



# **Statutory Consultation on Proposed Changes to Provision at Penrose and Elmwood Special Schools in Bridgwater**

**This document sets out the County Council's proposed changes to Penrose and Elmwood Special Schools, the two Foundation special schools in Bridgwater, and how people can provide their views on the proposals.**

**This is a statutory proposal under 'The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013.**

## Statutory Consultation

In order to enable a move to the new special school being constructed at Bower Lane in September 2021, the County Council and the Federated Governing Body of Penrose and Elmwood Schools are currently consulting on a number of school organisation proposals.

The changes will affect the two existing special schools in Bridgwater, namely:

Name of School: **Penrose School**

School type: Foundation special school  
Address: Albert Street  
Bridgwater  
Somerset  
TA6 7ET

Ofsted rating: Good  
Last inspection: 07 March 2017

Name of School: **Elmwood School**

School type: Foundation special school  
Address: Hamp Avenue  
Bridgwater  
Somerset  
TA6 6AP

Ofsted rating: Good  
Last inspection: 14 March 2019

## **The Proposals**

Although the County Council and Federated Governing Body view the two existing schools as amalgamating, one school technically has to close while the other expands its provision.

Therefore, the proposals being consulted on were as follows:

- (1) Penrose Special School is proposed to close at the end of the current academic year;
- (2) Elmwood Special School's registered capacity is proposed to increase from 88 to 200 places;
- (3) Elmwood Special School is proposed to extend its age range from 11-19 to 4-19 in order to accommodate existing Penrose pupils.

## **The New School**

If the above proposals are accepted, Elmwood Special School will move to the new school building at Bower Lane in Bridgwater in time for the start and change its name to 'Polden Bower School'.

### **What will the new school provide?**

The new school will have a range of fully accessible classrooms equipped with the latest teaching technology. There will be spaces and specialised equipment where the children can receive physical therapy and sensory stimulation and a sports hall and outdoor spaces for children to participate in a range of physical activities. The school will also have a café to help post-16 students to develop vocational skills and encourage engagement with parents and the wider community.

### **Who will the new school cater for?**

The new school will cater for children with the most complex needs and learning difficulties who may not be appropriate for mainstream education, including children with significant mobility needs.

## **Why is there a need for a new school?**

The County Council has a statutory duty under the Education Act 1996 to ensure there are sufficient school places available in its area. In addition, the Council has a strategy to make sure pupils are able to attend schools that meet their needs close to their homes.

The school population in Sedgemoor is forecast to increase over the coming years due to a number of factors. For example, there are large housing developments in Bridgwater which will bring in excess of 3,500 dwellings to the town when they are completed. The construction of Hinkley Point C power station is also drawing families to the town.

Children and young people with complex educational and mobility needs thrive best when they have the right environment in which to learn, which the new school building will provide.

## **How is the new school being funded and how much will it cost?**

The County Council is borrowing money to build the new school. It is likely to cost in the region of £20-£22m. The borrowing has been factored into the Council's medium-term financial plan and capital programme.

## **What will happen to the existing school buildings when the new school opens?**

The building at Penrose will continue to provide special needs education and will focus on post-16 provision with an emphasis on promoting independence and employability skills. Elmwood school will be converted to provide more capacity at Robert Blake School, providing additional mainstream school places.

## **How will places be allocated at the new school?**

Any pupil on roll at either Penrose School currently will be automatically enrolled onto Elmwood's roll.

The school will have a virtual catchment area which will cover all of the Sedgemoor area, including Bridgwater, Burnham-on-Sea and Cheddar. Places will be allocated on the basis of assessed educational need of children and only after full consultation with parents and carers.

## **Will the arrangements affect other schools in the area?**

The new school is unlikely to affect other schools in the area due to it catering for children with special educational needs that cannot be met within mainstream education.

## **Have you considered the impact on Equalities?**

This consultation recognises the Public Sector Equality Duty, which places an obligation on the County Council to contribute to making society fairer by tackling discrimination and providing equality of opportunity to all.

The County Council has considered the impact this could have on a range of equality groups including: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation and marriage or civil partnership. These groups are described as 'protected characteristics' in the Equality Act 2012. Our findings to date are that, if the proposal were to go ahead, the impact on the protected groups overall is positive.

## **The Consultation**

## **If the school is already being built, why are you consulting now?**

The County Council has a statutory duty to consult people when it is proposing a significant change to a school or schools (and in this case, we are proposing to close one school and significantly expand the other).

Even if this were not the case, the County Council would still wish to hear the views of people in the locality that may be affected by a significant change in local education provision.

## **Who can respond to the consultation?**

We would like to hear from anyone with comments about the proposals.

This could include:

- Our neighbours, including local residents and businesses
- Pupils, our staff and parents and carers
- Prospective parents
- The local district council

- Each Local Authority which maintains an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or statement of SEN in respect of a child attending the school
- MPs and Local Councillors
- Other schools within the local authority
- Trade Unions
- Any interested bodies from the general public.

If you are a parent or carer of a child at one of the schools, or an employee, you should have received an invitation to provide your views during November although that does not preclude you from participating in this consultation and we continue to welcome your views.

### **Can I object to the proposals?**

Yes, anyone can object or comment on the proposals.

### **What if I require additional information before providing my feedback?**

Please contact us if you require any additional information before submitting your feedback. The e-mail to use is: [Lpandrews@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:Lpandrews@somerset.gov.uk)

If you are a parent or carer of a pupil on roll at Penrose and Elmwood have specific queries or requests for additional information, you may wish to speak to your school initially.

### **How long does the consultation run?**

The consultation period is from Monday 7 December 2020 to Monday 18 January 2021.

### **When is the deadline for submitting views?**

The deadline is 5.00pm on Monday 18 January 2021. Views received after this time may not be able to be taken into account.

### **How can I provide my views?**

There are a number of ways you can submit your views:

(1) You can complete submit views online at the Somerset County Council Consultation portal: <https://somerset.inconsult.uk/>

(2) You can e-mail us at [LPAndrews@somerset.gov.uk](mailto:LPAndrews@somerset.gov.uk)

(3) You can write to us at:

Mr L. P. Andrews  
Commissioning & Performance Officer  
Somerset County Council  
County Hall  
Taunton  
Somerset  
TA1 4DY

### **Will you respond to my feedback?**

Individual queries received during the formal consultation period will not normally receive a response although will be addressed in the consultation report produced at the end of the process and published online for all interested parties.

### **What will happen to my feedback?**

All responses to this consultation will be collated and presented to the Council's Cabinet Member for Children and Families at the end of the consultation period for consideration. Responses will be placed on file and available for public inspection. Consultation responses will be shared with the schools concerned unless you request otherwise.

### **What happens after the consultation?**

The decision-maker will need to consider all feedback and decide whether or not to proceed. It is anticipated that the process will be as follows:

	Expected Date
Consideration of feedback	19 – 22 January 2021
Publication of report	26 January 2021
Final decision is taken	15 February 2021
Implementation period	16 February – 2 September 2021
New School Opens	September 2021

### **Who takes the decision?**

The decision will be taken by Cllr Frances Nicholson, Cabinet Member for Children and Families.

## **What will the Cabinet Member decide?**

There are four possible options available to the decision-maker; the Cabinet Member can decide to reject the proposals; approve them without modification; approve them with some modifications or approve them subject to certain conditions being met.

## **How will the Cabinet Member come to a decision?**

The Cabinet Member will not simply take account of the numbers of people expressing a particular view. Indeed, she will give the greatest weight to responses from stakeholders likely to be most affected by the proposal.

## **How will the decision outcome be made available?**

A copy of the consultation report will be placed on the schools' and Council's websites. It will also be appended to the eventual key decision paper expected in February 2021 which will also be published.

Compiled by:

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