



Complete Proposal to Discontinue

The Boarding Provision at The St Francis Special School, Lincoln

MATTERS TO BE SPECIFIED IN SECTION 19 OF THE EDUCATION AND
INSPECTIONS ACT 2006

PROPOSALS TO MAKE A PRESCRIBED ALTERATION TO A SCHOOL

17 December 2020

Contact details

This proposal has been published by Lincolnshire County Council, County Offices, Newland, Lincoln LN1 1YQ regarding the potential closure of the boarding provision at The St Francis Special School Lincoln, Wickenby Crescent, Lincoln, LN1 3TJ.

Implementation

The proposal is to discontinue boarding provision at The St Francis Special School, Lincoln with effect from 01 September 2021.

Objections and Comments

Any person or organisation may object to or make comments on the proposal by sending them to the School Organisation Planning Team, Children's Services, Lincolnshire County Council, County Offices, Newland, Lincoln LN1 1YQ or by emailing schoolorganisation@lincolnshire.gov.uk to be received by the deadline of 14 January 2021.

Alteration Description

The proposal detailed in this document is to discontinue the boarding provision at The St Francis Special School, Lincoln with effect from 01 September 2021 due to concerns over the long term sustainability of the provision and the possibilities it may present if it were to become something else that could benefit vulnerable young people in an alternative way.

Objectives and Reasons for Closure

The St Francis Special School, Lincoln, caters for pupils aged 2 to 19 with a wide range of special educational needs including physical and medical, Autistic Spectrum Disorders and social communication difficulties and severe and profound learning difficulties. The school currently has a residential facility, which has been temporarily closed since March 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. When open it has capacity for up to 8 pupils.

It is the LA's statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places to accommodate all pupils of all needs of statutory school age across the county of Lincolnshire. The LA must consider its duty to promote high educational standards, ensure fair access to educational opportunity and assist every child to achieve their potential with the aim of enabling children to take up a school place in the local area. To help the LA meet these duties and restructure local provision they have the power to close all categories of maintained schools, including boarding provision.

The objectives of this proposal relate to the long term sustainability of the residential facility at St Francis Special School and the possibilities it may present if it were to become something else that could benefit vulnerable young people in an alternative way. This proposal will not impact the main St Francis School which will remain open as it is now.

It is not known when it will be safe for the residential unit to re-open due to the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic. As no timescale can be determined and with staff temporarily deployed into other positions on an informal basis within the school, it is not

considered reasonable to keep the boarding provision open and staffed in the long-term with no pupils. It is not considered the best use of resources and it is not the best practice financially with alternative options available.

Following careful consideration regarding the residential provision, Lincolnshire County Council, at the request of the Governing Body, made the decision to consult on the ending the boarding designation of the school to enable the residential accommodation to be included as part of the LA's wider considerations regarding the future of care provision for young people and the positive opportunities it may provide. Options for the alternative use of the residential accommodation continue to be explored and will be considered in detail when determining the final decision regarding the future of the residential designation. If it were to discontinue then possible alternatives include using the accommodation for St Francis school to accommodate additional pupils and/or to support additional or alternative children's home or short breaks provision.

The Statutory Notice has been published to propose the discontinuance of the boarding provision at The St Francis Special School, Lincoln for the following reasons:

- To comply with the wishes of the Governing Body.
- There are currently no pupils boarding due to the pandemic. It is not considered reasonable to keep the boarding provision open and staffed in the long term with no or very few pupils. It is also not considered to be the best use of the accommodation compared to other potential options, which may be more sustainable and could benefit more children requiring specialist social care. It is best practice to ensure spending commitments deliver the optimum outcomes for children and young people of Lincolnshire and deliver value for money.
- It would enable the residential accommodation to be included as part of the LA's wider considerations regarding the future of care provision for children. The LA is exploring the possibility of how the facility could be opened up to a wider area in and around Lincoln, as at present only pupils on roll at St Francis can benefit from the residential provision.
- To enable other options for the use of the facility to continue to be explored prior to a final decision being taken on the future of the residential classification of the school.
- To enable the process to continue to the next stage and allow a further opportunity for people and organisations to express their views about the proposal and ensure that they will be taken into account by the Executive Councillor prior to the final decision being taken. This continuation of the process will allow more time for all potential alternatives to be fully and robustly explored.
- To enable the statutory and legal processes to proceed in accordance with guidelines laid down by the DfE.

Alternative Provision, Standards and Diversity of Provision

The proposed permanent closure of the residential facility does not affect the number of main St Francis daytime places, in addition the quality and diversity of schools in the area will not be impacted.

When open, the boarding provision has capacity for up to 8 pupils. Full-time boarding places are not offered by the school; part-time places are offered on rotation to ensure all those who wish to utilise the facility get an opportunity. The boarding provision provides an opportunity for pupils to spend a few nights away from home to develop life skills which prepares them for independent living in later life; it also offers an opportunity for pupils to socialise with their peers and in addition provides respite for the families of pupils.

As the school's residential facility is not a traditional full-time boarding school there is not a requirement to consider alternative state boarding provision in the wider area, in the long-term it is also considered that the proposal will still meet the needs of the pupils at St Francis and their parents.

The closure of the boarding provision will not affect pupils attending their daytime provision, as no pupils reside at the boarding provision full-time, with pupils travelling daily from home to access education at St Francis.

If this proposal goes ahead there are alternative methods successfully embedded within the day to day curriculum of the school (as with all other schools in Lincolnshire) that ensure pupils gain the life skills they need for independent living, so it is not considered that education standards of the school will be impacted as a whole.

In addition the LA are exploring more cost effective alternatives for the use of the residential buildings, with the aim to provide more opportunities for vulnerable young people through a wider residential offer for short breaks or other possible opportunities.

Community Cohesion

As the main day-time provision of St Francis is not affected by the proposal it is not considered that there will be an impact on community cohesion. Children from different backgrounds will still be able to access their day-time place at the school and pupils will continue to learn about other cultures, faiths and communities.

Equal Opportunities

Throughout this decision making process the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) will be complied with and 'due regard' will be given to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and
- foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.

The LA does not consider that there are any sex, race or disability discrimination issues that will arise if the residential provision closes. The LA continues to be committed to provide access to a range of opportunities which reflect the ethnic and cultural mix of the area and aims to ensure that such opportunities are open to all.

Travel and Accessibility

As the main day-time provision is not affected and because pupils could not reside full-time at the boarding provision it is considered that there will be little change to the amount of travel a pupil would usually undertake. In addition, the boarding provision has been temporarily been closed since March 2020.

Financial Implications and Costs

Financial implications on the closure of The St Francis Special School would be dependent on the facility's future use. A final decision will not financially impact the running of the main school site education delivery at The St Francis Special School, Lincoln.

The boarding provision is funded as a commissioned activity through the High Needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant. It is seen as best practice to ensure spending commitments continue to deliver the optimum outcomes for children and young people of Lincolnshire and deliver value for money. This is even more important in the context of local and national funding challenges of high needs spending. The Dedicated Schools Grant is a ring-fenced grant and has to be spent in accordance with the Schools & Early Years Finance Regulations in supporting the children of Lincolnshire. The Local Authorities role is to govern the use and effective deployment and prioritisation of resource, and decisions are made in consultation with schools and other stakeholder groups.

Should a decision be made at the end of this process to proceed with the closure of the boarding provision, there may be staff related financial implications resulting from the closure which will need to be determined; however re-deployment opportunities will be explored to maintain high quality specialist skills of valued staff within the sector. Financial liabilities will need to be managed within available school reserve and the High Needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

Consultation

In order for the boarding provision to close the LA must follow the necessary statutory legal processes as required by the Secretary of State in accordance with the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the Education Act 2011 and the guidance "Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools" October 2018 issued by the DfE.

On 30 September 2020 a letter incorporating relevant information and reasons for the proposal was sent out to interested parties to commence a five week period of consultation. Responses to the consultation could be submitted online by completing a short survey, by letter or email. The deadline for responses was 4 November 2020. A copy of the letter commencing consultation was published on the County Council at www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/school-pupil-support/school-organisation-planning

It was not felt appropriate to hold a public meeting due to the Covid-19 pandemic, so a virtual information event was scheduled to take place online and offered to all interested parties. Information about this event was published on the LA's website and included in the letter. Parents of pupils were also encouraged to either discuss the proposal with the

school or to approach the School Organisation Team via email, phone or through writing a letter, in addition to the online survey.

All written responses received during consultation have been made available to the Executive Councillor for consideration and further details are confirmed in the decision report which can be found through the following link <https://lincolnshire.moderngov.co.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?Id=648> or by writing to request a copy.

Under current legislation the LA is the decision maker for the proposal and is co-ordinating the statutory process before making a final decision in March 2021. The LA, as decision maker, must be able to show that all relevant issues raised are taken into consideration in the decision making process.

Related Proposals

The proposal to discontinue the boarding provision at The St Francis Special School Lincoln is not related to any other statutory school organisation proposal.

What will happen now?

Any person may object to or make comments on this proposal by sending them to the School Organisation Planning Team, Children's Services, Lincolnshire County Council, County Offices, 51 Newland, Lincoln LN1 1YQ, by emailing schoolorganisation@lincolnshire.gov.uk or online via www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/school-pupil-support/school-organisation-planning through a simple online survey.

At the close of the 4 week representation period (statutory formal consultation) on 14 January 2021 responses will be collated and analysed. A further report will be presented for an Executive final decision in March 2021 on the closure of the boarding provision.

The representation period is the final opportunity for people and organisations to express their views about the proposal and ensure that they will be taken into account by the decision maker.