

MATTERS TO BE SPECIFIED IN SECTION 18 PROPOSALS FOR ALTERATIONS TO SCHOOLS

Extract of Schedule 2 to The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools)(England) Regulations 2013 (as amended)

1. Contact details

The proposal to discontinue the post 16 sixth form provision delivered by Ashton Community Science College, Aldwych Drive, Preston, PR2 1SL, by permanently lowering its age range from 11-18 years to 11-16 years with effect from 31st August 2017, is published by Lancashire County Council, the relevant local authority. Ashton Community Science College is a community school. The local authority can be contacted at the following address: Sarah Hirst, Skills, Learning and Development Service, CCP Ground Floor, PO Box 100, County Hall, Preston, PR1 0LD, Lancashire.

2. Description of alteration and evidence

This proposal is for the closure of Ashton Community Science College's (ACSC) sixth form by permanently lowering its age range from 11-18 years to 11-16 years. The school will remain open and unchanged for secondary school provision.

Participation in Education or Training

When ACSC approached the local authority in December 2015 to discuss the future of its sixth form provision, there were only 32 students in the sixth form and only four of these were intending to progress into their second year. ACSC has ensured that the students who wish to progress onto their second year are able to make a positive transition onto a course at a local college.

The table below shows the student number and funding allocations ACSC has received from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) since it opened its sixth form in September 2010:

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16
Student Numbers	30	75	42	55	77	66
Funding	£144,694	£355,085	£224,448	£315,202	£350,957	£320,053

The average EFA student number allocation for the school sixth forms and academies in Lancashire were 225 students in 2013/14, 236 in 2014/15, 225 in 2015/16 and 217 in 2016/17. ACSC's student numbers are significantly below the average level.

In terms of the 2016/17 academic year, ACSC held an open evening for its sixth form on 3rd December 2015 to publicise its offer for September 2016 and the gauge the level of interest from students wishing to attend. ACSC promoted the open evening in various ways: with its own year 11 students; through its local feeder schools; a radio advert on Rock FM; on its website; and a promotional banner on Blackpool Road. However, following these promotions, no attendees visited the event.

In recent years, there has been minimal interest from students in progressing to ACSC's sixth form. In 2015/16, only 14 pupils chose to stay on at ACSC for post 16 provision, as their first preference. In addition to this, information from the local authority's Wellbeing, Prevention and Early Help Service shows the percentage of leavers from ACSC attending a school sixth form, which would include their own provision, is reducing year on year, with more young people progressing onto an FE college. Of ACSC's July 2015 leavers, only 8.0% progressed to a school sixth form compared to 84.0% progressing to an FE college. Of the 8.0% progressing to a school sixth form, not all will have stayed in the sixth form at ACSC, instead moving on to the sixth forms of other schools.

The Department for Education's (DfE) statutory guidance, Making 'Prescribed Alterations' to Maintained Schools, published in April 2016, sets out the following guidelines which should be considered for proposals to open new sixth form provision:

- School to be rated as Good or Outstanding by OfSTED.
- The quality of pre-16 education must be good or outstanding.
- The proposed sixth form will provide places for a minimum of 200 students.
- The proposed sixth form will, either directly or through partnership, offer a minimum of 15 A level subjects.
- There is a clear demand for the new sixth form (including evidence of a shortage of post 16 places and a consideration of the quality of L3 provision in the area).
- The proposed sixth form is financially viable (there is evidence of financial resilience should student numbers fall and the proposal will not impact negatively on 11-16 education or cross-subsidisation of funding).

As can be seen from the guidelines above, a minimum of 200 places and a clear demand for the provision must be in place for a new sixth form to be approved. As no interest was shown in the open event for the sixth form's 2016/17 offer and there are no students in the sixth form at present, it is not expected that closure of the sixth form will have an adverse impact on participation by young people from the local area.

Educational or Training Achievements

ACSC was last inspected by OfSTED in October 2013 and the outcome for Overall Effectiveness was 'Good'. However, the inspection report made the following comments in relation to the sixth form:

- The sixth form requires improvement. Although many students make good progress, a significant proportion do not achieve as well as they could because their attendance is poor and they do not complete courses.
- In order to improve further, the report advises the school to raise achievement at post 16 by improving the attendance of sixth form students and ensuring that more students continue the courses they start in Year 12 into Year 13.
- Overall attainment at the end of the sixth form is low because many enter with low GCSE grades. The achievement of students who complete courses is often good but too many start courses and do not complete them and some students' low attendance prevents them from making good progress in their learning.

To support the new inspection arrangements, which were introduced in September 2015, OfSTED and the DfE have developed an inspection dashboard. The validated 16-19 inspection dashboard for ACSC, which was published on 23rd June 2016, identified no strengths within the dataset. It did, however, identify five weaknesses.

Of the alternative providers in the local area, all have been rated by OfSTED as 'Good' or 'Outstanding'.

As can be seen from the information above, the young people attending the sixth form do not achieve as well as they could and they have poor attendance. It is not expected that closing the sixth form will have an adverse impact on the achievements made by young people from the local area.

Range of Educational or Training Opportunities Available

In the 2015/16 academic year, ACSC was only delivering post 16 provision in two curriculum areas: one course is offered under Science and Mathematics and four courses are offered under Hair and Beauty.

The DfE's current criteria for adding a new sixth form requires proposals for new sixth forms to demonstrate that they will offer a minimum of 15 A level subjects. ACSC only offers provision in two subjects.

Whilst young people will not be able to access post 16 provision at ACSC if this proposal is approved, some or all of the courses offered by ACSC are available at a number of other post 16 institutions in the local area. These providers are Cardinal Newman College, Preston's College, Moor Park High School and Sixth Form and Carr Hill High School and Sixth Form Centre. All of these have been rated by OfSTED as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' and they are within 3-6 miles of ACSC. There is capacity at these providers should any students from ACSC wish to progress into post 16 education or training with them.

From reviewing the data of where the students who attended ACSC's sixth form in 2014/15, the majority were from the following wards in Preston: Larches, Lea, Ribbleton, Ingol, Tulketh and St Matthew's. Young people from these wards not attending the sixth form at ACSC accessed post 16 provision at a wide range of providers, but mainly Preston's College, Cardinal Newman College, Runshaw College, Carr Hill High School and Sixth Form Centre and Moor Park High School and Sixth Form. As can be seen from the paragraph above, four out of five of these are within reasonable travelling distance from ACSC and offer the same or comparable courses so young people will be able to easily access alternative post 16 provision.

Young people wishing to participate in post 16 education or training will have access to a wider curriculum choice at the other providers in the local area.

Should the outcome of the statutory consultation process be that ACSC's sixth form is closed, the capacity currently used for the delivery of this provision will become available. As the number of mainstream pupils is set to increase in the Preston area over future years, this will enable the school to consider increasing the number of statutory aged pupils it can accommodate.

Conclusion

As the number of 16-19 year olds attending ACSC is minimal and the other post 16 providers in the local area offer the same courses as part of their provision, the local authority does not believe that there will be an adverse impact on participation should ACSC not offer sixth form provision in the future.

3. Objectives

The objective of this proposal is to permanently lower the age range of the school from 11-18 years to 11-16 years with effect from 31 August 2017, through the closure of the sixth form.

The sixth form has a very limited provision offer, little or no interest from young people in enrolling in the future, and has a number of weaknesses which have been identified by independent bodies, such as OfSTED.

As the secondary element of the school is unaffected by this proposal and the number of young people accessing the sixth form is minimal, the closure of the sixth form is not expected to have an adverse impact on the community.

4. Effect on other local education institutions

As the proposal is to close the sixth form provision at ACSC, there is not expected to be any adverse impact on other local post 16 providers.

There will be sufficient capacity in the local area for all young people to be able to access post 16 provision within a reasonable travelling distance. The closest alternative post 16 providers measured by a car journey from ACSC are:

Moor Park High School and Sixth Form	2.7 miles
Preston's College	2.9 miles
Cardinal Newman College	3.2 miles
Carr Hill High School and Sixth Form Centre	5.7 miles

5. Project Costs and Value for Money

The final DfE criteria for opening a new sixth form is for it to be financially viable. There is a concern that the small number of students in the sixth form at ACSC mean that it is not financially viable and keeping the sixth form open does not demonstrate value for money.

The local authority's Post 16 Adviser for ACSC undertook a review of their sixth form provision in October 2015. They noted that ACSC should only run courses which meet a minimum student number threshold to ensure that they are financially viable and that running a sixth form on low numbers was 'becoming detrimental to the school's core business at key stage 5 and key stage 4'. A further concern was noted in that running small courses is exacerbating the financial difficulties being projected by ACSC. The overall long-term financial position of the school would be improved through the removal of small courses which are not financially viable.

6. Implementation

It is proposed to close the school's sixth form on 31st August 2017.

The school took the decision not to recruit any students to its sixth form from September 2016 due to the lack of interest as described above. As a result, there are currently no young people accessing this provision. This was a decision taken by the school outside of this consultation process. Arrangements were made for any young people accessing provision at the sixth form in 2015/16 who wished to continue in post 16 education to do so at another local provider. This means that no further transition planning is required as there are no young people to relocate.

7. Procedure for responding to the consultation

Within four weeks from the date of publication of this proposal, 26th September 2016, any person may respond, support, object to or make comments on the proposal by posting them to Sarah Hirst, Skills, Learning and Development Service, FREEPOST PR503, Preston, PR1 0LD. Responses can also be emailed to sarah.hirst@lancashire.gov.uk. To be considered as part of the decision making process to determine the proposal, responses must be received no later than 24th October 2016.