

Bradstow Community Special School and Children's Homes – Formal Consultation Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

September 2025

Consultation process

- What happens during the consultation period and how will you ensure it is accessible for all?

The consultation process must follow the statutory guidance. Over the four weeks' formal consultation period we will be consulting with pupils, parents and carers, staff, the governing board, trade unions and the wider local community.

There will be different ways to engage, including online and by post. We will translate all relevant material into languages which are spoken by the school community on request and as required. We will ensure we support those parents and carers with additional needs, so their voices are heard through this engagement phase.

- Could more time be given to consider alternative options?

Despite the pre-publication consultation stage closing in February 2025, Wandsworth decided to pause proceeding to the next stage of the statutory process to ensure further exploration of alternative options, such as academisation. This has equated to a period of approximately 7 months for full exploration of all options, none of which were feasible in addressing the school's challenges. The difficult decision then had to be made to reinstate the formal consultation process.

Finances

- Is this a financially driven proposal?

Wandsworth Council is committed to supporting children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) locally, keeping them educated and cared for within Wandsworth or as close to their homes as possible.

The council has invested £41m in expanding SEND provision in Wandsworth creating over 271 places since 2021, of which £34m is on a purpose-built expansion of Paddock Secondary and Sixth Form School to improve our local provision for children with complex special educational needs linked to their diagnosis of Autism and severe learning disability. A primary aim for the development of Paddock School is to enable Wandsworth children to remain in their local community to enable them to successfully retain their close links to family and friends, which can be lost if they are placed at a significant distance from home.

Bradstow School is a complex school which operates within a challenging financial landscape and the unwillingness of councils to pay the levels of fees needed to maintain the quality and financial viability of the school has forced Wandsworth council to look at other options.

The financial sustainability of the school requires that the income generated and paid for by councils is equal to or greater than the expenditure (the costs of running the provision including maintenance, overheads and staffing costs).

With the significant fall in pupil numbers over the last year, the impact has been that costs have continued to exceed income even after undertaking the most recent restructure. Unfortunately, with only 13 children on roll, and 2 of these still being Kent Council placements whose debt stands at £4.6m and growing, the costs significantly exceed the income. The result is that the already £1m accumulated deficit (before bad debts are accounted for) keeps growing every single day at an increasing rate.

- Are there any courses of action to recover Bradstow's debt?

Wandsworth have met with the Department for Education (DfE) to understand the available courses of action to recover the debt. The DfE articulated that because councils are the commissioners and need to agree the charges, especially with regards to inflationary uplifts or changes in prices for existing placements, our ability to set prices is constrained.

Some councils, particularly Kent County Council that owes approximately £4.6m, have not paid for placement for a year, nor the full fees for much of the previous two years. Legal processes for collecting this debt were initiated between February 2024 and May 2024 but were paused to allow for Kent to complete their due diligence of the transfer proposal. Following confirmation that Kent had no interest in taking transfer of the provision, the legal process was reinstated with the recovery of unpaid fees actively pursued through solicitors. This process of recovery is ongoing.

The high-risk financial liabilities associated with the school are therefore over £4.6m, total debt is over £8m, with the accumulated revenue deficit now £1m. These amounts are growing, and any unrecoverable debt or unrecoverable deficits will be a cost to Wandsworth Council, impacting its residents and children.

- Would finding more savings to help Bradstow's financial position?

Bradstow undertook a significant exercise in reducing operating costs (including staffing) as it moved from a 52-week to a 38-week provision. This was following a large staffing restructure that delivered approximately £1.0m savings in 2023-24. In total, Bradstow removed approximately £2.5m of costs between financial year (FY) 2023-24 and FY 2024-25, with a further £816k in the most recent restructure, which was in FY 2025-26. This expenditure is forecast to be significantly lower again in FY 2025-26 as the full year effect of the restructure is felt. However, the level of income has also fallen with reduced pupil numbers, and as a result a loss is forecast in the current year. This loss will grow by approximately £100,000 a week or over £600,000 a term unless staffing levels fall.

Educational provision

- Will every child affected by this proposal get a suitable alternative school placement?

As of July 2025, the cohort of children at Bradstow has reduced to 13 from 32 children as recorded in the October census and reported in the pre-publication consultation proposal. This would indicate that alternative placements are available which meet the needs of the children the school currently supports, and which in line with the SEND code of practice parents have agreed to accept.

Of the 4 remaining children placed by Wandsworth in Bradstow as at the start of the pre-publication consultation in January 25, all have secured offers of suitable alternative provision, with 3 placements accepted and transition commencing in September 25. We are working with the remaining family to ensure there is no gap in education for their child with appropriate support provided through the transition.

It has been the recommendation to all other placing local authorities to parallel plan with families and commence the consultation process for alternative provision. This will ensure that if the proposal to close is approved, responsible individuals in placing local authorities will have sufficient time to work with families and the staff at Bradstow school to support pupils to integrate smoothly into their new setting.

Options considered

- Bradstow is located in Kent - could the school be transferred to Kent County Council to avoid closure?

As the majority of placements at Bradstow historically were from Kent County Council and the school is located in their county, we worked on a proposal to transfer the schools as a maintained provision to Kent County Council for over 3 years. The transfer included the offer of the freehold of the property. Kent County Council notified us in writing on the 15 October 2024, that they are not interested in pursuing this option. Their reason for this is the financial investment required to make the building fit for purpose alongside the considerable resourcing and risk it would present to operationally sustain the provision. Further to communicating our intention to consult on closure, the leader of Wandsworth Council and lead member for Children wrote to their counterparts at Kent County Council to reopen a conversation to safeguard a future for the school. However, Kent County Council are clear that there are no plans to take over the running of Bradstow School and they are working to find alternative educational provision for the pupils currently attending the provision. Their focus will then concentrate on supporting pupils to integrate smoothly into their new setting.

- Could the school be academised to avoid closure?

Although it is the decision of Bradstow's Governing body to academise, a decision that is irreversible, Wandsworth liaised with the Department for Education (DfE) prior to commencing the statutory consultation process on the closure of Bradstow School to ascertain if there might be any interested parties. Due to the school's complexity, both operationally and financially, no suggestions were offered at that time. However, DfE enquiries would continue with a view that initiating the proposal to close the school would enable interested academy trusts to come forward with an expression of interest.

In February, the Cabinet Member for Children's agreed to delay the decision to move to formal consultation until after 24 March 2025 to allow governors the opportunity to engage with any interested academy trusts and select a suitable partner with whom to undertake the necessary due diligence to secure the future of the school.

Wandsworth Council fully committed to supporting transparent discussions about the school's position, including its financial viability. As such, the council met with 3 interested parties, Ambitious about Autism, Seva Homes and Cygnus Academy Trust to provide any required information to support the governors' decision to academise. One provider was not progressed by the governors, one provider withdrew their interest, with Cygnus the governors preferred Trust and with whom an application to the Department for Education was made.

Despite fully supporting this process, we were notified on the 29 July 2025 that the Department for Education (DfE) was not able to approve the application with Cygnus Academy Trust. Given the impact of falling pupil numbers, which has worsened the school's financial position, added to the aged debt the school already holds, Wandsworth has now taken the difficult decision to re-instate the statutory process and formally consult on closure.

- Could Bradstow be transferred to an independent school proprietor to avoid closure?

The DfE have advised that formerly state-funded schools taken over by a new proprietor can seek to register as independent schools. They should allow six months for the registration process to be completed. This means that an application to register should be made by the new proprietor at least six months before the state-funded school is due to close, if the newly registered independent school is to provide continuity of education for current pupils. That said there are challenges to the identification of a new proprietor to run an independent school, such as securing the assets from the local authority, alongside any transfer of staff, on which the new proprietor would need to obtain independent advice. They would also need to be able to develop and articulate a sustainable business plan.

The governors and school leadership were able to explore all alternative options to closure during the paused statutory process following the completion of the pre-publication consultation. SEVA homes, a care provider with schooling, approached the council for an introductory meeting, however, governors did not follow up with the provider having shared their contact details further to Wandsworth's meeting.

Impact on the Community

- How will you assess the impact of the school closure on the community?

An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and has been shared as part of this consultation. This has been reviewed and updated following responses received to the pre-publication consultation.

Whilst we understand that this proposal will have some impact on the local community, it has been put forward in response to the need to manage risk for our most vulnerable SEND children, as well as the sustainability of the Wandsworth school system for all our children and families.

As of July 2025, there are 13 pupils remaining at the school.

Staff

- What support will be available to staff affected by this proposal?

We recognise the incredible dedication and expertise that the staff community brings to Bradstow School. We know that staff will be anxious about the implications of any decision, and their wellbeing is important to us. We would like to offer our reassurance that council officers, governors and school leaders are here to support staff as we navigate this process together.

We will be guided by staff in relation to their needs, which includes exploring employment opportunities with relevant job centre contacts and other local education provisions, providing career transition resources, and offering individual support as we move through the consultation and transition phases.

School leaders and Governors will continue to offer support to all staff in collaboration with the Wandsworth Schools and Community Psychology Service that will help staff work through and manage any anxieties and emotions that may be felt both for themselves and those of children, young people and their families.

To supplement the support outlined above, all staff have access to a 24/7 support helpline from an external provider. The provider's website also has a variety of additional resources.

Parents

- What support will be available to parents whose children will be affected by this proposal?

We will work with Bradstow to ensure children and families are supported throughout this process, addressing any issues as they emerge and ensuring change is handled efficiently and sensitively. Through the staff team, we are continually seeking the views, wishes and feelings of pupils to inform the support package that is being provided.

The School and Community Psychology Service (SCPS) will work alongside the school's leadership team and help them to manage the impact of this proposal on staff, pupils and their families. If this proposal progresses, placing local authorities, and the SCPS alongside Kent County Council Educational Psychology Services will work in collaboration with the school leadership to ensure that children's transition to a new school is managed as effectively as possible. These conversations and this work will be carefully planned and managed sensitively in discussion with the head and senior leadership to ensure they best meet the needs of the school community as they emerge and if needed.

We will translate all relevant documents and provide interpreters on request and as required.

- How will children and families be supported around admissions to a new school if the proposal is approved?

In the event proposals are agreed we will work closely with the school community and other Local Authorities in a planned way, and we want to provide parents and carers reassurance that there is no need to act alone in response to the notification of this consultation.

It has been the recommendation of Wandsworth Council to all other placing local authorities to parallel plan with families and commence the consultation process for alternative provision.

This will ensure that if the proposal to close is approved, responsible individuals in placing local authorities will have sufficient time to work with families and the staff at Bradstow school to support pupils to integrate smoothly into their new setting.

Wandsworth Council would recommend that parents contact their Local Authority's SEND Team, or case worker, to discuss this proposal and to understand their options for their children in the event of Bradstow's closure.