

Summary of Statutory Consultation on proposals to make prescribed alterations to the Willows School.

ROTHERHAM METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

NOTICE OF APPLICATION TO MAKE A PRESCRIBED ALTERATION TO THE WILLOWS SCHOOL

Notice is given in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 that Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council intends to make a prescribed alteration to The Willows School, Locksley Drive, Thurcroft, Rotherham S66 9NT from September 2019.

The Willows School is a Local Authority maintained school and is rated as a good school by Ofsted. The school currently has 120 pupils on roll with a range of moderate learning difficulties. The school is currently registered for 100 pupils with an age range of 7 to 16 and is oversubscribed.

It is proposed to increase the number of registered places available and change the age range of the school from September 2019. The school will be expanded in order to accommodate 120 children on roll rather than its current registration for 100 pupils. It is also proposed to change the upper age limit at the school from 16 to 19, by prescribed alteration, to enable the continuity of education.

This Notice is an extract from the complete proposal to the Department for Education. Copies of the complete proposal can be obtained from:

https://www.rotherham.gov.uk/downloads/download/37/school_organisation_and_admissions_public_notices

or:

Christopher Stones, Children and Young People's Services, Riverside House, Main Street, Rotherham S65 1AE (Tel: 01709 254831) Email Christopher.Stones@rotherham.gov.uk

Within four weeks from the date of publication of this proposal (that is by 1st February 2019), any person may object to or make comments on the proposal by sending them to:

Christopher Stones, Children and Young People's Services, Riverside House, SPAA, Floor 2 Wing C, Main Street, Rotherham S65 1AE (Tel: 01709 254831) Email Christopher.Stones@rotherham.gov.uk

Signed: Jon Stonehouse, Strategic Director, Children and Young People's Services

Publication Date: 4th January 2019

Representations received:

Whilst we certainly aren't objecting to this exciting new development for the Willows, I would welcome further information about the LA's view for how the opening of a further special school 6th form will impact on current commissioning arrangements for key stage 5 – specifically at Hilltop school, who take a number of key stage 4 leavers from the Willows and have done for a number of years.

It may be that this provision will target more high functioning young people who would otherwise access FE provision (rather than typically coming to Hilltop). However, I'm sure this development will have an impact on those Willows' families wishing to take up 6th form places at Hilltop in future, and we need to plan and prepare for that as best we can, as that could significantly reduce the size of our Key Stage 5 Rotherham cohort.

We've recently been asking the LA about expanding our own roll lower down school in response to increased demand and have been told that the LA is undertaking a sufficiency review which will then inform next steps of growth in the state special education sector in the borough, though we were also of the understanding that this work hasn't yet completed.

I've copied The Willows Head Teacher into this email as I wouldn't want this query to be misconstrued as an objection: clearly I have a duty to plan strategically for the future of the academies in my MAT and therefore would appreciate more information at this time. Regardless, more choice and diversity of offer for families is a good thing in our view.

LA response:

Thank you for your comments, which will be fed into the decision making process.

I have also copied this reply to Inclusion and Commissioning colleagues for response.

Representation received:

I am writing in support of the proposal by The Willows School to increase their registered places to 120 and to change the upper age limit to 19 years.

As a parent of a child at the school, I see both proposals as a positive step forward and fully support the application.

Representation received:

I wish to express support to increase the places available at The Willows and the increase in age limit to 19 for sixth form opportunities. This is an amazing school which I hope my daughter can continue her education to sixth form, ensuring smooth transition in education.

Representation received:

Our child attends The Willows School in Rotherham. We received a letter from the willows regarding proposals to increase the upper age limit of the school from 16 to 19 to provide a sixth form. Also to increase the number of places available to 120 pupils. We think it is an excellent idea it is an excellent school we would love for our child and others to have the opportunity to stay at school in sixth form.

The school is very popular and it would be great to be able to offer more places for children with additional needs. The care and learning that is provided in the school is outstanding and all the teachers work really hard for the children. It is a happy environment for any child to be in. Our child has thrived since he started there we hope that this is granted.

Representation received:

Hello I would like to say that we currently have a little boy at the Willows school in L1 and to think that when he is older he would be able to access 6th form within this amazing school would be amazing.

Representation received:

I am writing in support of the change in designation of The Willows School to post 16 provision. I am Chair of Governors at The Willows and am extremely proud of the education and opportunities offered to our pupils. In consultation with parents, pupils and staff over several years, the overwhelming request has been to be able to provide for some pupils post-16.

We pride ourselves in looking at every child as an individual and this will in no way alter with the change of designation; for some pupils it will remain the right move to access SLD or college provision. However there is a sizeable number of pupils, and their families, that fall between these two positions who will benefit from the continuity of input from our specialist staff and provision such as the Life Skills bungalow, vocational centre, horticulture facilities and access to wider post-16 opportunities.

We already provide a member of staff who supports pupils at transition to college, however this cannot entirely stop some pupils, who are not yet ready for college, from becoming NEET. Giving them extra time with staff who understand their needs can avoid this situation.

I wholeheartedly support the proposal on behalf of the Governing Body and the pupils who will benefit from the change.

Representation received:

Please refer to the Proposal for 6th Form at the The Willows School, I would like to support for this consideration. The Willows is an excellent school and extending the education will significantly help number of students.

Representation received:

I am writing in regards to the proposed changes for The Willow's School, Thurcroft, for the number of registered places to be increased and also increase the age limit from 16 to 19.

I am fully in support of these changes, I cannot stress enough how much this school has helped in the last 12 months with my daughter's education and social development. It would mean a lot to us as a family to know she will be able to continue her education at The Willow's right up to the age of 19.

If it wasn't for The Willows School my daughter would be home schooled, this is due to not being able to cope with the size of the secondary local schools.

I think it would make a massive difference for the school, and the children to be granted the extra places and the sixth form, they do a fantastic job, and I can't praise the school enough.

Representation received:

WE ARE WRITING TO YOU TO SAY THAT WE ARE IN FAVOUR OF THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS WHICH HOPEFULLY WILL TAKE PLACE WITHIN THE WILLOWS SCHOOL AT THURCROFT.

WE ARE ESPECIALLY EXCITED ABOUT THE AGE RANGE INCREASING FROM 16 TO 19 AS THIS WE FEEL WILL BENEFIT OUR TWO CHILDREN WHO BOTH ATTEND THE SCHOOL (AT THE MOMENT AGE 10 AND 11)

BUT WE FEEL THAT THIS PROPOSAL WILL ENABLE ALL THE CHILDREN AT THE SCHOOL (NOT JUST OURS) TO HAVE THE CONTINUITY WITH EDUCATION, SURROUNDINGS, STAFF AND FREINDSHIPS.

THE OVERALL PROPOSAL WILL BE VERY WELCOME.

Representation received:

I think it would be in the best interest of the community that the willows school becomes a post 16.

Representation received:

I think it's a fantastic idea to have a post 16 at the Willows School.

Representation received:

I am fully supportive of Willows offering 16+ to their students. I feel this would benefit the students so much and prepare them more for the world of work.

Representation received:

My son attends Willows School and at present is in his final year there. The school has been very beneficial for my son. He has improved in all spheres of life. His academic work is at a great level and his social skills have improved considerably so much so that he is close to becoming independent. He has a great rapport with all the teachers and feels safe and secure in the environment.

The proposal for an extended sixth form would be the ideal place for the transition my son needs into employment. The small class size is ideal as there would be less distraction for him. I like the emphasis on self-learning but also having rules and boundaries to work within.

The school has all the attributes my son needs to develop, safety encouragement, empowerment and learning the skills he needs to head on the path to independence. We feel he would excel there he likes learning and certain subjects he really enjoys.

The school has very good academic standards and the Ofsted report was good and improvement has been made. I think the proposal is a great idea for the school and the pupils and be of great benefit. It would also ease pressure on parents who worry what will happen as schooling ends, knowing they can continue to develop and grow seamlessly. Thank You

Representation received:

We are writing to offer our comments about this proposal. As parents of a daughter who attends The Willows currently, we wholly support this proposal. She has thrived since she transferred to this school, and we have found that this MLD environment with its focus on maximising a child's academic achievements alongside developing life skills and independence has already had a huge impact on her capability and confidence; and she has built strong peer group relationships. Effective transition to another school/educational establishment takes time and having the extended 6th form provision at this school would allow this continuity of education to continue. In our view this is particularly valuable for these Y11 students who, due to their learning levels/maturity, often need those extra years to further develop their life skills and have a clear idea about their choices for the future. Having looked around the other schools and FE provision in Rotherham in preparation for a 6th form transition move for her, we have found the school choices to be limited given they largely meet SLD needs, and she is not yet ready for an FE setting. Being able to remain at The Willows for the 6th form would provide continuity in her learning, the environment and relationships with peers and staff, who are already well informed about her capability and areas for development. Additionally, she is already familiar with the journey to/from school, and therefore continuing at The Willows would maximise learning time otherwise needed to be spent on transition planning and adjustment from Easter onwards this school year, and for the first part of the next academic year.

In summary, our view is that The Willows provides excellent learning and support currently, and is a strong part of the local community, which will be strengthened further by this extended provision. We support this proposal for continuing provision up to the age of 19, both for our own daughter, and also as an excellent additional facility for future Y11s in the borough to move into.

Representation received:

I am writing in support of the proposal to increase the number of registered places available at The Willows Special School. The school will be expanded in order to accommodate 120 children on roll rather than its current registration for 100 pupils.

It is also proposed to change the age range of the school from September 2019, increasing the upper age limit at the school from 16 to 19, to enable the continuity of education.

My daughter is a current pupil at The Willows and would benefit greatly from these proposed changes. Change is very disruptive, and the opportunity to continue her education in a setting that she is both relaxed and learning is our main concern. As such, my husband and I would like to register our support.

Representation received:

My child is currently a pupil at Willows school in Thurcroft. Recently the school has applied for an extension to the age of the pupils taught in the school and an increase in the numbers of pupil allocation. The school is very well organised with a fantastic range of activities and educational experiences that compliment and run alongside the curriculum. We have always been impressed by the commitment and quality of the teaching and support staff, as they prepare the pupils to engage effectively and socially with the wider world after leaving education. The school is very popular and held in high regard by many people in the community. We believe that extending the age of education to 19, would further improve the chances and opportunities of the pupils and students, to make a confident step into the wider world, and empower them to make a more significant contribution to society.

The approach of the school to enable the pupils with relevant and confidence building social and practical skills is hugely appreciated, and vital for the pupil's development. We are aware that because of the popularity and the outcomes of the education praxis and ethos, there is a waiting list of people seeking to place their children in Willows school. Increasing the numbers of pupils in the school, will enhance the overall experience and provide further opportunities for social engagement and inclusion.

Because of the emotional challenges many of the pupils' face, consistency and stability in their educational environment and development is highly significant. Changing school at 16 for just two years and the subsequent upheaval and disruption of that move, would be, in our view, detrimental to the pupil's overall development. We are aware that changes in life do come to all of us, but the transitional period for many young people with special needs would be better extended until the age of 19.

We fully support the proposal to increase the number of pupils at the school and also the change in the age range to 19.

Representation received:

I wish to put forward a brief statement. My Son attends The Willow School. I feel it's the best option for him. And is due to leave in July 2019.

Am also delighted to hear they have made a proposal for extending upon 18/19.

In my interest alone. It's the perfect place. And I see all the time some pupils are more vulnerable than others. And at least at The Willow School. They are getting the best education to make them more ready for the next stage in life.

Representation received:

I am emailing you about the future plans to expand The Willows School.

My child has attended this school since October 2017 after being at a local main stream school since starting his education. My son has autism and would not have been able to continue his education at a mainstream comprehensive and The Willows was the best school for him. The changes I have seen in my child over the past year are unbelievable, and our lives have become easier.

The Willows School is amazing. My son is happy and loves to go to school now every day. He has learned more and progressed in the past year than he ever did at his previous school. The staff all give 100% of themselves all the time. Nothing is too much trouble for the children they look after. They are positive, caring and well trained to deal with children with special needs, and are proud of the school they work at.

I know from my son attending there and attending parents meetings that this school would give students between 16 and 19 that extra confidence they need to continue their studies and to mature and look at what they want to move on to in the future.

I know I would be looking at my son staying on at The Willows to further his education even at this point of his time there. Expanding the school in my opinion can only be a positive move forward for the school and the children's future there.

Representation received:

I am emailing my support for the proposals to change the number of children and the upper age limit of children attending The Willows School.

I am a parent of one of the children who currently attends this school. He has very complex special needs and was struggling in all areas in mainstream school. The school has made a huge difference to his quality of life and mental state. It has changed him from feeling like he was stupid, being withdrawn, quiet, unsure of himself and unhappy to being happy, growing in confidence and being able to be proud of his achievements.

Despite having significant, well documented medical needs and learning and behavioural difficulties it took a whole school year to complete the process of transferring him from mainstream school. This was due (in part) to the school being full. As I believe the special schools in Rotherham often are. Being able to extend the number of pupils allowed on the role will enable other children who are in desperate need to be taught out of mainstream school to receive a place. The importance of being taught at a special school is huge to a certain group of children who otherwise would fail and not receive the support they need to succeed in mainstream school.

These children have the potential to be active, valueable members of our society but without the correct input when they are children to nurture them and teach them the life skills they need they would fail to thrive and achieve as adults.

This is also why I believe extending the upper age limit of the school would be of huge benefit to these children. Many who attend The Willows have a functional age lower than their actual age. So providing them with an extra 3 years of sixth form opportunities while they are still maturing would have a great impact on their well being, personal development and skills needed to be successful.

Representation received:

I would like to add an option to the application to extend the age range at The Willows School, I have two children that attend this school and if they were able to continue their education within this same provision for a longer period of time would be amazing for them both. I feel that this area of Rotherham lacks 16+ provision and would benefit many students and also help overall in Rotherham to extend the number of places for specialist education for students with additional needs age 16+.