



Consultation Report: Penrice Academy Area Resource Base

Executive Summary

Penrice Academy is an inclusive secondary school serving 1,422 learners aged 11 to 16 and their families in St Austell. Part of Cornwall Education Learning Trust (CELT), the school is committed to the goal of providing an exceptional educational experience for every child.

Rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted in 2025, Penrice Academy has the capacity to expand its provision, and the proposed plan aims to meet increasing need in the local community by creating an Area Resource Base (ARB) on its site for 35 learners with autism and/or speech, language and communication needs (SLCN) – seven in each of its five year groups.

CELT already offers an ARB at Bodmin College, and works closely with the Special Partnership Trust (SPT) to deliver ARBs on the sites of two of its other schools: Mount Charles primary school and Brannel secondary school. This partnership also supports the development of staff in serving the needs to pupils with a range of special educational needs in all its schools.

Cornwall Council has sought applications for the expansion of SEN spaces across the county due to a shortfall in in the region.

CELT approached the local authority to support an increase in SEN spaces in mid-Cornwall, and the ARB at Penrice Academy forms part of that response.

In addition, CELT is also consulting on the creation of other new provisions at Newquay Primary Academy, Newquay Tretherras Academy, Poltair School and Pondhu Primary School. Together, these represent an extensive expansion of specialist spaces in the region and the creation of new all-through pathways for our communities.

The creation of the ARB at Penrice Academy does not affect its PAN. It will provide:

- September 2026: 14 places in Years 7 and 8 to meet immediate local need



- September 2027: A further 7 places for a total 21 places across Year 7 to 9
- September 2028: A further 7 places for a total of 28 places across Years 7 to 10
- September 2029: A further 7 places for a total, final capacity of 35 in Years 7 to 11

This targeted investment is based on detailed analysis of local need. As part of the Mid-Cornwall sufficiency pilot, this development will also support clearer pathways between different types of provision, including smoother transition from primary to secondary school and opportunities for learners to transition into mainstream settings where appropriate.

Existing space in the school has been identified that could be used for this ARB, an interim solution for September 2026 has been agreed. A longer term plan will be required and the local authority and school are in the process of designing plans.



Statutory Consultation

Engagement work

As part of the Significant Change Process, the Academy undertook a public consultation which ran from 21 April to 13 May 2026. The aim of all our activities was to drive engagement in an online survey.

To support stakeholders to express their views, we provided:

- A consultation pack about the proposal, including site location and aims, with details of the public event and embedded survey
- A website page with same
- An email invitation to local councillors and MPs
- Emails to all parents of pupils at the Academy
- An online survey
- Social media posts on the school's and the trust's accounts
- A prominent post in the school's newsletter about the public event and the online survey

The aim of this consultation was to allow all members of the community and stakeholders to share their thoughts and feelings on the proposal.

The local community responded positively throughout this period and this consultation report is based on the responses we received to the online survey.

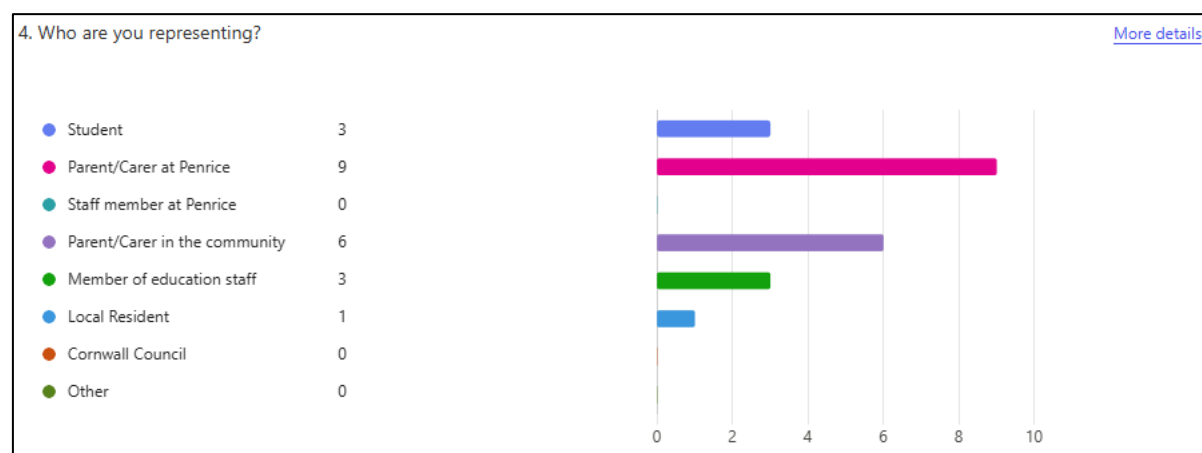


Responses

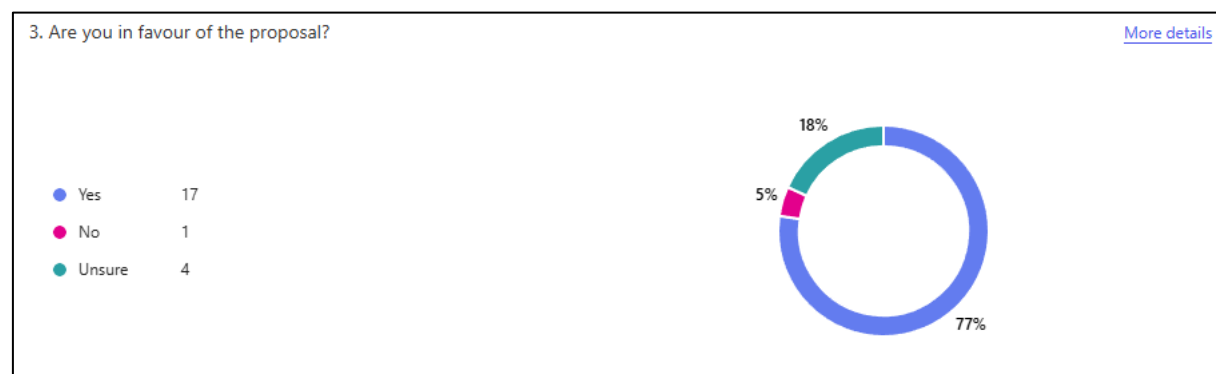
Big picture

The consultation evening was attended by four members of the community. The online survey, which we communicated to all as the only way to officially record their thoughts and feelings about the plans, received 22 responses.

Of the 22 respondents, 3 were students, 9 were parents or carers of children at the school, 6 were parents or carers in the wider community, 3 were members of the school's education staff, and one was a local resident in the wider community.



Seventeen expressed support for the new provision, four were unsure, and one said they were not in favour of the proposal.





The engagement of a range of stakeholders, including one with no direct affiliation to the school, is positive. That pupils, parents at the school and those from Penrice Academy's wider community took the time to express their views about the plans is also very welcome. Twenty-one respondents made the additional time to comment. One did not comment.

Need and trust

The many positive comments focus on a number of factors. Among these the most recurrent is the need for high-quality, local provision. Pleasantly, a number voiced trust in Penrice Academy and Cornwall Education Learning Trust to deliver it.

*"I think is **much needed** in St Austell for young people."*

*"I think the current ARB provision in Cornwall is overwhelmed and at capacity, therefore unable to provide **a much-needed resource** for many families. I think Penrice Academy approaching this issue with a solution **is a credit to the school and CELT**. I am wholly supportive of the proposal."*

*"I think this is an excellent idea. **Much needed** for our area and also means if you have a child with SEN and without, they can attend the same school."*

*"We are **desperate for suitable education** for my autistic child who doesn't get any help due to not fitting in any 'box'."*

*"I know of students having to travel to specialist school places and have had discussions with their families as to the **need for units within schools local to their homes** so feel this proposal is very positive in achieving that."*

"Great idea."



*"I think the proposal will really support the wider community with providing for pupils with SEND. **The lack of SEN provision within the local community is a concern** and therefore this will be a great addition to both the school and local community."*

*"It will be **a very welcomed addition to an already thriving school**. Thank you for recognising that these children need to have their own bespoke learning, so that everyone - despite differences - has access to an education."*

*"Establishing a new ARB unit would be **a valuable addition for local secondary-aged pupils** with SEN, offering **greater flexibility and more inclusive pathways**. It would also help to raise awareness, understanding, and acceptance of additional needs among mainstream students, which is **an important benefit for the wider school community**. **My son is due to start at Penrice in September** and, from both a professional perspective and as a parent of a child entering secondary education, I believe this **is a very positive and worthwhile proposal**."*

Place allocation

Others are more qualified in their support. One worried that the ARB would be used as a means of internally excluding pupils:

*"More ARB provision is needed and a logical progression from mount charles arb would be penrice. It is imperative from the start that staff and parents know this **is a local authority provision and places are allocated via ehcp reviews**, not pupils moved in there when they are too resource demanding or generally struggling in mainstream."*

As per our published proposal, we can assure everyone that:

"To be considered for a place in an ARB, the learner must have an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) with their primary area of need identified as SLCN and/or autism requiring specialist support."

And that:



"The local authority SEN statutory team will allocate places in the base in consultation with CELT."

Expertise and support

The previous respondent added: "I think having more specialist teacher knowledge on site will have a positive effect on the other staff too."

Like this respondent, others made clear that providing spaces was only part of the solution; the right support also had to be in place for the students in the new provision to thrive.

*"My daughter is currently struggling in mainstream school, she is ASD and is struggling to find her place within school, I feel this provision would be beneficial her and to other children like her, as it would mean they can stay on a site close to friends and teachers they have created good bonds with **but also allow them to access the correct support and education to their needs.**"*

*"**The SEND team will need to grow and be available for parents,** before and after school as currently it is hard to pass on valuable information."*

*"A great idea as long as the ARB **is appropriately staffed by professionals who are neurodiversity inclusive and trauma informed.** Schools need to do better for our children instead of punishing them for being different."*

These are valid concerns given the shortage of specialists both regionally and nationally, not least in terms of educational psychologists and speech and language therapists. We are mindful of this, which is one of the reasons the proposal is for a staggered build-up of students as we build our capacity.

In the meantime, Cornwall Education Learning Trust is already undertaking work to hire and develop specialist staff for the ARB at Penrice Academy, and the extensive programme of staff development through its Centre of Excellence will have an increasing focus on inclusion and SEND over the coming years.



Integration

A few respondents expressed concern about integration. For example:

*"I do think it should be set up with consideration as to **how the pupils will be integrated into as many aspects of mainstream school life as possible.**"*

In this further example, it's difficult to tell whether this is as a parent of a child in mainstream concerned about disruption, or a parent of a potential ARB learner concerned about isolation.

*"I would like to understand how this would change the offer my child currently receives at Penrice. **Will this be a separate unit or integrated within the current school?**"*

In response, we are pleased to say that our curriculum work for the ARB is specifically considering integration into mainstream classes. In addition, as our published proposal states,

"Our goal is that every learner placed here will benefit from approximately 50% of their time integrated into universal (mainstream) provision, accessing the core curriculum offer with their peers."

Wider impact

Some want to know what the wider impact will be on the school community. One parent of a child without an autism diagnosis wrote:

*"Will there be **more in place to help to spot ASD and neurodiversity** in children who would otherwise fly under the radar? [...] Would more provisions be aimed **for all students who would benefit**, not just those with an official diagnosis?"*

The proposal states that the Penrice Academy ARB will only be available to pupils with EHCPs. However, we have plans to ensure that the increased capacity and expertise it will bring serves the needs of our whole school population. This includes earlier identification of need, and better, more targeted support in mainstream classrooms.



Another respondent was concerned about student safety.

"I would be very happy to approve the proposal as long as there is no increased threat to student safety. If any of the new supported children are unsafe around other children, and have proven unsafe behaviours, they should not be mixed in with the other children. I would support all other educational needs."

In response to this, we want to reassure everyone in the Penrice Academy community that safeguarding is and will continue to be our paramount concern. Our previous Ofsted inspection noted that Penrice Academy had created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first. This will not change.

Policy and practice

Finally, two respondents questioned whether our policies are up to the challenge. One asked:

*"I would like to know if **the uniform policy** will be different for the ARB."*

At present, there are no plans to vary the uniform policy. However, we understand that some students with autism can be sensitive to restrictive and sensory fabrics. We will review this on a case-by-case basis, informed by the child's EHCP.

Another had a raft of questions, some of which are answered by the initial proposal of which we are pleased to answer here.

"What qualifications will staff have?"

The setting will be led by someone with at least a SENCO qualification and expertise in specialist education. Teaching staff will be trained in delivering the ARB's curriculum and working with the children in their classrooms. We are commissioning support from educational psychologists and speech and language therapists.



“What will your expectations on children be?”

Our expectations will be the same in the ARB as elsewhere at Penrice Academy and across CELT: that children achieve the best results they can and thrive emotionally and socially as well as academically. We want all our students to attain enriching careers and fulfilling lives when they leave us.

“How will you use de-escalation?”

Our restrictive intervention policy states: “PRICE is a training package for staff utilising de-escalation and positive handling strategies to support a child before and when they are in a crisis situation. Within the ARB all staff will be trained in de-escalation and the relevant staff will be trained in PRICE techniques. Specific policies, aimed at the safeguarding and behaviour of pupils, have been adopted and are available to staff.”

“Will children follow the national curriculum or will there be child-led learning?”

Children within the ARB would continue to access an ambitious and appropriately adapted curriculum, with learning personalised to meet their individual needs, strengths and developmental profile. The intention is that pupils remain connected to the National Curriculum whilst recognising that some children may require, adapted teaching approaches or targeted interventions to enable them to engage successfully in learning.

The provision would therefore not be based solely on either a completely child-led model or a purely standardised approach. Instead, the curriculum would combine high expectations with flexibility and responsiveness to individual need. This would include consideration of communication, social development and independence alongside academic learning. As with all children, teaching and provision would be adapted to ensure pupils are able to access learning in a way that is meaningful, engaging and appropriate for them.

“Will children that need it get 121 support whose sole responsibility is supporting them? How bespoke will education be?”

Levels of support will be determined by the needs of individual children, and their levels of integration in mainstream classrooms determined by



their ability to engage with them, which we will keep under consistent review. Within the ARB, provision will be tailored to the needs of learners.

“Will you provide therapy (animal, music, art, speech and language)?”

Our full curricular offer for the ARB is still under construction. Speech and language therapy will certainly form part of this offer, and we believe fervently in the value of enrichment through the arts. We will also ensure that any specific requirements as detailed in an EHCP are fulfilled.

“What is the position of school on ABA and enforced compliance?”

The school has never been asked to voice an opinion on Applied Behaviour Analysis. Penrice Academy prides itself on its evidence-based practice, its commitment to inclusiveness and its absolute prioritisation of pupil safety. ABA (and other forms of enforced compliance) does not meet these standards.

“What is your restraint policy?”

Please see our Restrictive Intervention Policy, [here](#).

“Ratios of adults to children.”

We are unable to confirm this at this stage, as there are a variety of factors, but the maximum will be 1:7 as each ARB class will offer 7 spaces only.

“Are you going to change your behaviour policy?”

Our behaviour policy allows us to maintain a safe, calm and orderly environment, which is important to all learners, and all the more so for those with sensory needs. Complemented by our other policies (including our SEND policy) these form a flexible framework that allows for prevention where possible, adjustment where reasonable and appropriate sanctions where necessary.



Conclusion and next steps

We are confident that the proposed Area Resource Base at Penrice Academy will deliver a number of benefits for the school's community, not least in supporting us to provide an exceptional educational experience for learners with autism and/or speech, language and communication needs.

The proposal is fully supported by Cornwall Council in its efforts to meet growing needs across the county and drive down expensive and difficult out-of-area placements.

Across the trust, we have also developed the systems and networks to hire and develop staff with the necessary skills and expertise to deliver an innovative, bespoke curriculum for the learners who will attend it.

In sum, we are confident that, if approved, the ARB will be ready to open at the start of the autumn term, and that we have the backing of our pupils, families and the wider community to make this important addition to our provision in St Austell.

We are also mindful of the reasonable concerns of our community. We will continue to communicate our developments in terms of curriculum, staffing and resources, and we will sound community opinion ongoingly to ensure we are alleviating these and rapidly aware of new ones as they arise.

We are grateful to all the stakeholders who took part in this consultation, and we look forward to continuing to work closely with them to ensure the provision meets everyone's needs.