

Report to: Councillor Jacquie Russell, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Learning and Skills

April 2024

Consultation on proposal to change the status of Millais School from an all girls' school to a co-educational school

Report by: Claire Hayes, Assistant Director (Education and Skills)

Electoral divisions: all

Summary

Millais is a Local Authority maintained single sex girls' secondary school in Horsham for pupils aged 11-16. Demand for places at the school has been declining in recent years, evidenced by a reduction in the overall number of families applying for a place at the school as first preference. Reduced pupil numbers impact upon the finances available to schools and thereby on how the school can deliver opportunities for both staff and pupils.

In addition, there has been a shortage of secondary pupil places for boys in the Horsham area and consequently some boys have had to be allocated places in schools outside the District. It is the responsibility of the Local Authority to provide sufficient places for all children in the area.

To address these issues it is proposed that an initial consultation takes place to seek views on changing the status of Millais School from a single sex girls' school to a co-educational school with the first co-educational cohort admitted from September 2026. Approval is now sought to proceed with launching the initial consultation process.

Recommendations

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Learning and Skills is asked to

1. Approve the launch of a public consultation, in accordance with the Department for Education's [Making significant changes \('prescribed alterations'\) to maintained schools](#), to seek views on the proposals to: change the status of Millais School from a single sex girls' school to a co-educational boys' and girls' school from September 2026.

Proposal

1 Background and context

- 1.1 Horsham currently has three co-educational secondary schools (Tanbridge House, The Forest School and Bohunt, Horsham) and one single sex school for

girls (Millais School). The Forest School was formerly a boys' school but, due to declining demand for places at single sex boys' schools, the County Council together with the Board of Governors of the Forest School consulted on a change to the designation to become co-educational which was supported and came into effect on 1 September 2021 ([decision ES08\(20/21\)](#) refers). This, in part, has led to a shortfall of secondary places available to boys in the Horsham area.

- 1.2 This shortage of places for boys in Horsham was particularly evident for those applying for secondary places for September 2023 entry, with 34 not receiving one of their three preferences. Following successful appeals and moves of some pupils into independent schools, by September 2023, all of the 34 boys were able to attend a school of preference.
- 1.3 For September 2024, seventeen families with boys in the Horsham area have not received one of their three preferences and so have been offered alternative schools. This may change as happened in 2023 but is not considered to be a sustainable position.
- 1.4 The opportunity for change and a re-organisation of Millais arises from:-
 - The recognition of pressure for additional secondary places in the Horsham locality and the need to provide secondary places for all pupils. Under s14 of the Education Act 1996, the County Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient places to provide education for all children and young people in their area. In meeting this need for additional places it is acknowledged, that co-educational schools are currently more popular than single sex schools.
 - The school has not filled all its places for the last three years which impacts on budgets and resources, as school budgets are mainly based on the pupil head count.
 - Moving from a single sex school to a co-educational school will lead to a broader range of curriculum subjects that will bring wider choice and diversity for all pupils.
 - The proposal to offer another co-educational school in Horsham will provide parents with greater choice when applying for school places for their children.
 - An opportunity to build on the current good practice of the school and to drive up educational standards across the town by offering boys as well as girls access to the high-quality education offer.

2 **Proposal details**

- 2.1 It is proposed that a consultation is undertaken with the community and all stakeholders to seek views on the proposal to change the status of Millais school from a single sex girls' school to a co-educational school. At this stage, it is not intended to consult on changing the age range of the school which is currently 11-16.
- 2.2 The earliest the first co-educational cohort could enter Year 7 would be from September 2026. Existing year groups of girls would continue to receive their education at the school until they leave at the age of 16.

- 2.3 The process to change a school from single sex to co-educational needs to be undertaken in accordance with the [Department for Education's \(DfE\) guidance](#), which consists of a number of stages. For a maintained school, it is the responsibility of the Local Authority to lead any such consultation. The first stage, undertaking an informal public consultation, the subject of this report, is not a statutory requirement but there is a strong expectation that interested parties will be consulted in developing the proposal. In order to obtain views from these interested parties it is proposed that an initial consultation take place for a four-week period.
- 2.4 Following the closure of the consultation period all responses will be collated, summarised and assessed and reported to the Cabinet Member to determine next steps. If it is proposed that the proposals should proceed, this will require a further Cabinet Member decision to agree the publication of statutory proposals for the formal stage of consultation in accordance with DfE guidance.
- 2.5 Any consultation arising from the publication of statutory proposals would last for a minimum of four weeks and the Local Authority would be the decision maker on the proposals following the consultation. This would be timetabled for September 2024 with an expected decision in October 2024 to enable implementation of the changes for September 2026 should this be the eventual proposal.
- 2.6 Should it be determined that a change in status at Millais School should proceed, once it came into effect a review of the Horsham secondary school catchment areas would be required. This would be subject to separate public consultation and consultation with neighbouring schools to identify the best approach. This will be considered at the same time as the final proposals following the currently planned consultation.

3. Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

- 3.1 To continue with the status quo. As the demand for secondary places rises and as there are more places in Horsham available for girls than boys, more boys are likely to be displaced with some boys in the Horsham area having to be sent to schools in other Districts and Boroughs. This would result in the boys potentially being separated from their friendship groups and being required to travel long daily journeys, which could result in significant cost to the authority in paying for transport to the nearest school with a place available (if the place offered is more than 3 miles away). For these reasons it is necessary to seek opportunities to increase the number of places available for boys in the Horsham area.
- 3.2 To give preference for boys over girls for co-educational places in the area. This is contrary to the admission authority's admission criteria and the statutory Admissions Code.
- 3.3 To offer further co-educational places at neighbouring schools over their Published Admission Number (PAN). This is not preferable as a school's PAN is set within a capacity range to allow an appropriate number of children for the space and buildings available. It can also make curriculum timetabling difficult.
- 3.4 Open a new co-educational secondary school. This option is being considered in the longer term in response to the rising demand for secondary school places and to new housing proposed in the Horsham District Local Plan. It is

considered that if a larger number of co-educational places were offered through the opening of a new school, based on current patterns of parental preference, this could further negatively impact on the numbers at Millais School compounding viability issues.

4. Consultation, engagement and advice

- 4.1 The proposal to consult on the change to co-educational provision has been discussed with the Headteacher and Governors of Millais School. The Headteacher and Governors have been given the opportunity to contribute to the consultation document.
- 4.2 The proposal has been shared with the Headteachers of the other secondary schools in the Horsham area.
- 4.3 The details of the proposals have been shared with the local Members in the Horsham divisions who were offered the opportunity to attend a briefing at the end of February 2024 to ask questions on the proposals.
- 4.4 The consultation will be undertaken in accordance with the Department for Education's [Making significant changes \('prescribed alterations'\) to maintained schools](#), in order to seek views from parents, school staff and education and political stakeholders in and around Horsham. It would be an online consultation, available on the County Council's [Your Voice Engagement Hub](#).

5. Finance

5.1 Revenue consequences

Revenue funding for mainstream schools is regulated through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Schools Block National Funding Formula (NFF). The school would therefore continue to receive funding through the current mechanism. There are no direct revenue funding implications against County Council funding as a result of the proposal to change the designation of Millais School from a girls' school to a co-educational girls' and boys' school.

5.2 Capital consequences

To enable Millais School to admit male pupils alongside female pupils there would be a need for some capital investment. The County Council's Multi-Disciplinary Consultant (MDC) is in the process of being appointed to review the capital works required to enable boys to be educated at Millais. Works that would be needed to implement the change to co-educational provision for September 2026 are likely to include the creation of male toilets and male changing rooms together with investment in PE facilities.

It is expected that further works to those listed above would be phased over a period of up to five years as the number of male pupils steadily grows in the school year on year. Every opportunity to use s.106 Developer contributions to support capital investment to provide facilities needed for male and female pupils will be explored; should s.106 funding not be secured the council would need to consider using Basic Need Capital funding or corporate borrowing. The school would need capital works completed by September 2026 to enable the first cohort of co-educational pupils to be admitted.

5.3 The effect of the proposal:

(a) **How the cost represents good value**

The cost for remodeling existing accommodation represents good value compared to the alternative of providing further co-educational places at neighbouring schools that are already full. Creating new co-educational places at alternative schools would require significant build programmes to expand or temporary relocatable units to be placed on school sites. It is a more sustainable solution to remodel existing underutilized space and also less expensive than building an entirely new co-educational school.

(b) **Future savings/efficiencies being delivered**

By adapting unused places for girls to provide education for places for boys would be a cost effective and sustainable solution allowing for the efficient use of staff and buildings to maximise benefit for young people, both boys and girls, in the area.

(c) **Human Resources, IT and Assets Impact**

The Board of Governors and School Leadership of Millais are considering the details of the proposal for the school to go co-educational. Should a decision be taken for the school to take both boys and girls, a needs assessment for training and development would be undertaken to ensure staff have the appropriate skills to work in a co-educational setting.

6. **Risk implications and mitigations**

There are no risks to the decision to consult on this subject.

7. **Policy alignment and compliance**

7.1 [Our Council Plan](#) sets out the corporate priorities and includes a commitment to help people and communities to fulfil their potential. This proposal will provide secondary school places in an area of increasing school population to best meet the needs of young people.

7.2 Legal implications

None.

7.3 Equality duty and human rights assessment –

The arrangements for consultation follow DfE guidance. The consideration of the equality duty will be applied both to the process of undertaking the consultation and the analysis of feedback to ensure that due consideration is given to the needs of persons with protected characteristics and the requirements of the public sector equality duty.

7.4 Protecting the environment – None

7.5 Crime and disorder – None

7.6 Public health – None

7.7 Social value – Not applicable for this specific proposal.

Claire Hayes

Assistant Director(Education and Skills)

Contact Officer: Graham Olway, Head of Organisation and Planning, tel. 0330 222 3029

Background papers - None.