

CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF FURNESS SCHOOL

Kent County Council would like to hear your views on
a proposal to discontinue

Furness School, Rowhill Road, Swanley, Kent BR8 7RP

The consultation will run from 4 February 2015 until 25 March 2015.
Information about how to respond to this consultation is contained within this document.



THE PROPOSAL

Kent County Council and the Interim Executive Board (IEB) for Furness School have agreed, with regret, to launch a public consultation on a proposal to discontinue Furness School by 31 August 2015.

The Local Authority will work closely with schools in the locality to secure appropriate education for children in other schools. All pupils on roll will be offered a suitable alternative school place as near to their home as possible.

KCC recognises the significant importance given to parents' and carers' views. We are especially mindful that the Children and Families Act reforms of SEN and Disabilities which came into force from September 2014 has looked to ensure they are involved in shaping and influencing strategic decisions that affect their children and young people.

KCC also recognises that parents of high functioning pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are ambitious for their children and would like them to be supported in mainstream schools where they have access to high quality subject specialist teachers and access to specialist teaching facilities. Parents in North and West Kent have therefore asked the Council to develop mainstream provision rather than further provision in Special schools.

For this reason, this proposal is linked to a Kent County Council plan to establish a Specialist Resource Based Provision for pupils with ASD, at Hugh Christie Technology College, White Cottage Road in Tonbridge, Kent, TN10 4PU from September 2015.

This proposal is associated with but not linked with a Leigh Academy Trust proposal to establish a Specialist Resource Based Provision for pupils with ASD, at Wilmington Academy, Common Lane, Wilmington, Dartford, Kent, DA2 7DR.

THE REASONS

Background

Furness School is currently designated as a Special School provision, offering 60 places for pupils with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Previously the school was designated as a 60 place provision for pupils with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Needs (BESN).

In May 2012, OFSTED inspected the school on the 15th and 16th May 2012 and placed the school in Special Measures. In response to this and in the interest of pupils' health and safety, KCC closed the school for a short period until 11th June 2012. At the same time KCC entered into a contract with Lilac Sky Schools Academy Trust to provide management support to Furness. The aim was for Furness School to convert to Academy Status within the Lilac Sky Trust and move to a Good OFSTED judgement.

Upon reopening, delegated powers were removed from the Governing body and on 23rd July 2012, an Interim Executive Body (IEB) was appointed to oversee the governance functions of the school. Delegated powers were returned to the school in August 2012 but in addition, the decision was taken to not admit any new pupils for the next year as the school looked to consolidate and improve standards, behaviour and safeguarding.

Since 2011-12, Furness School has encountered significant budget difficulties, which can be attributed to low pupil numbers and the need for the high staffing ratios that were retained to maintain and improve standards. This position has been exacerbated by the

national changes to Special School funding introduced in April 2013. Due to the extent of the cumulative budget deficit the position would now be irrecoverable (see financial position below).

KCC in agreement with the IEB, re-designated Furness to be an ASD provision following full public consultation. However, in spite of the recognised need for additional ASD provision in the County, it appears the previous poor reputation of the school remained and the school has continued to operate well below capacity. At the same time mainstream Secondary schools hosting ASD unit provision in Meopham and Malling are oversubscribed. Despite high levels of ASD need, the school has been unsuccessful in increasing the pupil numbers to a level that makes the school financially and educationally viable.

School Standards

The latest OFSTED inspection in December 2013 judged Furness to be requiring improvement. There were improvements in leadership and management, which Ofsted judged to be good. In September 2014 OFSTED also inspected the residential provision and this was judged as good. It should be noted that this provision was for the remaining BESN pupils at the school and there were no plans to retain this in the future even if the main school were to continue in operation.

Student achievement required improvement because “not all learners have been able to catch up with where they need to be when they leave school”. While some progress on this has been made the regular local authority monitoring visits identify this as an ongoing challenge.

Student safety and pastoral care were judged as a strength but the strategies to improve behaviour were “not always used to support their learning in class”. Attendance overall continued to be an issue.

The full report can be found on the Ofsted website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Pupil Numbers

Historic Numbers of Pupils on Roll (using annual September data collection)

Sept 2008	Sept 2009	Sept 2010	Sept 2011	Sept 2012	Sept 2013	Sept 2014
72	81	68	90	50	34	30

There has been a significant decline in pupil numbers over the last seven years. This can primarily be attributed to loss of confidence among parents who have chosen to place their children in other schools.

Current Numbers of Pupils on Roll

Yr	7	8	9	10	11	total
ASD	3	5	2	6	6	22
BESD		1	1		6	8
SCLN				1		1
Total	3	6	3	7	12	31

Pupil numbers remain very low at 31. Schools receive a large element of their funding based on pupil numbers and the decline in pupils attending the school results in a corresponding decline in funds available to run the school. Furness has a considerable budget deficit and this means that it will be impossible to maintain the current staffing levels necessary to maintain and sustain a satisfactory quality of education and the improvements required to achieve a good inspection outcome in the future.

Expected Future Numbers

Furness School is unlikely to experience an increased number of pupils applying for a place at the school.

Financial Position

	Actual 2010/11	Actual 2011/12	Actual 2012/13	Actual 2013/14	Y/E Forecast 2014/15
Rollover b/fwd	£41,158	£95,316	£45,969	(£30,591)	(£868,578)
In Year Surplus / Deficit	£54,157	(£49,347)	(£76,559)	(£837,987)	(£762,942)
Yearend Surplus / Deficit	£95,315	£45,969	(£30,590)	(£868,578)	(£1,631,520)

Furness School has a budget deficit that has increased every year since 2012. The school is forecast to have a significant 2014/15 cumulative budget deficit of £1,631,520, which is completely unsustainable.

There are two factors. Despite several structural solutions being implemented, pupil numbers are not expected to increase, which would see the deficit becoming worse, year on year.

The second and most significant factor is the methodology for funding high needs pupils. In line with Government policy this changed to "Place Plus" from April 2013 which resulted in the majority of funding being linked to individual pupils' need type and the months they are on the school roll. Previously funding was allocated to Special Schools based on the number of places available (regardless of the numbers of pupils actually attending). However, from 2013-14 the national funding methodology for Special Schools changed so that only £10,000 per annum per place is available. The remaining funding then fluctuates during the year depending on the actual numbers of pupils on roll. An example of the volatility of the in-year position is that, if one residential pupil leaves it results in a reduction of £46,000 over a year.

As previously stated, the reduced pupil numbers and the move to the new national funding methodology, reduced funding from 2012/13 to 2013/14 by 43%.

Even if the school could now begin to work within the available resources each year, a cumulative deficit of £1.6m would be irrecoverable and KCC is not able to provide exceptional or additional resources to a school on an on-going basis.

Alternative Structural Solutions

In agreement with the IEB, KCC re-designated the school to ASD and looked to facilitate conversion to academy status through Lilac Sky. However due to parental choice and the school's significant budget difficulties, both solutions have proved unsuccessful.

The Premises

The buildings are a mixture of an old manor house forming the main part of the school, surrounded by newer outbuildings and residential apartments.

The school buildings are in reasonably good condition both internally and externally. The number and age of the buildings would indicate higher maintenance costs over time. The site size is 4.41 hectares and is wholly owned by Kent County Council.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR PARENTS?

The Local Authority and the Interim Executive Board of Furness School will work closely with parents and carers to provide support throughout the consultation period, and beyond with the aim of securing a suitable place at an appropriate alternative school.

A school place will be offered to the parents of all pupils currently on the roll of Furness School. We have completed an Equality Impact Assessment to see if the proposal could affect anyone unfairly. We welcome your views on the assumptions we have made and the conclusions we have drawn. To view the document, go to:

www.kent.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

Home to school transport will be provided in accordance with Kent County Council's published policies with individual cases being considered on their merits and the needs of individual children and their families.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The consultation period will run from 4 February to 25 March 2015, allowing additional time for school holidays. Parents and carers will be consulted at a separate meeting followed by individual discussions with parents about placement options. A public drop in will be held at the school during the Public Consultation on Tuesday 24 February 2015.

There is a response form attached to this document, which should be returned to Ian Watts, Area Education Officer, North Kent, Worrall House, 30 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent ME19 4AE, by Thursday, 25 March 2015.

Following the consultation period, feedback from the consultation will be reported to KCC Education Cabinet Committee on 15 April 2015. All views expressed will be taken into consideration by the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform when making a decision whether or not to issue a Public Notice proposing closure of the school.

The public notice period (if issued) will be 8 May to 12 June 2015 and the final decision on closure will be taken by the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform at the end of the public notice period.

If a Public Notice is issued, the decision on whether the school should close will be made by Kent County Council's Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform.

Consultation Timetable

Deadline	Activity
4 February 2015	Publish proposals – start of statutory consultation
24 February 2015	Public drop-in session
25 March 2015	Formal consultation closes
15 April 2015	EYCC committee
By 23 April 2015	Cabinet Member Decision taken
	Call-in Period (5 days plus 1)
May 15 – June 2015	*Public Notice Period
June 2015	*Appeal period (4 week period)
July 2015	Final notification to statutory stakeholders of closure, if the proposal is agreed

* A process that will take place unless the proposal is rejected by the Cabinet Member following the public consultation

There are a number of ways you can let us have your views:

1. Complete and return the response form overleaf to: Ian Watts, Area Education Officer, North Kent, Worrall House, 30 Kings Hill Avenue, Kings Hill, West Malling, Kent ME19 4AE, by Thursday 25 March 2015
2. Or Email your comments to: school.consultations@kent.gov.uk

You can view the consultation information online at: www.kent.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

We will note all you say, but will not be able to respond individually to response forms, letters or emails.

PUBLIC CONSULTATION RESPONSE FORM

On the future of Furness School, Rowhill Road, Swanley, Kent BR8 7RP

PLEASE RETURN NO LATER THAN THURSDAY 25 MARCH 2015

Do you agree with the proposal?

YES

☐

NO

☐

I am a: * Pupil, Parent/Carer, Member of Staff, Governor, * Please delete as appropriate

or other interested party.....(please state your interest)

Name

Address

Kent County Council is a data controller under the Data Protection Act 1998 and will comply with the requirements of the Act at all times. We will ensure that your personal information is processed fairly and lawfully and in this instance used only for the purpose of validation, which will enable a fair and just consultation.

Your comments....

Please continue overleaf if necessary.....

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