

PROPOSAL TO CLOSE NORTH WALNEY PRIMARY SCHOOL, BARROW-IN-FURNESS

Section 15(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

1. Establishment

Westmorland and Furness Council, School Organisation Team, Westmorland and Furness Council, Post Box 305, Kendal, LA9 9GZ. The school to be discontinued is North Walney Primary and Nursery School, Duddon Drive, Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria, LA14 3TN. It is a community school.

2. Description of the Proposal

To discontinue the provision of primary and nursery level education at North Walney Primary School from 1 September 2024.

3. Evidence

North Walney Primary School is significantly under-subscribed. There has been a sharp decline in the number of pupils on roll at the school since 2019/20 when the school provided education for 84 children. The number of children on roll in the school at the beginning of the academic year 2023/24 was 27. The school has a capacity of 161 based upon its published admission number.

Births in the North Walney catchment area have reduced in recent years, as they have across Walney Island. Due to fewer children being born, there is little prospect of a significant increase in the number of pupils on roll at North Walney Nursery and Primary School.

In addition, there is little opportunity for pupil growth as a result of inward migration because there are no substantial housing developments planned for Walney Island within the next four-year period.

The Local Authority is concerned about the increasing pressure upon both the leadership and staff of North Walney Nursery and Primary School to continue to provide a quality educational offer given the ongoing decline in the number of pupils at the school and the resulting impact on the school's financial position.

In accordance with the statutory guidance for "Opening and Closing of Maintained Schools" (January 2023), reasons for closing a maintained school include situations where there is no predicted demand for a school in the medium to long term, there are surplus places elsewhere in the local area

which can accommodate displaced pupils and where the school is no longer considered viable. The Local Authority considers that the proposal to close North Walney Nursery and Infant School meets these criteria.

4. Objectives of Proposal

The Council is proposing to close North Walney Primary and Nursery School in order to secure future education provision for children in the Barrow planning area given the current and ongoing risks to the financial, and resulting educational, viability of North Walney Primary and Nursery School.

5. Effect on nearby Educational Institutions

There are four other schools (including South Walney Infant and Junior schools together) within a two-mile radius of North Walney Primary School. Three of them are located on Walney Island and all of them have unfilled places. There is substantial unallocated capacity in the area with more than 30% of primary school places projected to remain unfilled during the academic years 2024/25, 2025/26 and 2026/27.

All of the pupils that were on roll at the school at the time of the consultation can be accommodated within the other schools in the area, including at Vickerstown Primary School which is the nearest school to North Walney Primary and Nursery School. Given the availability of places within the area, the proposed closure should not result in increased transport usage as a result of changes to the mode of school travel journeys.

If the proposed is implemented then Local Authority Officers will liaise with staff from North Walney Primary and Nursery school and staff from any receiving schools to ensure that appropriate transition support is in place for children and their families.

All relevant local stakeholders have been asked to provide feedback on the proposal and an equality impact assessment has been undertaken and updated in response to stakeholder feedback.

6. Funding for the Proposal

No additional funding will be required to implement this proposal. However, if the Council's Cabinet decide to approve the proposal for implementation there will be financial implications relating to the school's budget share and cumulative deficit.

The school is funded through the Schools Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Funding is based on the National Funding Formula meaning the majority of the funding is linked to numbers of pupils in school on the

October census day. As a result of the falling pupil numbers at the school, funding is also reducing.

The school closed the 2022/23 financial year with a deficit of £0.161m. Any deficit relating to the school at the point of closure will transfer to the Council and be funded from the DSG contingency budget. The school's remaining budget share for the 2023/24 financial year will be used to support any potential redundancy costs arising as a result of closure.

7. Implementation and Any Proposed Stages for Implementation.

The proposed implementation date for the proposal is 31 August 2024.

However, if following the representation period, the Council's Cabinet takes the decision to proceed with the closure the families of children currently attending the school will be supported in finding an alternative school placement during summer term 2024 so that children can make a smooth transition to their new schools from 1 September 2024.

The Local Authority will ensure that support will be provided to assist parents in applying for new school places and appropriate support will be provided to parent regarding transport and uniform provision. Local Authority Officers will also liaise with staff from North Walney Primary and Nursery school and staff from any receiving schools to ensure that appropriate transition support is in place for children and their families.

Teachers and other staff will be offered bespoke packages of support. This may include career advice, skills development, pension advice, financial planning support, and redundancy estimates in order to enable each member of staff to make the most appropriate decisions about their future based upon their own personal and professional situation.

8. Objections and Comments

Within four weeks of the publication of this notice any person wishing to raise objections or make comments on the proposal may do so in writing to the School Organisation Team, Westmorland and Furness Council, Post Box 305, Kendal, LA9 9GZ or by emailing school.organisation@cumbria.gov.uk by 3 March 2024.