

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.

Consultation on proposed changes to Fred Nicholson School

Let us know what you think of our proposal.

How far do you agree or disagree with our proposal to close the boarding provision at Fred Nicholson School from 31 August 2023?

Please tick a box.

Strongly agree

Agree

Neither agree or disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

Why do you say this? Please write in the box below.

Are there any other comments or suggestions you would like to make to help us with this decision and in planning for the future provision for children? Please write in the box below.

We would like to hear from many different people as your views help us to decide whether we make these changes. We will also use any personal information to understand how different groups of people feel about our proposal to close the boarding provision at Fred Nicholson School.

We will process any personal information we receive from you in line with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (Regulation (EU) 2016/679), the Data Protection Act 2018 and Norfolk County Council's data protection policy and guidelines. This means that Norfolk County Council will hold your personal data and only use it for the purpose for which it was collected, being this consultation.

We won't identify individuals when reporting back our findings and, under our record management policy, we will keep this information for five years. We will also, under normal circumstances, not pass your personal data on to anyone else. However, we may be asked under access to information laws to publish or disclose some, or all, of the information you provide in response to this consultation, including any personal information. We will only do this where such disclosure will comply with such relevant information laws which include the Freedom of Information Act 2000, the Data Protection Act 2018 and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

Please tell us who you are (tick all that apply):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pupil | <input type="checkbox"/> School governor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent / Carer | <input type="checkbox"/> Local resident |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Member of the Parent Teacher Association | <input type="checkbox"/> Local business |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Member of staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Local sports group |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Local community group |

Other (please specify): _____

At which school? _____

What is your postcode? _____

Your views will help us decide if this proposal goes ahead. You can tell us your views by returning this completed form to:

- Accessing our online survey;
<https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/fnsboarding>
- Completing this questionnaire and returning it to school.review@norfolk.gov.uk

This consultation ends at 12 noon on Tuesday 6 June 2023