

Appendix 2 - Concerns and alternative proposals raised during informal consultation

Concerns raised during informal consultation

1. Quality of provision at Leopold Primary School and why the local authority is not proposing to close a school with more spare places / budget pressures or a lower Ofsted rating

A number of responses and comments highlighted the high quality of the educational provision at Leopold Primary School and questioned why the Gwenneth Rickus site had been chosen for closure when there are schools in the area with fewer children on roll, budget pressures and/ or a lower Ofsted rating.

Response:

96.8% of mainstream primary schools in the borough are rated as good or outstanding by Ofsted and this includes Leopold Primary School.

The local authority considered several factors pertaining to each school in Primary Planning Area 4 when making the proposal to consult on the closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site. These included current Pupil Admission Numbers (PANs) and current informal capping arrangements, spare capacity, demand patterns and how easily demand could be absorbed by other local schools, Ofsted ratings, the proximity to other schools, budget positions and performance. The local authority considered these factors in the round, with the geographic location of schools a key driver for selecting the Gwenneth Rickus site for closure. There are seven other schools located within less than one mile of the site providing parental choice.

The Governing Board's written consultation response focused on the 'lack of logic' for selecting the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School for closure and this was reflective of feedback received during the public consultation meetings.

The Governing Board's analysis of school level information used by the local authority to inform the Primary Planning Area Four school estate review ranked Leopold Primary School as being fourth in the list of schools to be closed. The three schools ranked above Leopold Primary School do not include The Stonebridge School that it was suggested in public consultation meetings should be closed instead of Gwenneth Rickus site.

The Local Authority does not agree with the governing board's analysis. The majority of schools in Planning Area Four have spare places and are operating in buildings that are larger than the pupil population they serve. In selecting the Gwenneth Rickus site for closure, the Local Authority is reducing the size of Leopold Primary School and not closing a local community school.

The Local Authority acknowledges the work of the leadership team of Leopold Primary School to deliver a good standard of educational provision as judged by Ofsted. All schools in Planning Area Four other than one school are currently rated as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.

2. Identity of Gwenneth Rickus site as a standalone school

Parents highlighted that they considered the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School to be a separate school and not related to education on the Leopold Hawkshead Road site. Parents of children attending the Hawkshead Road site expressed the same view.

Response:

Up until September 2013 Leopold Primary School operated from the Hawkshead Road site only. The expansion of the school was originally in response to a shortfall of primary places across Brent and Leopold Primary School officially became a split site school operating from the two sites in 2015. The school has one leadership team under an Executive Headteacher.

During the consultation it became apparent that the two sites operate independently, other than the shared leadership team, and the local authority recognises that, for parents, the Leopold Primary School Gwenneth Rickus site is the school that their child attends. Children attending the site do not travel to the Hawkshead Road site for any of their education. The Governing Board's written response was pleased to note officers acknowledged their school was "not just Leopold Primary School with the Gwenneth Rickus bulge site".

If the proposal to close the site is taken forward, the implementation plan will consider how best to support children and families during the period of transition working with the leadership of the school. The current plan to phase the closure of the site aims to ensure that all children attending the site can complete their current Key Stage on the site to minimise disruption to families.

3. More difficult travel arrangements/ Families wanting siblings to attend the same school

Parents suggested any proposals to move their children to the Hawkshead Road site of Leopold Primary School would make travelling to school much more difficult. Families with siblings of children at the Gwenneth Rickus site are assuming their children will be able to attend the same school, and there are several large families who will be impacted.

Response:

The local authority is proposing a phased closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site. This would involve ceasing Reception intakes from September 2025 and moving any children who attend the site in September 2027 to the Hawkshead Road site to complete their education. This means that only children in Reception and Year 1 and Year 2 in academic year 2024/25 would need to move to the Hawkshead Road site if the site closed in summer 2027. The current Year 3 would complete their Year 6 in July 2027 and not be directly affected by the closure.

The Local Authority recognises this may mean a longer journey for some children depending on where they live. It is also recognised that the closure proposal could have an impact on families who have children currently educated at the Leopold Primary School Gwenneth Rickus site and younger children who have not yet started school, as it would not be possible for them to attend the Leopold Primary School Gwenneth Rickus site from September 2025. Having children attending more than one school could be particularly difficult for large families.

While it will not be encouraged by the local authority, parents would be able to choose to move their children to an alternative school. There are seven other Primary schools located within less than one mile than the Gwenneth Rickus site providing parental choice with the average travel distance of 0.52 miles. There are also seven schools located within one mile of the Hawkshead Road site with 0.57 miles being the average distance to other schools.

Distance from the Gwenneth Rickus site to other Primary Planning Area Four Primary Schools	Distance from the Hawkshead Road site to other Primary Planning Area Four Primary Schools
Mitchell Brook 0.3	Newfield 0.4
Brentfield 0.4	St Joseph's RC 0.4
St Joseph's RC 0.5	John Keble CE 0.5
St Mary's CE 0.5	St Mary's CE 0.5
The Stonebridge 0.6	Harlesden 0.7
Our Lady of Lourdes RC 0.6	Mitchell Brook 0.7
Harlesden 0.8	Donnington 0.8
Leopold Hawkshead 0.8	Leopold Gwenneth Rickus 0.8

Any parents wishing to change schools as a result of travel arrangements or wishing to have their children attend the same school would be supported with their application by the Local Authority's School Admissions team.

4. Instability of pupil numbers and staffing

Concerns were raised that any proposals to close the site would lead to instability of pupil numbers and staff leaving to secure jobs elsewhere.

Response:

While it was made clear during the informal consultation meetings that parents and carers do not need to move their children from the school, the Local Authority acknowledges that some parents and carers may choose to move their children from the Gwenneth Rickus site of the school before it is due to close either to the Hawkshead Road site or to other schools, leading to lower class numbers. It is also recognised that staff may choose to seek employment in other schools due to concerns about job security. If the closure proposal proceeds, the Local Authority and the school would work together to manage implementation of the proposal in the least disruptive way.

5. Concerns that the council is not supporting the local community in terms of regeneration and housing developments.

Some parents questioned the local authority's projection figures, highlighting examples where they were aware of a lot of large families moving to the area, and asking what would happen if demand in the area rose significantly in the future.

Response:

The local authority uses projections provided by the Greater London Authority (GLA) to inform school place planning. GLA projections are informed by national data inputs such as census data and birth rates together with locally held information on migration patterns and planned housing growth. Pupil projection figures are a good indicator of need, rather than a definitive position, and are updated annually to reflect changes in underlying data. The most recent projections have been underpinned by 2021 census data.

At the time the Gwenneth Rickus Site of Leopold Primary School was opened and when other schools were expanded, there was anticipated demand for the planned places. However, Reception intakes have since reduced and the most recent projections provided by the GLA indicate further reductions in demand over the next few years. This is the case across London as well as in Brent.

Even if demand was to exceed current projections in the future, there would need to be very large increases in the local birth rate for demand to take up all surplus school places in Primary Planning Area Four if the Gwenneth Rickus site was to close. This is unlikely given the current birth rates in Brent and trends across London.

6. Governors have been responsible in managing the impacts of falling rolls

In their written response, the Governing Board expressed that it had been forward thinking in terms of managing the impact of falling rolls on the school's budget, for example undertaking a staff restructure, and were exploring ways to increase the school's income using buildings and the annex at Gwenneth Rickus for the benefits of the local community and children in this area.

Response:

It is recognised that the Governing Board have taken actions to respond to falling rolls and to manage the budget implications. The Local Authority would expect all schools to do so and to develop future plans to ensure the quality of education provided can be protected.

Alternative proposals submitted during informal consultation.

1. Continue to monitor pupil numbers.

The local authority has been working closely with schools across the borough over the past five years to monitor and manage the impacts of falling demand. A School Place Planning Working Group, comprising officers and headteachers was established in the 2022/23 academic year focused on planning areas where there is falling demand. This group identified there was a need to act in Primary Planning Area Four given the high level of spare places (2012) in the area. The Local Authority is of the view that action to address this is required to ensure the sustainability of schools in the area. The issues of falling primary rolls in Brent mirror the position across London and other London local authorities are undertaking action to reduce the number of local school places.

2. Reduce all schools in Brent to one form entry.

Reducing all of Brent schools to one form entry is not a viable option. One form of entry schools can be more vulnerable to the impacts of falling rolls than larger schools. and this proposal would not protect the long-term sustainability of all schools in Brent.

This would not be viable as spare capacity is not evenly distributed across all of the Local Authority's six Primary Planning Areas. Some Planning Areas are currently operating near to capacity, while others have a high number of spare places, as is the case in Primary Planning Area 4 where Leopold Primary School is located. The local authority needs to maintain some spare capacity for in-year admissions and the [School Place Planning Strategy 2024 - 2028](#) details the percentage of spare capacity available in each Primary Planning Area.

3. Cap the Pupil Admission Numbers (PANs) of all schools in Brent.

Informal caps can support schools by limiting their intake in a particular year group where demand is below PAN. The advantage of informal capping arrangements is that they can be implemented quickly in response to a current situation and can easily be removed if there is an increase in demand in an area. However, implementing informal caps is not a long-term sustainable solution nor does it allow for good school organisation planning and staff and budget management.

4. Reducing the pupils of both Gwenneth Rickus and Hawkshead Road site, so that each site operates as a one form of entry school

The maintenance costs to run the two sites will remain the same as they are now and this is not an efficient use of the school's budget allocation from the Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG), which would reduce if Leopold Primary School became a two form of entry school operating from two sites. Similarly, the leadership capacity to run two sites is more expensive than for a two form of entry school operating on one site.

As is the case with many schools across Brent, Leopold Primary School is predicting an in-year deficit using some of the school's surplus budget reserves to meet costs. The school's current financial plans suggest that school's reserves balance will be spent by March 2025/26 on goods and services including some planned capital works. Keeping both sites open with lower numbers on a long-term basis could create budget pressures for the school. The school could be at risk of a deficit budget if it continued to run on two separate sites with each operating only one form of entry.

5. Keep the Gwenneth Rickus site open and use the empty space for pupils with SEND/ other educational purposes or sell parts of the building

The removal of capacity through closing the Gwenneth Rickus site would direct future intakes to other schools in the area. Keeping the Gwenneth Rickus site open would not support increasing numbers on the Hawkshead Road site that also has some spare places or other schools in Planning Area Four whose Reception intakes would increase if the Gwenneth Rickus site was not a future option for parents.

Using the empty space on the Gwenneth Rickus site for educational purposes could form part of a phased closure process. This is not, however, a long-term solution as there is insufficient demand for the number of mainstream places across Primary Planning Area Four.

One of the principles from the [School Place Planning Strategy 2024 - 2028](#) is to ensure any measures taken that remove capacity from Brent schools do not negatively impact on the need to ensure sufficient places in the future. If the proposal proceeds, the Local Authority will consider using the site for alternative educational use.

6. Move all children from the Hawkshead Road site on to the Gwenneth Rickus site.

This is a potential option which could be further pursued if the leadership team and governing body of Leopold Primary school felt the Gwenneth Rickus site was a better site to retain. However, Leopold Primary School has operated on the Hawkshead Road site for over 100 years and the school is surrounded by family housing. It is the Local Authority's view that it would be better to close the Gwenneth Rickus site that has only been opened for around 10 years.

7. Amalgamation with another school and retaining both of the Leopold Primary school sites.

The Legislation does not allow the Local Authority to amalgamate two schools and establish a new community primary school. Furthermore, the Legislation provides the Council with the authority to close community schools but it does not have the same authority over academies, Foundation or Voluntary Aided schools. This does not mean that the Local Authority would not want to work with both Dioceses, academies and the DfE's Regional Director in this regard.

An amalgamation proposal would effectively mean either closing another school and the children moving on to the roll of Leopold Primary School and continuing their education either on the Gwenneth Rickus or Hawkshead Road site or closing two schools and opening a new free school academy under the Presumption Process. This is not considered a better option than the proposal to close the Gwenneth Rickus site, as it would be more disruptive and impact on more schools and their communities.