



Cabinet
28 May 2024

**Report from the Corporate Director
Children and Young People**

**Lead Member – Cabinet Member for
Children, Young People and
Schools
(Councillor Gwen Grahl)**

**Outcome of Formal Consultation on School Organisation
Proposals for Leopold Primary School in Primary Planning
Area 4**

Wards Affected:	Stonebridge & Roundwood
Key or Non-Key Decision:	Key
Open or Part/Fully Exempt: <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
List of Appendices:	Three Appendix 1: Statutory notice Appendix 2: Governing Board response to the consultation Appendix 3: Equalities Impact Assessment
Background Papers:	None
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1.0 Executive Summary

1.1. This report provides Cabinet with a summary of the formal consultation undertaken between 29 February 2024 and 28 March 2024 on the proposal to implement a phased closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School.

2.0 Recommendation(s)

2.1 That Cabinet agrees to:

- (a) The variation of Leopold Primary School's Published Admission Number (PAN) from 120 to 60 from September 2025; and
- (b) The phased closure of provision on the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School between September 2025 and the end of July 2027.

3.0 Detail

3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword:

3.1.1 Borough-wide projections indicate that demand for Reception school places will continue to fall over the next 5 years. Planning Area 4 has the greatest number and percentage of spare places of all the six Primary Planning Areas in Brent. Schools in the area have been managing the impact of falling rolls for several years with the support of the Local Authority. The request to reduce capacity at Leopold Primary School is to support the long-term sustainability of all schools in the area.

3.1.2 School place planning supports the Borough Plan Strategic Priority 4: The Best Start in Life, by ensuring there are sufficient school places for children and young people in Brent and supporting every child and young person to access high quality education in the borough.

3.2 Background

3.2.1 The primary school population across London, including Brent is reducing. Between 2012-2021 there was a 17% decrease of the birth rate in London, which is a reduction of 23,225 live births across the capital. As a result the GLA has predicted a 7.6% decrease in reception pupil numbers across London from 2022-23 to 2026-27 (from 96,424 pupils to 89,121 pupils over this period). This roughly equates to a decrease of 243 classes of children. The falling birth rate is compounded by Brexit and migration patterns following the pandemic. The impact on falling demand in Brent is reflected in the updated School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028 approved by Cabinet in October 2023.

3.2.2 The number of children applying for primary school places in Brent has been reducing since a peak in 2017. The most recent population forecasts at ward level indicate this trend will continue for the next few years. Primary Planning Area 4, which covers the wards of Roundwood, Stonebridge and Harlesden and Kensal Green, has very high levels of surplus places currently and projections indicate a further reduction over the next few years (Brent School Place Planning Strategy 2024-2028).

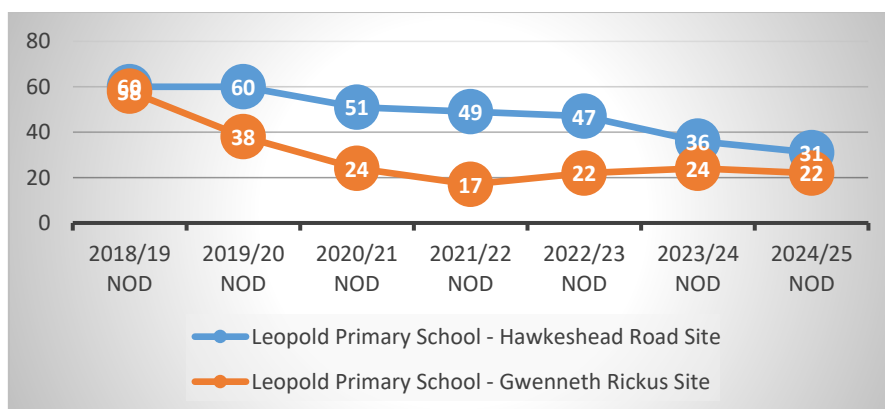
3.2.3 The local authority has been working with schools to manage the detrimental impacts of falling demand. A series of reorganisation strategies are currently being deployed including PAN reductions, federation arrangements and infant and junior school amalgamations. Officers are also connecting with local

authorities across London to share experiences and learn from strategies to successfully manage falling rolls. A number of local authorities across London have already consulted on closing local primary school provision or are planning to do so.

3.2.4 Leopold Primary School operates as one school under one leadership team and governing board across two sites. The main Leopold Primary School site is situated on Hawkshead Road within the Roundwood ward. The Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School is situated on Brentfield Road within the Stonebridge ward. The Leopold Gwenneth Rickus site was opened in September 2013 in response to increasing demand for primary school places in Brent. The site was previously used by the borough as a school improvement centre running courses for education professionals. Currently children attending each of Leopold Primary School’s two sites receive all of their education exclusively at that site. The school achieves good outcomes for pupils at or above national averages at all key stages and was rated by Ofsted as ‘Good’ in June 2022.

3.2.5 Currently Leopold Primary School offers 120 places a year, with each of its site accommodating two forms of entry. However, the Gwenneth Rickus site currently operates an informal cap of one form entry in Reception, Year One, Year Two and Year Four in response to falling demand. For the purposes of admissions when applying for a place at Leopold Primary School, parents can make a preference for either the Hawkshead Road site or the Gwenneth Rickus site on Brentfield Road. As shown in graph 1 below, the number of children applying for and receiving an offer of a place at the Gwenneth Rickus site through Reception co-ordination has been at a consistently lower rate since 2019 than the number choosing the Hawkshead Road site. This graph includes National Offer Day data for the 2024/25 academic year.

Graph 1: National Offer Day offers at Leopold Primary School

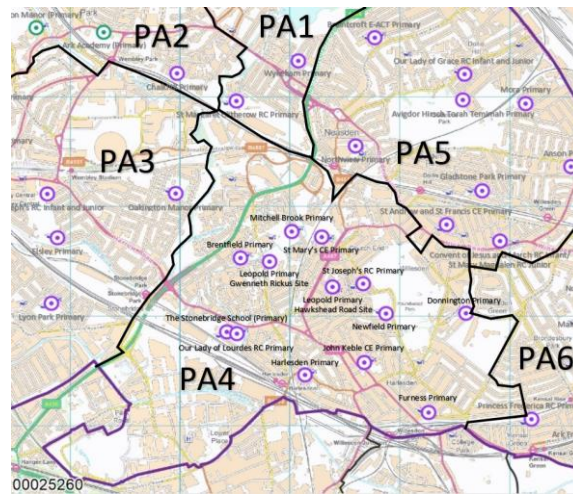


National Offer Day occurs from 16 April each year.

3.2.6 In the context of falling demand, there is no longer a need for Leopold Primary school to be split across two sites as there are sufficient spare places on both the Leopold Primary School Hawkshead Road site and in other local schools to accommodate future demand for primary provision in the area. The Gwenneth Rickus Leopold site is less than one mile to seven other Primary schools,

including Brentfield, Mitchell Brook and Stonebridge Primary Schools as seen in the map below.

Map 1 – Map of Primary Planning Area Four schools



3.2.7 Within this context, on 16 October 2023, Cabinet was informed of the intention to undertake informal consultation on the future provision on the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School. This was approved and a period of informal consultation was carried out between 1 November 2023 and 13 December 2023. The outcomes of this consultation were reported to Cabinet on 5 February 2024 with a request to approve a period of formal consultation through publication of a statutory notice. Cabinet agreed to the request to move to the formal consultation stage.

4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement

4.1 Consultation

4.1.1 Formal consultation to change the provision of Leopold Primary School was carried out in accordance with the Department for Education (DfE) statutory process outlined in 'Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers January 2023'.

4.1.2 The statutory consultation process for significant changes to school provision has four stages - Stage 1: Publication of a Statutory Notice, Stage 2: Representation (formal consultation) for a period of 4 weeks, Stage 3: Decision, whereby Cabinet is required to make a decision on the proposal within two months, and if agreed then Stage 4: Implementation.

4.1.3 A period of formal consultation was carried out between 29 February 2024 and 28 March 2024. A statutory notice (provided in Appendix one) was displayed adjacent to the main school gates on the Hawkshead Road site and the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School. The proposal was published in the Brent and Kilburn Times. Both of these actions were required as per the DfE guidance. The statutory notice proposed:

- a change to the school's published admission number so that only 60 children are admitted to the Hawkshead Road site from 2025 with no children admitted to the Gwenneth Rickus site in reception.
- to implement a phased closure of the provision on the Gwenneth Rickus site with full closure taking place at the end of July 2027.

4.1.4 To ensure the formal consultation was accessible to families, the notice was translated into Arabic and Somalian as the two main languages of the communities of the school. A short letter describing the proposal and how to respond was provided for the school to distribute to parents and carers in both hard copy and electronic format in English, Arabic and Somalian. The documents were published on the school admissions webpages on Brent's website, which enabled the document to be translated into any language, and the formal consultation was included on the Brent 'Have your say' consultation portal.

4.2 Responses to the Formal Consultation

4.2.1 Only one response was received to the formal consultation from the Chair of Governors at Leopold Primary School. The full submission from the Governing Board is attached at Appendix 2.

4.2.2 The Governing Board's response to the consultation sets out their disappointment that the local authority is continuing to propose the closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site, which is rated as 'Good' by Ofsted and given that the majority of respondents during informal consultation did not agree to the proposal. Other points raised are summarised here:

4.2.2.1 Objection to the phased closure as parents were reassured during the informal consultation that children currently in the school would not be affected and that the proposed closure date would impact on the viability of the school over the next 3 years as parents and teachers may decide to leave.

Response: Officers have been clear throughout the consultation process that children currently in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 and those entering reception in September 2024 would be the year groups affected and those in years 3 to 6 would be able to finish their education at the Gwenneth Rickus site. The local authority's view is, even with up to a 10% reduction of on-roll numbers, if parents decide to change their child's school the Gwenneth Rickus site will remain viable to operate until July 2027.

4.2.2.2 Concerns about the need for further redundancies after the school has already undertaken a staff restructure to manage the school budget effectively, which will affect staff morale and the school community.

Response: The local authority recognises that a Cabinet decision to close the Gwenneth Rickus site would be a disappointing decision for the staff and wider school community. Officers from across the

Council would support the leadership team and Governing Board to manage the closure process and issues that arise as a result, such as potential redundancies, to ensure that the school continues to deliver a high quality education.

- 4.2.2.3 That there are other schools with falling rolls in the local area who should be considered for closure and that a more strategic approach than closing this site and reducing the PAN of Mitchell Brook Primary School is required to address the scale of the issue. The Governing Board provided an analysis of factors that should form the basis of decision-making during the informal consultation period that has been ignored.

Response: The Local Authority's proposal to close the Gwenneth Rickus site was based on a significant amount of work which was undertaken prior to the informal consultation and included a strategic analysis of a number of different factors. The Local Authority reviewed the Governing Board's analysis provided during the informal consultation process and responded to points raised in the February 2024 Cabinet report.

- 4.2.2.4 That the Council has failed to appreciate that the two Leopold Primary School sites are two distinct communities and staff bodies and the impact of the closure on vulnerable children and families.

Response: The Local Authority recognises that the two sites of Leopold Primary School operate as distinct communities, despite having shared leadership and governance. 61.9% of respondents to the informal consultation indicated that, if the proposal were to go ahead, they would like it to be as a phased closure and this is the proposal which has been put forward to Cabinet. Local Authority officers would work with the school leadership team to support vulnerable children and families if the decision is taken to close the provision.

- 4.2.2.5 That it appeared the Gwenneth Rickus site had been ringfenced for closure, with a decision already made, and that proposal is inconsistent with the need for wider reductions proposed in the Review of Primary School Places in Primary Planning Area 4 document.

Response: No decision has been made regarding the future of the Gwenneth Rickus site, as this is for Cabinet to determine. The proposal to close the site is a recommended approach which is being undertaken by other London local authorities on a wider scale, and the Council is following a process as set out by the DfE for managing significant change to maintained schools. The proposal to close the Gwenneth Rickus site forms one part of the response to surplus capacity in Primary Planning Area 4, as set out in the School Place Planning Strategy 2024 – 2028. The reduction of PAN at Mitchell

Brook Primary School, which is now confirmed for September 2025 forms another part of that response.

4.2.3 The Local Authority acknowledges the quality of education provided by Leopold Primary School to deliver a good standard of educational provision as judged by Ofsted. However 96.7% of Brent primary schools are rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted and, this includes all schools in Planning Area Four, other than one school which is making rapid improvement. Officers are confident that the remaining schools in the area will provide a suitable education for future cohorts of children.

4.2.4 The proposed closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School will require some children attending the site to move to the Hawkshead Road site of Leopold Primary School from September 2027. There will also be parents who had hoped for siblings of their children currently attending the site to join the school at some future point in Reception, which would not be possible from September 2025 onwards when admissions to the site cease. However, other than the concerns identified above in section 4.2, no issues were raised during the formal consultation to indicate that the closure proposal should not proceed. Officers therefore recommend to Cabinet that the proposal as set out in Section 2 (Recommendations) is agreed.

4.3 Implementation

4.3.1 The Gwenneth Rickus site can continue to operate until July 2027 with a viable number of classes. Table 1 below details the projected number of children on roll in each year group up to the point of the proposed closure date.

Year	Rec	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
2023/24*	26*	28	26	37	42	35	54	248
2024/25**	25***	23	25	23	33	38	32	200
2025/26**	0	23	21	23	21	30	34	151
2026/27**	0	0	20	19	20	19	27	106

* Based on January 2024 census figures

** Assumes a 10% reduction in on-roll numbers each year

*** Projection based on April 2024 offer numbers.

4.3.2. As Cabinet has determined admissions arrangements for community schools for 2025/26 (in February 2024 in line with statutory requirements), should the proposal be agreed, the local authority will be required to submit a referral to approve a variation to the published admission arrangements for the school to the Office of the Schools' Adjudicator.

4.3.3 Officers would support the leadership team and governing body of Leopold Primary School through the transition period. A steering group will be set up whereby officers from the Setting and School Effectiveness Service, HR, finance, capital and legal will provide advice and guidance to the school through what it is acknowledged will be a difficult time.

4.3.4 Admissions Officers will continue to work with the school to facilitate in-year admissions to the Gwenneth Rickus site until the point of closure if applications for the school are received.

4.3.4 Children who attend the Gwenneth Rickus site and who will remain on roll at the school from September 2027 will be transferred to the Hawkshead Road site. The Hawkshead Road site may require additional teaching space to be made available for children transferring from the Gwenneth Rickus site, but this can be achieved using existing capacity within the current school building. The steering group detailed in section 4.3.3 will work with the leadership of school to understand how they wish to deliver education from September 2027. This could require some minimal capital expenditure at a cost to the Council.

4.3.5. Table 2 indicates the projected number of children on roll in each year group at the Hawkshead Road site following a phased closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site.

Table 2:								
Year	Rec	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
2027/28	48	48	47	68	68	63	66	409
2028/29	51	48	48	47	66	66	62	388
2029/30	53	51	48	48	47	65	65	377
2030/31	55	53	51	48	48	47	63	365
2031/32	58	55	53	51	48	48	47	360

4.3.6 Any parent who does not wish their child to transfer to the Hawkshead Road site from September 2027 can apply through the normal in-year admissions process for a place at an alternative school. Although many schools in the area currently have vacancies, places will not be held specially for children moving from the Gwenneth Rickus site and applications will be considered according to each schools' admission arrangements.

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 School funding received via the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is driven by pupil numbers, and vacant school places cause a financial pressure for schools as they will need to operate with reduced budgets. A small number of schools have applied for a licenced deficit and several schools in the primary phase remain at risk due to the knock-on effect of falling rolls in Brent and across London. A licenced deficit enables a school to hold a deficit balance for a period of three years while implementing an agreed plan on how to return to a balanced position at the end of the three-year period. This approach becomes increasingly difficult as pupil numbers continue to fall leading schools to undertake staff restructures which have a financial cost arising from redundancies and will not be sustainable.

5.2 Leopold Primary school's main source of income is from the Dedicated Schools' Grant (DSG). The school reported a surplus reserves balance of £0.986m as at end of March 2024. The school planned to use almost all of the reserve

balance by March 2025/26 on goods and services including some planned capital works, however this is subject to change following submission of the three year plan in June 2024. The school undertook a restructure in 2022/23, to match staff numbers to pupil numbers due to continued falling rolls across the two sites and to ensure financial viability. The restructure cost absorbed by the school was £0.250m.

- 5.3 The school receives a per pupil funding rate of £6,221 with approximately 579 pupils reported in the October 2023 census (a reduction of 55 pupils compared to October 22). This equates to £3.6m DSG funding, inclusive of £0.92m split site funding allocation. This compares to an average of £6k per primary pupil across the borough. The closure of the site will lead to a more efficient use of the DSG as spare places in other schools are utilised for new cohorts of children. There may be support required towards redundancy payments as the school would be required to restructure its staffing resources to address the risk of reduced funding from the reduced number of pupils.
- 5.4 There would be general fund cost implications to maintain the Gwenneth Rickus site if it remained vacant, including utilities and any security provisions that officers felt were required. The costs and the budget required are yet to be confirmed but could be in the region of £20,000 per site per annum, depending on the level of resources involved to look after the site.

6.0 Legal Considerations

- 6.1 The authority has the power to consider and determine proposals published under Section 19 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006, pursuant to Section 21 (2) (f) of the Act and in accordance with Schedule 3 paragraph 3 of The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013.
- 6.2 Under sections 13 and 14 of The Education Act 1996, as amended by The Education and Inspections Act 2006, a local education authority has a general statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places available to meet the needs of the population in its area. The local authority must promote high educational standards, ensure fair access to educational opportunity and promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential. They must also ensure that there are sufficient schools in their area and promote diversity and increase parental choice. To discharge this duty, the LA has to undertake a planning function to ensure that the supply of school places balances the demand for them.
- 6.3 If the proposals which form the basis of the formal consultation were to be implemented, then this would have the potential impact on the reduction of staff required with the effect of the staff being placed at risk of redundancy or redeployed to the Hawkshead Road site.
- 6.4 Although not part of the considerations for the site proposed to be closed, any change of use from Education use and/or disposal requires the permission from

the Secretary of State for Education under Section 77 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and Schedule 1 of the Academies Act.

7.0 Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations

7.1 The Public Sector Equality Duty under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Local Authority when exercising its functions to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited under the Act, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who have a protected characteristic and those who do not share that protected characteristic. The protected characteristics covered under the Act are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination) pregnancy and maternity, race (this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality) religion or belief (this includes lack of belief) sex and sexual orientation. Due regard means giving relevant and proportionate consideration to the duty, in that whenever significant decisions are being made consideration must be given to the impact/affect that implementing a particular decision will have in relation to equality before making that decision. Brent Council also has a policy of considering Human Rights and socio-economic impact.

7.2 An Equality Analysis has been carried out on the proposals set out in this report and is attached as Appendix 3 to this report. It is not anticipated there will be any negative impact from these proposals on the basis of disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (only in respect of eliminating unlawful discrimination) pregnancy and maternity, race (this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality) religion or belief (this includes lack of belief) sex and sexual orientation.

7.3 Pupil-level data suggest that the intake at the Leopold Primary School Gwenneth Rickus site is similar to other local schools in terms of ethnic diversity, children on free school meals and the number of children with special needs and disabilities (SEND). This proposal could have a negative impact on individual children depending on their individual needs if they were required to move schools. However, based on current information other local schools would provide a suitable alternative and would support children to settle.

7.4 The top three ethnic groups attending Leopold Primary School match the top three ethnic groups across Primary Planning Area 4, although the proportion of each group is higher in Leopold Primary School. The proportion of children receiving benefits related Free School Meals at the school is 32.8% compared to 33.2% for the whole planning area. The proportion of children at Leopold Primary School with an EHCP is 1.5% compared to 3.7% across the whole planning area. The proportion of children at Leopold Primary School receiving SEN Support is 9.2% compared to 18.1% across the whole planning area.

8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations

8.1 School place planning and admissions policies aim to ensure that primary children can attend a local school and therefore can walk to school or take

public transport. This approach underpins these proposals. All schools in Brent can access support to develop a sustainable travel plan.

9.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations

- 9.1 Implementation of the proposal to close the Leopold Primary School Gwenneth Rickus site would be likely to impact on the required staffing for Leopold Primary School, as it would lead to a reduction in overall staffing levels. This could therefore result in the possibility for the need to consider redundancies and/or relocation of staff to the Hawkshead Road site. The number of staff affected would depend on the nature of the phased closure. The school, supported by the Local Authority and the school's HR provider, would need to follow the Managing Change in Schools Policy and Procedure including consultation with affected staff and trade unions to effect the changes in due course. The Local Authority would work with the governing boards of local schools to see if affected staff could find local re-employment.
- 9.2 Should a decision be made to close the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School, then the building and site would become surplus to requirements for mainstream primary school use. At that time the Council will review its priorities and potential future uses for the site, but the expectation is that the site is retained for educational use given the need for other forms of local educational provision, for example for children and young people with SEND.

10.0 Communication Considerations

- 10.1 If the proposal is agreed, Cabinet's decision would be communicated to all stakeholders, including staff and families attending the school who will be affected by the decision. Information for families would include details about which of the current year groups would be affected, and which year groups would be unaffected as the children will have left the school by the time of the closure.
- 10.2 Information would be provided to families where consideration is given to moving their children to the Hawkshead Road site closer to the time of implementation. Advice and guidance would be provided to any families who apply to move to a different school at any point before the closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site.
- 10.3 If Cabinet do not agree to the proposal, stakeholders would be notified that the proposal will not go ahead.

Related document(s) for reference

Review of Primary School Places in Primary Planning Area 4 – Cabinet Report 16 October 2023

Outcome of informal consultation on school organisation proposals for Leopold Primary School in Primary Planning Area 4 - Cabinet Report 5 February 2024

Report sign off:

Nigel Chapman

Corporate Director Children and Young People