

## MATTERS TO BE SPECIFIED IN SECTION 15 PROPOSALS TO DISCONTINUE WENNINGTON HALL 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:  
Wennington Hall School  
Lodge Lane  
Wennington  
LA2 8NS

is published by Lancashire County Council, the relevant local authority. Wennington Hall is an 11-16 community special school with on-site residential facilities.

The local authority can be contacted at the following address:

Susan Strother,  
Property Asset Principal,  
Education and Children's Services Room 2:27,  
Lancashire County Council PO Box 100,  
County Hall  
Preston  
PR1 0LD.

Or by emailing:

[susan.strother@lancashire.gov.uk](mailto:susan.strother@lancashire.gov.uk)

#### 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.

It is proposed to close the school on 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022.

Wherever possible, Lancashire County Council (LCC) will ensure pupils 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 proposal arises because of low educational standards, the failure to identify a sponsor to convert the school to an academy, the school's low pupil numbers and lack of financial viability.

##### Low educational standards

Ofsted's last full inspection of the school took place in July 2019, judging the school to need significant improvement. This followed the previous full inspection by Ofsted in December 2016, which rated the school as in need of special measures. This indicates the school has not shown

sufficient evidence of improvement during this period and requires new arrangements to secure substantial improvement.

#### Conversion to an academy

In line with national policy for schools causing concern, the Department for Education's Regional Schools' Commissioner (RSC) issued LCC with an academy order. LCC and RSC sought to identify a sponsor to convert the school to an academy as part of a multi-academy trust.

Despite repeated attempts, a sponsor could not be found to lead this conversion, which has left the school with an uncertain long-term future.

In September 2019, the RSC wrote to LCC to advise that approval had been given to revoke the academy order, subject to LCC sourcing an appropriate independent provider to take over the running of the educational provision at Wennington Hall School. The revocation of the directive academy order is contingent upon the discontinuance of the provision as a maintained school.

#### Maintenance of the school within the independent sector

Approval was given by LCC's Cabinet to commence the formal procurement process intended to secure the future of Wennington Hall School in January 2020. The implementation of this decision was delayed due to the national pandemic but the invitation to tender was published in October 2020. The process for receipt of tenders closed in December 2020. Despite an extensive procurement process to find an independent provider with the ability to maintain and develop the provision and site, only 1 tender was received. At the end of the evaluation process, it was not possible to award the contract. This means that the conditions of the revocation of the academy order have not been met.

#### Pupil numbers and financial viability

As of September 2021, the school had 17 pupils on roll, well below its potential capacity of 80. In 2019, when the outcome of the Ofsted inspection showed that the expected improvements in provision identified in the previous report had not been achieved and the school was therefore still not judged by Ofsted to be 'good', the local authority stopped placing additional pupils in the school. This means that numbers on roll have shown a steady decline and this has had a significant impact on the financial viability of the school, which has been in deficit since 2017. The school now has a cumulative deficit of over £1.77million, as a result of maintaining higher staffing levels, to ensure pupils are adequately safeguarded, and additional transport costs due to reducing, and now no, residential placements. This deficit is currently forecast to rise by around £1.1million in 2021/22 and will continue to grow if no action is taken. This has prevented substantial improvements being made to the site and to the range of provision offered.

#### Consultation

In accordance with the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013, a stage 1 consultation period ran from 6<sup>th</sup> September to 17<sup>th</sup> October 2021. During this consultation period, a total of 4 individual responses were received, all from members of staff.

Given the benefits of continuing to adhere to social distancing rules, it was decided not to offer physical consultation events. Instead, a virtual event for Union Representatives was held on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2021. 6 Representatives attended this event on behalf of 4 Unions. Other virtual events for any interested parties were offered during the week of 20<sup>th</sup> September but were cancelled due to no bookings being made.

#### Conclusion

LCC has concerns that Wennington Hall is not able to provide the standard of education required as a maintained school and believes that this would be best addressed by closing the school and transferring the remaining children to other appropriate educational establishments. This concurs with the DfE's view, as demonstrated by their revocation of the directive academy order being made contingent upon the discontinuation of the local authority's maintenance of Wennington Hall in favour of an independent provider. The school's rapidly growing and significant financial deficit makes it not viable and impacts negatively on the provision of other LCC services.

#### **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.

Wennington Hall School is a special school for boys. The school has the capacity to provide secondary education for boys aged 11 to 16 with Education, Health and Care Plans, whose needs cannot be met in mainstream secondary schools due to their social, emotional and/or mental health needs

The school has a designated capacity of 80 pupils. As of September 2021, 17 children were on roll; but the number is reducing as some parents decide to accept places at other schools. In September 2021, the only year groups with children still on roll were Y9, 10 and 11 (age 13-14, 14-15 and 15-16). There are facilities on site to provide 20 single occupancy residential places. There are currently no pupils in residence.

Included in these numbers is one young person in the care of the local authority.

#### **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.

The local authority is proposing to close Wennington Hall School. During the school summer holiday period 2021, just before the stage 1 consultation period began, centrally employed officers held conversations with each family about their wishes for their sons' futures. Places at other appropriate educational settings were offered to them all. The children who returned to Wennington in September were either those awaiting finalisation of arrangements to move elsewhere, or those whose parents did not want them to move. The local authority is confident that there are sufficient places available in other schools to accommodate all current pupils.

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 families of each child have already been offered places at alternative schools but have chosen to keep them on the roll of Wennington Hall.

The proposal is to close the school at the end of the academic year 2021/2022.

By the start of the Spring Term 2022, it is anticipated that there will be 14 children on roll, 7 in Y11. Arrangements for annual reviews have been made to take place during November for all the children, after which time the agreed next steps will be officially pursued.

Places for children for whom it is agreed that special school provision continues to be required will take account of parental preference, the child's views, distance from home and the confidence of the proposed school to meet the identified needs. Schools within the maintained and non-maintained/independent sector will be considered.

Notes from individual meetings with 5 boys in Y10 held in October 2021 record desired career paths and preferences for the next place of study. 2 named Carnforth High School as their preferred school and 3 Lancaster and Morecambe College. Some of the boys have already benefitted from taster sessions at the college. Further discussions about the pursuit of these options will be held at the annual review meetings.

It is proposed that the children will have a personalised, carefully planned transition from Wennington that will begin as soon as it is felt appropriate for each child.

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 SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2020 supports the presumption for mainstream provision, as outlined in the SEND Code of Practice. 7 SEND units within primary schools, each providing for up to 16 children with social, communication and interaction needs are being set up. Feasibility studies for more SEND units are being carried out in another 9 mainstream schools. An additional 132 places are being made available by expanding 2 existing special schools and there has also been cabinet agreement to create satellite extensions to other special schools on mainstream sites. This will enable children to benefit from the expertise of specialist teachers at the same time as being able to enjoy inclusive opportunities alongside mainstream peers. The creation of these additional places will help ensure sufficient specialist provision is available in the future, if Wennington closes.

### **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.

Wennington Hall draws its pupils from a wide area of Lancashire. It is a county-wide provision and very few pupils come from the immediate locality, so the potential closure will have minimal effect in terms of e.g. increased home to school travel time, on children and their families in the local neighbourhood.

Some of the school's staff are resident in the local area and would be affected by closure. The authority is aware of the potential impact on the emotional wellbeing and mental health brought about by the current status of the school and its uncertain future. LCC's Human Resources team is already involved in making sure all staff are aware of their options for the future and there is a good track record for avoidance of compulsory redundancies. The school commissions a

counsellor who works with both staff and children and the school is also engaged with the LCC funded Emotional Health in Schools and Colleges support programme for staff.

If a decision is made to close the school, the building will be handed back to the local authority on the designated closure date, 31<sup>st</sup> August 2022. LCC's Cabinet would need to approve any change of use or any disposal of the site. This would involve Secretary of State approvals which can be quite lengthy, however no decision can be made on the future use of the site until a decision is made to close the school.

Although it would not be the desired scenario, if the property were to be left vacant for any period of time, consideration would be given to maintaining site security and safety e.g., by using a security firm or site guardians and maintaining the fire and security alarms to allow them to continue to work.

There are no facilities on the school site to which the local community has regular access and there are no long-term contractual arrangements in place. Facilities have been made available on an ad hoc basis, as and when requested. Dependent upon the future use and ownership of the building, it may still be possible for the local community to benefit from the facilities.

### **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):

Not applicable.

### **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.

Not applicable.

### **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.

Not applicable.

### 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.

Not applicable.
-----------------

### 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.

There is much respect for the feelings expressed by loyal staff, some of whom are responsible for the provision of good learning experiences for the children, and the boys, who told the Ofsted inspector that they did not want their school to be closed. However, the school has still not been judged to be 'good' by Ofsted. Attempts to improve the school by fulfilling the option of school academy conversion or by being taken over by an experienced provider from within the independent sector, have not been successful. The support the school has been receiving in the meantime has not brought about sufficient progress in making the required improvements to the quality of provision. LCC is committed to providing Lancashire's children with only the best education experiences and now feels that placing the children in other schools will provide them with a better quality and standard of education. Their development and outcomes will also be enhanced by being able to learn and interact with and from a larger group of children than currently.
---

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

Wennington Hall admits pupils from across Lancashire, with the majority coming from northern and central districts. Consequently, most current pupils have significant journeys to school. Almost all are transported to and from school by minibus or taxi. Consideration will be given to the travelling time from pupils' homes to avoid any adverse impact on individual pupils. None of the boys who have already been moved from the school has incurred increased travel time. Whilst travel time is important, the most relevant determinant of suitability of a school, though, has to be its ability to meet the needs of the child.
--

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

It is not possible to predict the travel arrangements which might need to be put in place at this time. However, given that almost all pupils currently travel by minibus or taxi, any new arrangements are unlikely to result in increased car use.
--

Where transport is provided by LCC, the type of transport provided is discretionary. If a child is entitled to free transport to and from school, the local authority will normally provide them with a
---

travel pass for a bus service, a contracted vehicle, such as a coach or minibus, or a railway service. In exceptional circumstances, a taxi may be provided.