



GREENWOOD ACADEMIES TRUST

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Re: Houghton Regis Academy

On 24 September 2019, we announced that Greenwood Academies Trust was in discussions with the Department for Education (DfE) and Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) to assess the impact and practicalities of potentially closing Houghton Regis Academy.

We are writing to inform you that the Secretary of State for Education, in mutual agreement with the Trust, has now made the substantive and final decision to proceed to closure of Houghton Regis Academy. However, in order to reduce the impact of the closure we have agreed a proposed closure transition plan which means the Academy will remain open for some year groups until 31 August 2022.

We will now conduct a 'listening period'. The listening period is an opportunity for stakeholders and interested parties such as pupils, parents and staff to be provided with more information about the proposed closure process. It is also an opportunity for you to submit your views on how the process can best be managed.

I am aware of the concern the current position will be causing pupils, parents and the wider community at Houghton Regis. We are committed to working with you to ensure that we do all we can do to support you at this challenging time.

Please find further details about the proposed closure process and how to give your views included in this letter.

Background to the Proposed Closure

Houghton Regis Academy joined the Greenwood Academies Trust (GAT) on 1 September 2012 as a middle school. There was an agreed plan and identified funding at that point to change the intake of the academy from a middle school of four forms of entry (years 5 to 8) to become a nine form entry secondary academy with a post-16 provision to serve the needs of the current community and the planned development of 7,500 new houses in the locality, in a new fit for purpose building.

However, for many reasons, over a protracted period of time, the significant development of housing has not been delivered, which was to facilitate the expansion and rebuild of the academy.

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Over a number of years this situation has led to the Academy becoming unviable, because of the sustained very low numbers of students in the Academy. The key issues include:

- The small number of pupils on roll means the resources available to the Academy are not enough to enable the recruitment and retention of a sufficient number of high quality specialist staff to provide the broad, balanced, modern and aspirational curriculum that secondary pupils should expect.
- The suitability and condition of the Academy buildings are not appropriate for the delivery of a high quality secondary education, nor is the general environment and the available resources.
- As at 31 August 2019, the Academy had a deficit of over £1.1m, which is being funded by the Trust and its academies.

The Trust has been in discussions with the Department for Education (DfE) and Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) regarding possible solutions to the current challenges but, having reviewed and explored the various factors described above, the current view of the Trust and the Department for Education is that the school is not viable.

The Academy

The Academy currently has 269 pupils on roll and has pupils from age 11 to 16. It is a mixed gender Academy with 155 boys and 114 girls who attend the Academy.

The Proposed Closure Plan

A plan has been developed in order to close the Academy by 31 August 2022. The plan seeks to reduce the impact of the closure on pupils, parents, staff and the community and to ensure that any pupils at the Academy up to closure have access to a good quality of education.

There are a number of key aspects to the plan.

Provision of Key Stage 3

It is proposed that from September 2020 the Academy will become a Key Stage 3 only provision (years 7, 8 and 9). This is to ensure that the Academy has the best chance of providing a good quality of education for those pupils remaining at the Academy and to ensure that those pupils in Key Stage 4, who will be working for and sitting their exams, can do so without any potential disruption to their education.

The proposal to have a smaller school during the closure process also enables us to address the current poor accommodation at the Academy by allowing years 7, 8 and 9 to be moved to the adjacent former UTC building from 1 September 2020.

Provision of Key Stage 4

Current year 11 pupils will continue to be supported with their education where they are until they have completed their exams.

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GAT has been working with CBC to identify appropriate high quality school places in the locality, and we can confirm that there are sufficient alternative places for all existing year 9 and 10 pupils at the Academy.

We understand that parents and pupils affected by this will be concerned about the disruption and, whilst we recognise that this isn't ideal, this option does ensure that year 9 and year 10 pupils will receive the best possible education in a fully and appropriately staffed school.

We are working with CBC, as the admissions authority, to organise an event where year 9 & year 10 parents can discuss the options available to them and the application process. We'll be in touch with parents about this shortly and more information is available on the council's website at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/hra Alternatively, you can contact the Admissions Team by telephoning 0300 300 8037 or emailing admissions@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

If your child has an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), parents still need to express a school preference and should contact the SEND team who will make the application on your behalf, you can contact them by telephoning 0300 300 8356.

Current year 8 pupils, who will be in year 9 in 2020/21 will receive further information about transferring to another school for their Key Stage 4 provision nearer this time.

Longer term, the Local Authority has a plan for a new secondary school on the Kingsland site, which is expected to be open by 2022. This would ensure that the local community have full secondary school provision in their local area in the future.

The Listening Period

The listening period will last for a period of four weeks and will commence on 28 February 2020 and end at 5pm on 27 March 2020 and we look forward to receiving your views.

How to give your Views

On Tuesday 10 March 2020 there will be a public meeting for stakeholders and interested parties to attend. This will be held at the Houghton Regis Academy at 6.00pm. The aim of the session is to allow stakeholders the opportunity to give their views on the proposed closure transition plan.

Your views are very important to us and if you are unable to attend the public meeting and wish to submit your views, please email them to consultation@greenwoodacademies.org or complete the online form, which can be found in the news section on the Trust's website www.greenwoodacademies.org, by 5pm on 27 March 2020.

Information and updates will be posted on the Academy's website www.houghtonregisacademy.org and the Trust's website www.greenwoodacademies.org under the news sections.

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Next Steps

Following the close of the listening period, the Trust will consider the representations made on the proposed closure plan before finalising the closure transition plan.

We very much hope this information is useful and that you will submit your views. We understand this is a sensitive issue for all involved, particularly for pupils, parents, carers and staff, and we are committed to working with you to ensure we are able to come to the best possible solution for the education of the pupils at Houghton Regis Academy.

We will continue to work closely with CBC and the DfE to minimise any disruption to pupils, families and staff as much as possible.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank our pupils, parents, carers and staff for their ongoing support and look forward to continuing to work closely together over the coming months.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wayne Norrie', written in a cursive style.

Wayne Norrie
Chief Executive

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