

MINOR PROPERTY TRANSACTION: *ACADEMY LEASE, PINN RIVER SCHOOL, EASTCOTE*

Cabinet Member & Portfolio	Cllr Susan O'Brien - Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education Cllr Jonathan Bianco - Cabinet Member for Corporate Services & Property
Responsible Officer	Julie Kelly – Corporate Director Children Services Dan Kennedy – Corporate Director of Residents Services
Report Author & Directorate	Gary Binstead - Education & SEND and Andrew Low - Residents Services
Papers with report	Appendix 1 and 2 site plans

HEADLINES

Summary	<p>Pinn River School is a new 180-place all-through Free School for pupils with SLD/PMLD, funded and delivered by the DfE due to open in January 2026. It replaces Grangewood School within The Eden Academy Trust, which was demolished to accommodate the new provision.</p> <p>It is proposed that the Council:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Grants a 125-year lease on standard terms for the new Free School.
Putting our Residents First Delivering on the Council Strategy 2022-2026	<p>This report supports our ambition for residents / the Council of: An efficient, well-run, digital-enabled council working with partners to deliver services to improve the lives of all our residents</p> <p>This report supports our commitments to residents of: Thriving, Healthy Households</p>
Financial Cost	The creation of Pinn River increases capacity for special schools in the borough which will be in keeping with the strategy for achieving a balanced in-year DSG budget by FY2028-29.
Select Committee	Children, Families & Education
Ward(s)	Eastcote

RECOMMENDATION

That a 125-year lease on standard terms for the new Free School Pinn River be agreed with the Eden Academy Trust, as set out in the report and site plan, subject to DfE approval for the formal closure of Grangewood School and the opening of Pinn River.

Reasons for recommendation

Pinn River School is a new all-through Free School, offering 180 places. The successful application for the school was submitted by the Eden Academy Trust in 2012 and the project is being funded and delivered by the Department for Education (DfE). It replaces the former Grangewood School, which was demolished to make way for the new, expanded provision. Subject to DfE approval for the formal closure of Grangewood School and the opening of Pinn River, the school will serve children and young people with severe and profound learning difficulties (SLD/PMLD) and is a key project in creating additional special school places in Hillingdon.

- **DfE Requirement** - The DfE requires a 125-year lease from January 2026 and Insuring as standard for Free Schools to ensure long-term security and viability of the site.
- **Retention of Public Ownership** - A lease arrangement allows the local authority to retain ownership of the land while enabling the school to operate independently, thereby protecting the public asset.
- **Support for Capital Investment** - The DfE is making a significant capital investment in the development of Pinn River School. A long-term lease ensures the site remains dedicated to educational use, justifying the investment.
- **Operational and Strategic Stability** - A 125-year lease provides the Eden Academy Trust with the stability needed for long-term planning, recruitment, and service delivery.
- **Compliance with Legal and Funding Frameworks** - The lease term aligns with legal and funding frameworks governing Free Schools, ensuring compliance and facilitating smooth project delivery.

To facilitate the delivery of the new free school, the boiler room as shown in blue area of land illustrated in Appendix 1 within the existing lease between London Borough of Hillingdon and The Eden Academy dated 2012 was surrendered and terms thereof simultaneously varied to reflect the omission of the blue land which is now included within the free school as illustrated in Appendix 2.

The new lease supports the delivery of Hillingdon's SEND and Alternative Provision Sufficiency Strategy (2025–2030), which aims to expand specialist provision and meet rising demand locally. The strategy outlines plans to create over 700 new SEND places, reduce out-of-borough placements, and improve inclusion across mainstream and specialist settings. Pinn River School contributes directly to these priorities by increasing capacity and offering high-quality, local provision for children with complex needs.

Alternative Options Considered

- a) Shorter Lease Term (e.g. 99 Years) - While still offering long-term tenure, a shorter lease may not meet DfE expectations and could lead to delays in project approval or funding. It introduces a risk that the site may not be considered sufficiently secure for the scale of investment, potentially requiring additional negotiation or legal variation. This option is therefore less favourable in terms of compliance and delivery certainty.
- b) Freehold Transfer - This option would involve transferring full ownership of the site to the academy trust. While it simplifies tenure, it results in the permanent loss of a public asset. The DfE generally discourages freehold transfers for Free Schools unless there are exceptional circumstances. It may also trigger legal and financial complexities, including potential clawback provisions if the site is no longer used for educational purposes.
- c) Assignment of the existing lease to the Eden Academy Trust but this would not give the 125 year term required as there is only 112 years left unexpired on the existing lease.

Select Committee comments

None at this stage.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

1. Grangewood School a specialist academy for primary aged pupils with severe and profound learning difficulties was located on the Fore Street, Eastcote. The school joined The Eden Academy Trust in 2012 and currently has a lease with the Local Authority for 125 years.
2. The site is now being redeveloped to accommodate Pinn River School, a new 180-place all-through Free School with SLD/PMLD needs.
3. The redevelopment is being delivered by the Department for Education (DfE) in partnership with Kier Construction, and is designed to provide a modern, inclusive learning environment tailored to the needs of children and young people with complex SEND.
4. The Fore Street location was selected due to its existing educational use, proximity to local services, and suitability for expansion. The site will continue to serve the community as a dedicated specialist education facility under the Eden Academy Trust.
5. The school site is situated within the London Borough of Hillingdon adjacent to Ruislip Woods National Nature Reserve and adjacent to Coteford Junior School (part of the Partnership Learning Trust), which remains operational.
6. During discussions with the DfE, it was requested for the boiler house, situated within the Coteford Junior School boundary to be relocated in order for the floor space to be incorporated within the school. This was agreed by both Trusts.

Free School Academy Lease

7. The template free school academy lease includes the following main terms:
- The annual rent is to be a peppercorn for the duration of the term and on a full repairing terms.
 - The site must be used solely for educational purposes, including ancillary activities such as community engagement, recreation, and fundraising.
 - The academy trust is responsible for keeping the property clean, safe, and in good repair.
 - The landlord may enter the site to carry out repairs in cases of persistent breaches that pose safety risks, with costs recoverable from the tenant.
 - Structural or external changes require landlord consent, which cannot be unreasonably withheld.
 - Initial development works are typically covered by a separate agreement; future changes are subject to lease terms.
 - Subletting or transferring the lease is restricted and requires prior approval to ensure the site remains under the control of the approved academy trust.
 - If the school ceases to operate or breaches key terms, the lease may be terminated and the site reverts to the landlord.
 - Clauses are included to safeguard the capital investment made by the Secretary of State, particularly in cases of closure or change of use.

Financial Implications

- The creation of Pinn River increases capacity for special schools in the borough which will be in keeping with the strategy for achieving a balanced in-year DSG budget by FY2028-29.
- Increased capacity in our special schools reduces the incidence of placements in more expensive independent settings. Currently any placement where an independent provision is avoided results in a cost avoidance of £24k per annum on average.
- With Pinn River set to reach a capacity of 180 places, there is a possibility of an annual cost avoidance of £1.2m should the additional 49 places created be filled by pupils who would have otherwise gone to independent placements.

RESIDENT BENEFIT & CONSULTATION

The benefit or impact upon Hillingdon residents, service users and communities

Granting a 125-year lease to Pinn River Free School will deliver significant long-term benefits to the local community and aligns with the strategic objectives of the Safety Valve Agreement for Hillingdon:

- The school will provide high-quality, tailored education for children and young people with severe and profound learning difficulties (SLD/PMLD), addressing a growing local need and helping to reduce reliance on costly out-of-borough placements.

- The long lease ensures the site remains dedicated to specialist education for generations, offering stability for families and service users, and supporting sustainable SEND planning under the Safety Valve programme.
- The redevelopment will deliver modern, purpose-built facilities, improving the learning environment and supporting better outcomes for pupils, in line with Hillingdon's commitment to improving local SEND infrastructure.
- The school will offer opportunities for inclusive activities, partnerships, and engagement with local residents and organisations, fostering a sense of belonging and shared purpose.
- Local provision reduces travel time for families, enabling better access to wraparound services and support networks, and contributing to improved wellbeing and educational continuity.

Consultation & Engagement carried out (or required)

No public consultation required.

Conclusion

It is recommended that Cabinet approve the granting of a 125-year lease on standard terms for the new Free School, Pinn River, to the Eden Academy Trust. This approval is subject to confirmation from the Department for Education regarding the formal closure of Grangewood School and the opening of Pinn River. The proposal supports the strategic objective of ensuring sufficient and suitable school places for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) in Hillingdon.

CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

Corporate Finance

Corporate Finance have reviewed this report and concur with the Financial Implications set out above, noting approval is sought for granting a 125-year lease on standard terms to the Eden Academy Trust for the new Free School, Pinn River, subject to DfE approval for the formal closure of Grangewood School and the opening of Pinn River.

Furthermore, it is noted that the creation of Pinn River increases local special school capacity and supports the strategy to achieve a balanced in year DSG budget by 2028/29. The additional 49 places has a potential cost avoidance of up to £1.2m annually, if fully utilised by pupils who would have been placed into independent placements.

Legal

The Council will be entering into a new lease with the tenant in question. The lease will set out the obligations and rights to be accepted by the tenant and the obligations and rights the Council will accept as landlord. In the event of any disputes, regard will be given to the lease in question to determine what rights exist in respect of either party.

Legal relationships will be created by virtue of this lease and thus any future dealings with the tenant in question in respect of the property will be regulated by such lease. Legal Services confirm there are no legal impediments in the Council agreeing the recommendation.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

NIL