



Listening Period Exercise

Closure of High Weald Academy



Shaping Lives, Transforming Communities



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Carnation Road, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 2SX

1 Closure proposal - listening period

Leigh Academies Trust (LAT) is beginning a listening period on the plan for the closure of High Weald Academy (HWA) by 31 August 2022. This follows a substantive decision by the Secretary of State for Education that HWA's funding agreement should be terminated and the school should close, subject to a final agreement of the closure plan. The Secretary of State for Education will consider the outcome of the

listening period before giving permission for the Trust to announce details of the closure.

This document sets out the rationale for the decision and the plans we intend to put in place to support pupils to transfer to alternative schools with minimal disruption. Also included underneath is information about how you can have your say.

2 Background to the proposal

The DfE was considering HWA's viability beyond August 2022 prior to Brook Learning Trust transferring the academy to LAT. This decision about closure has been taken following a great deal of consideration, including of alternative options. The reasons for the decision to close HWA relate to long-term issues with low pupil numbers resulting in financial difficulties and in turn contributing to poor educational performance.

Pupil numbers and viability:

- *High Weald Academy has very low pupil numbers for a secondary school* - its building can accommodate around 1,000 pupils, but is currently just over one-quarter full with 276 pupils on roll (a full breakdown of pupil numbers at the school is set out at annex A). It is easily the smallest fully open secondary school in Kent based on pupil numbers and only a little larger than a one-form entry primary school. Only 54 parents chose HWA as their first preference secondary school in 2021, by far the lowest in the Tunbridge Wells district.
- *Pupil numbers are not expected to rise sufficiently* - Kent County Council's (KCC's) latest Commissioning Plan demonstrates that year 7 pupil numbers are not forecast to rise sufficiently in the surrounding area during any year which forms part of current forecasts. In the years up to 2027, in the school place planning district where HWA is located, in any one year there are never fewer than 109 surplus places in year 7. This rises to a high of 154 surplus year 7 places which is more than the total pupil admissions number (PAN) for HWA of 151.
- *Impact on viability* - The very low pupil numbers at HWA have produced considerable and ongoing

budget challenges. Consequently, HWA's financial position is not sustainable. In recent years, in order to remain solvent, HWA has relied upon significant additional "falling rolls" funding from KCC (a fund which is intended for schools rated as "good" and only for a limited period). In the academic year 2020-21 this amounted to £613,000 and is not guaranteed from year to year. All areas of expenditure have to be very tightly managed. Therefore, offering a high quality full secondary curriculum to pupils is extremely challenging. Pupils are not enjoying the full range of educational experiences available in more average-sized secondary schools.

Educational performance:

- Since it opened in 2012, HWA has never been judged to be "good" by Ofsted. It has had three consecutive "requires improvement" judgements since then.
- Educational outcomes for pupils at the school have been poor. For example, between 2017 and 2019 (the last three years the DfE has published performance data) the percentage of pupils who achieved grade 4 or above in English and maths has been between 16 and 31 percentage points below the national and local authority averages. Likewise, over the same period, the school's Progress 8 score was "below average" in 2017 and "well below average" in 2018 and 2019. (Progress 8 is an important measure of progress made by pupils between the end of key stage 2 and the end of key stage 4 compared to pupils nationally with similar results at the end of key stage 2).

3 Approach to closure

Our overriding concern is to minimise disruption for pupils through the closure and provide them with the best opportunity for a high-quality education in future. For this reason, we propose to take the following approach to closure:

- The academy will partially close at the end of December 2021 with year 10s transferring to an alternative school in January 2022. This is to ensure maximum continuity throughout their vital key stage 4 programme of study ahead of their GCSE examinations in 2023.
- The school will fully close to all remaining year groups at the end of August 2022.

All year 7-10 HWA pupils (including those with SEN) are to be offered a place to join Mascalls Academy in Paddock Wood (11.3 miles away from HWA). Mascalls Academy is consistently judged “good” by Ofsted with positive progress scores and value added at GCSE and A Level. As a LAT academy, we want to ensure the best outcomes for HWA pupils. We are able to establish new capacity at Mascalls over the next year to offer places to all HWA pupils so that the important established relationships between pupils can be maintained.

- Pupils in years 7-9 accepting a place at Mascalls will transfer on 1st September 2022.
- Pupils in year 10 accepting a place at Mascalls will transfer on 1st January 2022.

Pupils in year 11 already need to apply for a sixth form place in another school or college by the end of this academic year as no such provision exists at HWA. Therefore, they will be able to remain at the school until it fully closes in August 2022. They will be given maximum support to achieve the best outcomes possible in their 2022 GCSE examinations.

- This approach allows:
 - all HWA pupils the opportunity to attend a school rated as “good” by Ofsted, with much stronger educational performance results than HWA;

- greater curriculum consistency as well as additional co-curriculum opportunities; and
- greater stability of friendship groups.
- To help parents avoid additional cost, all pupils, whether moving to Mascalls or another school, will be supported to purchase new uniform.
- Existing year 10 pupils joining Mascalls on 1st January will have an offer of free transportation to the school for the remainder of this academic year. Those pupils and all other existing Kent-based HWA pupils who join Mascalls on 1st September 2022 will be offered free transportation. This should also help mitigate the risk of increased car use. We appreciate this will result in additional travel for some pupils and parents may, of course, choose to apply for their child to join a different school.
- To ensure the HWA buildings continue to be used to benefit children in the area and avoid them becoming derelict, LAT is beginning a separate consultation on an alternative future educational use for the site. A copy of this additional consultation is available on request.
- To avoid any adverse impact on the community, the existing working farm at HWA will be preserved and community use of facilities will be extended as part of any future use proposals.

4 Process for transferring pupils

A series of open events are planned at Mascalls to ensure a smooth transition for pupils. More information on these events for pupils and parents will follow shortly.

Information for parents about how to apply for a place at another school should you not wish to take up the offer at Mascalls will be provided by Kent County Council.



5 How to have your say

We are consulting with a range of parties as set out in the relevant DfE guidance. A separate equalities impact assessment is available on request. The consultation starts on **Monday 27th September** and closes on **Monday 25th October**.

You can contribute your views via [this Google Form](#).

Alternatively, you can write to Leigh Academies Trust at:

Carnation Road
Strood
Rochester
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ME2 2SX



Simon Beamish
Chief Executive

Annex A

High Weald Academy pupil numbers

Pupils on roll in 2021/22:

	No. pupils	Boys	Girls	SEN
Year 7	73	42	31	18
Year 8	57	36	21	15
Year 9	50	29	21	10
Year 10	43	24	19	12
Year 11	53	29	24	7
Total	276	160	116	62