

MATTERS TO BE SPECIFIED IN SECTION 15 PROPOSALS TO DISCONTINUE A SCHOOL

Extract of Schedule 2 to The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools)(England) Regulations 2013 (as amended):

Contact details

1. The name and contact address of the local authority or governing body publishing the proposals and the name, address and category of the school it is proposed that should be discontinued.

The proposal to close Thomas Whitham Sixth Form, Barden Lane, Burnley, BB10 1JD is published by Lancashire County Council, the relevant local authority. Thomas Whitham Sixth Form is a 16-19 community school. The local authority can be contacted at the following address: Education Improvement (11 – 25 years), Room CH2:24, PO Box 100, County Hall, Preston, PR1 0LD.

Implementation

2. The date on which it is proposed to close the school or, where it is proposed that the closure be implemented in stages, the dates of and information about each stage.

This proposal is for the closure of Thomas Whitham Sixth Form (the school) from 31 August 2020.

Should the proposal be approved, the local authority will support the school in seeking places at alternative providers for students who will not have completed their study programmes by the end of the 2019/20 academic year. Wherever possible, the local authority will ensure that students are not disadvantaged if the decision is taken to close the school.

Reason for closure

3. A statement explaining the reason why closure of the school is considered necessary.

The reasons for the proposal are concerns about the school's financial deficit position and the number of students accessing the provision. There are no concerns about the quality of education being provided by the school.

Financial Viability

Thomas Whitham Sixth Form's financial position has been in steady decline for a number of years but there has been a rapid increase in the cumulative deficit since 2017/18.

As at 31 March 2019, the school held a cumulative deficit balance of £3.2m, which is forecast to increase by £1.0m in the current 2019-20 financial year, taking the overall cumulative deficit to £4.2m. The current three year forecast for the school indicates that this cumulative deficit is likely to exceed £6.3m by March 2022.

By law, schools must set a balanced budget. Unfortunately, the school is not able to do this, meaning that it is no longer financially viable.

Student Numbers

The school's facilities and staffing were originally based on a cohort of 600 students. Due to the fact that student numbers have been well below this level, the school has recently reduced the amount of space it occupies on the Burnley Campus and, as a result, has reduced the number of places it has available to 450 students. There are currently 101 students on roll at the school.

The table below shows the student number and funding allocations the school has received from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) in recent years:

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Student Numbers	359	244	157	104	139
Funding	£1,652,663	£1,134,632	£719,297	£508,357	£645,439

Since 2012/13, the school has seen a reduction in its student number allocations from the ESFA every year up to 2018/19. As can be seen from the table above, the school has seen a growth in student numbers which has led to an increased allocation from the ESFA in the current academic year.

The average ESFA student number allocation for the school sixth forms and academies in Lancashire was 209 in 2017/18, 206 in 2018/19 and 220 in 2019/20. This shows that the school's student numbers have been below average in the last three years and, with 101 students on roll at present, they remain below average. As a further point of comparison, if a maintained school wished to open a new sixth form, the Department for Education (DfE) states that a minimum of 200 places must be provided.

Despite the best efforts of the school, and with the support of the local authority, Thomas Whitham Sixth Form has not been able to increase its student numbers sufficiently and the funding they receive has reduced as a result of this. The school's financial position has been in decline for a number of years and this means that the school has been unable to cover its operating costs for more than five years.

The school is currently operating well below its capacity and this, coupled with reduced funding, has led the governing body to request that the local authority reviews its future viability.

Alternative Options

Based on the financial position of the school and their student numbers, the school is aware that an alternative solution would be needed to secure its financial viability. Over the last few years, the school has explored the option of converting to academy status and joining a Multi Academy Trust but it has not been possible to progress this option. In addition, the school has looked into creating a federation partnership with a local school but this did not proceed.

Consultation

The stage 1 consultation period ran from 16 September to 1 November 2019. During the consultation period, a total of 212 responses were received. In addition, a consultation event was held at the school on 23 September 2019. At this event, 43 appointments took place, with 51 interested parties in attendance.

Conclusion

As can be seen from the information above, the status quo position is untenable given the scale financial deficit and the low student numbers.

Pupil numbers and admissions

4. The numbers (distinguishing between compulsory and non-compulsory school age pupils), age range, sex and special educational needs of pupils (distinguishing between boarding and day pupils) for whom provision is currently made at the school.

Thomas Whitham Sixth Form is a co-educational stand-alone 16-19 school, providing for students of all abilities. The space assigned to the school on the Burnley Campus was originally based on 600 students. Due to the fact that student numbers have been well below this level, the school has recently reduced the amount of space it occupies on the Burnley Campus and, as a result, has reduced the number of places it has available to 450 students

The school's funding allocation from the ESFA for the 2019/20 academic year is based on 139 students.

As at September 2019, there were 52 male and 49 female pupils aged between 16 and 18 enrolled at the school.

There are currently no students with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) on roll at the school.

Displaced pupils

5. A statement and supporting evidence about the need for places in the area including whether there is sufficient capacity to accommodate displaced pupils.

If Thomas Whitham Sixth Form were to close, there is sufficient capacity at alternative providers to accommodate their current students.

The significant majority of students at the school are from the Burnley and Pendle districts. In terms of future student numbers, the Office for National Statistics projections show that the number of 16-18 year olds in Burnley and Pendle are forecast to grow by 1,125 young people over the next 10 years. The more immediate projections show that the number of 16-18 year olds in Burnley and Pendle are forecast to grow by 444 young people over the next three years. It must be noted that these figures do not reflect the housebuilding taking place so the actual number of young people may be higher as a result.

6. Details of the schools or further education colleges at which pupils at the school to be discontinued will be offered places, including:

- a) any interim arrangements;
- b) the provision that is to be made for those pupils who receive educational provision recognised by the local authority as reserved for children with special educational needs; and
- c) in the case of special schools, the alternative provision made by local authorities other than the authority which maintains the school.

The significant majority of students attending Thomas Whitham Sixth Form are from the Burnley and Pendle districts. Within these districts, there are two other mainstream 16-18 ESFA funded providers and these are Burnley College and Nelson and Colne College. Burnley College is judged as 'Outstanding' by OfSTED. Due to its merger with Accrington and Rossendale College in November 2018, Nelson and Colne College does not currently have an official OfSTED judgement. However, prior to the merger, Nelson and Colne College was judged as 'Outstanding' and Accrington and Rossendale College

was judged as 'Good'.

Young people from Burnley and Pendle access further education provision which is funded by the ESFA at a wide range of providers and the school is the 5th choice for these young people. In terms of where young people from Burnley and Pendle are accessing provision, the breakdown is as follows: 40.3% chose to go to Nelson and Colne College; 38.0% chose Burnley College; 2.7% chose Craven College; 2.5% chose Clitheroe Royal Grammar School; and 2.4% chose Thomas Whitham Sixth Form. The remaining 14.1% chose to study at 49 other providers. This shows that, whilst the provision in the district may reduce, there is a range of provision available for young people to access as an alternative to Thomas Whitham Sixth Form.

With regard to the school's curriculum offer, all of the subject areas are available at at least one of the alternative providers, with the majority of subjects being available at both Burnley College and Nelson and Colne College. Where there is not a direct match for a course at another provider, there are alternative courses within the same subject area.

- a) For students currently in their final year of study, there should be no implications. They will sit their exams as planned and leave the sixth form at the end of the academic year.

If the decision is taken to close Thomas Whitham Sixth Form, the local authority will work with the school to support all young people who are part way through their study programme to find a place at an alternative provider. We will aim to ensure a smooth and successful transition for those moving to a new provider.

For those young people moving to a new provider, it is expected that the transition arrangements to the new provider will include a review of the work they have undertaken to date to ensure that, wherever possible, this is taken into account and minimises the need to begin a course again.

- b) The school does not provide any provision is which specifically for young people with special educational needs (SEN).

There are currently no students on roll at the school with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). As at September 2019, the school has nine students with SEN.

Where a student has a learning difficulty or disability which calls for special educational provision, the new provider must use its best endeavours to put appropriate support in place. Young people should be supported to participate in discussions about their aspirations, their needs and the support that they think will help them best.

- c) Not applicable.

7. Details of any other measures proposed to be taken to increase the number of school or further education college places available in consequence of the proposed discontinuance.

The 'Displaced pupils' section above confirms that there is sufficient capacity at alternative providers to accommodate the current students at the school.

Impact on the community

8. A statement and supporting evidence about the impact on the community of the closure of the school and any measures proposed to mitigate any adverse impact.

Thomas Whitham Sixth Form is located on the Burnley Campus, along with a range of other partners, and there is a wide range of community access to the various facilities provided at the campus, including those within Thomas Whitham Sixth Form.

It must be noted that this proposal relates to the proposed closure of Thomas Whitham Sixth Form and not the Burnley Campus as a whole. Should the decision be taken to close the school, the local authority will look at ways to ensure that as wide a range of community access as is reasonably practicable can be facilitated in the future.

Rural Primary Schools

9. Where proposals relate to a rural primary school designated as such by an order made for the purposes of section 15, a statement that the local authority or the governing body (as the case may be) considered section 15(4):

N/A

Balance of denominational provision

10. Where the school has a religious character, a statement about the impact of the proposed closure on the balance of denominational provision in the area and the impact on parental choice.

N/A

Maintained nursery schools

11. Where proposals relate to the discontinuance of a maintained nursery school, a statement setting out:

- a) the local authority's assessment of the quality and quantity of the alternative provision compared to the school proposed to be discontinued and the proposed arrangements to ensure the expertise and specialism continues to be available; and
- b) the accessibility and convenience of replacement provision for local parents.

N/A

Sixth Form Provision

12. Where the school proposed to be discontinued provides sixth form education, the effect for 16 to 19 year olds in the area that closure will have in respect of:

- a) their educational or training achievements;
- b) their participation in education or training; and
- c) the range of educational or training opportunities available to them.

As the school is a 16-19 community school and only offers sixth form provision, this document relates solely to sixth form provision.

- a) Since it opened, the school has been judged as 'Good' at every OfSTED inspection. The last full inspection took place in July 2011 and the school was judged as 'Good'. OfSTED undertook a short inspection of the school in March 2016 and determined that the school continues to be judged as 'Good'. The short inspection acknowledged that the school had been through 'a period of considerable uncertainty and turbulence' but that there is a 'positive and exciting vision for the future' and 'the leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school'.

Using the most recent information from the DfE's 2018 Performance Tables, it can be seen that, for A level, Academic and Applied General qualifications, the school is below average in terms of the average points score (APS) per entry but is average for the progress headline measure. This means that the students accessing this provision at the school had generally lower Key Stage 4 attainment than enter the average sixth form, but made similar progress, on average, to students accessing this type of provision across England who got similar results at key stage 4. For Level 2 English and maths progress, students undertaking this provision made positive progress at the school.

- b) There are currently 101 students on roll at the school. As can be seen at question 3, the school has seen a reduction in student numbers over time. However, the school did see an increase in students in 2018/19, leading to an increased funding and student number allocation in 2019/20.

The school's student numbers have been below the Lancashire average for a number of years and, with 101 students on roll at present, their student numbers remain below average. The DfE's statutory guidance, Making 'Prescribed Alterations' to Maintained Schools, published in April 2016, sets out a number of guidelines which should be considered for proposals to open new sixth form provision, including:

- Size: the proposed sixth form will provide at least 200 places and there should be sufficient demand for these places.
- Demand: there should be a clear demand for additional post 16 places in the local area (including evidence of a shortage of post 16 places and a consideration of the quality of L3 provision in the area).
- Financial viability: the proposed sixth form should be financially viable (there must be evidence of financial resilience should student numbers fall).

As can be seen from the information in this proposal, the school does not meet the above guidelines. The school has not had a student number allocation

above 200 from the ESFA since 2016/17. The reduction in the number of students accessing the school shows that there is reducing demand for this provision. Whilst the school did see an increase in students in 2018/19, it remains notably below 200 students. In terms of financial viability, this is the key concern for the school. The school's financial position has been in steady decline for a number of years. At present, the school is not financially viable and, as at 31 March 2019, it held a cumulative deficit balance of £3.2m, which is forecast to reach £4.2m by 31 March 2020.

- c) The significant majority of students attending Thomas Whitham Sixth Form are from the Burnley and Pendle districts. Within these districts, there are two other mainstream 16-18 ESFA funded providers and these are Burnley College and Nelson and Colne College. Burnley College is judged as 'Outstanding' by OfSTED. Due to its merger with Accrington and Rossendale College in November 2018, Nelson and Colne College does not currently have an official OfSTED judgement. However, prior to the merger, Nelson and Colne College was judged as 'Outstanding' and Accrington and Rossendale College was judged as 'Good'.

Young people from Burnley and Pendle access further education provision which is funded by the ESFA at a wide range of providers and the school is the 5th choice for these young people. Question 5 shows more information on the providers being accessed. This shows that, whilst the provision in the district may reduce, there is a range of provision available for young people to access as an alternative to Thomas Whitham Sixth Form.

With regard to the school's curriculum offer, all of the subject areas are available at at least one of the alternative providers, with the majority of subjects being available at both Burnley College and Nelson and Colne College. Where there is not a direct match for a course at another provider, there are alternative courses within the same subject area.

Special educational provision

13. Where existing provision that is recognised by the local authority as reserved for pupils with special educational needs is being discontinued, a statement as to how the local authority or the governing body (as the case may be) believe the proposals are likely to lead to improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of the educational provision for these children.

N/A

Travel

14. Details of the length and journeys to alternative provision.

Based on the where young people from Burnley and Pendle are accessing post 16 providers, the distances to the most popular providers, by a car journey from Thomas Whitham Sixth Form are:

Burnley College	1.6 miles
Nelson and Colne College	4.6 miles
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School	10.6 miles
Craven College	18 miles

15. The proposed arrangements for travel of displaced pupils to other schools including how the proposed arrangements will mitigate against increased car use.

Whilst the information above makes reference to car journeys, it is acknowledged that young people accessing post 16 provision are more likely to travel by bus. Therefore, the table below shows the length of time it would take to travel by bus to these providers from Thomas Whitham Sixth Form:

Burnley College	15 minutes
Nelson and Colne College	40 minutes
Clitheroe Royal Grammar School	1 hour 15 minutes
Craven College	1 hour 29 minutes

Whilst it is possible that this proposal will lead to an increased use of transport, this is difficult to determine as it depends on where the young people live and which alternative provider they may choose to access.

Should young people experience an increase in travel costs which may prevent them from participating, they may be eligible to access financial support through the 16-19 bursary fund, which colleges and school sixth forms received from the ESFA.

The local authority publishes a post 16 transport policy statement on an annual basis and this sets out the transport support available to young people of sixth form age and young people up to the age of 25 who have a special educational need or disability or an Education, Health and Care Plan who are entering or continuing in further education or training. The current policy can be accessed through this link:
<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/media/898457/post-16-transport-to-education-and-training-policy-statement-2019-20.pdf>.