

Consultation on the Proposal to Close Wennington Hall School

Lodge Lane, Wennington, Lancaster LA2 8NS

6th September to 17th October 2021

Consultation on the proposal to close Wennington Hall School by Lancashire County Council

www.lancashire.gov.uk



Foreword

Lancashire County Council is required by law to supply primary and secondary school places to any Lancashire child of school age who requests one. As for many other authorities, accomplishing this goal brings many challenges. Changes in education policy and demographic variables, such as the make-up of the population and where people live in the county, necessitate a regular evaluation of the amount, type and location of school places. Lancashire County Council also has a duty to ensure that schools are safe, secure and deliver a high standard of education that meets the wide range of needs of the county's children.

Lancashire is a large, diverse county with many excellent schools, and we are dedicated to improving standards and opportunities for all our children and young people.

The County Council and schools collaborate with parents and other service providers to ensure that our children thrive and achieve their learning and personal goals. We want all children and parents to be proud of their school and to develop a desire to learn for the rest of their lives.

Lancashire County Council strives to have schools that provide only the highest standards of provision. However, in the case of Wennington Hall, the combined best efforts of the school's Governing Body, the Local Authority's School Improvement Team and the Office of the Regional Schools Commissioner were unable to bring about the necessary improvements to enable it to offer the standard of provision the children deserve. It is unfortunate that we now have little alternative but to consult on whether or not to close Wennington Hall School.

We hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to express your thoughts on what Lancashire County Council is proposing to do during this consultation period. The opinions you share with us regarding our school plans are valuable to us, and they will be taken into consideration to shape the decisions and next steps that must be made.



County Councillor Jayne Rear
Cabinet member for Education and Skills

1. Overview

1.1 The Proposal

Lancashire County Council is consulting on a proposal to close Wennington Hall School. The proposal is as follows:

- To close Wennington Hall School, Lodge Lane, Wennington, Lancashire, LA2 8NS from 31st August 2022.

1.2 How to Respond to the Consultation

You can respond to this consultation online at www.lancashire.gov.uk/consultations

A paper copy of the questionnaire is also available at the back of this document. Alternatively, you can respond in writing using the contact details below. All responses must be received by **6pm on the 17th October 2021**.

1.3 Contact Details

All hard copy responses should be sent to the following address:

Business Intelligence, Lancashire County Council, PO Box 100, County Hall, Preston PR1 0LD

E-mail: schoolplanning@lancashire.gov.uk with Wennington in the subject line.

Online: www.lancashire.gov.uk/schoolorganisationreviews

1.4 What will Happen Next?

The consultation period will start on 6th September 2021 and end on 17th October 2021. A consultation report will be produced which will outline the feedback received and make recommendations to Lancashire County Council's cabinet members on how they may wish to proceed. The cabinet will consider the report and will decide on whether or not to publish a public notice about the proposal to close the school. This decision is expected to be made on 2nd December 2021.

If the cabinet members decide to publish a public notice, this is expected to happen on 6th December 2021. This would be followed by a period of at least 28 days during which the public are able to make their views about the proposal known. This period, called the Representation Period, would happen between 6th December 2021 and 21st January 2022.

Another report summarising the representations received would be written, including recommendations on the options that may be available, and this would inform cabinet's decision on whether or not to close Wennington Hall School. If this stage of the process is reached, the cabinet's decision would be most likely to be made on 3rd March 2022.

2. Part A

The case for change:

Lancashire County Council is consulting on a proposal to close Wennington Hall School. The proposal is as follows:

- **To close Wennington Hall School from the 31st of August 2022.**

2.1 Background

Wennington Hall is a community residential special school for pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs. Most pupils attend the school on a day basis. The school has capacity for 80 pupils, and 13 pupils are expected to be attending in September 2021.

The residential school has been on site since 1954, providing educational support to meet a wide range of special educational needs. Until the end of the summer term 2021, 3 pupils were in residence on a 38 week per year basis. No children are expected to be in residence in September 2021.

Following an Ofsted inspection in December 2016, when the school was first classified as being 'inadequate', the Regional Schools Commissioner placed a directive academy order on the school. This is the usual practice when a maintained school is judged to be in need of intervention to improve. The sponsorship of a successful academy to provide the right level of support and challenge to a school that is providing an inadequate level of education is regarded by the Department for Education (DfE) as the best way to bring about rapid improvements. Unfortunately, in spite of several discussions, the Regional Schools Commissioner was unable to find an academy sponsor willing to take on Wennington Hall School. Various options were considered, including requesting that the academy order should be lifted. The Regional Schools Commissioner agreed to revoke the academy order, but only if Lancashire County Council agreed to cease to maintain the school so that an experienced independent provider could take over the running of the provision at Wennington.

In January 2021, cabinet approved a Stage 1 Consultation to be undertaken on the proposed discontinuance of the Local Authority's maintenance of Wennington Hall School, to allow a provider from the independent sector to take it over. The consultation undertaken was on the basis that an independent provider would be found. A suitable provider was not identified so the statutory process, set out in the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013, had to be stopped and an alternative course of action decided upon. On 1st June 2021, cabinet made the decision to consult on the closure of Wennington Hall.

The statutory consultation process (Stage 1) on the potential closure will therefore begin on 6th September 2021. Parents, staff, and other interested parties will have the chance to ask questions and to express their views, as part of this consultation. Opportunities to do this will be offered during the week beginning 20th September 2021.

The County Council is committed to continuing to support the school during this period of change.

The map below shows the location of the school and its surrounding area:



2.2 Current context

Expected pupil numbers at the school September 2021:

Year groups	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Residential
Wennington Hall	3	4	6	0

Wennington Hall School is a small, specialist provider for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. All pupils have an education, health and care plans (EHCP). The primary needs described in most pupils' EHC plans relate to social, emotional, or mental health needs. A significant proportion have autism spectrum disorder or experience difficulties when communicating with others.

The educational provision at the school was first judged to be 'inadequate' and in need of special measures to improve by Ofsted in December 2016. At its next full inspection in July 2019, the school was judged to have remained 'inadequate'. Subsequent monitoring visits by Ofsted have not noted sufficient improvements having been made to stop the school continuing to be of concern. The latest Ofsted monitoring visit of the educational provision was in March 2021. The residential provision was inspected in May 2021. The Local Authority, the school's governors and members of the school's Senior Leadership Team knew the areas in need of improvement, but, despite Action Plans, closer involvement of governors and more extensive support from the Local Authority and Ofsted remain with the view that the progress made towards achieving the required improvements have not been quick enough and the school is still not providing an effective enough education for the children.

The SEN Team have not placed new pupils at the school since 2019 when the school received its second Ofsted judgement of 'inadequate' and it was confirmed that the expected improvements in the educational provision were not evident. This means that the school has been operating below its expected capacity for some time and this has impacted significantly on its budget. The school has a deficit budget, which is growing, and the school is no longer deemed to be financially viable.

2.2 Options Considered

The following options have been identified and have been considered by the Local Authority and the Regional Schools Commissioner on behalf of the Department for Education:

Option	Description
1	School converts to an Academy following an 'inadequate' Ofsted inspection judgement
2	An independent provider is procured to manage the running of the school
3	School closure

Line of Reasoning Leading to the Proposal

In 2017 the school was issued with an order to convert to a sponsored academy. The Regional Schools Commissioner was unable to find a suitable sponsor to run the school.

The Secretary of State subsequently agreed to revoke the academy order subject to the County Council being able to secure an appropriate provider from the independent sector to take over the running of the school. Despite a full tendering process, it was not possible to award the contract, so no independent provider has been found to take over the school from the County Council.

It is considered highly unlikely that further attempts to achieve option 1 or 2 would be successful a second time around.

The school has a current budget deficit of around £1.77m and is therefore not considered financially viable.

Wennington Hall has still not improved sufficiently in the required areas to be judged by Ofsted as a 'good' school.

The DfE guidance document, Schools Causing Concern, September 2020, states:

'In circumstances where the maintained school is not viable and the decision has been taken to revoke the academy order, then the local authority will be expected to close the maintained school following the statutory school closure process and if necessary, ministers may use the power to direct them to do so.' (page 32).

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/922910/schools_causing_concern1.pdf

Therefore, consultation on pursuing Option 3 is now deemed to be the only available route.

3. Part B – The Proposal

3.1 Overview

Lancashire County Council is consulting on a proposal to close Wennington Hall School. The proposal is as follows:

We are proposing to close Wennington Hall School from the 31st August 2022.

Reasons for the Proposal

Lancashire County Council is proposing to close Wennington Hall School for the following reasons:

- All children deserve to receive a good education. When Wennington Hall received its first Ofsted judgement of 'inadequate' in 2016, it was anticipated that the necessary improvements would be made within the expected 2-year period. However, when a second judgement of 'inadequate' was made in 2019, meaning that the children were still not receiving a good standard of education, the decision was taken to stop placing additional children in the school until a 'good' standard of education could be confirmed. The current number on roll – 20 in July 2021, expecting to fall to 13 in September 2021, makes the experience for the children very different from those of their peers in similar special schools. It also presents challenges in maintaining the subject specialisms needed to offer a full and broad curriculum as well as the wide range of SEND specialist knowledge required to meet the individual special needs of the children.
- As a result of the falling roll, the school's running and maintenance costs are much higher than its income. There is a large budget deficit that is growing larger each year. As all schools must set a balanced budget, this school is no longer financially viable.
- Closure could provide an opportunity for pupils to attend schools that would give them an improved quality of education. Discussions with individual families about their hopes and aspirations for their child are already well underway.
- Financial saving to the council. The school's deficit currently stands at £1.77m. It will continue to grow as long as the school remains open. The cost of the deficit will have to be met from the council's budget meaning less money will be available to spend elsewhere.

3.2 Advantages and Disadvantages

The advantages and disadvantages of the current proposal to close Wennington Hall are summarised below:

Advantages	Disadvantages
Improved quality of education for the children	Possible negative impact on the mental health and well-being of the children, their families and school staff
Possible attendance for some children at a school nearer to their local community	Loss of established relationships between children and their friends and trusted adults in the school
Reduced financial liability on the Local Authority	Staff losses or redundancies
	Loss of specialist provision in the County, particularly in the north and the residential element

3.3 Risks

As with all school reorganisation proposals, there are some risks associated with the proposal to close Wennington Hall School.

These are outlined below together with suggested mitigating actions:

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating Actions
Continued period of uncertainty for Wennington Hall if the statutory process is carried out and, if decided, implemented, which might have a negative impact on bringing about the improvements still needed at the school	Medium	Medium	The County Council made a successful application to the Secretary of State to put in place an Interim Executive Board (IEB) that will hold all the people working to support and improve the school to account for their work. This should mean that outcomes for the children improve during the time of uncertainty about the future. Child and staff well-being and welfare are paramount.
Uncertainty for staff whilst the process is ongoing	Medium	Medium	Human Resources will ensure staff are made aware of their options and signposted to support services should it be needed. The IEB will ensure that staff are appropriately supported and managed during this time.
Uncertainty for parents and children whilst the process is ongoing	High	High	The Inclusion Service has already begun the process of contacting parents and carers to ascertain their future hopes and aspirations for their child. As far as possible, this information will inform the future placement of the child, should the school close. Transition support for all the children will be individually tailored with the child being as closely involved in the planning as possible.

3.4 Anticipated Implementation Timescale

Should cabinet decide to proceed with the proposals, potential implementation timescales are as follows:

Stage 1 Consultation	6th September 2021 – 17th October 2021
Consultation Report to be published and considered by cabinet	2nd December 2021

If Cabinet Decides to Proceed

Publish Statutory Notice (28 days Representation Period) and Representation Period	6th December 2021 – 21st January 2022
Final report to be published and decision made by cabinet	3rd May 2022

If Cabinet Approves Implementation

School closes	31st August 2022
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4. Part C – Likely Impact of the Proposal

4.1 Impact on Pupils

Should the Council proceed with implementation of the proposal, Wennington Hall School would close, and pupils would transfer to their nearest appropriate school. It is acknowledged that this would have a potentially negative impact on the pupils currently attending. Should the proposal be implemented, the Council will work closely with the school and appropriate other schools being considered for the children. This will ensure disruption is kept to a minimum and a smooth, carefully planned transition to a new school for September 2022 is facilitated. As far as possible, parental preference and the child's views will be taken into account.

Travel costs and time always need to be taken into consideration when deciding on special school placements. The ideal will be to source places at schools that involve no more travel cost or time for each child than is currently expended. Hopefully, it will be less for most of them. However, the most important criteria for identifying a school is that it can meet the child's needs.

4.2 Impact on Staff

Should the proposal be implemented, Wennington Hall School would close with effect from 31st August 2022. A staff redundancy process would be necessary for staff currently employed at the school. This would be conducted in line with relevant Human Resources policies relating to the different types of staff. Staff will be offered individual meetings during Autumn Term 2021 where their options will be discussed, and they will be given an indication of any redundancy payment to which they may be entitled. Staff will be offered information about available support.

4.3 Impact on Residential Element of Provision

In September 2021, it is not expected that any child at Wennington will need to be in residence at the school. Residential provision at a maintained special school is used in the main by children and young people who have profound and multiple learning difficulties or have mental conditions which make them highly likely to cause harm to themselves or others. They are in need of a 24-hour curriculum that assures them opportunities to continue their learning beyond the normal school day. It also ensures they have consistency of approaches throughout their waking day.

None of the children at Wennington require this 24-hour approach. They have used the residential facility to avoid the need to travel the very long journeys some of them would need to make on a twice daily basis.

4.4 Impact on Governance Arrangements

Wennington Hall's governing body has been reconstituted as an Interim Executive Board (IEB) following a successful application to the Secretary of State. An IEB is set up on a short-term basis and is made up of highly experienced individuals with financial skills and/or substantial experience of transformational educational improvement. The decision to form an IEB has not been taken as part of the decision to consult on the closure of the school. Actions still need to be taken to address the outcomes from the recent Ofsted inspections and in particular, those raised in the monitoring visit of 22nd and 23rd March 2021. The IEB has been set up to be in existence until the school is no longer causing concern, therefore if the school closes, it will be disbanded. If the school remains open, the IEB will set up a shadow governing body to work alongside them and take over from them at the appropriate point.

5. Part C - Consultation Details

5.1 Who will we consult with?

The council will consult with a range of stakeholders as required by Government guidance, which include the following:

- Staff, parents/carers, governors and pupils of Wennington Hall School (The views of the pupils will be sought through the school)
- Headteachers and chairs of governors of Lancaster district primary and secondary schools
- Headteachers and chairs of governors of Lancashire special schools and pupil referral units
- Members of Lancaster City Council
- Members of the Education Scrutiny Committee at Lancashire County Council
- Lancashire County Councillors
- Local Members of Parliament
- Trade Unions and Associations
- Lancashire Association of School Governing Bodies
- Department for Education: Regional Schools Commissioner
- Ofsted: Her Majesty's Inspector for the area
- The wider community – through local libraries

5.2 The Stage 1 Consultation Period

The consultation period will commence on 6th September 2021 and will end on 17th October 2021

The Consultation Event

As the pandemic remains with us, it is felt unwise to hold a physical meeting that some people may feel unable to attend. Therefore, you are invited to express your views on the proposal at a virtual event organised via Zoom during the week commencing 20th September 2021.

Please note that this will be an appointment led event requiring interested parties to make a booking and provide us with your questions prior to the event. This will allow us to manage the process effectively, minimise waiting times and ensure that appropriate officers are available to offer guidance relating to specific matters of interest.

Bookings can be made by contacting Susan Strother via:

susan.strother@lancashire.gov.uk

or by telephone on:

01772 534401

The closing date for booking an appointment is:

5pm on Wednesday 15th September 2021

5.3 The Full Statutory Process

i) Stage 1 Consultation Period

Feedback from the consultation will be collated and summarised, and a Stage 1 Consultation Report will be produced and shared with key stakeholders.

It is important to note that responses made to the consultation at this stage will inform the report but will not be counted as formal objections to the proposal.

The County Council's cabinet will consider the Stage 1 Consultation Report and will decide:

- whether to proceed with the proposal, or
- to make changes to the proposal, or
- not to proceed with the proposal.

If cabinet decides not to proceed, that will be the end of this proposal.

It is anticipated that the Stage 1 decision will be made by cabinet on 2nd December 2021

ii) Stages 2 and 3 Statutory Notice and Representation Period

If cabinet decides to proceed with the proposal, statutory notices would be published after the cabinet meeting. Publication is anticipated to happen on 6th December 2021. The publication of the notice signifies the beginning of a period of 28 days during which people are able to submit written representations. This is called the Representation Period and it is anticipated to begin on 6th December 2021 and end on 21st January 2022.

Any representations made would be analysed and put into a report. The council's response to the representations would be presented. Only written objections submitted during the Representation Period will be considered as objections and included in this report. Comments submitted as part of the Stage 1 Consultation Period would not be counted as objections.

iii) Stage 4 - Decision

Further recommendations would be presented to the County Council's Cabinet, which they would consider alongside the collated representations report. These documents would guide their decision on whether or not to agree to the closure of Wennington Hall. It is anticipated that this final, Stage 4, decision would be made on 03/05/22.

Government guidance can be accessed at the link below:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/851585/Opening_and_closing_maintained_schools1012.pdf

iv) Implementation

If the County Council's cabinet were to approve the proposal, it would be implemented in accordance with the date given in the statutory notice or any subsequently modified date. All the actions necessary to close down the school would be completed in time for an official closing date of 31st August 2022.

QUESTIONNAIRE

Who should complete this questionnaire?

- Staff, governors, current parents/guardians of pupils at Wennington Hall School
- Any other interested member of the community

NB: Please complete just one form per person

**We are proposing to close Wennington Hall School from the 31st August 2021.
Are you for or against this proposal?**

Please tick one option only

For

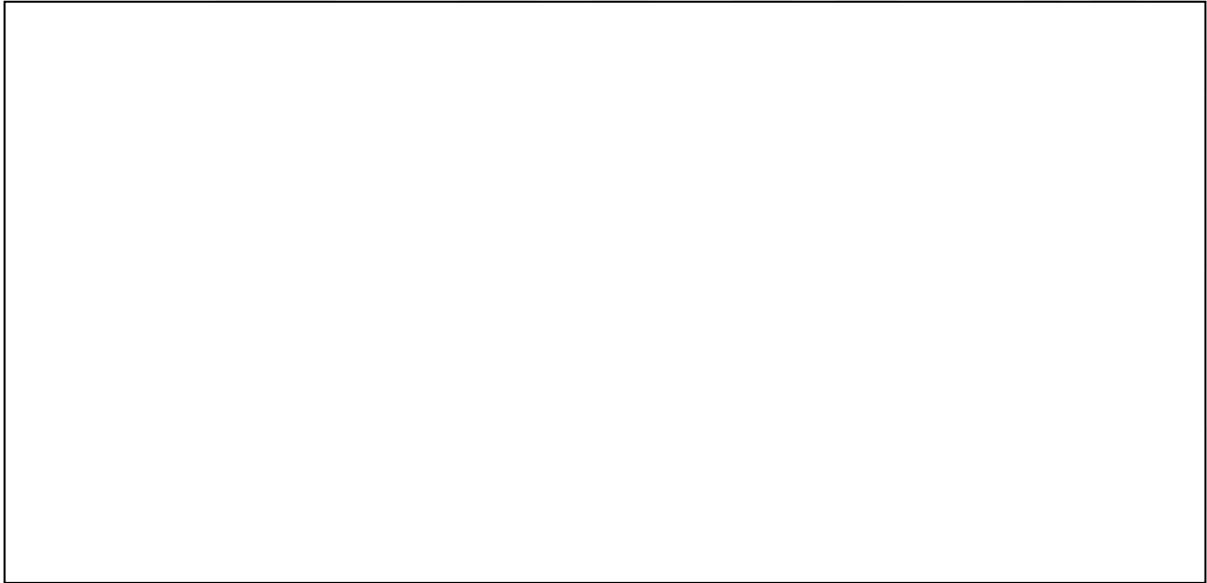
Against

Why do you say this?

Please write in below

How would the closure of Wennington Hall School affect you?

Please write in below



Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Please write in below



About you

This final section is about you. It's a little more personal but is useful to us. By answering these questions, you will help us to understand the views of different groups of people. If there are any questions that you'd rather not answer, please tick 'prefer not to say', or leave it blank and go on to the next question.

Are you responding to this proposal as...?

Please tick as many as apply and where appropriate write in the name of the school

- A parent/carer of a pupil currently at Wennington Hall School
- A member of staff at Wennington Hall School
- A school governor at Wennington Hall School
- Other:

What was your age on your last birthday?

Please tick one option only

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Under 16 | <input type="checkbox"/> 50-64 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16-19 | <input type="checkbox"/> 65+ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 20-34 | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 35-49 | |

Are you...?

Please tick one option only

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Male | <input type="checkbox"/> Other |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Female | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |

Do you have a disability?

The Equality Act 2010 defines a disabled person as someone who has a physical or mental impairment, which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

Please tick as many as apply

- Yes, learning disability
- Yes, physical disability
- Yes, sensory disability
- Yes, mental health condition

- Yes, other disability
- No
- Prefer not to say

Are there any children or young people in your household aged under 18?

Please tick as many as apply

- No, but expecting
- Yes, aged under 5
- Yes, aged 5-11
- Yes, aged 12-15
- Yes, aged 16-17
- No children aged under 18
- Prefer not to say

Which of the following best describes your ethnic background?

Please tick one option only

- White
- Black or black British
- Asian or Asian British
- Mixed ethnic background
- Any other ethnic background
- Prefer not to say

Important Information

Lancashire County Council may be required to publish consultation responses as part of the reports for consideration by its cabinet either as appendices to those reports or as part of the background papers referred to in those reports and available on request. Please be aware that your responses to this consultation may be made available on the County Council's website as part of this process.

What is your home postcode?

Please write in below