



Dear Jo Morin,

01.08.26

Justification for Additional Therapeutic Accommodation, Specialist Teaching Spaces and Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA)

Introduction

Although the existing Courtlands Independent Special School building has been assessed as being capable of accommodating up to 80 pupils, the proposed development is not simply intended to increase pupil capacity. Rather, it reflects the continued development of the school's specialist provision and the increasing complexity of the educational, therapeutic, sensory and emotional needs of the pupils attending the school.

Courtlands is an independent special school supporting pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), primarily relating to autism, anxiety, emotionally based school avoidance, sensory processing differences and associated social communication and emotional regulation needs.

Delivering the provision specified within pupils' EHCPs requires significantly more than conventional classroom teaching. Throughout the school day, pupils access a range of therapeutic, pastoral and specialist interventions alongside their academic curriculum.

The proposed development is therefore a qualitative improvement to the school's specialist provision rather than simply a quantitative increase in teaching accommodation.

Legal Requirement to Deliver EHCP Provision

All pupils attending Courtlands have an Education, Health and Care Plan. These statutory plans identify the special educational provision required to meet each pupil's assessed needs and support them in achieving agreed outcomes.

Under section 42 of the Children and Families Act 2014, the local authority responsible for maintaining an EHCP has a legal duty to secure the special educational provision specified within that plan. When a pupil is placed at Courtlands, the school must work with the placing authority and relevant professionals to deliver the provision it has agreed to provide.

Courtlands must therefore ensure that it has suitable accommodation, staffing and facilities through which the required educational and therapeutic provision can be delivered effectively.

In many cases, the provision set out within pupils' EHCPs includes occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, emotional regulation work, sensory programmes, social communication interventions, therapeutic support and individual or small-group teaching.

The proposed therapeutic lodges, specialist teaching spaces and MUGA will provide the physical environments necessary to deliver this provision safely, consistently and effectively.

The development should therefore not be viewed as an optional enhancement. It is a necessary part of ensuring that Courtlands can continue to support the delivery of legally specified EHCP provision and meet the needs of the pupils placed at the school.

Therapeutic Lodges

A central feature of the proposal is the provision of dedicated therapeutic lodges within the school grounds.

The lodges will provide purpose-designed accommodation for professional therapists and specialist practitioners, including:

- Occupational Therapists;
- Speech and Language Therapists;
- Psychotherapists;
- counsellors;
- ELSA practitioners; and
- other specialist intervention staff.

These spaces will primarily be used for small group therapeutic interventions, enabling pupils to access personalised support identified within their EHCPs in environments specifically suited to therapeutic work.

Currently, many interventions take place in classrooms, offices or shared meeting rooms. Although these spaces can be used when necessary, they are not always conducive to effective therapeutic practice. They may lack privacy and can be affected by background noise, movement, interruptions and the general activity of the school day.

These factors are particularly significant for pupils with autism, heightened anxiety, sensory sensitivities and difficulties with emotional regulation. Such pupils frequently require calm, predictable and low-stimulation environments before they are able to communicate openly and engage meaningfully with therapeutic intervention.

The proposed lodges will provide dedicated accommodation for:

- Occupational Therapy;
- Speech and Language Therapy;
- psychotherapy and counselling;
- emotional literacy and ELSA interventions;
- sensory regulation programmes;
- communication and social interaction groups;
- individual literacy and numeracy interventions;
- assessments and review meetings; and
- sensitive meetings involving pupils, parents and external professionals.

The location of the lodges within the landscaped school grounds is an intentional aspect of their therapeutic design. The quieter, more natural surroundings will create a calm and mindful atmosphere, separate from the activity and demands of the main school building.

This will enable pupils to regulate emotionally, engage more effectively with therapy and return to their lessons in a more settled and learning-ready state.

From a planning perspective, the lodges have been specifically selected because they represent a low-impact and proportionate form of development. They will be modest in scale, positioned sensitively within the existing grounds and designed to sit sympathetically within the gardens without materially altering the character of the site.

Their installation will avoid unnecessary damage to the landscape and preserve established planting and the overall character of the grounds wherever possible.

Additional Specialist Teaching Accommodation

The proposed additional teaching accommodation is required to provide greater flexibility in curriculum delivery, personalised learning and specialist intervention. It is not simply intended to increase the number of conventional classrooms.

Courtlands teaches pupils in small groups, often significantly below mainstream class sizes. This is necessary because pupils may require reduced levels of noise

and distraction, carefully structured routines, differentiated teaching, predictable environments and regular opportunities to access individual or small-group intervention.

The school must balance academic teaching with:

- therapeutic programmes;
- examination access arrangements;
- vocational learning;
- individual literacy and numeracy interventions;
- sensory and emotional regulation work;
- personalised educational pathways;
- phased reintegration programmes; and
- support for pupils experiencing heightened anxiety.

At present, therapeutic and specialist interventions can compete with existing classrooms and meeting areas. This may result in classes being displaced, shared spaces being used for incompatible activities or interventions taking place in environments that are not sufficiently private or calm.

The additional accommodation will enable the school to:

- maintain appropriately small teaching groups;
- provide dedicated intervention spaces;
- deliver literacy and numeracy catch-up programmes;
- support phased reintegration and personalised timetables;
- accommodate examination access arrangements;
- provide quiet learning environments for pupils experiencing anxiety;
- separate activities where noise or sensory demands may affect other pupils;
- reduce disruption to established classes; and
- expand specialist and vocational curriculum opportunities.

These spaces will allow therapeutic intervention and academic teaching to operate alongside one another without either compromising the quality of the other.

The need is therefore based on the complexity and range of educational and therapeutic activities taking place within the school, rather than simply the maximum number of pupils who can physically be accommodated within the existing building.

Multi-Use Games Area

The proposed Multi-Use Games Area forms an important part of Courtlands' therapeutic, educational and wellbeing provision.

For many pupils with autism, anxiety and sensory regulation needs, regular access to structured physical activity is fundamental to emotional regulation, concentration and readiness to learn.

Movement can provide an important means of reducing anxiety, managing sensory needs and preventing emotional dysregulation. Access to appropriate physical activity is therefore not simply recreational; it forms an integral part of the support provided to many pupils.

The existing grassed areas are valuable resources during favourable weather.

However, during periods of rain and inclement weather, these areas can become wet, muddy, slippery or unsuitable for regular use. This restricts pupils' access to outdoor activity precisely at times when opportunities for movement and regulation remain necessary.

The MUGA will provide a safe, dependable and all-weather surface, allowing pupils to continue accessing outdoor space and structured activity throughout the school year.

The facility will support:

- Physical Education lessons;
- structured movement and sensory regulation breaks;
- gross motor development;
- therapeutic physical activity;
- supervised social interaction;
- small-group games;

- enrichment activities;
- wellbeing programmes; and
- year-round access to outdoor exercise.

The MUGA is not proposed as a commercial sports facility and will not be intended for intensive external or community use. It is a modest school facility designed to meet the needs of Courtlands pupils during the normal school day.

Its primary purpose is to ensure that pupils are not prevented from accessing safe outdoor space and physical activity because of poor ground conditions or inclement weather.

The design has deliberately been kept low impact. It will incorporate low perimeter fencing and will not include floodlighting or any additional external lighting.

Its use will therefore be limited to normal school hours and will not generate evening activity, light pollution or unreasonable disturbance. The low fencing will reduce visual intrusion and help preserve the open appearance and character of the school grounds.

The absence of additional lighting, combined with low fencing and sensitive landscaping, will ensure that the MUGA remains proportionate to its surroundings and does not become an intrusive feature within the site.

Overall Educational, Legal and Planning Need

The proposed development reflects the changing nature of specialist education and the increasing requirement for education, therapy, emotional regulation and wellbeing support to be delivered as part of one coordinated school-day programme. Every pupil attending Courtlands has an EHCP identifying the specialist provision required to meet their individual needs. The local authority has a statutory responsibility to secure that provision, while Courtlands must ensure that it can deliver the educational and therapeutic support it has agreed to provide for pupils placed at the school.

The school therefore has a clear educational, professional and contractual responsibility to maintain suitable facilities through which EHCP provision can be delivered.

As the complexity of pupils' needs has increased, so too has the requirement for:

- dedicated therapeutic accommodation;
- quiet and confidential intervention spaces;
- specialist small-group teaching rooms;
- sensory and emotional regulation facilities; and
- reliable access to physical activity throughout the year.

The proposed development is a direct and proportionate response to these requirements.

The therapeutic lodges, additional specialist teaching accommodation and MUGA will enable Courtlands to:

- improve the delivery of provision specified within pupils' EHCPs;
- provide calm, confidential and purpose-designed therapeutic environments;
- protect pupils' dignity, privacy and confidentiality;
- integrate therapeutic intervention into the school day;
- maintain appropriately small teaching groups;
- provide personalised learning and phased reintegration programmes;
- increase access to physical activity and emotional regulation support;
- ensure pupils can access outdoor space during inclement weather;
- preserve the landscaped character of the site;
- minimise visual and environmental impact;
- avoid floodlighting and additional external lighting;
- limit the use of the facilities to normal school activities and hours; and
- provide therapeutic accommodation that can be removed in the future should the school relocate.

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Taken together, the proposals represent a carefully considered, proportionate and low-impact enhancement of Courtlands' specialist provision.

They are necessary not simply because the school requires additional physical space, but because modern specialist education requires a range of dedicated environments in which statutory EHCP provision, therapeutic intervention, personalised teaching, sensory regulation and physical wellbeing can be delivered safely and effectively.

The proposed development will allow Courtlands to continue meeting the complex needs of its pupils while preserving the character of the site and minimising the impact of the facilities upon the surrounding gardens and wider area.

Kind regards

Mark Birkbeck
Headteacher