

Mill Meadow Pupil Referral Unit Consultation on the Future of the Unit

Background and Introduction

Mill Meadow is a 24 place Key Stage 2 and 3 Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) based in Gazeley near Newmarket. The Pupil Referral Unit caters for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties who have been permanently excluded or are at risk of permanent exclusion. Pupils joining the unit do so with histories of low attendance, challenging behaviour or having disengaged from mainstream learning. The Unit's interventions provide intensive support and strategies to re-engage pupils in their learning with the objective of their re-integration into mainstream education. The Unit does not provide long term education for its pupils. Pupils join at different times of the year; most are dual-registered with their own school. There are currently 11 pupils on roll and attending the Unit. Staff at the Unit are also delivering outreach to 5 pupils in local schools.

In November 2015, Mill Meadow underwent a Section 5 Ofsted inspection and was judged to be in Special Measures. Since then, the Local Authority (LA) has worked closely with the recently appointed Associate Headteacher and the new Chair of the Management Committee to make improvements at the Unit. While this has been positive, the Unit will have to become a sponsored academy, if it is to continue in operation. To date, it has not been possible to identify a sponsor willing to take on the Unit.

The question of how best to secure sustainable high quality alternative provision in the area has now become a key priority for the Local Authority (LA) and the Unit's Management Committee. This document sets out the background and process for deciding the future of the Unit. It covers:

- The current position and the LA's conclusions
- The options for future alternative provision for young people in the area
- The consultation process
- The decision making timetable
- Details of how you can respond to the consultation

The Present Position

Mill Meadow was inspected by Ofsted in November 2015. The Unit was judged to be inadequate and requiring special measures. In response to this judgement, the LA appointed an Associate Headteacher and new Chair for the Unit's Management Committee who worked with the LA to take firm action, focusing on four key issues:

- to improve the quality of leadership and management, at all levels
- to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment
- to improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and well-being
- to raise achievement of pupils.

In April this year, Ofsted revisited the school as part of its monitoring duties. The inspection confirmed that improvements had been made and deemed that Leaders and Managers were taking effective action towards the removal of special measures.

Although this was very positive news, the Education and Adoption Act 2016 requires the Secretary of State for Education to make an Academy order in respect of a maintained school in England,

which requires significant improvement or special measures. The Department for Education (DfE) did identify a potential sponsor but this Academy Trust subsequently decided that it did not want to pursue sponsorship of the provision. This means that currently there is no sponsor prepared to take on Mill Meadow and the DfE has not been able to identify another.

In the light of this, the LA and Management Committee considered a number of factors:

1. what the implications of delay in finding a sponsor might mean for pupils at the Unit – delay would not be a positive outcome for pupils who need a stable and firm base to flourish;
2. the quality and appropriateness of the present accommodation – the Gazeley accommodation is not considered appropriate and the cost of bringing it up to standard is prohibitive;
3. whether suitable places could be found for pupils at existing alternative providers – the LA can provide places at other alternative providers in the west of the county.

It is the view of the LA that its priority is to provide a stable, high quality environment for pupils attending the provision. In the light of the failure to attract a suitable sponsor and the cost of the refurbishing the present accommodation, the LA's preferred course of action is to close the provision and transfer pupils to other alternative provision settings, as soon as possible. If this course of action is agreed, it would:

- enable pupils to be educated in stable, sustainable and appropriate settings;
- enable pupils to be supported by experienced staff with appropriate resources.

Alternative provision

The LA's proposal is to retain and reallocate the 24 places to other alternative provisions located within West Suffolk. Suitable alternative providers include Kingsfield PRU, the Albany, First Base and Catch 22. This potential solution has been discussed with representatives from the DfE and they are supportive of this proposal.

Some of the pupils require longer term specialist placements and the SEN team is in the process of identifying new provisions for them to move to.

The final decision to place a pupil with another alternative provider will only be taken once the due diligence process has been completed and commissioners are satisfied that high quality alternative provision will be delivered. The due diligence process will be undertaken by a Panel specially constituted to judge alternative providers on:

- The quality of education and learning
- Health and safety arrangements
- Safeguarding of pupils

The transition to other alternative provision in the area would need careful planning. If the proposal is agreed the LA and Management Committee would work together on a transition plan to ensure pupils are well prepared and supported appropriately during any move.

Transport to other provision would follow the County Council's Home to School Transport Policy.

The consultation process

The consultation period will run from Monday 12 September 2016 until Friday 7 October 2016. The Secretary of State for Education lays down regulations indicating those who should be consulted and the LA will of course comply with these.

The timetable

- Wednesday 14 September 2016 at 6.00 pm at West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds, IP33 3YU: Meeting for parents and carers and other interested parties.
- Wednesday 14 September 2016 at 3.45 pm at the Unit: Meeting for staff and their representatives.

Suffolk County Council's Cabinet will consider the responses to the consultation on 15 November 2016 and decide whether to ask the Secretary of State to close the Unit. The final decision will be made by the Secretary of State.

How to have your say

You can give your views on this proposal, including options that may not have been considered:

1. by completing the enclosed questionnaire and returning it in the pre-paid envelope provided
2. by letter addressed to Mill Meadow Consultation, Children and Young People's Services Schools Infrastructure Team, Suffolk County Council, Russell Road, Ipswich, IP1 2BX.
3. by email at the following address: schools@suffolk.gov.uk
4. by on-line survey at www.suffolk.gov.uk/consultations from 12 September 2016.

All responses must be received by Friday 7 October 2016.

