

THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SUNDERLAND

**NOTIFICATION OF STATUTORY PROPOSAL FOR THE DISCONTINUATION OF
PENNYWELL EARLY YEARS CENTRE NURSERY SCHOOL**

Local Authority Proposals and Contact Details

Notice is hereby given in accordance with Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, that it is the intention of Sunderland City Council, Civic Centre, Burdon Road, Sunderland, SR2 7DN to discontinue (close) the following school:

- **Pennywell Early Years Centre, Portsmouth Road, Pennywell, Sunderland, SR4 9AX** with effect from 31st December 2019.

Pennywell Early Years Centre is a nursery school maintained by Sunderland City Council.

Implementation.

- Pennywell Early Years Centre is proposed to close with effect from 31st December 2019

This proposal is required to facilitate the amalgamation of Pennywell Early Years Centre and Academy 360 (part of the Laidlaw Schools Trust (LST)).

Legally, there is no formal process for a nursery to join an academy group so to enable this proposal to proceed it will be necessary to merge Pennywell Early Years Centre and Academy 360. This would require the nursery to be technically closed from 31st December 2019 and the lower age range of the Primary School extended to accommodate the nursery aged pupils. Pennywell Early Years Centre would then become part of Academy 360, under LST, from 1st January 2020.

This would enable the two schools to work seamlessly and bring together all systems and staff. There would be one overall budget and one OFSTED inspection but no change in staff, leadership at the nursery or the education provision delivered by the Pennywell Early Years Centre. This proposal is therefore subject to the approval of the Laidlaw Schools Trust's proposal to reduce the age range at Academy 360 (Portsmouth Road, Sunderland, SR4 9BA) from 5 years of age to 0. Subject to approval of both proposals, the buildings, staff and physical assets of Pennywell Early Years Centre are proposed to transfer to the Laidlaw Schools Trust on 1st January 2020.

Reason for Closure of Pennywell Early Years Centre

Pennywell Early Years Centre currently operates as a local authority maintained nursery provision, offering education and day-care in the St Anne's ward of the city for children between the ages of 0 and 5 years old. It has been recognised as an outstanding provision by Ofsted.

The nursery is a popular community resource, with 166 children on roll at the nursery as of the May 2019 School Census. However, changes in national education policy and funding are

making it increasingly challenging for nursery schools to continue to operate. In January 2019, there were 392 state-funded nursery schools in England, a reduction of 85 since 2003. This means that more than 17% of the country's nursery schools have closed or have ceased to be state run during this period. Pressures on nursery schools have been reflected in Sunderland, with the closure of Concord Nursery and Millfield Community Nursery a consequence of national and local pressures.

Sunderland City Council, the governing body of Pennywell Early Years Centre and 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 Pennywell Early Years Centre become 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 excellent 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, even 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.

Effect on other Schools, Academies and Educational Institutions in the Area

This proposal seeks to continue current processes and relationships that exist between the management of Pennywell Early Years Centre and neighbouring nursery schools, primary schools and academies. Where pupils attending the nursery are projected to attend primary education at a local provider other than Academy 360 current practices will be retained relating to appropriate sharing of data and resources. Current best practice sharing between Pennywell Early Years Centre and other Sunderland based nursery schools will continue.

The proposal will result in a reduction in Sunderland's nursery 'Lump Sum' allocation. This allocation is calculated based on the number of pupils attending local maintained nursery provision, with the cumulative citywide total allocation then split equally across all local authority maintained nursery schools. Pupils attending Pennywell Early Years Centre would no longer be included in the lump sum calculation. Based on the city's 2019/20 lump sum allocation this would result in a £101,834 reduction in the overall lump sum. As Pennywell Early Years Centre would also cease to be a recipient of the lump sum, with the nursery projected to receive £80,005 in

2019/20, this would equate to a lump sum allocation reduction of £3,119 for each remaining setting.

Currently the Local Authority is not in receipt of the city's projected lump sum allocation for 2020/21.

Project Costs

This proposal is not anticipated to result in any costs related to redundancy, capital or the need to meet existing deficit requirements. Project costs related to legal services will be met by Laidlaw Schools Trust and Pennywell Early Years Centre.

Pupil Numbers and Admissions

Given the nature of maintained nursery provision numbers on roll are subject to some fluctuation. The numbers included below are from the May 2019 School Census.

Number	166*
Age Range	2 - 5 years old
Boys	78
Girls	88
SEND	1

*The numbers noted above only include funded nursery places and do not include fee paying day-care placements.

Displaced Pupils

There will be no pupil displacement because of this proposal. The capacity of the nursery and the nursery's admission criteria are not proposed to change as part of this proposal. Pupils currently attending the nursery will continue to have the opportunity to do so post implementation and prospective pupils would be subject to the current admissions criteria at the nursery.

Impact on the Community

There is not anticipated to be an immediate net impact to the wider community as part of this proposal. However, in the long term the community will benefit from the long-term sustainability of the nursery setting, the key driver behind this proposal, and the potential increases in quality at both the nursery and Academy 360 as a result of shared best practice and resources.

Balance of Denominational Provision

There would be no impact on the balance of denominational provision as the nursery does not have a religious character.

Rural Primary Schools

Pennywell Early Years Centre does not fall within the categorisation of a rural primary as set out in Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. Furthermore, the school is not listed on the DfE's List of Designated Rural Primary Schools 2018.

Maintained Nursery Schools

This proposal is for the discontinuation of an existing maintained nursery provision. The Statutory Guidance 'Opening and Closing Maintained Schools' (November 2018) identified the presumption against closure of a maintained nursery school. The Guidance states that this does not mean that a nursery will never close, but the case for closure should be strong and should demonstrate that:

- plans to develop alternative early years provision clearly demonstrate that it will be at least equal in quantity to the provision provided by the nursery school with no loss of expertise and specialism; and
- replacement provision is more accessible and more convenient for local parents.

The proposal to discontinue the nursery is linked to the Laidlaw Schools Trust's proposal to incorporate Pennywell Early Years Centre within its Multi Academy Trust. This proposal will not result in the removal of local provision, the requirement for alternative local provision or any change to structure or governance that would necessitate a reduction in the quality of delivery.

It is the intention of LST that the capacity of Pennywell Early Years Centre, location of the provision, staffing and current leadership of the nursery will remain in place, and that there will be no change in the admissions criteria of the nursery

Sixth Form Provision

Not applicable - There is no provision for students aged 16 to 19.

Special Educational Needs Provision (SEND)

Pennywell Early Years Centre is not designated as a provider of Special Educational Needs Provision. This proposal will not result in the discontinuation of SEND provision in Sunderland. However, there will be ongoing engagement to ensure the needs of children with SEN attending the nursery setting are met.

Travel

The Council has considered the impact of travel within this proposal. It is considered that, given the nursery will continue to operate from its current building and there will not be a reduction in the capacity of the nursery, there will be no requirement for any parent or carer of a pupil currently on roll or any prospective pupil to seek an alternative setting and, therefore, there are no travel implications associated with this proposal.

Consultation

An informal (pre-publication) consultation upon the proposals took place during the following dates:

- 17th May to Friday 5th July 2019

Consultees recommended in the relevant statutory guidance were consulted via a Consultation Document that was made widely available on the Council's website, Pennywell Early Years Centre and the Laidlaw Schools Trust websites. Consultees included parents, staff, pupils, local schools and academies, early-years providers, the local ward councillors and staff representatives (unions).

Submission of Objections and Comments on Proposal

A copy of this proposal can be viewed on the Sunderland City Council website at

<https://www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/13038/School-organisation-consultations>

It can also be requested via:

E-mail: alan.rowan@sunderland.gov.uk

Telephone: 0191 5611372

Post: Retained Education Functions Lead, Civic Centre, Burdon Road, Sunderland, SR2 7DN.

Within four weeks of the Publication Date below, any person may object to or make comments on the proposals by sending their written representations:

By e-mail to :-

schoolorganisation@sunderland.gov.uk

Or by post to :-

Alan Rowan

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Burdon Road

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Signed : Patrick Melia,
Chief Executive,
Sunderland City Council.

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