



Overview and Scrutiny Commission

Bracknell Forest Council
Time Square, Market Street
Bracknell, RG12 1JD

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP

Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London, SW1P 3BT

3 June 2025

Dear Secretary of State,

Re: Urgent Request for Funding Approval – Forest View Academy School, Buckler's Park, Bracknell Forest

I write to you on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission at Bracknell Forest Council, following our meeting on 23 May 2025, where the Commission unanimously resolved to issue this open letter. We are seeking a clear and timely decision from the Department for Education regarding the future of the proposed Forest View School at Buckler's Park site.

Forest View is a 100-place autism-specific school that is central to our borough's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) strategy and a key deliverable within our Safety Valve agreement with the Department. The school is critical to ensuring children and young people's needs can be met locally whilst reducing our reliance on high cost out-of-borough placements within the Independent Non Maintained Specialist School (INMSS) sector. The projected savings—up to £63,000 per pupil annually—are critical to the long-term sustainability of our High Needs Block (HNB), which is forecast to reach a deficit of £51.7 million by March 2029.

Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Commission

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Despite the Council's readiness to proceed, including the preparation of a high-level delivery programme and a formal offer to self-deliver the project under a one-off capital grant, the Department's internal funding review has placed the project on indefinite hold. Bracknell Forest received notification over two years ago, in early March 2023, that this project could begin and this delay is jeopardising our ability to meet our Safety Valve obligations and increasing pressure on both our SEND services and general fund.

The Commission urges the Department to:

1. **Confirm the capital funding allocation for Forest View School without further delay.**
2. **Commit to building the school immediately**, or, if the Department lacks capacity within its own programme, **approve Bracknell Forest Council's proposal to self-deliver the project under a capital grant model.**
3. **Provide a clear and immediate timeline for recommencement** if neither of the above options is feasible.

The urgency of delivering Forest View School is further underscored by the findings of the recent Area SEND inspection, which identified systemic failings across the Bracknell Forest Local Area Partnership. The report highlights a persistent lack of sufficient, appropriate educational provision for children and young people with SEND, resulting in many being placed out of borough, and others experiencing disrupted education due to inadequate specialist support. These gaps in local provision are contributing to delays in assessment, unmet needs, and poor educational outcomes. Establishing Forest View School is therefore not only a strategic response to our Safety Valve obligations but a critical intervention to address the insufficiency of local placements and improve the lived experiences of children and families in our borough

This project has the full support of our local MP, Peter Swallow, and is backed by cross-party councillors and community stakeholders. We believe that swift action from the Department will also demonstrate a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children with SEND, whilst honouring the spirit of the Safety Valve agreement.

We respectfully request a formal response by end of June 2025 so that the Council and its partners can plan accordingly.

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Georgia Pickering
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Commission
Bracknell Forest Council

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