

# High Weald Academy Closure

## Further clarifications for parents

*To assist parents during the listening exercise Leigh Academies Trust has put together the following points to provide clarification to parents on some of the issues raised so far during the listening exercise.*

### **Q1. The High Weald Academy building will go to waste, become derelict or be knocked down and used for housing.**

The new building will not go to waste or be taken down for housing. Instead LAT proposes to put the building to good use as a new campus for Snowfields Academy.

### **Q2. HWA was already improving.**

LAT's assessment of the current provision is that Ofsted would not judge the academy favourably, largely due to a much-restricted curriculum, some ongoing poor pupil behaviour which disrupts learning and high rates of absenteeism. Whilst a lot of improvements have been made this term under the new Principal, the chronic problem of very low pupil numbers will ultimately prevent any substantial and sustainable improvement in the long term.

### **Q3. HWA needs more time to show that it can improve.**

HWA has never been judged "good" since it failed under local authority control and became an academy in 2012. The problems at HWA are very deep seated and fundamentally will not be resolved without a significant and long-term increase in student numbers.

### **Q4. Travel times will be unmanageable for pupils and the additional strain on the roads would result in an extra 22,000 car miles every week.**

Only 23% of pupils in years 7-10 actually live in Cranbrook and of these, only 6% of pupils live within easy walking distance (i.e. postcode "TN17 2"). 77% of pupils do not live in Cranbrook with a high proportion living north-west of the school, closer to Paddock Wood (where Mascalls Academy is located) than Cranbrook. The nature of this rural part of Kent means that most pupils already have to travel to get to secondary school by car or public transport. With public transport being provided to Mascalls it is hoped that there will be less car traffic on the roads.

### **Q5. Closing HWA will have a detrimental effect on children with SEN.**

Historic academic results for SEN pupils at HWA are very poor despite the best efforts of our amazing staff. At present the SEN students at HWA account for an unusually high proportion of exclusions and persistent absenteeism. It is evident that despite the expertise of our small staff team, SEN pupils are not doing well at HWA. These pupils will be served much better by transferring to a stronger secondary school where these groups of pupils typically perform much better.

### **Q6. There are lots of new houses being built in the area so the school is needed.**

KCC's commissioning data, which takes account of any new housing developments, shows large surpluses in secondary school places for the whole duration of the commissioning period. Therefore there is no evidence that the need for places is rising. In fact, the opposite is true in some future years.

### **Q7. HWA should be combined with a new SEN school (i.e. Snowfields) on the same site.**

Unfortunately there would not be enough room for the two schools (once full) in one building. The on-site combination of these different educational setting types would also not be complementary. It

would also not address the problem with mainstream pupil numbers as HWA would still struggle to be financially viable and cover its own costs.

**Q8. There has been no consultation with the local community.**

The Secretary of State for Education has taken the decision to close HWA based on a wide range of factors and after a long period of detailed consideration. Feedback is now being taken as per the relevant guidance on the closure plan.

**Q9. The closure is too rushed.**

There is no benefit for pupils remaining in the current under-performing school beyond this academic year, especially whilst such uncertainty hangs over HWA. In addition, it is in year 10 pupils' interest to move to Mascalls in January to ensure much better continuity and higher standards during their GCSE studies. Waiting until next September for pupils in year 10 would almost certainly cause them to significantly underperform.

**Q10. Three are concerns over the future of the school farm.**

LAT will maintain the farm as part of Snowfields Academy. It is hoped that the farm will become a more significant part of the school's curriculum and remain a key facility for the local community.

**Q11. There is no space in other local secondary schools.**

This is not the case. Other local non-selective secondary schools are below their pupil admissions numbers in most year groups due to the lack of secondary-age pupils in the area. We are aware that a number of places have already been taken by HWA students wishing to move in year, but please remember that you are guaranteed a place at Mascalls Academy which is the closest non-selective "good" school as rated by Ofsted.

**Q12. Why weren't parents told before a new year 7 group of pupils joined the school.**

The Minister's decision was only officially confirmed to LAT in a letter dated 24th September 2021.

**Q13. HWA is a small school and can give better attention to pupils.**

This is not the case. The low capacity and staffing numbers at HWA, including pastoral and SEN staff, mean that it is often difficult to fully address pupils' needs. From our considerable experience we find that students are best supported in a larger school with greater staff capacity.

**Q14. Can the closure not be phased over time with no new intake of pupils from September 2022, but existing pupils remaining until they finish key stage 4.**

This would not be viable. It would involve providing a secondary curriculum for an increasingly tiny number of pupils for another 4-5 years. Annual financial deficits would mount considerably and it would be virtually impossible to attract new staff to the school given that its life would be time limited. The quality of education for pupils still at the school would continue to decline up to the point of closure, whenever that might be. It is likely that Ofsted would judge the school to be "inadequate" at some point prior to full closure.

**Q15. Would a partnership with Cranbrook School save HWA.**

LAT has spoken to Cranbrook School about any support they might be able to give, but none of the points offered would be enough to save the school. For instance, the offer of some shared sixth form courses would not help as HWA does not have a sixth form. Whilst wishing to offer a level of support, Cranbrook School would not be willing to sponsor the school themselves as they recognise the very deep seated financial and educational challenges at HWA which cannot be turned around.