

Consultation information:

Statutory Notice on the Proposal for the Closure of The Cherry Trees Special School

XX Month XXXX



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Introduction

Notice is given in accordance with section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (as amended by the Education Act 2011) and the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 that Tower Hamlets Local Authority intends to discontinue The Cherry Trees Special School with effect from 31 August 2021.

Contact Details

Name and address of Local Authority publishing the proposal:

Tower Hamlets Council, Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent, London, E14 2BG

Name, address and category of school proposed to be closed:

The Cherry Trees Special School, 68 Campbell Rd, London, E3 4EA.

The Cherry Trees is a registered community special school that currently makes day provision for up to 26 boys age 5 – 11 with social emotional and mental health needs.

Implementation

Date on which it is proposed to close the school:

It is proposed to close The Cherry Trees School on 31st August 2021.

It is proposed to implement the closure as follows:

By the time the School is proposed to close, all but seven of the pupils will have completed their primary education and moved onto secondary school. Discussions are being held with the parent/carers of the seven remaining pupils to plan their transfer to alternative provision at a time appropriate to their needs and taking into account parental preference.

Reason for Closure

The Cherry Trees is one of six special schools in Tower Hamlets. It makes provision for primary aged pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) Needs. All pupils have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). Pupils come from across Tower Hamlets and neighbouring boroughs. It occupies a small site in the Bow area.

The Cherry Trees School has in the past been a valued asset to the borough's provision for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). It has previously been rated as outstanding by OFSTED. However, in recent times the school has underperformed and was placed in special measures following its most recent OFSTED Inspection in September 2019. In the period following the inspection, through the process of the Borough's SEND review and the development of its SEND Strategy, it has become evident that the specialist provision offered by Cherry Trees is no longer effective or fit for purpose. In addition, its number of pupils on roll has reduced to the extent that this already small School is no longer financially viable.

The Local Authority's ambition is to create a better, more inclusive, and sustainable education service for the future. It must therefore ensure that it has the right provision in the right place at the right time for all of the borough's children. This is particularly relevant to children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The Local Authority is therefore now in the process of developing a new specialist and more inclusive provision, through the establishment of an SEMH Resource Base within Ben Jonson Primary School, in alliance with Bowden House Secondary SEMH School. This new provision, although not a direct replacement for Cherry Trees, will extend the range of options to meet the diverse needs of vulnerable children who academically are able to access a mainstream curriculum, albeit with significant modification, support and intervention. This supports the key principles of the SEND Strategy.

The Local Authority also needs to make best use of its finances. The Cherry Trees School is now very small and is not financially viable without significant transitional protection from the Local Authority. In the last year the Local Authority has had to allocate an additional £200,000 of transitional protection to the school to enable it to balance its budget. This subsidy is not sustainable and is not an effective use of resources.

Children with highly complex needs in specialist provision need additional help from professionals in health and social care. This is best provided where staff can work better together in a more integrated way. To be able to achieve this, Tower Hamlets needs to create economies of scale and this is not possible at a school with so few pupils.

Pupil Numbers and Admissions

There are currently ten pupils on roll at the School. This number has steadily declined over recent years as follows:

School Year	Commissioned Places	Actual Pupil Numbers
2015/16	26	22
2016/17	26	24
2017/18	26	24
2018/19	26	21
2019/20	26	19
2020/21 (current)	14	10

Displaced Pupils

The proposed timeframe of closure in August 2021 will mean that all except seven pupils will have completed their primary education. For the seven pupils who may remain on the school roll in July 2021, alternative suitable placements will be arranged as part of a personalised pathway, determined in full consultation with the families and over a carefully managed timescale. The Local Authority is acutely aware of the potential impact of the proposals on the stability of these pupils. It is therefore working with their parents /carers to develop a personalised plan for each pupil, to ensure that they get the support and services they need to be able to complete their transition successfully.

Impact on the Community

The provision for children in Tower Hamlets will not diminish as a result of the proposed closure of Cherry Trees. Thus, there will be sufficient capacity within other specialist provision across the borough to accommodate pupils with SEMH. These will be distributed across the new planned specialist facility at Ben Jonson Primary School, other special schools or, in exceptional cases, one of the independent providers in the surrounding area.

The Cherry Trees School has been a part of the community over the past 20 years and it is acknowledged that it has served its community well. However, the School does not currently provide additional services or use of its facilities for the wider community and there are a number of alternative facilities available for hire at other nearby locations. There will therefore be no loss of any enrichment clubs or programmes for local families.

Rural Primary Schools

Not applicable

Balance of Denominational Provision

Not applicable

Nursery Provision

Not applicable

Sixth Form Provision

Not applicable

Travel

Few of the Cherry Trees pupils live in the immediate locality and most travel to school on school bus transport from other parts of Tower Hamlets. There will continue to be travel across the Tower Hamlets area as the Local Authority (LA) is obliged to offer a school place appropriate to a child's need, when the most local provision is deemed unsuitable. Occasionally neighbouring LAs have sought a place for particular children following parental request. However, this necessitates a long home to school journey for these children.

Finances

When a special school closes its finances is returned to the Local Authority High Needs Funding Budget, including any surplus. However, this proposed closure is not a cost-cutting exercise as all money remains ring-fenced to children with SEN and disabilities.

The proposal for closure follows a strategic review, aimed at ensuring that money is spent to provide best value for all children. Best value cannot be achieved for Cherry Trees as its falling roll will require the Local Authority to provide financial protection to ensure that the School can remain open. It therefore forms part of a strategy to significantly reduce the annual spend on financial protection for schools with falling rolls who are otherwise not financially sustainable.

Procedure for Making Representations (objections and comments)

Within four weeks from the date of publication of this proposal any person may object to or make comments on the proposal by:

Email: school.organisation@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Post: School Organisation and Place Planning Manager
Pupil Services and School Sufficiency
Tower Hamlets Children and Culture
Town Hall
Mulberry Place
5 Clove Crescent
E14 5BG

Closing date for responses is 7th January 2021.

We will not be able to consider any responses received after this date. All responses received during the representation period will be published on the Council's website in late January 2021. The website address is:

<https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Home.aspx>