



supporting YOUR future

Arbour House School Expansion

Some questions you may have...

(15th May 2023)

Why do we need an additional school site?

The decision to make the application to the DfE to increase capacity and register an additional school was essentially a result of our commitment to best meet the needs of our pupils.

We are registered to take pupils aged 6-18 years but on one site this can be quite challenging to facilitate. The needs of a 6 year old can be very different to the needs of an 18 year old! Even the very process of furnishing and equipping rooms and communal spaces is quite complex on one site, in one building.

Many of the younger children in particular need space to play, and in line with their age and emotional development they often need a very play-orientated approach. As we know, often play can be noisy, which is fine unless you are a 16 year old trying to study for your Functional Skills exams with a Primary School downstairs!

Given the broad age range that we are registered for, we felt it important to enhance the opportunities for pupils to grow and develop friendships and meaningful connections through adding an additional school site and increasing pupil numbers overall. If there are only 1 or 2 other pupils of your child's age or of a similar profile that can be difficult for children to find commonality and like-minded peers.

The school is also becoming increasingly popular and our referrals are at a record high with a significant demand for places. We work carefully to profile match our pupils as best we can, given their complex needs. We will continue to do so but an additional space will offer more opportunities to meet the needs of more pupils who need a bespoke and individually tailored approach to their education.

Why was Maen in Dorchester chosen as a suitable location?

Much consideration was given to the right place for our additional site, not just in terms of best meeting our older pupils' needs but also in relation to the area geographically and where our referrals come from. Already we have pupils who travel some distance to get to us and referrals coming from North Dorset, Somerset, Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole and even as far afield as Bristol.

Dorchester as the county town is a more central location without being too far from Weymouth and it offers excellent transport links and a vast array of community facilities, many of which our older pupils already use routinely but currently have to travel to.

We are keen to continue to develop pupils' independent living skills and best prepare them for transition to adulthood and Dorchester offers some excellent opportunities for that work to continue. That aside, most of our pupils already visit and know Dorchester so it already has an element of familiarity for them.

Maen, like the current Glendinning site, is also a converted house. The vast majority of our pupils say that one of the things they like about our school is that it is a house and not purpose built, so it feels better than a 'normal' school and has a more family feel.

Will the school name change?

No, the school is still registered as one school so we will continue to be called Arbour House School.

The site in Weymouth on Glendinning Avenue will be deemed our 'Lower School' site and to help distinguish it from the site in Dorchester this site will be called 'Glendinning'.

The site in Dorchester has been designed with older pupils in mind so will be deemed our 'Upper School' site and will be called 'Maen' - (pronounced MARN) - this is the name of the original house and also the name of the road on which it sits - Maen Gardens.

That said, if both are simply referred to as 'Arbour House' then that's fine too, whatever is easiest for the children to manage!

Will the school day and timings be the same?

Yes, the school day will remain as 9.00 am – 3.00 pm.

We will continue to support parent/carers as best as we can who have other children in other local schools, just as we do now. We know how difficult it can be sometimes to get multiple children to different schools in different locations, but the aim is to ensure both sites start and end the day at the same time.

Will the school calendar be the same?

Yes, the calendar will be the same for both sites because it is one school.

We always aim to match Dorset Local Authority Schools' calendar when setting the term dates wherever possible because we know that many families have other children in local schools. Obviously that may not work for every single parent/carer, but we know that different Inset Days and different half terms etc can be hard to manage for families, so we will continue to consult with other local schools and aim to create a 'best-fit' for term dates and inset days for the school year.

Will the uniform be the same?

Yes, the school uniform will remain exactly the same and consistent across both sites.

We are keen to minimise the level of change for existing children and we do not want parent/carers to incur any additional expense, and a consistent school uniform also helps children to have a sense of belonging to a whole school community.

What will happen about School Transport to and from school?

Now that we have approval from the DfE we will be working with School Transport for those pupils who are entitled to receive transport to and from school. For some it will be a little further to travel, but for some closer – so we are hopeful that school transport will be supportive of future plans and needs.

If your child lives in Weymouth and is not currently entitled to transport, they may be if they move to Maen in due course and we will support with clarifying and arranging this. The School Office will make all necessary enquiries and keep you updated, so at this time there is nothing you need to do yourself directly.

No changes to your child's current transport arrangements will be made suddenly or without discussion first with you.

If your child accesses Maen in Dorchester before any School Transport arrangements have been agreed and finalised for them, then we will simply transport them there and back ourselves in our own school vehicles from the Weymouth site.

Will my child have the same core staff team?

Given the DfE decision has only just been given and we are already well advanced into the summer term, there are no changes planned to your child's core staff team for the remainder of this academic year.

In most schools children change staff and move classes as they progress through the school and in September if your child moves up a school year, as most naturally do, then they may change staff teams, but that will be discussed with you as part of their natural progression anyway.

No sudden changes will occur for children, and no changes planned to their provision will be made without consultation with you – and with them.

Will my child receive the same level of support?

We remain committed to offering bespoke provision to best meet the needs of your child. Children are staffed and their provision planned in line with their EHCP and SEN and associated funding and this will remain the same.

We will continue to ensure that all children have access to Thrive and to ELSA and have already ensured that trained staff are in place to facilitate this on both sites.

We have also appointed a new, experienced SENCO, Elaine Hurley, that I know has already met or been in touch directly with many of you, and one of her key remits over the coming year is to to continue to develop the interventions and support we offer to meet your child's needs.

Elaine will lead on all EHCP Annual Reviews, get to know all parent/carers and children and will therefore work across both school sites equally.

Which children will move to the Dorchester site and when?

We hope that as children advance through the school and work towards increased maturity and self-regulation they will be ready to transition to our new site, but no child will transition from Arbour to our new site without prior discussion with you – and with them – and any transitions for individual pupils will be phased at a pace that they can manage.

Whilst the Dorchester site is designed with older pupils in mind, existing children will only move to Maen when it is deemed that they are ready to do so, so we will continue to work in a stage appropriate not simply age-appropriate way to meet the needs of your child.

From the end of this academic year, new secondary-aged pupils joining the school who are considered able to do so may join at Maen from the outset. That will always depend on the individual child, their SEN, and the site that is considered best to meet their bespoke needs.

Will my child's timetable stay the same?

All class timetables are slightly different and will continue to be so, whichever site they attend.

Older pupils generally follow a more 'formal' model, and many can now manage a specialist teacher approach for their more academic curriculum, so a Maths teacher for Maths, an English teacher for English for example.

That has been successful now for almost 2 years, and many of our older children are now working towards formal qualifications as a result, at their own request. We hope to continue to develop this model at our new site.

There will however always be children that need 'different', a more bespoke timetable, just as there are now, and that will remain the same. We recognise that one size does not fit all, so some pupils even when older cannot manage more than one teacher, and some pupils need more sensory breaks than others, so your child's timetable will be one that is deemed best for them and will not necessarily be determined by the site that they attend.

Timetables are planned in line with the Desired Outcomes of your child's EHCP. We also have a legal DfE remit to continue to offer a broad and balanced curriculum that applies to all SEN schools just as it does for other schools, but for some pupils, especially as they get older, the focus may be on Preparing for Adulthood and developing Independent Living Skills for example. Maen has been designed with this in mind, but we are committed to working with your child at whatever stage they are at and provision will continue to be available on both sites to facilitate this approach.

How big will the school be?

The current site in Weymouth will remain the same in terms of capacity – registered for 25 pupils. Maen in Dorchester is registered for 35 pupils, primarily because it is a bigger site.

Will classes be bigger with the increase in pupil numbers?

There is no plan to significantly increase class sizes. We remain committed to keeping class sizes small as that is what makes our provision manageable for most of our pupils and best supports our model of core staff teams getting to know children well.

As our pupils get older and in preparation for their moving on and transition to adulthood we always work towards them being able to cope in larger groups where appropriate, so that we don't de-skill them for life beyond Arbour House.

For some pupils this may mean they can routinely work with a group of 5-6 peers every day; for others it may mean that their core class is smaller than this for their key learning, but that they access larger groups in lessons such as PE or via trips and off-site activities

Your child will be placed in a class that is deemed the right size for them and this will continue to be dependent on their SEN and their EHCP remit as well as in line with their individual progress.

Will the pupils still see each other and have opportunities to work together as a whole school?

Yes. Currently pupils tend to work in classes or key stages for the bulk of their learning as in most other schools, but staff work hard to ensure all children have the opportunity to work with other pupils from other classes and different age groups to best equip them with the confidence and social skills they need.

Classes tend to group together for subjects such as PSHE, PE, and Special Interest Time for example, as well as for class and whole school trips and events that will continue to be a priority across both sites.

When will we be able to see the new school site?

On Thursday June 22nd we are planning an Open Day and hope that you will be able to join us for this event.

As Maen nears final completion we will also be adding photographs of the site and its facilities to our School Prospectus so you will be able to see it online via the school website.

We understand that not all parent/carers will be able to attend on June 22nd and as such we will do our best to offer opportunities to view Maen at an alternative time.

The Material Change Ofsted Report enclosed also gives information about the new site and its facilities.