

## Consultation Feedback Letter

Date: 2 April 2026

Dear Parents, Carers and Stakeholders

### **VIARP Relocation Consultation – Formal Response from Gosforth Group**

The consultation on the proposed relocation of the Visually Impaired Additionally Resourced Provision (VIARP) has now concluded. Gosforth Group, in partnership with Newcastle City Council, has carefully reviewed all feedback shared by parents, carers, and stakeholders.

This document presents our formal response, incorporating the areas raised during consultation and setting out the commitments and actions we will take to safeguard statutory compliance, pupil wellbeing and the continuity and quality of specialist provision.

**Overview of engagement:** Fourteen consultation submissions from parents, carers and stakeholders were received and analysed. Themes were consolidated to ensure a clear, transparent response to the questions and concerns raised.

### **Our duties on equality, accessibility and lawful process**

We will continue to meet all statutory responsibilities under the SEND Code of Practice (2014), the Children and Families Act (2014), and the Equality Act (2010). Every pupil in the VIARP has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP); any change to a named placement will follow the statutory amendment process. Provision set out in Section F of each EHCP will remain in place throughout any transition.

In partnership with the Newcastle SEND Sensory Service, the Children's Vision Team, supported by a Habilitation Specialist, will complete a full environmental accessibility audit of Great Park Academy and provide tailored recommendations to ensure the site is fully accessible for learners with visual impairment.

Where a family expresses a preference for a pupil to remain at Gosforth Junior High Academy or Gosforth Academy, the EHCP will be reviewed collaboratively to identify the support required in that setting.

## **Protecting stability and wellbeing through transition**

We recognise that change can be especially challenging for some pupils with visual impairment. The move will be planned and delivered sensitively. Enhanced transition will include additional familiarisation visits to Great Park Academy, bespoke Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) support from Educational Psychologists, and close joint work between the Children's Vision Team and the school.

Staff at Great Park Academy will receive detailed briefings on individual access needs, routines and communication approaches so that trusted relationships and predictable support are sustained.

We note that current VIARP pupils span a range of year groups; while there is no single "perfect" timing, our approach is designed to maintain continuity and minimise disruption.

## **Continuity and quality of specialist provision**

Specialist staffing and quality assurance will continue to be provided by the centrally funded Newcastle SEND Sensory Service, operating in accordance with national Quality Standards for Sensory Support Services and for Resource Provisions in mainstream schools. Core staff will transition with pupils, preserving relationships and expertise, while the combined provision will benefit from a broader multidisciplinary team.

The indicative staffing model includes Teachers of Visual Impairment, Specialist Learning Support Assistants, a Lead Specialist, Habilitation input and a Visual Impairment Technician, with additional support from the peripatetic team, including colleagues focused on preparation for adulthood.

A comprehensive training programme for mainstream staff has been developed and will continue throughout the 2026/27 academic year, ensuring staff feel confident in adapting their teaching, learning, and assessment methods to meet pupil needs.

A larger, age-appropriate peer group will strengthen social inclusion and create more opportunities for group-based learning such as independent living skills, mobility work, and VI-specific sport.

## **Readiness and suitability of Great Park Academy**

### **Dr. Alexandra Thorp | CEO**

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Great Park Academy provides a modern environment with the flexibility to implement reasonable adjustments more readily than older buildings. Following the environmental audit, assistive technologies, specialist resources and mobility/orientation arrangements will be in place ahead of the move.

The locality, serving a growing residential area with shops, services and public transport, offers safe, consistent routes for community-based habilitation and independence work.

While Great Park Academy does not offer A-levels on site, pupils will continue to access a full range of post-16 pathways across the city, including sixth forms within the Gosforth Group and local colleges, with continuing support from the Children's Vision Team up to age 25.

SEN transport will remain available where appropriate; to support enrichment, we will continue to provide lunchtime clubs and other opportunities alongside sighted peers.

### **Rationale, transparency and how we involved families**

In May 2025, following placement-planning reviews that identified rising demand for specialist visual impairment places, we began work with Newcastle City Council to secure a larger, future-proofed setting from September 2026.

Combining the current provisions into one site reduces transitions and enables a continuous Year 5–11 journey with improved space, resources and curriculum breadth. Prior to formal consultation, families were written to in November 2025 outlining the proposal and next steps, including information on transport.

During consultation, parents and carers were invited to tour Great Park Academy and meet staff, request follow-up conversations via an online survey, and hold individual discussions with the Lead Specialist Teacher. This engagement will continue as plans progress.

To provide further reassurance, we can confirm that any planned relocation would not take place during the current academic year, ensuring families have sufficient notice and that no pupil experiences disruption midyear.

### **Next steps**

All consultation feedback, statutory guidance and operational considerations have now been reviewed by both the Gosforth Group and colleagues from Newcastle City Council, and the decision has been taken to progress to the next stage of the process.

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As we prepare our formal submission to the Department for Education (DfE), the body responsible for authorising any significant change to an academy's educational provision, all consultation feedback, statutory guidance and operational considerations will continue to be fully considered.

Once our submission has been assessed by the Department for Education (DfE) and a decision has been confirmed, we will provide a further update outlining the outcome and next steps.

Throughout, our focus remains on safeguarding pupils' access to high-quality, inclusive education and on delivering a well-supported transition for every young person in scope.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Stewart', with a long horizontal line extending to the right and ending in a stylized arrowhead.

Bryan Stewart  
Deputy Chief Executive Officer Education  
**Gosforth Group**

Enc: Consultation Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)  
Consultation Feedback Letter from Newcastle City Council

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## Consultation Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

### Relocation of the Visual Impairment Additional Resource Provision (VIARP)

*(Based on responses to the January / February 2026 consultation)*

#### 1. Statutory Processes, Equality & Accessibility

##### 1.1 Does changing a child's named school require an EHCP amendment?

Yes. Any change to Section I of a child's EHCP must follow the statutory amendment process.

##### 1.2 Will an accessibility audit of Great Park Academy be carried out and shared?

Yes. The Children's Vision Team and Habilitation Specialist will complete a full environmental accessibility audit of Great Park Academy. Recommendations from this audit will inform adaptations and will be shared with parents.

##### 1.3 What happens if parents feel relocation would fail to deliver the EHCP's provision?

Concerns would be considered through a statutory EHCP review. The Children's Vision Team will work with relevant SENDCOs to determine the support needed if parents prefer their child to remain at JHA or GA.

#### 2. Pupil Stability, Wellbeing & Emotional Support

##### 2.1 What support will pupils receive to manage anxiety and transition difficulties?

The move will be carefully planned with personalised emotional and environmental support from:

- The Children's Vision Team
  - Newcastle City Council Educational Psychology Service
  - Specialist staff familiar to the pupils
- Enhanced transition visits will help pupils build confidence in the new environment.

##### 2.2 How will the trust support pupils who rely on routine and trusted adults?

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Familiar VIARP staff will relocate with pupils, ensuring continuity of relationships and care. Additional training and preparation will ensure Great Park Academy staff understand each child's needs.

### **3. Quality & Continuity of Specialist Provision**

#### **3.1 How will the VIARP remain specialist and well resourced?**

The SEND Sensory Service uses established quality standards and will continue to staff and manage the provision following its proven citywide model.

#### **3.2 Will current specialist staff transfer to Great Park Academy?**

Yes. Teachers of VI, Specialist LSAs, the Habilitation Specialist, and technical support staff will move with pupils, maintaining stable relationships and consistent specialist input.

#### **3.3 How will mainstream staff be supported to meet VIARP pupils' needs?**

A comprehensive training programme will run at the start of and throughout the academic year. The ARP maintains an open-door policy to support ongoing advice and collaboration.

#### **3.4 How will friendships, peer networks, and social inclusion be maintained?**

The merged provision will create larger, age-appropriate peer groups and enable more effective group-based skills sessions, social activities, and enrichment opportunities.

### **4. Readiness, Suitability & Practical Arrangements**

#### **4.1 Will the new ARP be fully equipped and operational from day one?**

Yes. Newcastle City Council and the MAT are ensuring appropriate accommodation, IT infrastructure, and environmental adaptations are in place in advance of the move.

#### **4.2 How will safe navigation, orientation, and mobility be supported?**

Enhanced transition visits and ongoing Habitation sessions will help pupils learn and generalise mobility skills across new environments. Skills are taught flexibly and not tied to one building.

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### **4.3 Is Great Park Academy accessible in terms of location and the surrounding area?**

Yes. The area includes shops, cafés, bus routes, and safe walking routes, which support mobility training and independence.

### **4.4 What about quiet spaces for pupils who become overwhelmed?**

Provisions for low stimulus, quiet areas will be included as part of the ARP's design and transition planning.

### **4.5 What happens at Post16 if Great Park Academy has no sixth form?**

VIARP pupils will continue to access a broad range of Post16 pathways (e.g., Gosforth Academy, Jesmond Park Academy, FE colleges). The SEND Sensory Service supports young people with VI from birth to 25, ensuring continuity.

### **4.6 Will transport support be adjusted for siblings in different schools?**

Yes. SEN transport is already used for families with children in different settings and will continue to be available. Additional lunchtime clubs will help with afterschool activity access.

## **5. Rationale, Transparency & Capacity**

### **5.1 Why is the VIARP relocating?**

Internal reviews in May 2025 identified rising demand for Visual Impairment specialist places, with existing sites unable to meet future needs. A larger, modern, futureproof setting was required for September 2026.

### **5.2 Was the consultation genuine?**

Yes. Parents were informed early (Nov 2025), invited to school tours, offered one-to-one meetings, and given multiple opportunities to ask questions throughout the consultation.

### **5.3 How many places will the new ARP have? What if demand increases?**

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The merged ARP will increase capacity to meet projected demand. If demand grows further, placement planning would be reviewed in partnership with NCC.

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## Response to issues raised during the consultation process.

Joanne Scott, Manager, SEND Sensory Service, & Katie Fuller, Lead Specialist Teacher (VI) Newcastle City Council

02 March 2026

### Overview

A total of 14 parental consultation responses were received, which have been reviewed and analysed. The feedback has been grouped into five key themes to ensure a structured and transparent response to the issues raised. This document provides an overall summary of the consultation findings and outlines how the Gosforth Group and Newcastle Local Authority's SEND Sensory Service has considered and addressed the views shared by parents and carers throughout the process.

### 1. Equality, Accessibility & Legal Duties

#### **Concern raised:**

*"Please confirm that any proposal to change a named school (Section I) must follow the statutory EHCP amendment process"*

*Has an independent accessibility audit been carried out at Great Park Academy specifically for pupils with visual impairments, and will this be shared with parents?*

*What is the process if a parent believes the relocation would constitute a failure to deliver the provision named in their child's EHCP?*

#### **Response:**

Newcastle City Council would like to reassure parents and carers that the Newcastle SEND Sensory Service will continue to operate fully in line with the Council's SEND principles and the statutory duties set out in the SEND Code of Practice 2014, the Children and Families Act 2014, and the Equality Act 2010. All children and young people attending the ARP have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), and the Service will continue to follow guidance from the NCC SEND Statutory

Assessment and Review (SAR) Team to ensure full compliance with statutory processes and timescales.

As part of the relocation, the Children's Vision Team—supported by the Habilitation Specialist—will complete a full environmental audit of the new school site. This assessment will provide tailored recommendations to ensure the environment is fully accessible for children and young people with visual impairment. Great Park Academy has been designed in line with modern building regulations and accessibility standards under the Equality Act 2010, offering significant advantages over older buildings where reasonable adjustments may be limited by structural constraints. Support and advice will continue to be personalised to meet each child's individual needs.

Children and young people will remain fully included in the day-to-day life of the school and will continue to learn alongside their sighted peers. All provision set out in Section F of each pupil's EHCP will remain in place throughout the transition to Great Park Academy. If parents express a preference for their child to remain at Junior High Academy or Gosforth Academy instead of relocating, a review of the EHCP will be required. In these cases, the Children's Vision Team will work closely with the SENDCOs of those schools to outline the support required to meet the pupil's needs.

## **2. Stability and wellbeing for pupils**

### **Concerns raised:**

*"For those already in the system, the move would happen outside natural transition points, making the disruption more severe"*

*"What emotional support will be provided before, during, and after the move to help pupils manage anxiety, disorientation, and loss of familiar routines"*

*"What plans are in place to minimise anxiety for visually impaired pupils who may find change, especially environmental change, significantly more challenging than their peers?"*

*"How will the Trust support pupils who rely on familiarity, routine, and trusted adults to feel safe and confident in school?"*

### **Response:**

The Newcastle SEND Sensory Service – Children’s Vision Team fully recognises the wide-ranging impact that a visual impairment can have on a child or young person’s learning, independence, and emotional wellbeing. Newcastle City Council want to reassure parents and carers that the relocation will be carefully planned and sensitively managed by the Children’s Vision Team, with additional support from the NCC Educational Psychology Service.

The Newcastle SEND Sensory Service – Children’s Vision Team will work closely with the SEND team at Great Park Academy to ensure that staff have a thorough understanding of each pupil’s individual needs and the specific ways their visual impairment affects them. This proactive approach will help maintain consistency and support each pupil’s stability and wellbeing throughout the transition.

As a centralised service, children and young people are already familiar with working alongside a range of specialist staff, including Teachers of Visual Impairment, Specialist Support Assistants, our Technical Officer, and the Habilitation Specialist. This multidisciplinary team will remain in place, ensuring continuity of support from professionals who have extensive training, experience, and in some cases lived experience of visual impairment. This expertise helps to promote learning, independence, confidence, and positive peer relationships.

Gosforth Group and Newcastle City Council recognise that there is no perfect time to implement this relocation. Children and young people currently attending the VIARPs span National Curriculum Years 4–10 and are therefore at a variety of educational stages and transition points.

The Newcastle SEND Sensory Service – Children’s Vision Team fully recognises that a successful move depends on a well-planned and carefully managed transition for both pupils and staff. To ensure this, every pupil will receive enhanced transition support, including additional opportunities to visit the new school site so they can build confidence and become familiar with their new environment. Specialist Educational Psychologists will work closely with the SEND Sensory Service, Children’s Vision Team to provide bespoke Social, Emotional and Mental Health support, ensuring that each young person is well supported throughout this period of change.

Great Park Academy is part of the Gosforth MAT and shares the same values and ethos regarding inclusive education and the support of children with additional needs.

### **3. Continuity and quality of specialist provision**

#### ***Concerns raised:***

*How will the Trust ensure that the VIARP remains a specialist, high-quality, well-resourced provision rather than an add-on to a growing school?*

*How will the Trust guarantee that specialist staff who know a child's needs, learning style, and access arrangements remain available throughout their exam year?*

*Will all current VIARP staff (QTVIs, LSAs, mobility specialists, technical support) transfer to Great Park Academy, and will their roles remain unchanged?*

*How will the Trust ensure that relationships, routines, and communication systems built over years with visually impaired pupils are preserved during the move?*

*How will the Trust ensure that mainstream teachers at Great Park Academy are fully prepared to differentiate and adapt teaching for VIARP pupils?*

*How will friendships, peer support networks, and social inclusion be protected during and after the move?*

**Response:**

The Newcastle SEND Sensory Service is a centrally funded, specialist service that currently staffs and manages six Additional Resourced Provisions (ARPs) for children and young people with sensory impairments across the city. The proposed ARP at Great Park Academy will follow this established and successful model of management and staffing. The Newcastle SEND Sensory Service have robust quality assurance processes, including regular staff appraisal, service evaluation, and use of national Quality Standards. These include:

- Quality Standards for Sensory Support Services in England
- Quality Standards: Resource Provision for Children & Young People with Visual Impairment in Mainstream Schools

To ensure continuity and stability for pupils, familiar members of staff will move with the children and young people to the new provision. They will also be introduced to the wider Children's Vision Team, meaning they will benefit from a larger pool of adults available to support them. This will strengthen the level of specialist expertise and ensure that pupils continue to receive high-quality, consistent input.

The staffing structure will include:

- 1.5 Teachers of Visual Impairment (TVIs)
- 5+ Specialist Learning Support Assistants (LSAs)
- Lead Specialist

- 0.2 Habilitation Specialist
- 0.7 Visual Impairment Technician
- Additional support from the peripatetic team, including colleagues who contribute to preparation for adulthood (PFA)

This model ensures that pupils will not only maintain relationships with trusted staff but will also gain access to an expanded multidisciplinary team with the knowledge and experience required to support academic progress, independence, emotional wellbeing and social inclusion.

Although the ARP is relocating from a host school with experienced staff, the Service has a long and successful history of establishing ARPs within different host schools. A comprehensive programme of training will be delivered at the start of the academic year and will continue throughout the year. This training will cover the specific needs of each child and will be supported further through the ARP's open-door policy. Members of the Senior Leadership Team at the proposed new school have previously worked in a host school with a VI ARP and therefore already understand how children with visual impairment are supported and how the ARP team works alongside mainstream staff.

The merging of the Junior High Academy and Gosforth Academy ARPs will also bring significant benefits by enabling larger, age-appropriate peer groups. Previous group-based activities have consistently shown how positively pupils respond when learning alongside peers with similar needs. With a larger combined cohort, group sessions such as kitchen skills, mobility work, and VI-specific sports can be offered more effectively and more frequently.

Experience from whole-ARP activities and trips demonstrates that group learning can reduce pupils' hesitation to try new techniques or equipment. Seeing peers confidently use long canes or assistive devices can normalise these tools, build self-confidence, and enhance peer understanding of a range of visual impairments.

#### **4. Readiness and suitability of the new setting**

##### **Concerns raised:**

*How will the GPA VIARP be ready by April, is their provision already at the standard 'purpose built' indicated in the letter? How is this being funded? Who is being consulted to ensure it meets the criteria of a modern, purpose-built environment?*

*What adaptations, technologies, and environmental adjustments will be in place from day one, not planned, not aspirational, but fully operational?*

*How will safe navigation, mobility training, and orientation be supported in a new and unfamiliar building?*

*The site is in an isolated location with limited access to public transport. This reduces independence (and may therefore increase disability) and creates greater reliance on car travel*

*Will pupils have access to quiet, low-stimulus spaces if they become overwhelmed in a new environment?*

*Great Park does not offer A-level provision, whereas GHA does. As a result, students would need to move again into an unfamiliar environment for high-stakes exams, taught by staff with limited experience of supporting children with a visual impairment (VI).*

*What happens if a parent has a child with these needs who must attend GPA but has another child already at GA without these needs who is allocated to GA? e.g. will siblings at different schools be considered in transport planning to avoid unmanageable family logistics?*

**Response:**

Parents and carers can be reassured that Great Park Academy is a highly suitable setting for a VIARP. The SEND Sensory Service has worked closely with the Gosforth MAT to identify appropriate accommodation within the school, and this collaboration will continue to ensure the space is well-equipped, accessible, and efficient for both pupils and staff.

Newcastle City Council will also ensure that all necessary IT infrastructure is in place so that children and young people can access their learning without disruption.

Following the environmental audit, pupils will receive an enhanced transition programme designed to help them become familiar with the building and its surroundings. The Habilitation Specialist will continue to focus on developing transferable skills. Importantly, Habilitation teaching is not tied to a specific location; techniques and strategies are introduced in a way that enables pupils to use them confidently across a range of environments. Skills can be taught and practised in any suitable setting and then generalised to new places, supporting children and young people as they increase their independence and broaden the environments they can navigate. This approach is central to preparing them for confident and independent adulthood.

The school's location, near a newly developed residential area with a supermarket, cafés, shops, and regular bus routes, provides excellent opportunities for mobility

and independence work. The surrounding estate includes well-maintained roads, pavements, and crossings, offering a safe and consistent environment for community-based Habilitation lessons.

Although Great Park Academy does not have its own sixth form, parents and carers can be reassured that children and young people in the ARP will continue to have full access—alongside their sighted peers—to a broad range of Post-16 pathways across the city. These include the Gosforth Group sixth forms at Gosforth Academy and Jesmond Park Academy, as well as further education colleges, training providers, and apprenticeship opportunities.

The Newcastle SEND Sensory Service supports children and young people with visual impairment from birth to 25 years. This means that as pupils move through their Post 16 pathways, they will continue to receive specialist input from the Children’s Vision Team. This ongoing involvement ensures continuity, stability, and consistent support during an important period of transition, enabling young people to access their chosen courses confidently and successfully.

Newcastle City Council recognises that attending an ARP outside of a child’s local mainstream school can have an impact on family routines. SEN transport is available to support families with children attending different schools, and this is already in place for many of the current pupils. The SEND Sensory Service is also mindful of the limitations that SEND transport can present, particularly around access to after-school activities. To help address this, the Children’s Vision Team will continue to offer lunchtime clubs and opportunities so that children and young people can take part in clubs and enrichment activities alongside their sighted peers.

## **5. Transparency, rationale, and involvement**

### **Concerns raised:**

*“What is the driver behind the change? What is the problem to be solved by suggesting the relocation.”*

*“Some parents feel the consultation appears to be a “done deal” rather than a genuine listening process.”*

*“How many VIARP places will be available at Great Park Academy, and how does this compare to current capacity? And what happens if demand outstrips availability?”*

**Response:**

Gosforth Group and Newcastle City Council understand the importance of clear communication with parents and carers, including the need for openness about the reasons for the proposal, the options considered and the timeline for change.

Newcastle City Council began discussions with the Gosforth Group in May 2025 following internal placement-planning reviews, which identified a significant increase in demand for specialist Visual Impairment (VI) ARP places across the city. It became clear that the current accommodation could no longer meet projected needs, either in terms of space or long-term suitability. To protect and sustain the high-quality provision available to children and young people with visual impairment in Newcastle, a larger and more appropriate setting was required for September 2026. This timeline aligns with a particularly large cohort of Year 5 pupils needing placements and a cohort of Year 9 pupils preparing to begin their GCSE pathways.

The relocation proposal was therefore developed to ensure that provision could be future-proofed, enabling the ARP to continue meeting the needs of pupils effectively as numbers increase and service requirements evolve.

The proposed merge and relocation of the VIARP is intended to strengthen specialist provision by creating a larger, more connected peer group for pupils with visual impairment, while reducing transitions so that children move only once—from Regent Farm First School to Great Park Academy—supporting greater stability and continuity. The merged ARP will offer a seamless educational journey from Year 5 to Year 11, with enhanced opportunities for a richer curriculum and wider extracurricular experiences. A centralised specialist staff team will continue to provide in-class support and personalised curriculum adaptations to meet individual needs, and pupils will benefit from the improved space and modern, inclusive environment available at Great Park Academy.

Throughout the process, the Council and the SEND Sensory Service have involved parents and carers by sharing information, explaining the rationale for the proposal, and creating multiple opportunities for questions and discussion.

In November 2025—before the formal consultation began—all families were sent a letter outlining the relocation proposal, its rationale, next steps, and information about SEND transport. During the consultation period, parents and carers were invited to tour Great Park Academy and meet staff from both the school and the SEND Sensory Service. This invitation was shared via a Microsoft survey, which also allowed families to request a discussion with the Manager or Lead Specialist Teacher if they could not attend in person.

Alongside these opportunities, many parents also met individually with the Lead Specialist Teacher, ensuring everyone had the chance to ask questions, express concerns, and receive personalised information. This commitment to transparency will continue as the project progresses.

