF Graduated Response when supporting pupils with SEND [Graduated Response \(SEND support in education provision\) | Worcestershire County Council](https://www.worcestershire.gov.uk/graduated-response)
- WCF Accessibility Guidance
- The school will be proactive in preventing exclusions and will following the Graduated Response to preventing Exclusions in Mainstream Schools.
- The school must commit to the continuing professional development and training of its staff to upskill senior leaders, teachers, teaching assistants and other school staff in understanding the requirements to meet the individual needs of pupils.

- The school must commit to implementing reasonable adjustments so pupils with SEND can be an active and valued part of the school community and access learning, which will include but not be limited to effective differentiation of the curriculum.
- The school must meet the parent/carers of CYP with SEND regularly to develop school and parent/carer relationships and agree support/outcomes for pupils to ensure continual integration and access to education and school life. The coproduction of policy and practice for CYP with SEND alongside families will be key to effective provision.
- The school will effectively delegate Pupil Premium funding and track impact on pupils.
- The school must have a SEND Governor in place – the SEND Governor will be provided with ongoing support & provided with Governor training.
- The school will utilise the Early Help pathway to identify CYP at the earliest stage for support and complete an assessment in line with WCF Community Early Help assessment processes, including the completion of a Supporting Families assessment and follow WCF processes for reporting.
- An Early Help offer must be integrated onto the school website/s to enhance support for parent/carers, CYP and their families.
- Pupil participation in decision making that directly affects them is critical, and it will be expected that the school will have a formal structure in place which allows pupils, including those students who have SEND and/or are vulnerable learners, to have a real say in issues that affect them and know that their opinions count. We will expect the Academy Sponsor to, as a minimum, have a School Council which actively encourages participation and engagement in democracy, local and global citizenship and accountability. Further best practice for pupil participation can be found here: <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/school-councils-and-pupil-participation>

Health and Wellbeing

It is expected that the Academy Sponsor will have a strong approach to ensuring the health and wellbeing of pupils and staff, with consideration of both physical and mental health.

Recent engagement with parent/carers and the community emphasised the importance of the Academy Sponsor having a strong approach to supporting pupil and staff mental health, reducing stress and anxiety, and ensuring pupils develop the skills to thrive after leaving school. We will expect the chosen Academy Sponsor to have:

- An ethos of pupil and staff wellbeing throughout policy and practice, with evidence of engagement and commitment to National and Local schemes, initiatives and opportunities to promote wellbeing and prevent mental ill health.
- A clear Policy which documents the approach to ensuring and improving pupil and staff health and wellbeing.
- Safe spaces and quiet areas accessible to pupils for counselling sessions or to support with emotional regulation or sensory needs.
- Development opportunities for staff and a process for ensuring wellbeing is prioritised.

The design of the school can also support the health and wellbeing of students and staff, contributing to increased performance and reduced absenteeism. In particular, the integration of green spaces within and around a school improves the mental development of CYP, increases students' memory, and improves attention span. There is ample opportunity on this site to integrate green infrastructure into school life and we will expect the approved Academy Sponsor to consider the use of all facilities where possible to improve the health and well being of staff and students.

Section D – Education Plan

Approach to Education

The chosen Academy Sponsor must have a strong approach to education and be able to evidence:

- Strong leadership track record with experience in a range of schools to provide a depth of knowledge and assurance regarding best practice for school development.
- A strong educational vision and a curriculum delivery based on high standards of attainment for each key stage.
- An ambitious, broad and balanced, and deliverable curriculum plan which is consistent with the vision and pupil intake. This could include a curriculum table and pupil build up chart.
- Strategies for measuring pupil performance effectively and setting challenging targets.
- Quality assurance model to ensure pupil performance, behaviour and attendance targets are maintained and improved.
- A staffing structure that will deliver the planned curriculum within the expected income levels; with a focus on outstanding teaching (including strategies for effective

performance management). This could also include an organogram and staff build up chart.

- A dedicated head of school with experience of strong leadership.
- The Academy Sponsor is expected to work closely with the recognised Education Trade Unions to negotiate policies, funding, arrangements, and staff terms and conditions.
- Descriptions of how the needs of all CYP are fully provided for and how the school will be fully inclusive (please see section below on accessibility and inclusivity for more details).
- Details of enrichment and extended services, for example: breakfast clubs; sports clubs; homework clubs; and music/art clubs.

Partnership Working and Community Integration

We will expect the chosen Academy Sponsor to work closely with the Local Authority, the local community, other local schools, and community partners to share best practice across Worcestershire, provide added value, and improve outcomes for children and parents. As a minimum we will expect the Academy Sponsor to:

- Have a local understanding of Worcester and the areas for which the school will serve.
- Provide additional social value to the local community and be able to provide evidence of working with local community and groups to increase social value.
- Actively take part in Partnership Working and collaboration; taking a proactive approach to providing and supporting Early Help, a Graduated Response for children with SEND, inclusive practices and Safeguarding – *including creating a safe and inclusive environment and school community for all CYP.*
- Utilise the Early Help offer to ensure Early Help partner agencies in the local community and countywide are able to support children in the school through signposting and/or referrals.
- Link with Adult and Family Learning to enhance learning opportunities for CYP and their families in their school and community.
- Work to the Statutory Guidance of ‘Keeping Children Safe in Education’, ‘Working Together’, and other critical initiatives and partnerships to ensure the wellbeing and safety of the CYP.

Section E – Capacity and Capability

It must be demonstrable that the Academy Sponsor has the resource and experience to successfully provide secondary school provision in line with this specification. This must include:

- Strong evidence of education outcomes across existing school/s
- A demonstrable record of strong financial management across the Trust and individual school/s
- Evidence and proven learning of how the operation and policies of school/s in the Trust have adapted to the needs of their individual and unique communities
- The resources the Trust will draw on and/or deploy to support the development of the new free school by the opening date
- Clear evidence that the Trust has the range of skills and abilities necessary to set up and then run a school effectively, including: managing school finances; leadership; project management; marketing; human resources; safeguarding; and health and safety
- How the school will be organised and what the governance arrangements will look like, including a diagram of the proposed structures

Section F – Funding and Costs

The design and build costs will be met by Worcestershire County Council from a combination of funding through County Council borrowing and Section 106 developer contributions. The project will be commissioned by Worcestershire County Council in line with the approved specification.

The land will remain within the ownership of Worcestershire County Council, with a 125-year lease issued to the Academy Trust at a peppercorn rent.

Currently, the funding for mainstream schools is allocated to LAs by the DfE through their National Funding Formula (NFF) from the Schools Block DSG on a 'lagged' funding basis using the previous October pupil census. There is also a national Pupil Growth Fund (PGF) allocated by the DfE based upon their national formula, which is designed to support the revenue cost implications of approved growth in pre-16 pupil numbers to meet basic need and revenue costs for new schools.

The funding has been based on the current funding structures in place as at the time of the Academy Sponsor competition. However, it is anticipated that by school opening date, the DfE will have implemented their full 'hard' NFF. The implications of this on the Schools Block DSG and PGF are currently unknown but therefore the below may be subject to change by the time of school opening.

So, taking this into account, in terms of pre-opening funding and on-going revenue funding, this will be a call on the allocation of the PGF received by WCC as part of its Schools Block DSG. The pre-opening funding will be £100k to support the set-up costs for the key appointments e.g. Headteacher, School Business Manager etc from the start of the Spring Term prior to the school being opened in the following September. Based upon the 4FE model (120 pupils in KS3), using the approved WCC PGF criteria on the current secondary MFL of £5,415 per pupil, will require an annual commitment of £0.65m for 5 years from the PGF to support the school's growth in Year 7. This is indicative funding and is subject to Worcestershire Schools Forum approval and any changes from the DfE arising from any implementation of their 'hard' NFF policy. Also, being based upon estimated numbers it will be adjusted annually for the effect of actual pupil numbers against the 120 funded from the PGF. As the school year groups grow the October census will fund the year groups 8 to 11 on a lagged funding actual pupil number basis as detailed above.

As the new school will be a free school, the successful Academy Sponsor will need to enter a revenue funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education. The DfE currently provides £25,000 for legal expenses to the successful Academy Sponsor. The on-going school revenue costs will be met from the Dedicated Schools Grant.

It is possible that we will seek to include a 12-place Mainstream Autism Base (MAB) as part of this school. If this is the case, the number of commissioned places will equal the number of places for which the MAB is designated. Each place will have a financial value and the aggregate value of the places plus the pupil top up provides the budget for running the MAB. There will be a requirement for an end of financial year audit and financial report to the LA showing an analysis of income and expenditure for the MAB.

Section G – Impact and Equalities Assessments

As prescribed by section 9 of the Academies Act 2010 and section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the Local Authority must assess the potential impact of any new school on existing educational provision in the area. The Local Authority must also consider whether the new school will impact on any groups with protected characteristics. A full impact assessment

has been undertaken on the proposal and the Academy Sponsor will be involved in assessing such impact as the school is built and delivered.

Section H – Application Process and Contact Details

Proposers *must* be a DfE approved Academy Sponsor. If you are not already an approved Academy Sponsor you will need to apply separately through the formal Academy Sponsor approval process and this must be completed by the application deadline.

You must contact the DfE about becoming an Academy Sponsor before submitting a proposal and you can find out more information at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sponsor-an-academy>

Bids must be submitted by 22nd April 2022. Applicants must take account of the relevant criteria in Annex C of the free school presumption guidance and expectations outlined in Section B-G of this document.

All forms can be downloaded from www.worcestershire.gov.uk/newsecondaryschool

Please submit your application by the submission deadline via the In-Tend system.

NB: The Local Authority led free school presumption is a different route to the DfE's free school programme. Further information about how to establish a new school via the DfE's free school programme route can be found at: [Setting up a free school - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/setting-up-a-free-school).

Section I - Timeline for Provider Competition

- Start of Free School Academy Sponsor Competition – 14/03/2022
- Application deadline – 25/04/2022
- Recommendation shared with the Regional Schools Commissioner – June 2022

The Regional School Commissioner (RSC) for West Midlands, on behalf of the Secretary of State, will then consider the Local Authority assessments and recommendations before deciding which proposer is in the best position to take forward the new school. The RSC will inform the Local Authority and the successful proposer of its decision, and the Local Authority will inform any unsuccessful proposers.