

July 2023



## **Report to the Executive Director of Children's Services for decision on statutory proposals for prescribed changes at Fred Nicholson School, Dereham, Norfolk**

### **What is the proposal?**

The proposal by the Governors of Fred Nicholson (Foundation) Special School is the transfer of the school to a new site on Lynn Road, Swaffham, from 1 June 2025.

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.

Full details of the proposal published for the Informal Consultation stage for the transfer of the school to a new site and increase the capacity by 52 pupils, are included in the Consultation Reports, which are available here;

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

The consultation report and proposal for the boarding provision is available here; [boarding-provision.pdf \(norfolk.gov.uk\)](#)

### **Public notice and representation period**

A statutory public notice was issued by the Chair of Governors, Fred Nicholson School and the Executive Director of Children's Services, Norfolk County Council and published in the Eastern Daily Press on 26 June 2023. Copies were displayed at all the main entrances to Fred Nicholson School and on the school and council websites. The four week representation period came to an end on 21 July 2023. See Appendix 1 for Public Notice and Prescribed Information.

One representation was received during the statutory Public Notice period. This was from a local headteacher, supporting the proposals. They said 'This email is to express my support for the proposals for Fred Nicholson school. The expansion of age ranges at both ends of the current age range is an excellent idea and will give more choice to families looking for a place from Reception to Year 2 and for Years 12 and 13. Our only concern is what will happen to the site when it moves to a new site as we share a site, access and fields and there is no vehicle access to the Infant buildings eg for fire engines, except for through Fred Nicholson, which has always been the case and I have been the Infant Head for over 20 years now. We wish the school and its plans and all the staff and pupils all the best for future growth and success

All statutory requirements in relation to the statutory consultation were complied with.

## **The decision**

In coming to a decision, the Decision Maker is obliged to consider the following factors:

- Education standards and diversity of provision
- Equal opportunities issues
- Community cohesion
- Travel and accessibility
- Funding.

### Education standards and diversity of provision

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

These proposals are 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 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 Special Education Needs. The expansion of our existing special school estate is one aspect of our overarching strategy to increase the number of places available in Norfolk special schools and to enable children to attend a local school suitable to their special educational needs.

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

The closure of the boarding provision means that this provision will not be offered at Fred Nicholson, on the existing site. However, it will enable an earlier than planned opportunity to offer 6<sup>th</sup> form places from 1 September 2023, at the existing Fred Nicholson site.

In summary, this proposal will;

- 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 6<sup>th</sup> form places, thereby increasing the offer to pupils and parents

### Equal opportunities issues

The County Council has considered that there are no specific discrimination issues that arise from the school organisation change being proposed.

### Community cohesion

The County Council has considered that there are no specific community cohesion issues that arise from the school organisation change being proposed.

### Travel and accessibility

The increase in pupil places will be phased over time, starting with 7 places in September 2023. The majority of the young people are bussed to school, so there is unlikely to be a significant increase in traffic.

In time, more local young people will attend the school, reducing the need for long journeys to school.

However our analysis of the current 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 will depend on the route that the transport takes. We are also aware that these proposals may have an impact on staff travel and accessibility.

In summary, relocation to a new site is likely to see an impact on travel and accessibility. Further work will be undertaken as part of the transition arrangements if the decision is made to approve these proposals. The impact of the increase of pupil places is likely to be low due to the phased increase, that many pupils are bussed to the school and in time, more the pupils will live locally.

### Funding

Governors at Fred Nicholson School will undertake a minor refurbishment programme of the current boarding accommodation to create a learning space for 6th form provision at the school.

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 new school building will be funded from Norfolk County Council's SEND Improvement Programme. The design life of the building will be 50 years plus.

In summary, funding has been agreed to support the delivery of these proposals and long term value for money will be achieved as there is greater capacity to meet the needs of children with SEND locally. Given the planning permission is still to be sought, a specific condition for planning permission should be included with the approval.

### **Conclusions and recommendation**

In considering the proposals, the Decision Maker can decide to:

- Reject the proposal
- Approval the proposal
- Approve the proposal with a modification
- Approve the proposal subject to it meeting a specific condition.

One response to the proposal was received during the statutory Public Notice period. In response to the comment made supporting the proposal, it is noted;

- The County Council has made no decision about the use of the current Fred Nicholson site. Usually, a site is first considered for possible educational re-use. If no usage can be identified, Norfolk County Council offer it to other services across the council, for consideration. Only then would the council look to see the site on the open market. Any proposal for re-use would consider the impact on the neighbouring schools and if access routes have to be retained or alternatives found, this would be part of any re-use proposal.

These proposals support Norfolk County Council's Local First Inclusion Programme.

It is therefore **recommended** that the Executive Director of Children's Services, in her role as Decision Maker as delegated by the Children's Services Committee, should decide in favour of the proposals, with one specific condition on the approval of the transfer of school site;

- Transfer the school to a new site on Lynn Road, Swaffham, from 1 June 2025, subject to planning permission approval by 31 March 2024.
- 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.



### Proposed changes to Fred Nicholson School

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN, that, the Governing Body of Fred Nicholson School, Westfield Road, Dereham, Norfolk NR19 1JB, intends to make a prescribed alteration to the following school, in accordance with section 19 (3) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 to;

- Transfer Fred Nicholson School to Lynn Road, Swaffham, from 1 June 2025.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that Norfolk County Council intends to make prescribed alterations to Fred Nicholson School, in accordance with section 19 (1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013, by:

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

| School  | May 2023 Number on roll | Present age range of pupils | Proposed age range of pupils | Annual intake |          | Capacity |          |
|---|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|----------|----------|----------|
|   |                         |                             |                              | Existing      | Proposed | Existing | Proposed |
| Fred Nicholson (Foundation Special) School<br>Westfield Road,<br>Dereham, Norfolk<br>NR19 1JB | 173                     | 3 - 19                      | 3 - 19                       | N/A           | N/A      | 173      | 225      |

This Notice is an extract from the complete proposal. Copies of the complete proposal can be obtained from;

- <https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/fns>
- emailing [schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk)
- by writing to the School Organisation Team, Children’s Services, County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich, NR1 2DL.

Within four weeks from the date of publication of this proposal, any person may object to, or make comments on, the proposal by sending them to Norfolk County Council, c/o School Organisation Team, Children’s Services, County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich, NR1 2DL or by email to: [schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk](mailto:schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk)

Signed: Hilary Bradshaw  
Chair of Governors  
Fred Nicholson School

Sara Tough  
Director of Children’s Services  
Norfolk County Council

Publication Date: 26 June 2023



## Statutory Proposal to make prescribed alterations to Fred Nicholson School, Dereham, from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023

### 1. Local Authority details

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

### 2. School details

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| <b>Name</b>      | Fred Nicholson School                         |
| <b>Type</b>      | Foundation Special School                     |
| <b>Address</b>   | Westfield Road, Dereham, Norfolk NR19 1JB     |
| <b>Age Range</b> | 3 - 19 years                                  |
| <b>Capacity</b>  | 173 pupils; Numbers on roll 1 June 2023 = 173 |
| <b>Ofsted</b>    | 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 and consultation proposals 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 report and proposal for the boarding provision is available here; [boarding-provision.pdf \(norfolk.gov.uk\)](#). 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.

## **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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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 concerned 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 6<sup>th</sup> 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](mailto: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.

| <b>School organisation process</b>            | <b>Date</b>            |
|---|------------------------|
| 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         |