

**DELEGATED DECISION BY CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN,
EDUCATION & YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICES
19 March 2025**

WOODEATON MANOR SCHOOL RESIDENTIAL PROVISION

Report by Director for Children's Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to:

Approve the proposal from the governing body of Woodeaton Manor School to permanently close the residential provision at the school.

Executive Summary

2. The Interim Executive Board (IEB) of Woodeaton Manor School, the body responsible for governance of the school, has proposed that the temporary closure of residential provision at Woodeaton Manor School is made permanent.
3. As a prescribed alteration under the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013, this requires a statutory consultation and decision-making process. While the governing body of a Foundation School is the only body able to propose this change, the decision-maker is the local authority.
4. The Cabinet Member is now required to make a decision on the proposal in accordance with the statutory prescribed alteration procedures.

Background

5. Woodeaton Manor School was inspected by Ofsted 7 to 8 November 2023, and was assessed as "inadequate", which resulted in the governing body being replaced by an Interim Executive Board (IEB), and the school being required to convert to an academy. That conversion is currently scheduled to take place on 1 June 2025.
6. The residential provision at Woodeaton Manor School was inspected by Ofsted 30 October to 1 November 2023. At that time, the school was recorded as having 10 residential places, available for four days a week during term time, but it was noted that the residential provision had not been used since July 2023. There has continued to be no use of the residential provision since then.

7. The Ofsted inspection assessed the residential provision as “inadequate”, noting “serious and widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected and their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and the care and experiences of children and young people are poor.”
8. While the IEB has made progress in addressing management and safeguarding arrangements, concerns raised in the inspection included the unsuitability of the residential accommodation available, which does not meet the relevant national minimum standards.

Proposed alteration

9. It is proposed to formally close the residential provision, making permanent the “pause” in residential provision since 2023.
10. There are no current pupils at Woodeaton Manor School with Education, Health and Care Plans requiring residential provision; as such it is identified that restarting residential provision is not required to meet the needs of pupils, and the county council SEND team does not intend to start commissioning residential places in the foreseeable future.
11. The school is due to convert to an academy, and the incoming academy trust (Propellor) also does not intend to restart residential provision for pupils post-conversion. Given the provision was suspended prior to the academisation order being issued, the Trust has requested that, based on safeguarding concerns, this provision be formally closed pre-transfer.

Process

12. Closure of residential provision at a school is defined as a significant change under the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013, requiring a prescribed alterations statutory consultation and decision-making process. Details of this process are set out in *Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers* (last updated October 2024) referred to in this report as the *Guidance*.
13. Woodeaton Manor School is currently a Foundation School. Governing bodies of Foundation Schools have the statutory power to propose the removal of boarding provision; the decision-maker is the Local Authority – in this case, Oxfordshire County Council.
14. The council has followed the statutory process for a significant change. A statutory notice was published by the county council on 30 January 2025, followed by the required 4-week representation period, ending 27 February 2025.
15. Seven representations were received and are summarised below in the Consultation section of this report.

16. Under the prescribed process, the local authority must decide whether to approve the proposed alteration within 2 months of the representation period ending, i.e. by 27 April 2025, or the proposal must be referred to the Schools Adjudicator.
17. If approved, the closure would formally take effect on 1 April 2025.

Considerations for the decision maker

18. The DfE Guidance states that decision makers should consider whether the proposal will meet or affect the needs of parents, raise local standards and narrow attainment gaps.
19. The proposed alteration would address some of the concerns raised in the 2023 Ofsted inspection, which highlighted the unsuitability of the previous arrangements. Formal closure of the residential provision would ensure the governing body, and incoming academy trust, are able to fully focus on raising educational standards at the school. Formal closure would have no impact in practice on families and children, as the accommodation previously used for residential provision is not fit-for-purpose, and the provision has not been in use since 2023.
20. In making a decision on a proposal to remove boarding provision from a school, the decision maker should consider whether there is a state funded boarding school within reasonable distance from the school and whether there are satisfactory alternative boarding arrangements for those currently in the school and those who may need boarding places in the foreseeable future.
21. Of the children now at Woodeaton Manor School, none has a requirement for residential provision included in their Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP). Oxfordshire County Council's SEND team does not expect to require residential provision at Woodeaton Manor School in the future. There is, therefore, no requirement for alternative boarding arrangements, if the residential provision at Woodeaton Manor School is closed.

Financial Implications

22. Woodeaton Manor School received additional revenue funding for the operation of residential provision. The permanent closure of the residential provision will therefore mean a permanent end to this funding stream, alongside the permanent end to the revenue costs of running residential provision. The school will continue to receive revenue funding based on the nature of provision it delivers and its pupil numbers. There is one staff member affected by the closure of the residential provision. If no suitable alternative position is found, then this employee is at risk of redundancy and redundancy costs are estimated to be £3,400. That cost would be borne by the county council. It is appropriate that we agree to cease the residential provision formally, along with the funding.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Issues

23. The proposals set out in this report involve a legal process which the Council has followed, including statutory consultation. The recommendation for a change of category results in a change of legal status for the school.
24. Closure of residential provision at a school is covered by The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 ('the Prescribed Alterations Regulations') which should be read in conjunction with Parts 2 and 3 and Schedule 3 of the Education and Inspections Act (EIA) 2006 (as amended by the Education Act (EA) 2011) and the Prescribed Alterations Regulations.
25. The proposed change is subject to the "Guidance", as set out in "Making Significant Changes ('Prescribed Alterations') to maintained schools" last updated October 2024. This Guidance is for proposers and decision-makers. The Guidance states that the statutory proposal must contain sufficient information for interested parties to make a decision on whether to support or challenge the proposed change. The proposal should be accessible to all interested parties and should therefore use 'plain English'. The full proposal must be published on a website (e.g. the school or LA's website) along with a statement setting out:
 - (a) how copies of the proposal may be obtained;
 - (b) that anybody can object to, or comment on, the proposal;
 - (c) the date that the representation period ends;
 - (d) and the address to which objections or comments should be submitted.
26. A brief notice (including details on how the full proposal can be accessed e.g. the website address) must be published in a local newspaper. Within one week of the date of publication on the website, the proposer must send a copy of the proposal and the information set out in the paragraph above to the Governing Board and any other body or person that the proposer thinks are appropriate.
27. The representation period must last for four weeks from the date of the publication. During this period, any person or organisation can submit comments on the proposal to the LA to be taken into account by the decision-maker. It is also good practice for representations to be forwarded to the proposer to ensure that they are aware of local opinion.

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Staff Implications

28. While school staff have previously been employed to operate the residential provision, as the residential provision has not been in use since 2023, staff have been redeployed to other functions in the school. There are two posts still shown in the school staffing structure relating to the residential provision, which will no longer exist. One post is vacant, and the school is considering potential suitable alternative roles with the affected post holder. If no suitable alternative position is found, then this employee is at risk of redundancy and redundancy costs are estimated to be £3,400.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

29. Decision makers should be satisfied that proposed changes will not adversely impact any particular group, including those with protected characteristics or who are disadvantaged (for example, those who are eligible for free school meals or pupil premium).
30. When it was operating, the residential provision was clearly valued by pupils and their families, but as the residential provision has not been in use since 2023, and none of the current pupils has a requirement for residential provision included in their Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP), the proposal to now formally close the provision is not considered to have a direct equality and inclusion implication. It is not usual for maintained special school in Oxfordshire to offer residential provision, so closure brings the provision at Woodeaton into line with other schools.

Sustainability Implications

31. There are no sustainability issues, or implications for travel and accessibility.

Risk Management

32. The Ofsted inspection assessed the residential provision as “inadequate”, noting “serious and widespread failures that mean children and young people are not protected and their welfare is not promoted or safeguarded and the care and experiences of children and young people are poor.”
33. While the IEB has made progress in addressing management and safeguarding arrangements, concerns raised in the inspection included the unsuitability of the residential accommodation available, which does not meet the relevant national minimum standards.

34. Permanent closure of the residential provision will improve safeguarding and reduce risk at the school

Consultations

35. The statutory representations period ran from 30 January 2025 to 27 February 2025. Seven representations were received. One of these was neutral, from another special school offering residential provision should it be required. Two respondents strongly supported the closure, but gave no details of their reasons. One respondent somewhat objected and three strongly objected. Three of those respondents objecting detailed their reasons.
36. The reasons given for objecting were:
- (a) When the provision was operating, it gave pupils with SEND the opportunity to do things without their parents, and develop independence.
 - (b) The provision had received a Good Ofsted report as recently as February 2023, before being rated Inadequate in November 2023.
37. It is recognised that the pupils who were able to benefit from the residential provision when it was operating benefitted from a variety of opportunities for social and emotional development, tailored to their special needs. And this was valued by families. However, the school, county council and incoming academy trust agree that in the short-medium term, improving educational standards at the school must be the highest priority, and that addressing the significant concerns about the suitability of the residential provision could be a barrier to making swifter progress with improvement of the school as a whole.
38. The Inadequate Ofsted rating of November 2023 was based on concerns about management and resourcing of the provision, and also the physical accommodation, which would require significant capital investment to bring up to the required national minimum standards. While some of the issues raised have been addressed in the meantime, others cannot be quickly addressed. Given that the provision has already been out of use for nearly two years, it is considered more transparent to formal close the provision rather than leave it paused with no realistic timescale for being able to reopen it.

Lisa Lyons
Director for Children, Education & Families

Annex 1:	Statutory Notice
Annex 2:	Statutory Proposal
Background papers:	Nil
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