

Informal Consultation

A proposal for the closure of The Walnuts Children's home

The SEN Code of Practice 2015 requires that all local authorities regularly monitor their structures and arrangements to ensure that they continue to be effective and deliver positive outcomes. This is especially necessary at times when there is increasing pressure on resources. The Walnuts School is a maintained special school; on site there is a children's home where five children and young people currently reside. The residential establishment also provides targeted provision for a small number of children and young people each term. Milton Keynes Council is proposing to close The Walnuts Children's Home. Whenever any changes are proposed it is best practice to undergo a process of consultation with all stakeholders, including staff, service users and their families and other local organisations. Milton Keynes Council is running an eight week informal consultation to gather opinions on the proposal. This is the first stage in a five stage process:



What is the current position?

The Walnuts Children's Home currently has five children and young people accessing the children's home full time on a 52 week basis. The numbers accessing the targeted provision have incrementally decreased; as the provision has not had capacity to offer any further placements, the number accessing the provision averaged nine young people per evening between 2013 and 2015 and over the last year has averaged three. The children and young people who live in The Walnuts Children's Home live and attend school on the same site. The Walnuts School is the only special school in Milton Keynes that has retained any form of residential provision.

The management and governance model for The Walnuts School and The Walnuts Children's Home is complex and presents a number of challenges; with both being statutorily regulated under two different Ofsted frameworks. The staff are employed by The Walnuts School, but under the Ofsted Children's Home framework the residential home is not the responsibility of the school governing board. Until April 2018 the Headteacher was the responsible individual to Ofsted.

Why is this change being proposed?

The view is that The Walnuts Children's Home is not the most appropriate way to provide 52 week provision; when originally built it was designed to be a residential boarding school. The premises do not provide an environment that enables children and young people to maximise their development due to the restrictions and makeup of the physical environment. For example, there is limited outdoor space for sole use by the children's home, and the dining room is a shared facility. The buildings of both the school and children's home do not allow any separation for the children and young people, as they are interconnected; this limits their experiences, exposure to a variety of environments and then their preparation for adulthood.

The Walnuts School targeted provision is currently only accessed by a minimal number of children and young people each term; this does not allow for a consistent and equitable offer for all pupils. It is the view that the current offer is not the most effective or flexible approach to providing short term targeted interventions to children, young people and their families.

The children's home does not make most efficient use of resources and the budget pressures linked to The Walnuts Children's Home are unsustainable. The need for placements is not consistent, which contributes to the financial pressure and does not enable sufficient planning of resources. As the home is predominately funded through the high needs block of the Designated Schools Grant, this places the school's budget and the high needs block under increasing pressure.

What is the opportunity?

The consultation provides an opportunity to consider and develop even better local provision across Milton Keynes to ensure the needs of those children and young people currently accessing The Walnuts Children's Home are met. This would allow a separation between the home and school environment. This would dovetail with the current focus to consider and develop the range of respite options available to families with disabled children and young people to meet individual needs better.

The children's home building would be utilised to support children and young people with the most complex needs, creating bespoke working environments and also creating a 6th form teaching area; enabling the school to function from two sites instead of three; providing improved facilities for the 6th form provision.

A broader and fairer family support offer would be developed through The Walnuts School. Of the 181 children and young people on roll in The Walnuts School only a very small number access targeted provision through The Walnuts Children's Home; a proportion of the resource currently supporting only a few families would be reinvested to ensure a broader, more equitable offer.

What are the options?

1 **Do nothing**

The children and young people living in the home would live and have their education in the same building and not have the opportunity to access a broader environment with a greater focus on preparation for adulthood. The budget pressures would continue to have a detrimental impact on the school's finances and therefore continue to reduce the scope of provision for the 181 pupils.

2 **Close the Children's Home provision, but maintain the targeted provision**

This option would not address the financial pressures and would be low value for money and would not enable a broader and more equitable family support/targeted offer.

3 **Close The Walnut's Children's Home**

The proposal is to stop offering placements at The Walnuts Children's Home and the closure by finding alternative placements for the children and young people currently accessing the provision and developing the respite and family support offer for disabled children and young people in Milton Keynes.

This is the preferred option

How can I find out more and contribute to the process?

The Local Authority is keen to hear as many views as possible and what people think about these proposals. As part of this consultation, there will be two public information events where these issues can be explored in greater detail with managers from Milton Keynes SEND Team and with The Walnuts School Leadership Team.

Wednesday 27 June 2018

The Walnuts School, Admiral Drive, Hazeley, MK8 0PU at 5.00 to 7.00pm

Thursday 5 July 2017

The Walnuts School, Admiral Drive, Hazeley, MK8 0PU at 12.30 to 2.30pm

The contact for this consultation is Caroline Marriott, Head of Special Educational Needs and Disability.

Alternatively, you can go online and complete a response form at <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/consultations/445> to tell us what you think. **This early consultation will end on 10 August 2018.**

If you are unable to attend a public information event but would like to discuss this further, or if you are unable to access the on-line form, please email: sen@milton-keynes.gov.uk

