



Autumn Announcement

8 November 2023

In June 2023, the Council's new administration paused work on the Schools for the Future three to two tier transition programme for some areas to ensure the plans are affordable and deliverable. We committed to updating you in the autumn, so I want to inform you of the work we have been doing and what this means.

We remain totally committed to:

- supporting all three-tier schools across Central Bedfordshire to transition to the established Primary and Secondary school (two-tier) model;
- investing in school maintenance;
- providing more school places where needed; and
- creating specialist provision for children with Special Educational Needs.

The Council is investing £140m in this work over the next few years.

We have taken a thorough look at the two-tier and new school place plans against the budget, while considering how many school age children we have in Central Bedfordshire in the coming years.

You may be aware that birth rates are decreasing across the country, with the impact now being seen from the pandemic, while many residents are also tightening their belts and paying more for their bills. We currently forecast our demand for school places for a rolling five-year period, and this will continue to be updated on an annual basis.

Our plans need to reflect these changes. In light of the new forecast data and budget constraints, we have made some decisions and I have set out here what these are:

Biggleswade


The changes agreed for schools in the Biggleswade area remain unaffected and these schools will continue to transition to Primary and Secondary Schools ahead of the September 2024 academic year. Work has already begun on these schools with contractors being appointed and designs for the physical changes commencing.

We will continue to share updates as these works progress.

Cranfield

The planned transition to a two-tier model in this area is now proposed to be re-phased to take place by September 2026 rather than September 2025, as previously planned. Delaying this change for a year will





be more fiscally sensible and help ease the financial pressures across wider Council funding by several million pounds.

Please be assured that the Council remains committed to this two-tier change, and we will be continuing to work with our schools in the Cranfield and surrounding areas to become Primary and Secondary Schools ready for the 2026 academic year. We are also continuing to work with Bedford Borough Council and the Chiltern Learning Trust to ensure that we have school places for all children entering year 5 in September 2025, some of whom will continue the current transition pathway into Marston Vale Middle School as it undergoes its phased transition to become Stewartby Primary School over the coming years.

Houghton Regis

Since our last update, the brand new Houstone School building has now opened, serving Houghton Regis. [A video of the new school can be found here.](#)

We also have plans for a new school to serve the emerging **Bidwell West** development area of Houghton Regis and whilst we remain committed to delivering education in our new development areas, our current pupil forecasts support the development of this school at a later date, therefore, this will not take place by September 2025.


We will continue to monitor the demand for school places in this area and the timing of the new school will start in line with forecast demand for school places. At this stage, we are not experiencing pressures for school spaces but we do acknowledge that some year groups in specific schools in this area are popular, and this has resulted in siblings not securing spaces at the same schools. We will continue to review admissions criteria to consider ways to improve this situation.

Shefford and Stotfold

In the Shefford and Stotfold area, we have been considering the range of data that is available to us including current children living in the area as well as forecasts for new children being born and those moving into the area in the future. This reflects what we know to be the national picture with a decrease in birth rates and overall less emerging demand.

Changes like this have meant that the number of children we expect to need school places in the short to medium term has reduced. The previous model is no longer appropriate because it would create too many school places, which could have a negative impact on children's education and place unnecessary pressure on school operations. This is because school funding is linked to the number of children being taught each year at that school.

Given the size of some of our smaller, rural schools, there are also constraints which mean at least two lower schools could not expand into a Primary School teaching the same number of children each year (as previously planned).





We therefore need to continue to work with school leaders to develop a new plan meaning that these schools will not transition by September 2025. Whilst we recognise this is frustrating and unsettling for parents who want to plan their child's school journey, please be assured that this is the right course of action to avoid longer-term uncertainty for school's futures. This is because we can plan for children that have already been born or are in school now, while ensuring that our plans can be flexible to meet longer-term school place needs, for instance, if birth rates increase in the future.

An example of this has been our completion of a brand-new secondary school in Houghton Regis called Houstone School, which was designed in such a way that allowed us to build for the current demand for school places, while also planning for a future expansion to enable the school to grow at the right time to welcome children from the emerging housing developments as they move into the area.

We've also been taking a detailed look at the plan for **Campton Academy**. The relocation of Campton Academy will not take place as planned in September 2024, as there is no pressure for school places. The future relocation and planned expansion of Campton Academy will need to be considered as part of the wider two-tier planning for the Shefford and Stotfold to provide the best solution for our children's education.

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Three-tier schools in other areas

In line with our commitment to transition to a primary and secondary school model across Central Bedfordshire, we will also engage earlier with schools in the areas that have yet to begin the process: Harlington; Amptill and Flitwick and Leighton-Linslade.

This early engagement will help us to understand what will be needed to enable a smooth transition in the future and to work with the school leaders to plan their journeys effectively. It will also help us to prioritise the transition programme based on local insights.

Special Educational Needs and Disability

We are also committed to improving our provision for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and a priority is our work to increase specialist school places, which remains unaffected.

If you would like to know more about the investment we are making in our SEND school places, you can see our Specialist Place Plan, which was recently discussed at the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee [\[here\]](#).

Young people competition





We have also listened to schools and parents who feel that the Schools for the Future programme has changed from the aims originally set out in 2018. We have taken this onboard, and we will be working to redefine the work we do, whilst still maintaining the core focus of changing lower, middle and upper schools in Central Bedfordshire to either primary or secondary, to improve outcomes for our children.

As part of this, we want to involve young people in the work that we do and so we are launching an art competition for young people to help us understand what education means to them. The themes that emerge from this competition will help us have a better understanding of what's important to our children and young people.

Pupils from all schools in Central Bedfordshire can take part.

In return for schools assisting us in the running of this competition, the school whose student has submitted the winning illustration will be provided with 7 days' of construction related activities including careers talks, site visits and shadowing for our young adults and for our younger children, age-appropriate construction activities including a 'digger day' and bug hotel session hosted and delivered by our leading contractors and consultants.

We anticipate 3 winning categories – primary, secondary and SEND education - with entries coming from students in those cohorts across our schools (including those operating in a three-tier setup) and will work with the winning schools to schedule these activities towards the end of the current academic year.

We recognise that some schools and parents have experienced repeated setbacks and we thank you for your patience as we work to provide more clarity on the changes to your local schools.

Kind regards

Cllr Hayley Whitaker

Executive Member for Families, Education and Children

