



Statutory Proposal to make prescribed alterations to Fred Nicholson School, Dereham, from 1st September 2023

1. Local Authority details

Norfolk County Council, County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich NR1 2DH

2. School details

Name	Fred Nicholson School
Type	Foundation Special School
Address	Westfield Road, Dereham, Norfolk NR19 1JB
Age Range	3 - 19 years
Capacity	173 pupils; Numbers on roll 1 June 2023 = 173
Ofsted	Last Ofsted; November 2019 Rating; Good

3. What changes are proposed by Governors?

As a Foundation Special School, the governing body are proposing the transfer of the school to a new site on Lynn Road, Swaffham, from 1 April 2025. The governors believe this is an exciting opportunity to expand their successful provision, for the needs of the current and to meet the demand for future pupils.

4. What changes are proposed by Norfolk County Council?

As the local authority, Norfolk County Council is proposing to;

- Close the boarding provision by 31 August 2023
- Increase the capacity of the school by 52 pupils, served by the school as indicated from 1 September 2023.

This proposal is part of Norfolk County Council's Local First Inclusion which is the county council's six-year special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) improvement programme. We are committed to reviewing and developing Special Education Needs & Disability (SEND) provision as part of Norfolk's Local Offer of support to children, young people and families.

The proposal will also be supported by a funding agreement to support an increased staffing structure.

5. Why do we want to do this? (evidence of demand)

Norfolk County Council has a statutory duty to;

- ensure a sufficient supply of school places in its area for children of school age
- promote high educational standards, diversity and parental choice
- ensure fair access to educational opportunity
- help fulfil every child's educational potential.

Norfolk County Council and the Governors of Fred Nicholson School feel these changes would benefit children and young people because it;

- supports more students with special education needs and disabilities to be educated and thrive in their local school and community;
- ensures that needs can be met locally avoiding the need for students to spend unnecessary time travelling to an appropriate school further away. This is better for young people and saves the taxpayer money in transport costs;
- increases the availability of places to meet the needs of students with SEND.

Transfer to a new site

A review of the facilities at the current Fred Nicholson site has shown that much of the school building is in a poor condition. The site survey identified a number of areas which will require significant repair over the next five years. Altogether, the work needed would cause considerable disruption to the operation of the school for a significant period of time which would not be in the best interests of our pupils.

In addition, there is not sufficient room on the site to expand the school or improve access and create parking for our sizeable team. So, remaining on our current site, would not be in the best interests of our pupils or local community.

Close Boarding provision

Fred Nicholson has not been able to offer any of its potential 26 boarding spaces for the last 7 weeks. Due to poor recruitment responses over the past five years the care team numbers have diminished, impacting the ability to run at capacity. There are currently 6 full time staffing vacancies including the Manager and Deputy Manager role. In accordance with statutory regulations Governors had to temporarily suspend this provision on 10th February 2023 at which time it was attended by 18 pupils.

Norfolk County Council recently undertook a review of Education Boarding in the county. This found that whilst there was a level of benefit educationally for pupils, the review did not find that boarding was essential for pupils to meet their educational outcomes. However, it is clear that there are social care sufficiency needs around support for families with SEND children in the west of the county. It is therefore proposed to investigate future residential provision, with a social care focus e.g. short breaks for children and their families in the west of Norfolk.

Increase capacity of the school, by adding 52 pupil places

There is significant need for more school places in Norfolk for children with EHCPs, both in special schools and resource bases in mainstream schools. Norfolk County Council wants to make sure that we provide these places closer to home and reduce the travel times. This is part of the council's new six year Local First Inclusion Programme.

Our research shows that there are fewer special education places available in West/Central Norfolk, however there are a lot of young people living in this part of Norfolk who require complex needs placements.

6. Consultation details

Transfer to new site/increase capacity of the school

The governing body of Fred Nicholson School, with Norfolk County Council consulted on the proposal to transfer to a new site and increase the capacity of the school from 1 April 2025. The consultation document is available in Appendix A. The consultation

was delivered, as set out by the DfE statutory guidance 'Making significant changes (prescribed alterations) to maintained schools', January 2023, and ran from 7 March to 9 May 2023. A total of 438 consultation documents were sent to governors, staff and parents at Fred Nicholson School and key stakeholders.

A consultation event was held on 28 March 2023, virtually, supported by the Chair of Governors, Headteacher and School Organisation Manager, Norfolk County Council. No-one attended.

There were 86 responses and 80% of the responses strongly agreed or agreed with these proposals. The consultation reports are available here;

- Governors, Fred Nicholson School [Governor Report](#)
- Norfolk County Council [Norfolk County Council Report](#)

Following this consultation, the governing body of Fred Nicholson School and Norfolk County Council agreed to change the implementation date for the increase in capacity at the school from 1 April 2025, to 1 September 2023. If the Boarding provision proposal is agreed, we plan to bring forward the increase of pupil places, currently being consulted on, as part of the plans to relocate Fred Nicholson School to a site in Swaffham. This would not be an increase of all the pupil places in one term, but phased over several terms, so the school gradually grows. The space currently reserved for boarding would be repurposed and made available to create additional teaching and learning space for the additional pupils, from 1 September 2023.

Closure of Boarding provision

Norfolk County Council consulted on the proposal to close the boarding provision at Fred Nicholson School from 31 August 2023. The consultation document is available in Appendix B. The consultation was delivered, as set out by the DfE statutory guidance 'Making significant changes (prescribed alterations) to maintained schools', January 2023, and ran from 18 April – 6 June 2023. A total of 438 consultation documents were sent to governors, staff and parents at Fred Nicholson School and key stakeholders.

A consultation event was held on 2 May 2023, virtually, supported by the Chair of Governors, Headteacher and School Organisation Manager, Norfolk County Council. No-one attended.

There were 3 responses; one person supported the proposal, one person did not support the proposal and one person neither agreed or disagreed with the proposal. The consultation report is available here; [boarding-provision.pdf \(norfolk.gov.uk\)](#)

7. Objectives, including how the proposal would increase educational standards and parental choice.

The Governors of Fred Nicholson School and Norfolk County Council want to:

- Increase the number of special education places for children and young people in West/Central Norfolk, as part of the Local Authority's Local First Inclusion programme.
- Provide improved accommodation to support learning
- Provide 6th form places, thereby increasing the offer to pupils and parents.

Norfolk County Council's policy is to expand schools that are rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted. Fred Nicholson School was inspected in November 2019 and rated Good.

The cost-effective provision of high quality educational places is central to meeting the County Council's objective of ensuring inclusion and high standards of achievement for Norfolk learners with SEND.

This proposal offers parents access to an additional 52 places in Norfolk, reducing the travel time for children and young people living locally.

8. Will there be any effect on other schools, academies and educational institutions within the area?

We cannot foresee any impact on any other schools, as this proposal provides additional places which removes the pressure of meeting the needs of pupils in special schools who are currently waiting for additional support.

9. Will the proposed change impact travel and accessibility

Closure of boarding provision

It is not anticipated there would be an impact on travel and accessibility due to the closure of this provision, but please see 'increase in capacity of school'.

Increase in capacity of school

The addition of the 52 places will be phased over the next few years. It is planned to offer a 6th form, using the boarding provision accommodation at the current Fred Nicholson School site. This is anticipated to be 7 pupil places in September 2023 and 10 pupil places in September 2024, offered in the first instance to our existing pupils. These pupils are usually bussed to school, so there is unlikely to be a significant increase in traffic.

Transfer to a new school site

We are aware that there will be some impact on accessibility when the school moves to the new school site in Swaffham. This was raised during the informal consultation stage, with 8 respondents raising concerns about the increase in travel time.

This included;

- Impact of the extra distance and financial impact for staff to travel to new school site (5 respondents)
- Increased distance and travel time for pupils going to new school is a concern (3 respondents)

Our analysis of the transport provision for Fred Nicholson School shows, of the current 162 children who we provide transport for;

- 99 – 61% - would be further away
- 39 – 24% - would be nearer
- 24 – 15% - live roughly the same distance away.

It is difficult to identify the exact impact on journey times as it depends on the route that the transport takes.

We appreciate that this is an area that we would like to do further work, if the decision is made.

10. Project costs and an indication of how these will be met, including how long term value for money will be achieved.

Close boarding provision

Governors at Fred Nicholson School will undertake the minor refurbishment programme to transfer the boarding provision to a create a 6th form provision at the school.

Increase in capacity of school

The project costs are linked to the transfer to a new school site, see below.

Transfer to a new school site

A new school building will be built in Swaffham and will allow the existing Fred Nicholson School to relocate there. The school will be purpose built to modern building standards over three storeys. It has been designed to accommodate 225 pupils, ranging from Reception age through to 6th form.

The new school will be built with over 190 car parking places for staff and visitors and 30 drop off bays for minibuses and taxis. This should ensure no vehicles will have to park on adjacent roads. A planning application is due to be made Autumn 2023.

All capital costs for the new site and the news school building will be funded from Norfolk County Council's SEND Improvement Programme. The design life of the building will be 50 years plus.

Long term value for money will be achieved as there is greater capacity to meet the needs of children with SEND locally.

11. Will this definitely happen?

No. There is a statutory process we must follow to make this type of change to schools.

10. Implementation date and proposed stages

If the proposal is agreed by the local decision maker; the Executive Director of Children's Services, Norfolk County Council, it is intended that the significant change will be implemented as follows;

- Closure of Boarding provision – 31 August 2023
- Increase in capacity of school – 1 September 2023
- Transfer to a new site – 1 June 2025.

11. Related proposals

There is no other proposal linked to this proposal.

12. How can I make my views known?

Any person may object to, express support for, or make comments on the proposals, within 4 weeks of the publication of the statutory public notice by:

- Sending an email to; schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk. Please put the school name in the heading of the email.
- Writing to: School Organisation Team, FREEPOST, 1H 2076, Lower Ground Floor, County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich, NR1 2BR. You don't need a stamp.

13. What happens next?

The following table sets out the key dates for the consultation and decision making. At any point the proposal may be withdrawn. The dates set out below meet the Department for Education requirements for consultation on school organisation proposals.

School organisation process	Date
Public Notice published	26 June 2023
Statutory consultation (representation stage)	26 June – 21 July 2023
Decision required, no later than	31 August 2023
If approved, changes implemented from	31 August 2023

Fred Nicholson School

'Building for Successful Futures'

Westfield Road, Dereham, Norfolk, NR19 1JB

Tel: 01362 693915 **Email:** office@frednicholson.norfolk.sch.uk

Headteacher: Jane Hayman



Norfolk County Council

7th March 2023

Introduction

The Governors of Fred Nicholson School and Norfolk County Council would like to hear your views on our exciting plans for Fred Nicholson School, Westfield Road, Dereham, Norfolk NR19 1JB.

We are proposing;

- To increase the number of pupils with complex needs, from 173 to 225 pupils from 1st April 2025.
- To relocate the school to Lynn Road, Swaffham from 1 April 2025.

We are committed to expanding our successful provision, for the needs of our current pupils and to meet the demand for future pupils. Currently there is an increased need to provide places for children and young people with complex needs in this area of Norfolk. This proposal will provide much needed specialist educational capacity and space to meet this increased need.

Unfortunately, our school building is in a poor and ageing condition and we are looking to move to a new purpose built school building in Swaffham. The new building will mean we can offer places to more young people with complex needs and extend our offer from Reception to 6th form.

We are running a consultation on our proposals from Tuesday 7th March to Tuesday 9th May 2023.

Why we want to add more pupil places

By creating extra places at Fred Nicholson School, we can offer more children and young people an opportunity to learn with us. These are children and young people

who currently would have to travel long distances to school to access their educational needs or continue to struggle in their current schools, without the specialist help they require.

The additional places also means that for the first time Fred Nicholson School will be able to offer places to those from Reception to 6th form, providing opportunities for our cohort of young people to develop their independence by facilitating earlier support or support for longer within our school.

This will not be 52 young people in one term, but phased over several terms, so that we can gradually increase our pupil numbers.

Relocating to a new school site in Swaffham

It is also proposed to relocate our school, including our Orchard Specialist Autism Resource Base to a new, larger and purpose-built site at Lynn Road, Swaffham. This site also currently identifies further land, although the purpose is not yet fully defined, but could comprise a wider offer of provision in the local area such as;

- community and/or overnight short breaks
- a community hub
- outreach support

Norfolk County Council will be considering this provision as part of a wider plan of work; to review the sufficiency of social care provision for disabled children in the west of the county.

This is all subject to planning permission. Norfolk County Council will provide the funding for this new purpose built school site in Swaffham.

Evidence of Demand

There is significant need for more school places in Norfolk for children with EHCPs, both in special schools and resource bases in mainstream schools. Norfolk County Council wants to make sure that we provide these places closer to home and reduce the travel times. This is part of the council's new six year Local First Inclusion Programme.

Our research shows that there are fewer special education places available in West/Central Norfolk, however there are a lot of young people living in this part of Norfolk who require complex needs placements.

Unfortunately, a review of the facilities at the current Fred Nicholson site has shown that much of the school building is in a poor condition. The site survey that we conducted identified a number of areas which will require significant repair over the next five years. Altogether, the work needed would cause considerable disruption to

the operation of the school for a significant period of time which would not be in the best interests of our pupils.

The work needed to improve this accommodation would cause considerable disruption to the school days, for a long time. In addition, there is not sufficient room on the site to expand the school or improve access and create parking for our sizeable team. So remaining on our current site, would not be in the best interests of our pupils or local community.

Will the school receive additional funding due to the increasing numbers of pupils?

Fred Nicholson School will receive additional funding based around the increase in number of pupils. This will provide the additional staffing and resources needed for the extra pupils, so that we can continue to maintain the same support to our existing children.

Transport to new school site

Norfolk County Council will continue to provide transport for those living over 3.1 miles from school. We appreciate that for some young people this may mean a longer journey, however for others, their journey will be shorter as they live closer to Swaffham.

How do I have my say in this consultation?

We will be holding a virtual consultation event on Tuesday 28th March online from 6-7pm, where you can find out more about this proposal. If you would like to join this event, please contact Caroline Money for the joining details, by emailing schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk.

If you are unable to attend this event but would like to comment on our proposal, you can have your say by:

- Accessing our online survey at <https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/fns>
- Completing the attached questionnaire and returning it to Jane Hayman at head@frednicholson.norfolk.sch.uk

We need all responses by 12 noon, on Tuesday 9th May 2023 please.

What happens after this consultation?

The Governors of Fred Nicholson School and Norfolk County Council will consider all the responses to this proposal and decide whether to continue to the statutory stage, where we issue a public notice. The final decision is made by the Local Authority Decision-Maker; Sara Tough, Director of Children Services, Norfolk County Council.

Proposed closure of the boarding provision at Fred Nicholson School by 31 August 2023

Background

Fred Nicholson Foundation Special School is a local authority maintained special education needs school for boys and girls, aged 3 – 19 years, in Dereham, Norfolk.

The school currently has 174 children on roll, 18 of whom were staying overnight in the boarding provision for between one and four nights each week. The boarding provision is situated in the main school building and provides separate accommodation for boys and girls within open plan dormitories. The school caters for children with moderate and severe learning difficulties and associated complex needs such as speech and language disorders, sensory, physical and mental health needs including autism spectrum and neurodiverse conditions. The layout within the current residential provision limits the number of pupils able to access boarding. The residential environment is unable to appropriately meet the needs of the full range of complex difficulties within the cohort of the school. The main communal area is on the first floor of the school.

The school has a 'Good' Ofsted rating when they were inspected in November 2019. The residential inspections have had an annual 'good' rating since 2016. The most recent Ofsted was undertaken in May 2022 and rated 'Good'.

Our Proposal

Norfolk County Council is consulting on a proposal to close the boarding provision at Fred Nicholson School, Dereham, from 31 August 2023.

If this proposal is agreed, we plan to bring forward the increase of pupil places, currently being consulted on, as part of the plans to relocate Fred Nicholson School to a site in Swaffham. This would not be an increase of all the pupil places in one term, but phased over several terms, so the school gradually grows. The space currently reserved for boarding would be repurposed and made available to create additional teaching and learning space for the additional pupils, from 1 September 2023.

Boarding provision at Fred Nicholson School

Fred Nicholson has not been able to offer any of its potential 26 boarding spaces for the last 7 weeks.

When all staff are recruited there can be a maximum of 26 pupils across the four nights. The ages and genders of the young people residing dictates how many young people stay at any one time, according to the national statutory minimum standards. Due to poor recruitment responses over the past five years the care team numbers have diminished, impacting the ability to run at capacity.

There are currently 6 full time staffing vacancies including the Manager and Deputy Manager role. In accordance with statutory regulations Governors had to temporarily suspend this provision on 10th February 2023 at which time it was attended by 18 pupils.

Why are proposing closure of this provision

Norfolk County Council recently undertook a review of Education Boarding in the county. This found that whilst there was a level of benefit educationally for pupils, the review did not find that boarding was essential for pupils to meet their educational outcomes.

However, it is clear that there are social care sufficiency needs around support for families with SEND children in the west of the county. It is therefore proposed to investigate future residential provision, with a social care focus e.g. short breaks for children and their families in the west of Norfolk.

If the boarding provision at the school is decommissioned and removed from 31 August 2023 we plan to;

- Refurbish the space currently utilised for residential to accommodate pupils in a new Sixth form provision, already planned as part of the proposed school expansion. As is currently the case for Fred Nicholson School, appropriate pupils for the Sixth form provision would be identified using the SEND admissions process. Further details on the admissions process can be found on [Norfolk's Local Offer site](#).

For any remaining care staff it is possible that job offers can be made at the school itself however HR guidance will be sought and followed.

How do I have my say in this consultation?

We will be holding a virtual consultation event on Tuesday 2nd May 2023 online from 6-7pm, where you can find out more about this proposal. If you would like to join this event, please contact Caroline Money for the joining details, by emailing schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk.

If you are unable to attend this event but would like to comment on our proposal, you can have your say by:

- Accessing our online survey at <https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/fnsboarding>
- Completing the attached questionnaire and returning it to schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk

We need all responses by 12 noon, on Tuesday 6 June 2023 please.

What happens after this consultation?

Norfolk County Council will consider all the responses to this proposal and decide whether to continue to the statutory stage, where we issue a public notice. The final decision is made by the Local Authority Decision-Maker; Sara Tough, Director of Children Services, Norfolk County Council.