

Cranbrook Placemaking Group - 8th June 2026

Education Briefing Note

Purpose of Paper

The paper provides an update on early years, primary, secondary and special education needs and disabilities (SEND) education provision in Cranbrook.

Current position

- **High Pupil Numbers and Catchment Adjustments:** Cranbrook's cohort of children that could seek a place at the local schools remains high.
- **Primary and Secondary admissions for September 2026:** No children living in Cranbrook have been refused a place at their local school who sought a place. There was no requirement for bulge classes and fair access places will be available for families moving into the area in September.
- **Rockbeare C of E Primary School Expansion:** The project to deliver additional classroom facilities at Rockbeare C of E Primary School, which is a popular choice among Cranbrook families, has now gone out to tender. The Academy Trust will need to undertake a significant change process in September to increase capacity to 140 places.
- **Cranbrook Education Campus:** Expanded kitchen facilities will be completed by September 2026 supporting future development of the school.
- **Early Years and Childcare Provision:** There is a challenge in respect of all year-round early years and childcare places for 0–4 year olds. Currently, both existing primary schools offer places for 2-4 year olds term time only. The new purpose built nursery in Cranbrook is however due to open in September 2026. This will offer places from 0-5 years old all year round which will help to address the need for places for younger children and early years provision during the school holidays in Cranbrook. Another new nursery is set to open in June at Exeter airport. This will also offer places from 0-5 years old all year round and it is expected some pupils will attend from Cranbrook. This will support our Best Start in Life priority.

Cranbrook Plan

- **630 place primary school (3 form entry with early years provision for 0-5 year olds):** Due to be delivered at the Cobdens expansion area. Design work including planning is progressing and transfer of the school land to DCC is

expected to take place by July 2026 to allow for the housing delivery to begin before the end of the year. Phase one (classroom capacity for one form entry and two bulge classes plus ancillary space for the full scheme) could be physically delivered by September 2028. Approval to bring the school forward will be a major decision for DCC Cabinet.

- **420 place primary school (2 form entry with early years provision for 0-5 year olds):** Planned for either the Treasbeare or Bluehayes expansion areas, Treasbeare being the preference as the more accessible and better integrated option.
- **Phased secondary expansion:** Phased expansion of the all-through Cranbrook Education Campus (CEC) will increase capacity for secondary age pupils to at least 1,200 places. Initial phases of the expansion project recently increased the schools secondary capacity from 600 to a maximum of 850 places at a total cost of circa £1.8m, forward funded by DCC.
- **SEND:** The delivery of the SEND school planned for Cranbrook was proposed to be delivered through the Government's Free School Programme to support children and young people with SEND in East Devon. It was due to open in September 2026. However, this has been subject to significant delays due to national decision-making processes, the withdrawal of school sponsor and then a wider review of the programme by the Department for Education (DfE.)

The DfE presented DCC with the option to receive capital funding rather than await a significantly delayed special free school. Devon has accepted this offer to make arrangements to address the immediate need for specialist places. The Council also continues to secure developer contributions, along with High Needs Capital Funding, to support both current and future SEND sufficiency needs, including from the expansion areas in Cranbrook.

The recently published *Every Child Achieving and Thriving* White Paper, which is driving significant national SEND Reforms, promotes the development of "one inclusive education system," with a stronger emphasis on supporting children and young people within mainstream schools, alongside maintaining sufficient specialist provision for those with more complex needs.

In line with the proposed SEND reforms, DCC is taking a regional approach to SEND provision and prioritising increased capacity within mainstream settings. The development of specialist units across the County is currently being progressed by DCC to enable more children and young people with SEND to have their needs met within mainstream schools locally.

The first specialist base in East Devon is due to open at Exmouth College later this year, with another to follow at Honiton College. If successfully delivered, this will create an estimated 50 additional places. The government's ambition is for all secondary schools to have inclusion bases (which includes specialist bases) and there is a commitment by DCC to explore options within Cranbrook.

Challenges

- **Pupil Yields:** Typically, in larger developments, pupil yields are higher than established communities. Managing this whilst not over providing provision longer term is a challenge but can be mitigated by early delivery of new education infrastructure.
- **Forward Funding:** In order to achieve early delivery, infrastructure needs to be delivered in advance of Section 106 receipts. Capital project costs are also outstripping DfE funding rates and phased delivery has a cost implication. DCC's ability to forward fund multiple large projects is limited.
- **Section 106 triggers:** The progression of Section 106 agreements for developments in the Cranbrook Expansion Areas which do not include school land are currently being stalled as the housing delivery restriction of 750 homes (until the second school land is transferred to DCC) is being challenged. DCC are working collaboratively with East Devon and the ATLAS team from Homes England to overcome the challenges.

Next Steps

- **Early Years:** The new primary schools will be designed and be required to offer early years and childcare places for 0-5 year olds for at least 48 weeks of the year to address the identified need within the town. DCC will continue to review additional options in the short term and the impact of provision identified previously.
- **Cobdens Primary:** DCC are completing a period of redesign to address responses to the reserve matters planning submission before detailed design work can be further progressed. The provisional opening date is September 2028 however the capital is yet to be secured.
- **Secondary:** Design fees have been secured to complete the detailed design stage of works for the remainder of the expansion which will increase the

capacity of the secondary offer from 850 to at least 1,200 places. The next phase of the expansion is likely to begin in the medium term.

- **SEND:** Increase capacity in mainstream settings as a priority.