

**Record of
Executive
Decisions
published
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Civic Centre
Sunderland

7 November 2019

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Decision Taker:

School Organisation Committee of Cabinet

Appropriate Scrutiny Committee:

Children, Education and Skills Scrutiny Committee

Date decision in force:

15 November 2019

Date of decision:

7 November 2019

Title and author(s) of written report:

Proposed Closure of Pennywell Early Years Centre – Executive Director of Neighbourhoods

Full description of decision:

To approve the proposal to discontinue (close) Pennywell Early Years Centre, Portland Road, Sunderland, SR4 9AX with effect from 31 December 2019.

Suggested reason(s) for Decision:

Sunderland City Council, the governing body of Pennywell Early Years Centre and Laidlaw Schools Trust (LST) (on behalf of Academy 360) have recognised the need to sustain nursery provision in the St Anne's ward. Two of the four primary schools within the ward do not currently operate a nursery class. There would be insufficient alternative nursery places for the children in the local area should, as current 5 year budget projections indicate, Pennywell Early Years Centre becomes unsustainable in future years.

It is considered that merging Pennywell Early Years Centre with Academy 360 would ensure that Pennywell Early Years Centre's Outstanding provision would be sustained in the area. In addition to securing the long-term future of the nursery provision the proposal would also;

- Enable wider savings to be made through joint commissioning of goods and services between the nursery and Academy 360 (and the wider Laidlaw Schools Trust). This would create additional funding that could be re-invested in delivery of education at the nursery
- Strengthen the relationship between Academy 360 and Pennywell Early Years Centre
- Further assist the effective transition between children leaving Pennywell Early Years Centre to take up reception places at Academy 360 and
- Enable Academy 360 to access the high-quality early years expertise of Pennywell Early Years Centre and to utilise this expertise in the Academy's wider educational delivery.

Parents and children would continue to have the same experience in the nursery provision as part of the Academy. It is the intention of LST that the current nursery building would remain as the Nursery phase and accessed by

users as it is now and that there would be no reduction in the capacity of the nursery nor changes to the ages of children accessing it. Families would continue to access the nursery as they always have. However, closer co-operation with one of the local Primary phase providers should ensure that the children benefit from knowing the Primary building, staff and pupils very well before they transfer to Key Stage 1 education.

Current nursery staff would transfer from the Local Authority to LST and the nursery would remain under the same leadership. As a result, LST would benefit from the skills, experience and expertise of the nursery staff.

The current buildings operated by Pennywell Early Years Centre will be leased to LST for the term remaining on the current Academy 360 academy lease.

There is not a process to facilitate the academisation of a standalone nursery setting. Therefore, to facilitate the entry of the provision delivered at Pennywell Early Years Centre into the LST organisational model it is necessary to discontinue the existing nursery provision, with the Academy Trust applying to the Regional Schools Commissioners Office to lower its age range to include the full range of provision offered by Pennywell Early Years Centre. Subject to approval of the Council's proposal and the Academy Trust's proposals (by the dates specified above) the provision will amalgamate into Academy 360 on 01.04.20.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

- Retain Pennywell Early Years Centre as a Local Authority Maintained Nursery Provision
- Amalgamate Pennywell Early Years Centre with an alternative local academy

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Is this a key decision:

Yes

Does the Decision contain Confidential/Exempt Information:

No

Declarations of Interest and Dispensations:

None