



East Hall School

Feasibility Study for Expansion

Proposal to Add 6 SEMH Places and Extend into Adjacent Unit

Prepared for Hertfordshire County Council – Planning Department

Date: August 2025

1. Executive Summary

East Hall School seeks to expand its specialist SEMH (Social, Emotional, and Mental Health) provision by an additional 6 student places through the extension of its premises into the adjacent unit. Since opening in November 2023, the school has received over 135 referrals from Hertfordshire County Council. The significant and growing demand for places, alongside the success of our current provision, highlights the urgent need to expand our capacity.

The school is situated in a unique rural environment that offers daily access to outdoor learning, nature-based activities, and a calm, low-stimulation setting — all of which are highly supportive of students with anxiety, ASD, and other SEMH needs. This environment forms a key part of our therapeutic approach and contributes significantly to the success and well-being of our learners.

This expansion will enable more young people with complex needs to access the education and care they deserve in a nurturing and specialist setting.

2. Background and Context

East Hall School is a specialist SEMH school for students aged 14–17 who are unable to access mainstream or other special education provision due to complex needs such as:

- Severe anxiety
- ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder)
- ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder)
- Attachment difficulties
- School refusal or trauma-related behaviours

Our students often arrive with a history of failed educational placements and low self-esteem. The school provides a safe, predictable and therapeutic environment designed to rebuild confidence, trust and engagement with learning.

Importantly, East Hall School is based in a rural setting, away from the noise and pressures of urban life. This peaceful location plays a vital role in regulating anxiety and enabling a calm start to the day. We integrate daily outdoor learning, which includes nature walks, gardening, animal therapy, team-building tasks and sensory-based activities — all shown to have a positive impact on mental health, concentration, and emotional resilience.

Since opening in November 2023, the referrals from Hertfordshire County Council span a wide geographic area, including Royston, Tring, Bushey, Hertford, and rural communities — confirming a county-wide need for high-quality SEMH provision.

3. Demand Analysis

- Over 135 referrals have been received since November 2023.
- Current capacity has been reached, and new students are being offered enrolment for September 2026 due to oversubscription.
- There is a waiting list of students with EHCPs in need of immediate educational placement.
- Students referred are typically not suitable for mainstream or general specialist provision due to complex SEMH and neurodiverse needs.
- Our students come from across Hertfordshire, demonstrating a county-wide demand for our provision.

4. Proposal for Expansion

We propose to:

- Increase our capacity from 16 to 22 through the addition of 6 SEMH specialist places.
- Extend into the unit next door to our current premises, allowing for safe and appropriate space for this growth.
- Maintain our low staff-to-student ratio and therapeutic approach across the expanded cohort.

The additional unit will be adapted to provide:

- An additional classroom
- Small-group intervention and sensory regulation space
- Therapeutic room for 1:1 work and visiting professionals (e.g. CAMHS, SALT)
- Improved staff welfare and meeting space to support multidisciplinary planning

5. Justification

- Unmet Need: Over 135 referrals in under a year reflect a significant local shortage of suitable SEMH placements.
- Waiting List Pressure: Vulnerable students are left without educational access while they wait for appropriate provision.
- Value for Money: Local specialist places reduce the need for expensive out-of-county placements and complex travel arrangements and costs.
- Better Student Outcomes: Our setting is proven to improve attendance, engagement, well-being, and post-16 transitions for some of the most at-risk learners in Hertfordshire.
- Preventative Approach: Timely intervention through our setting reduces longer-term social care and mental health costs.

6. Suitability of Premises and Site

- The adjoining unit is immediately accessible from our current site and requires minimal structural work to be fit for purpose.
- The unit will be developed to meet the DfE building standards for SEND and SEMH

provision, mirroring our current high-spec spaces.

- The rural location contributes directly to the therapeutic benefit of our setting. The surrounding green space and calm setting reduce environmental triggers, and allow for daily outdoor learning — an integral part of our educational and well-being offer.
- The expansion will not negatively impact local infrastructure. Car parking, access, and safeguarding measures are already well established on-site.
- The extended building will retain the small-scale, low-stimulation environment that is vital to our students' success.

7. Staffing and Provision

To support the additional 6 places, we will:

- Recruit 1 additional qualified teacher with SEMH and trauma-informed training
- Appoint 1 specialist learning support assistant
- Increase capacity for in-house therapeutic support (e.g. therapeutic mentoring, SEND support)
- Maintain consistent behaviour, safeguarding and EHCP planning systems across the whole provision

8. Financial Viability

- The expansion will be funded through the carefully managed reserves built into the financial management of EHS.
- The school operates with a sustainable staffing and support model, and the additional income from the 6 new placements will cover both staffing and running costs.
- Capital development is limited due to the structural suitability of the adjacent unit.
- The model reduces future out-of-county placement costs for the LA.
- Parents of children who secure a successful placement with EHS, report of being able to return to work.

9. Conclusion

This proposed expansion of East Hall School:

- Responds to an urgent and growing need for SEMH provision in Hertfordshire
- Supports children currently on a waiting list without access to suitable education
- Makes full use of an adjacent, low-cost, and suitable building space
- Preserves the small, rural, therapeutic setting that is vital to our learners' success
- Reduces pressure on local services by providing a proven specialist intervention

We respectfully request support from the Local Authority Planning Department to proceed with this vital and timely extension, in the interest of Hertfordshire's most vulnerable young people.