

Consultation Pack

Expansion of Snowfields Academy



Shaping Lives, Transforming Communities



Leigh Academies Trust is a registered company (company no. 2336587) and an exempt charity.
Carnation Road, Strood, Rochester, Kent ME2 2SX

1 The proposal

From 1st September 2022, Leigh Academies Trust (LAT) is proposing to expand Snowfields Academy, a secondary special school for pupils aged 11-18 with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) for primary need type autism. If approved the total capacity of the academy, currently located in new buildings on the fringes of the village of Bearsted near junction 7 of the M20, will increase from 140 to 280. A revised copy of Snowfields Academy's statement of provision to reflect this change is included alongside this significant change consultation.

Concurrently, we are beginning a listening period on the plan for the closure of High Weald Academy (HWA) by 31 August 2022. This follows a substantive decision by the Secretary of State for Education to proceed to close the school, subject to a final agreement of the closure plan. HWA is based in new accommodation which opened in January 2020. If HWA closes on the 31st August 2022, we want to ensure the HWA buildings continue to be used to benefit children in the area. Therefore, as well as proposing to expand Snowfields Academy, we are also consulting on setting up a satellite of Snowfields in Cranbrook using the buildings currently occupied by HWA.



2 Details of the proposal

HWA has just 276 mainstream pupils on roll, which is just a little larger than a one-form entry primary school. As a result, offering a full secondary curriculum to pupils is challenging. HWA's new building which opened in January 2020 can accommodate around 1,000 pupils. It is currently at just over one-quarter capacity. HWA is consistently rated to "require improvement" by Ofsted and its GCSE results are "Well Below Average".

The very low pupil numbers have produced significant budget challenges. Consequently, HWA's financial position is not sustainable. Furthermore, Kent County Council's (KCC's) latest Commissioning Plan demonstrates that year 7 pupil numbers are not forecast to rise sufficiently in the surrounding area during any year which forms part of current forecasts. For these reasons, the Secretary of State is beginning a listening exercise on the closure of HWA with effect from 31st August 2022.

Meanwhile, Snowfields Academy opened on the fringes of the village of Bearsted in September 2020, just 15.6 miles from the proposed satellite in Cranbrook. Snowfields enjoys brand new accommodation delivered as part of the government's free school programme. Going into its second year of operation, it is already oversubscribed. Snowfields caters for pupils aged 11-18 with special educational needs who have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) with primary need type autism.

If the expansion is approved, the main site of Snowfields Academy at Bearsted and satellite at Cranbrook will operate as one school. When full, and on the assumption that this proposal is approved, Snowfields will have 280 pupils on roll in classes of 12/13 pupils. Across all age groups, roughly half will be based at Bearsted and half at Cranbrook.

Whilst each pupil would be designated a "home campus" based on proximity to where they live, all pupils will spend a proportion of their timetable visiting the other site. The exact proportion of time spent visiting the alternative site will increase as pupils progress through the academy and in consultation with them and their parents or carers. However, exceptions

will be made for any pupils for whom this represented an unacceptable barrier to their learning and/or well being given the level of their autism diagnosis. The extent of integration across the two sites will deepen over time.

Pupils will visit the alternative site to their "home campus" in order to access specialist areas of learning. The Bearsted campus contains facilities for hospitality and horticulture; the Cranbrook campus contains a working farm. Without movement between sites, pupils will not be able to access the full range of vocational curriculum opportunities on offer. This arrangement will be made clear to pupils and parents at the point of admission to the academy.

Staff contracts will be varied where appropriate following consultation to enable deployment at either site. All future staff will be employed on the basis that they can be deployed at either site and that this can change over time in line with the needs of the academy. However, for most teaching staff, they will be designated to work at one site for the vast majority of their timetable across an academic year. Members of the middle and senior leadership team will work across both sites with a Vice Principal designated to take an operational lead at either site reporting to the Principal. Each Vice Principal will be supported by an Assistant Principal and team of support staff. Despite where they spend the majority of their time, all middle and senior leaders will take responsibility for whole academy strategic areas across both sites.

All policies will be consistent across both sites including safeguarding, behaviour and teaching and learning. The curriculum will be consistent for all pupils regardless of which site is designated as their "home". This will be delivered via the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme with consistent unit plans and assessment arrangements for every subject. The mission, vision and values will be the same across both sites with all members of staff working hard to ensure consistency whether based at Bearsted or Cranbrook.

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The management of whole academy activities such as open events, parents evenings, staff training and some extracurricular provision will be consistent across the two sites. Given the vast learning that has taken place on such matters during the pandemic, technology will be used wherever possible to ensure opportunities for virtual interaction to connect the two sites together.

The academy will be led by a single Principal and leadership team. The Principal will report in turn to a single governing body which will govern the whole academy, plus Bearsted Primary which is co-located with the Snowfields campus at Bearsted. This arrangement is the same as now. The governing body will operate as a sub-committee of the LAT Board.

3 The need for additional SEN places

KCC's latest Commissioning Plan shows that the number of pupils with an EHCP for autism is rising considerably. 13,499 young people in Kent have an EHCP of which 41.2% are specifically for autism. In the period 2017 to 2020, the number of young people with an EHCP for autism rose by 45%.

Moreover, the group experiencing the highest EHCP percentage growth is young people aged 11-16. The area of Kent with the highest EHCP growth rate is Tunbridge Wells, the borough to which Cranbrook belongs, at 18.5% between 2019 and 2020. The next highest are Tonbridge and Malling and Ashford, both of which neighbour the Cranbrook district.

Locating this expansion within the area of greatest EHCP growth will enable KCC to achieve its stated goal of "avoiding transporting SEN pupils far away from their local communities" in order to attend school. It will also reutilise a brand new school building paid for by the taxpayer which could otherwise become derelict if this proposal is rejected since there is no alternative identified use. The expansion of Snowfields will help KCC to address each of the significant EHCP growth areas summarised below.

- Primary need type - autism;
- Age range - 11-16; and
- Location - Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge and Malling and Ashford.

The future demand for 11-16 special school placements rises considerably in the five-year period up to 2025 from 2,901 to 4,422 for 11-15 year olds and 1,144 to 1,724 for 16-19 year olds. KCC is developing plans to expand the number of specialist places by 712 across all age ranges by 2024, but even if every one of these projects come to fruition, demand will continue to significantly outstrip supply in all future years.

LAT has engaged fully with KCC and the Department for Education (DfE) on this proposal which represents significant value for money and can be made available at relatively short notice. The plan will make extra high-quality provision available quickly for some of Kent's most vulnerable young people with SEN. At the same time the proposal could ensure continued employment for many of the staff affected by the proposed closure of HWA.

4 How to have your say

We are consulting with a range of parties as set out in the relevant DfE guidance. A separate equalities impact assessment is available on request. The consultation starts on **Monday 27th September** and closes on **Monday 8th November**.

You can contribute your views via [this Google Form](#).

Alternatively, you can write to Leigh Academies Trust at:

Carnation Road
Strood
Rochester
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ME2 2SX

There will be no adverse effect on the local community if this proposal is approved. The site at Cranbrook will continue to be used for education as it is now, albeit with just over a quarter of the pupils that the site was originally intended for. This is likely to reduce the transport impact compared to the situation as it is now with most Snowfields pupils travelling to school via KCC-provided transport. At the same time, we are seeking views from parents at HWA to ensure a positive onward educational journey for their children.



Simon Beamish
Chief Executive