

CONSULTATION OUTLINE: BROADWATER PRE PUBLICATION CONSULTATION

PROPOSAL TO CLOSE (DISCONTINUE) A MAINTAINED SCHOOL

OCTOBER 2022

Introduction

After careful consideration, Wandsworth Council has made the difficult decision to consult on a proposal to close Broadwater Primary School in the Summer Term of 2023, with the intention to repurpose the site for a Special Needs School. If the recommendation is approved, this will provide approximately 190 places to local pupils with complex special needs to meet increasing demand in the borough.

Why are we proposing this change?

This proposal is primarily driven by our aspirations for our Wandsworth children with SEND to have their needs met locally, keeping them close to their families and friends and the need to retain a sustainable school system.

The increase in demand for specialist places means that there is no longer sufficient capacity within our own existing special school provision, and we are having to commission places outside of Wandsworth, often in independent schools. As a result, many of our young people with SEND have to travel long distances to attend schools away from their communities. This has a significant impact on children, their families and brings with it a significant financial cost, which places additional budgetary pressures on the overall school system.

Whilst the need for additional specialist SEND provision has increased, pupil numbers in mainstream primary schools has seen a steady decline. This is not unique to Wandsworth. The reduction in primary school age children is a direct result of families leaving the city as a consequence of Brexit, increased cost of living, lifestyle changes following the pandemic, as well as noticeable low birth rates across SW London.

To address these two issues decisive action is required to both secure additional specialist SEND capacity, as well as reduce surplus school places in the primary sector. This proposal will address both of these aims. This proposal is no reflection on the quality of teaching, skillset of staff and the leadership of the school.

We are committed through this consultation, to be clear and transparent, to listen to and act on the views and concerns of those affected, and to provide reassurance.

Whilst we understand that this proposal will inevitably impact on the children, parents and teachers of the Broadwater school community, this proposal has been put forward in the wider interest of all children and families in Wandsworth and particularly with the most vulnerable SEND children in mind.

School and LA details

Broadwater Primary School

Broadwater Rd
London
SW17 0DZ

Wandsworth Local Authority

Commissioning Team
5th Floor
Wandsworth Town Hall
Wandsworth High Street
London
SW18 2PU

Background

Broadwater Primary School is situated in Wandsworth, in Tooting area. The school site is large and has adequate outside space. The school has a capacity for 3 to 4 forms of entry for each year group and is currently operating as 1 form of entry.

Overall pupil numbers in Wandsworth schools are declining and this is putting significant financial pressure on all primary schools, including Broadwater.

Locally we have seen a 44% increase in demand for SEND places over the last 5 years. As of 2022, we are above London and national rates for pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) who require SEND provision.

Given the size of the Broadwater site footprint, it provides both the internal and external space needed to accommodate a specialist provision to meet the needs of a large cohort of SEND pupils with complex needs.

Pupil Numbers and forecasts

In Wandsworth, primary school numbers have fallen from 20,674 to 19,149 (7.3%) in the 5 years to October 2021. Reception numbers have decreased by 438 (14.5%) in the same period, from a peak of 3,006 in October 2016 to 2,568 in October 2021. It is also projected that Reception Year pupil numbers at borough level will decline in the second part of the decade (up to 2030)

Pupil numbers in the Tooting area have seen an even greater decrease than at borough level. As of January 2022, 25% (148 places) of available Reception year places in the area were not filled. At Broadwater School, pupil numbers have halved from 413 in October 2016 to 206 in January 2022 and are now closer to 150 from reception to year 6.

The table below shows the forecast for pupil numbers at schools in the area over the next five years, which demonstrates that overall pupil numbers from Reception to Year 6 are projected to fall by 2027, over 330 pupils or 1.5 forms of entry.

Year	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
2021/2022 A	437	481	456	448	486	447	448	3,203
2022/2023	428	437	480	452	443	479	442	3,161
2023/2024	455	417	432	473	445	437	473	3,132
2024/2025	444	440	408	423	462	432	429	3,038
2025/2026	423	428	428	395	409	445	421	2,949
2026/2027	417	412	416	414	382	395	433	2,869

Financial Position

Schools are funded on a per pupil basis, which means that a fall in pupil numbers in mainstream schools puts pressures on school budgets.

Greater demand for SEND places is increasing pressure on the High Needs Block of the Dedicated School Grant which funds SEND provision. As demand cannot currently be met within the borough and a greater reliance on expensive independent provision Wandsworth spends £12 million a year on independent placements.

The proposal to repurpose Broadwater Primary School into a specialist provision will assist with the budgetary pressures by reducing the need to place children in highly expensive independent settings away from the borough and meet our ambition to investing in high quality SEND provision locally, keeping our children in their local communities.

Alternative options considered and rejected

A number of alternative options were considered before we decided to consult on the proposed closure of Broadwater Primary School. These included:

Merger: Consideration was given to merging Broadwater with another primary school. This option was discounted for a number of reasons, including that this would still require a school closure, the wider impact on two sets of pupils, families, staff groups and overall school communities.

Alternative sites to meet SEND demand: Utilising available space on other school sites was explored. This was discounted as there was not a site large enough to accommodate the number of places needed for secondary children with complex SEND, associated challenges in getting agreement from an existing school for a large build on site managed by another specialist school and the impact on delivery of education provision.

No change: Doing nothing is not a realistic option in the current climate. If we make no changes, we will continue to see a rise in spend on independent specialist provision, placing significant pressure on High Needs DSG and reducing the funding available to Wandsworth schools. The surplus school places

will mean that there is financial risk to the schools' system. Ongoing pressures may result in the need for staffing restructures across many schools with a direct impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

Admissions

The greatest anxiety for parents associated with this proposal is likely to be related to admissions, securing a suitable school place for their child should Broadwater close, as well as the impact of any changes. In the event proposals are agreed we will work closely with the school community in a planned way, and we want to reassure parents that there is no need to act alone or immediately in response to the notification of this consultation.

Admissions

There are currently 622 vacant (reception to Year 5 pupil) places in primary schools within 1.5km of the Broadwater cohorts home address, to accommodate 137 children at Broadwater in the same year groups.

If a decision is made to close Broadwater Primary School, a separate admissions process will be administered by the Council's Pupil Services Team in March 2023 allowing families of affected pupils to apply for other local schools. Pupil Services will review new school applications for all existing pupils and ensure, wherever possible, they meet one of the parental preferences.

We will make every endeavour to offer family sibling groups a place at the same school. Places will be allocated in accordance with schools' individual admissions policies. Parents will have a right of appeal to an Independent Appeal Panel if it is not possible to offer a place at one of their preferred school.

SEN

The Head of SEND and Inclusion and the Special Needs Assessment Service Manager will work closely with the Broadwater SENCO to support all children with an EHCP and their families to consider school preferences, taking into account home to school distance. We will also work together to ensure that where there are siblings they can be placed together to avoid additional pressures on parents. We will give consideration to the wider SEND pupil cohort to manage transitions well and address any concerns parents may have.

Transition planning

The School and Community Psychology Service are working with the school to manage the impact of this proposal on staff, pupils and their families. Should this proposal progress, they will support the school to develop a transition plan for children as they move to a new school. These conversations and this work will be carefully planned and managed sensitively in discussion with the head and senior leadership. We will together think about how we can take forward positive learning from this experience for children.

Given the cost of living crisis, there is a commitment to work with families who require the support to provide funding for school uniform as a result of any changes.

Transport arrangements

Vacancy data for local schools currently suggests that 85% of the Broadwater pupils can be placed in a local school within 1km, with 97% placed within 1.5km. At present, only 19% of Broadwater pupils

actually live within 1km of the school. Therefore, we do not anticipate a significant impact on school journeys.

Because of the distribution of special needs pupils within the borough, if proposals are agreed, it is very likely that transport times for the majority of pupils attending a new Special School for Severe Learning Disabilities on the Broadwater site will have shorter travel times.

It is also very likely that the traffic and emissions impact around the Broadwater school site will reduce as most SLD pupils will receive Council provided bus transport to the school. The aim is for buses to become electric vehicles within the next three years therefore further reducing emissions in the area.

Local schools

Given the surplus of school places outlined in this document, our expectation is for local schools to accommodate any affected pupils if a decision is taken to close Broadwater primary school. We would work closely with these schools to ensure that appropriate support is provided to all pupils during this transition period.

This decision would also support the financial sustainability of other local schools in the Tooting area, thus benefiting the wider school community.

Impact on Staff

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.

If this proposal is moved forward, we can assure staff that the school will remain open for the whole academic year 2022/23.

We anticipate that staff redundancies will be minimal as affected staff will be supported to consider their options reflective of their individual circumstances. There are known local shortages for teachers, teaching assistants (TAs) and for learning support assistants (LSAs), which will provide new employment opportunities for any displaced staff. We will work with all Wandsworth school leaders to identify and signpost these vacancies and support staff to apply and secure interviews. We are very clear that regardless of the decision reached, we do not want to lose the experience, skills, and talent of education staff from Wandsworth.

We will continue to offer support to all staff through our school and community psychology service to work through and manage the anxieties and emotions which will inevitably be felt given this proposal.

To supplement the support outlined above, all staff have access to the council’s employee assistance programme.

School premises

It is proposed that the Broadwater Primary School’s building be redesigned to meet SEND need.

This would deliver 192 places, which is equivalent to 24 class bases of eight pupils. It is anticipated the school would be open, at the latest, for the academic year 2025/2026.

The Council would seek to preserve, wherever possible, the existing spaces, such as those utilised for the forest school, as we know how important and beneficial access to outside space, nature and sensory gardens is for children with SEND. We will engage with local expertise and other professionals to consider these in our designs for the new provision to ensure that the space works for the curriculum, acting as a teaching tool, but also to explore the senses in a safe, controlled environment and in a healthy and positive way.

Consultation and decision-making process

There is a defined statutory process in the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 which must be followed before making a decision on the closure of a maintained school. This is supplemented by further guidance on the process published by the Department for Education.

There are five stages to the statutory process:

Consultation:	The publication of this consultation document marks a period of consultation during which the views of interested parties are sought and which will be considered by the local authority.
Publication	Dependent upon the outcome of the consultation, the local authority will decide whether or not to publish statutory notices regarding the proposed closure.
Representation	The representation period starts on the date of publication of the statutory notice and must last for a period of four weeks. During this period, any person or organisation can submit comments on the proposal to the local authority, to be taken into account before a final decision is taken
Decision	Within two months of the end of the representation period the local authority must make a decision on the proposal.
Implementation	If the proposal is approved, Broadwater Primary School would close on 31 August 2023.

Equality Impact Assessment

The local authority is required to have ‘due regard’ to the duties set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Public Sector Equality Duty, ‘PSED’) in determining these proposals. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken as part of the consultation process to identify the equality implications of this proposal and any appropriate mitigation, which we are seeking views on as part of this consultation.

How to share your views

Wandsworth Council will begin consulting on the 12th November to get views on the outlined proposals. This will close on the 29th November 2022.

you can give your views via:

- Online survey: we would encourage you to complete the online survey as the most efficient and secure way to give your views at:
<https://haveyoursay.citizenspace.com/wandsworthcsd/broadwater>
- Hard copies can be available on request, by emailing consult@wandsworth.gov.uk or telephone at 020 8871 7316 (please note that callers should opt for the Admissions and Transfers option and refer to ‘Broadwater Consultation’ when they get through to an Officer).
- Attending the consultation event at Broadwater Primary School on Wednesday 19th October 2022, 5.30-7pm.

Upon concluding this consultation stage, all views will be considered in full and the Director of Children’s Services in consultation with the Cabinet lead for children will decide whether to publish statutory proposals for these changes.

Who we will consult

The local authority is consulting with pupils, parents and carers, staff, the governing board, other local schools and trade unions. We are also consulting with other groups as well as the wider local community.

Proposed Consultation Timeline

Activity	Timeline
Pre-publication consultation	12 th October to 29th November 2022
Review period for consultation feedback and decision for Director of Children’s Services in consultation with the Cabinet lead for children on whether to publish statutory proposals for these changes.	December 2022
Formal consultation	January 2023
Executive Committee – decision on outcome of formal consultation.	February 2023