

Consultation on Proposal to add an Autism Specialist Resource Base at Downham Market Academy, Downham Market, Norfolk, from September 2026

Our Proposal

Eastern Learning Alliance would like to hear your views on our proposal for Downham Market Academy, Bexwell Road, Downham Market, PE38 9LL, **to add a 20 place Autism Specialist Resource Base (ASD SRB) from September 2026.**

We appreciate that young people with autism can struggle to engage with learning and succeed in a classroom without additional strategies and interventions. A Resource Base can support young people to overcome their barriers to learning, be better able to succeed and to be re-integrated into a mainstream setting, in which they can achieve their potential.

We are very keen to provide this support at Downham Market Academy. Our Specialist Resource Base will be located within the Downham Market Academy main site and will be fully integrated within the school. The Base will be managed by the head of school and governance arrangements of Downham Market Academy and the Eastern Learning Alliance.

The Base will have a recurrent funding agreement to support an agreed staffing structure for the Specialist Resource Base, including resources, equipment and running costs associated with the Base.

Places at the Specialist Resource Base will be agreed through the County Councils' Autism Base Admissions processes and the school will be part of the decision-making process. It will grow to full capacity through this admissions process and may therefore not be full in September 2026.

Specialist Resource Bases are a key part of Norfolk's Local Offer for children with special educational needs and their families and have been identified in Norfolk's SEND Strategy as a priority for development.

What is a Specialist Resource Base (SRB)?

Autism bases form part of the Specialist Resource Base programme in Norfolk and are a key component of Norfolk's SEND Local Offer, and of mainstream inclusion support to young people, families and the school system. Autism Bases are areas within a mainstream school with a dedicated lead teacher and high levels of support staff. They are an integral part of the school and provide additional support from trained staff for young people with social communication difficulties or a diagnosis of autism.

Autism Bases provide a learning area which is calm and adapted to meet these needs. Young people can be taught in the Base or within mainstream classes as required. Pupils are supported to access mainstream classes alongside their peers as much as they are able. The balance of time spent between the Base and mainstream classes can vary and depends on each student's individual needs.

Placements at the Autism Base are permanent, and pupils will be on the roll of Downham Market Academy. These places do not form part of the school published admission number (PAN) and are registered in addition to that number.

Why DMA?

Downham Market Academy is part of the Eastern Learning Alliance, a multi-academy trust with a proven track record for excellence within the provision for learners with autism. Within the Trust we have a specialist school for children with autism, the Cavendish School, as well as two schools which have run successful resource bases for many years, Witchford Village College and Impington Village College.

The Trust has a Director of Autism, Stephanie Smith, who has oversight of provision across the trust for learners with autism. This ensures that supporting learners with autism is always treated as a high priority and staff are fully trained to ensure in-lesson provision is targeted and effective.

There is a lack of specialist provision for learners with autism in the West Norfolk locality and therefore establishing an SRB at Downham Market Academy would provide additional capacity to enable all students to

access education in a suitable setting.

As an Academy we place a high priority on inclusive practice, our Acting Head of School was previously the SENDCo both at DMA and across multiple schools within the Trust, including running “The Cabin” at Witchford Village College. The Academy has a focus on ensuring all students, no matter their starting point, make progress in line with their potential.

The Specialist Resource Base at Downham Market Academy will provide a supported environment for learners with autism who would benefit from a mainstream curriculum and environment, with the added support of specially trained staff to enable them to overcome any barriers to learning.

What are the benefits of this proposal?

The main driver for Eastern Learning Alliance and the senior leaders of Downham Market Academy is to meet the increased demand for specialist educational provision within our area and the needs of our most vulnerable learners. We feel our proposal would benefit young people because it will:

- support more students with special education needs and disabilities to be educated and thrive in their local school and community;
- enhance students’ progress by effectively meeting their individual social communication and interaction needs;
- help facilitate better access to the curriculum and support students to achieve their potential;
- ensure that needs can be met locally avoiding the need for students to spend unnecessary time travelling to an appropriate school further away. This is better for young people and can reduce transport costs.
- increase the availability of places to meet the needs of students with SEND;
- address identified geographical, and age and phase gaps in SRB provision across Norfolk.
- support the sharing of expertise and good autism practice as part of our school and Trust.

What are the potential impacts of this proposal and how will they be mitigated?

Increased traffic – as part of the proposal additional parking will be included within the build, the Base will also have its own layby for taxis to park to drop off children. These plans will ensure additional traffic can move swiftly from the roads near to the school rather than impacting the Academy’s neighbours.

Increased pupil numbers – providing extra classroom space where students can complete bespoke lessons for some of their timetable will reduce the impact on mainstream classes

Costs

The school will be responsible for staffing and resources, and the local authority and the school have worked together to financially model the provision to ensure it is affordable and will not impact upon the mainstream school budget. The capital costs for the new building have been costed and will be funded by the local authority from the SEN capital grant.

All statutory consultation requirements relating to these proposals will be complied with.

How can you have your say?

The school will be holding a drop in event at Downham Market Academy at 4pm on 13th May where you can come and find out more about this proposal.

If you unable to attend this event but would like to comment on our proposal, you can have your say by:

- Accessing our online survey; <https://forms.office.com/e/tPUCFAPNY2>
- Returning the completed form to the school office at Downham Market Academy
- Email Srbconsultation@dma.tela.org.uk

Responses by 12 noon 23rd May 2025

What happens next?

Eastern Learning Alliance will consider all the responses received during this consultation and decide whether to refer the proposal to the Regional Department for Education (DfE) Director for a decision.

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Let us know what you think of our proposal.

How far do you agree or disagree with our proposal to establish a permanent 20 place Specialist Resource Base for Autism at Downham Market Academy?
Please tick a box.

Strongly agree ☐

Agree ☐

Neither agree or disagree ☐

Disagree ☐

Strongly disagree ☐

Don't know ☐

Why do you say this? Please write in the box below.

Are there any other comments or suggestions you would like to make to help us with this decision and in planning for the future provision for children? Please write in the box below.

We would like to hear from many different people as your views help us to decide whether we make these changes. We will also use any personal information to understand how different groups of people feel about our proposal to establish the Specialist Resource Base at Downham Market Academy.

We will process any personal information we receive from you in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Regulation (EU) 2016/679), the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Academy Trust's data protection policy and guidelines. This means that Eastern Learning Alliance will hold your personal data and only use it for the purpose for which it was collected, being this consultation.

We won't identify individuals when reporting back our findings and, under our record management policy, we will keep this information for five years. We will also, under normal circumstances, not pass your personal data on to anyone else. However, we may be asked under access to information laws to publish or disclose some, or all, of the information you provide in response to this consultation, including any personal information. We will only do this where such disclosure will comply with such relevant information laws which include the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

Please tell us who you are (tick all that apply):

Pupil <input type="checkbox"/>	School governor <input type="checkbox"/>
Parent / Carer <input type="checkbox"/>	Local resident <input type="checkbox"/>
Member of staff <input type="checkbox"/>	Local business <input type="checkbox"/>
Member of the Parent Association <input type="checkbox"/>	Local sports group <input type="checkbox"/>
	Local community group <input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify): _____

At which school? _____

What is your postcode? _____

Your views will help us decide if this proposal goes ahead. You can tell us your views by returning this completed form to:

- The school office at Downham Market Academy.
- Accessing our online survey; <https://forms.office.com/e/tPUCFAPNY2>
- Email Srbconsultation@dma.tela.org.uk

This consultation ends at 12 noon 23rd May 2025