

Appendix 2 – Consultation submission from the chair of governors at Leopold Primary School, and local authority response

I am writing to you on behalf of the Governing Board of Leopold Primary School to express our disappointment that Brent Council has taken the decision to launch a formal consultation into the closure of the Gwenneth Rickus (GR) site despite the outcome of the informal consultation.

Below I have listed the reasons why we oppose the recommendations included within the formal consultation and hope that you take these into consideration when making the final decision regarding the proposed closure of the GR site.

1. The proposed plan to close GR goes against the Borough Plan Strategic Priority 4: The Best Start in Life, which aims to support “every child and young person to access high quality education in the borough”. As stated in the report to Cabinet, Leopold Primary 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”. If the council is committed to achieving ‘The Best Start in Life’ for children living in Brent, then it would not be best practise to close a school that has been confirmed as providing a high-quality education, especially, over schools in the area that are in a lower Ofsted category or have not yet received an Ofsted Inspection.
2. We are extremely disappointed that the recommendation to implement a phased closure of provision on the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School between September 2025 and the end of July 2027 was not discussed with the Governing Board before being made publicly available, especially as parents were reassured that current pupils would not be impacted by the closure if it were to go ahead. The fixed closure date will immediately and materially negatively affect our ability to maintain the viability of the school over the next 3 years, as there is an increased likelihood that parents and teachers may decide to leave the school prematurely.
3. We had the foresight to take preventative action to reduce the impact of the falling pupil roll and Leopold Primary School recently went through a staff restructure, which has helped ensure that the school is in a financially viable position. Staffing restructures reduce the morale of staff, affect their mental health and wellbeing as well as negatively impacting the school community as a whole and was not a decision that we took lightly. We have sufficient financial reserves to maintain staffing and the quality of education for a number of years because of the tough choices we made. A phased closure of the GR site in July 2027, will mean that further redundancies are inevitable and the whole school community will have to endure this difficult process again, within a short period of time. It now seems that our efforts to secure the financial viability of the school may have been in vain. This is particularly frustrating given the financial situation of other schools in the area, who would still remain unviable.
4. The report to Cabinet, outlined that the reason for choosing to close the GR site rather than the HR site is because of “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". If the rationale for closing GR is based on this, then the Review of Primary School Places in the Primary Planning Area 4 document outlines that there are 4 other schools that should have been considered based on this rationale. However, none of these schools have been included in this consultation process. This comment suggests that an irrational approach has been adopted, specifically to choose between Leopold Schools rather than choose between wider schools in Planning Area 4.

5. Responses to the informal consultation show that 86.7% of respondents disagreed with the proposal to cease provision on the GR site. In addition to this only 8.3% agreed that if the site were to close that this should happen at a fixed point in time. Your proposal to the Cabinet goes completely against the outcome of the informal consultation and is also not based on the concrete data highlighted in your own Review of Primary School Places in the Primary Planning Area 4 document, which demonstrates that the GR site should not be considered for closure above other schools.
6. In addition to this, during a meeting held with Shirley Parks and Michelle Gwyther, on the 2nd of February, I was very disheartened that during discussions it appeared that GR has been ringfenced for closure and that a decision has already been made regarding the future of the site, meaning that the formal consultation is being conducted as a formality rather than as part of a decision-making process.
7. The report to Cabinet states that the "proposal is required to address the level of spare places in the local area". In the Review of Primary School Places in Primary Planning Area 4 document, you outline that in 2022/23 the number of spare places available across planning area 4 was 1865. However, this entire consultation process has only considered a PAN of 90 pupils (including the reduction of PAN at Mitchell Brook Primary School). Given the number of spare places available, you have failed to explain how reducing the PAN of local planning area 4 by 90 pupils will help to address this problem. It is apparent that a more strategic and honest approach to place planning is needed. It seems that your preference for the closure of Leopold GR has not been driven by an objective review of the evidence when determining closure, but by expediency. Specifically, that closing the Leopold GR site is easier and politically more palatable than legally closing an official primary school. On many occasions, and also within the report to Cabinet, it has been stated that a "series of reorganisation strategies are currently being deployed including PAN reductions, federation arrangements and a potential amalgamation". We have not been privy to this information and in the spirit of transparency the other reorganisation strategies for Planning Area 4 should have formed part of the consultation process.
8. Having reviewed the results of the informal consultation, the majority of respondents rejected the proposal and also offered plausible alternatives to closing GR, many of which warrant investigation. Additionally, the Leopold Governing Board provided your team with a matrix clearly outlining why the GR

site should not be closed when compared to other schools on key metrics, which appears to have been dismissed and has not been addressed specifically by the local authority.

9. The council has failed to understand that we are two distinct schools, with distinct communities and separate staffing. It is particularly disappointing that sufficient consideration has not been given to the impact that the closure of GR will have on the vulnerable community that the school serves which includes a community with high levels of depreciation and SEND needs.

To conclude, we believe that Brent Council should implement a more coordinated approach when considering how to combat the falling pupil roll and the decision should be based on an objective assessment of the data rather than expediency. Closure of the GR site will not address the falling pupil roll in Planning Area 4 and it penalises a school that has successfully managed the impact of falling rolls and is a viable and flourishing school. Children in Brent deserve a high-quality education and closing a 'good' school will not support Brent in ensuring that all children receive the highest quality of education.

The Leopold Governing Board do not agree with or support the closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site of Leopold Primary School and closing this site is not in the best interest of our community stakeholders.

Kind Regards

Cynthia Allen
Chair of Governors
Leopold Primary School

Response from the local authority

The Local Authority acknowledges the high quality of education provided by Leopold Primary School to deliver a good standard of educational provision as judged by Ofsted and is proud that 96.7% of its primary schools are rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted and, all schools in Planning Area Four other than one school are currently rated as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.

The Local Authority has explained the decision to propose the closure of the Gwenneth Rickus site was made considering a number of different factors and not made on the basis the least effective school or school with the lowest pupil numbers should be closed. The Local Authority took into account the governing body's analysis during the informal consultation process which raised many of the same points listed above but did not agree with the analysis.

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 years 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 a 10% reduction in on-roll numbers if parents decide to change their child's school, the Gwenneth Rickus site will remain viable to operate until July 2027.

The Council clearly understands a Cabinet decision to close the Gwenneth Rickus site will be a very difficult decision for the staff, leaders and governing body of Leopold Primary School. Officers from across the Council will support the leadership team and governing body of Leopold Primary School to address issues which will arise as a result of this decision and to help the school to plan to continue to deliver high quality education.

The Local Authority gained a better understanding of the views of parents during the informal consultation process. 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.