

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE
CORPORATE DIRECTOR MEETING WITH EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

5 November 2024

Wensleydale School and Sixth Form – Proposal to cease Sixth Form Provision

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Executive Member approval to consult on a proposal that the Council should change the age range at Wensleydale School and Sixth Form, Leyburn, effective from 31 August 2025, by ceasing the Sixth Form Provision.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

- 2.1 At a recent meeting of the Governing Board of Wensleydale School and Sixth Form, Leyburn it was resolved, to ask North Yorkshire Council to consult on the permanent closure of the Sixth Form. The sixth form has been temporarily suspended since September 2023.
- 2.2 In 2018 Wensleydale School and Sixth Form, Leyburn opened their Business and Innovation Centre. The post-16 offer became a focus on BTEC and CTEC qualifications in subjects including business, travel and tourism, sports studies and health and social care, rather than A Level courses.
- 2.3 Due partly to the demographics of the school's sparse, and even super sparse, catchment area across Wensleydale, numbers on roll at Wensleydale School and Sixth Form dipped for five years, making it more difficult to maintain viable class sizes at post 16 in terms of quality of experience, subject breadth and financial viability. Wensleydale School and Sixth Form is a relatively small secondary school, and with the government's withdrawal of funding for the school's BTECs, it was difficult for the school to offer a curriculum with the sufficient breadth required. Though judging the school as 'Good' overall, Ofsted highlighted how the post-16 offering had 'narrowed' and acknowledged this was 'in part due to financial constraints'.
- 2.4 In response to falling numbers of sixth form pupils, and following consultation in Autumn 2022, the decision was made in Spring 2023 by the Governing Board to temporarily suspend entries to the Sixth Form at Wensleydale School and Sixth Form for two years to take effect from September 2023. The period of suspension has allowed time to assess the practicalities of continuing with post-16 provision, given the Government's withdrawal of the vocational BTEC courses, which the school offered.

3.0 WENSLEYDALE SCHOOL'S SIXTH FORM

Pupil numbers

- 3.1 Even though numbers are now recovering, the numbers on roll at the School fell for several years as shown in the table below. This is partly due to the demographics in the school's sparse and geographically very wide catchment area, which starts west of Hawes and runs east of Leyburn.

Pupil numbers from 2009/10 to 2024/5 and forecast pupil numbers to 2027/28

Year	Y7 –Y11	Year 12	Year 13	Pupil numbers 6th form	Total pupil roll
2013/14	426	44	42	86	512
2014/15	416	23	34	57	473
2015/16	405	26	18	44	449
2016/17	386	18	22	40	426
2017/18	366	17	16	33	399
2018/19	361	19	17	36	397
2019/20	351	6	8	14	365
2020/21	320	0	4	4	328
2021/22	325	10	0	10	335
2022/23	347	0	8	8	355
2023/24	367	0	0	0	367
2024/25	390	0	0	0	390
2025/26	406 ¹				406 ¹
2026/27					433 ²
2027/28					429 ²

Notes: 1. Forecast.

2. Forecast including additional children generated from housing.

- 3.2 Limited housebuilding forecast in the catchment area will also have some impact on the size of the pupil population. There is very little housing allocated to Wensleydale School and Sixth Form's catchment area in the Richmondshire Local Plan. (Risedale's catchment area benefits far more, since Catterick Garrison receives most of the Local Plan's housing allocations.)

Year	Estimated additional pupils from housing
2025/26	4
2026/27	7
2027/28	9

- 3.2 Though numbers have picked up, the school population reduced and prior to temporary suspension post-16 students were choosing to attend alternative sixth forms and Colleges of Further Education in Darlington and Middlesbrough, offering a variety of vocational post-16 qualifications. However, even if all post-16 students could be retained at Wensleydale School, the Governing Body does not feel that numbers would be large enough to provide a high-quality post-16 provision both in terms of curriculum and experience, or that it would be financially viable.

Funding

- 3.4 Pupil numbers primarily determine the funding for school budgets. The funding model for post-16 education has changed in recent years and now favours larger sixth forms than Wensleydale School has ever had. Historically, funding intended for those in years 7 to 11 at the school to some extent subsidised the provision of a sixth form, but this has become increasingly unsustainable as schools have faced increasing cost and funding pressures over recent years.

- 3.5 A Department for Education research report into 'Understanding costs of A level provision' stated that 'According to the providers that took part in the research, the average minimum class size required to cover costs was 11.7.' This is larger than Wensleydale School had been able to operate.
- 3.6 The Department for Education now expects, for both maintained schools and academies, that any proposals for new sixth forms should provide at least 200 places and should either directly, or through partnership, offer a minimum of 15 A level subjects, and that the average class size should be at least 15, unless there is a clear educational argument to run smaller classes.¹

Standards

- 3.7 In May 2022 Ofsted judged the overall effectiveness of Wensleydale School as 'Good', with the quality of education rated as 'good', behaviour and attitudes as 'good', personal development as 'good' and leadership and management as 'good'. However, as well as highlighting the school's existing strengths in these areas, the inspectors in this latest Ofsted report judged the sixth form provision as 'requires improvement'.

Staffing

- 3.8 The School has advised that there would be no changes to staffing as a result of the proposed permanent closure of the Sixth Form.

4.0 ALTERNATIVE SIXTH FORM PROVISION IN THE LOCAL AREA

- 4.1 The next nearest sixth form within North Yorkshire is at Richmond School. However, traditionally many Wensleydale pupils looking to study A Levels have travelled to Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College in Darlington.

There are benefits for young people of going to a larger external sixth form. Several larger secondary schools across North Yorkshire have already made a change in recognition that their sixth form is unable offer the full range of A Level courses that larger post-16 providers can.

- 4.2 The range of practical courses and vocational qualifications offered by Further Education colleges in the surrounding areas has increased over recent years. These organisations, such as Askham Bryan Agricultural College and Middlesbrough and Darlington FE Colleges, also offer specialist vocational facilities, and their size bridges the gap between school and employment. They have become very popular with local families who broadly feel these organisations provide the widest offer for post-16 education and ensure that students are placed on a pathway that meets their needs and interests.
- 4.3 In September 2023, out of 56 students who had attended Wensleydale School in Year 11, 43 chose to remain in education. 14 of these attended sixth form, 14 attended sixth form college, and 15 of these followed vocational courses in Further Education. Another 7 went into apprenticeships and 2 went into full time employment, with training. Those studying Level 3 courses (A Level/BTEC) went to Richmond School and Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, Darlington.

¹ DfE, Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers (January 2023); Making significant changes to an open academy Departmental guidance for all types of academy trust (January 2022).

Item	Total
Full time education	43
School sixth-form	14
Sixth-form college	14
Further education	15
Higher education	0
Full Time Training	0
Apprenticeship	7
Apprenticeship	7
Employment combined with training	2
Full time employment with regulated qualification	2

Transport

- 4.4 North Yorkshire Council publishes on its website a Post 16 Policy Statement by 31st May each year, which sets out the transport assistance available to young people moving onto sixth form or college who are resident in the county and who qualify.

To qualify for assistance with transport to sixth form or college, the following applies:

- students must be over 16 and under 19 on 1 September 2024 and live in North Yorkshire
- students must be attending the nearest sixth form or further education college to their home address, or the sixth form of the secondary school which is recognised as the normal school for your home address
- the course attended must be full-time for instance, more than 12 hours a week
- the sixth form or college is the nearest establishment offering a course that the Council consider suitable to a student's career choice, or that is a pre-requisite for entry into higher education (see below for more details)
- the nearest sixth form or college is more than three miles from the home by the shortest walked route
- students must have agreement from their parent or guardian to pay for the pass

Transport assistance needs to be renewed annually and is not provided for students on apprenticeships or work placements. Further details are available at:

<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/education-and-learning/school-and-college-transport/transport-sixth-form-or-college>

- 4.5 Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, Darlington runs a minibus service from Leyburn at the beginning and end of the school day for sixth form students and there is also public transport to Richmond School and Darlington College. Students attending post-16 courses in Darlington have tended to travel into Leyburn on public transport and then catch the College bus provided by Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College.

5.0 OTHER NORTH YORKSHIRE SCHOOL SIXTH FORMS

- 5.1 Other school sixth forms in North Yorkshire have experienced similar challenges to those faced by Wensleydale School and Sixth Form. At Boroughbridge High School, the Governing Board agreed to temporarily suspend post-16 provision from September 2022 and the Council subsequently, at the request of the Governing Board, changed the age range at Boroughbridge High School, by removing the sixth

form, effective from 31 August 2024. Recent years have also seen removal or suspension of sixth form provision at academy schools in North Yorkshire.

6.0 CONSULTATION PROCESS AND TIMESCALE

- 6.1 Statutory guidance and legislation sets out the process for making school organisation changes to local-authority-maintained schools.² For community schools like Wensleydale School and Sixth Form, the Local Authority as proposer and decision maker can alter the upper or lower age range of the school, including the removal of sixth form provision, by following a statutory process.
- 6.2 Should a decision be made to initiate a consultation, a period of six weeks is proposed. A draft timetable is set out below.
- 6.3 The final decision on closure would be taken by the Executive (or by the Executive Member for Schools if there are no objections during the representation period). Suggested key dates are shown below.

Key dates for a March/ April 2025 decision:

Approval to Consult by Executive Members	5 November 2024	
Consultation Period	11 November – 20 December 2024	
Executive reviews consultation	21 January 2025	Or 4 Feb
Statutory notice period (if approved)	31 Jan – 28 Feb	Or 14 Feb – 14 March
Final decision by Council's Executive	18 March	Or 15 April
Implementation	31 August 2025	

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 That the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills provide approval to consult on proposals:
- to change the age range at Wensleydale School and Sixth Form, effective from 31 August 2025, by ceasing the Sixth Form Provision.

Stuart Carlton
CORPORATE DIRECTOR – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE.

Report prepared by Mark Ashton, Strategic Planning Officer

Action AgreedExecutive Member
Date:

Action RequestedCorporate Director
Date:

² DfE, Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers (January 2023); The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013.



Consultation Document

Proposal to change the age range at
Wensleydale School and Sixth Form, by
ceasing the Sixth Form Provision
from 31 August 2025

November 2024

This paper sets out details of a proposal by North Yorkshire Council to change the age range at Wensleydale School and Sixth Form, by ceasing the Sixth Form Provision with effect from 31 August 2025. It gives the background to the proposal. There will be a public meeting on Thursday 5 December at 5.30pm at Wensleydale School.

Background

Following a consultation during October 2022, on temporary suspension of sixth form provision for a period of up to two years, effective from September 2023, the Governing Body of Wensleydale School and Sixth Form suspended sixth form provision. The period of temporary suspension has allowed time to assess the practicalities of continuing with post-16 provision, given the Government's withdrawal of the vocational BTEC courses, which the school offered.

The Governing Board based their decision on concerns about the limited range of post-16 qualifications and courses available, and related concerns about low post-16 pupil numbers and the school's financial position. Given the withdrawal of government funding for school's more vocational BTEC courses, the suspension was necessary to secure the interests of current and future pupils.

The Governing Board's decision to temporarily suspend provision was not reached lightly, and not before alternatives were considered. A Level teaching finished at Wensleydale School and Sixth Form, Leyburn in 2018. The Business and Innovation Centre opened with a focus on more vocational subjects. The post-16 offer became a focus on BTEC and CTEC qualifications in subjects including Business Studies, IT, Sports Studies, Travel and Tourism and Health and Social Care rather than traditional academic A Level courses.

Wensleydale School and Sixth Form is a relatively small secondary school. Due partly to the demographics of the school's very large, and often sparse catchment area, numbers on roll at Wensleydale School and Sixth Form suffered a demographic dip for 5 years, making it difficult to maintain viable class sizes at post 16 in terms of quality of experience, subject breadth and financial viability. With the government's withdrawal of funding for the school's BTECs, it was difficult for the school to offer a curriculum with the sufficient breadth required. Though judging the school as 'Good' overall, Ofsted highlighted how the post-16 offering had 'narrowed' and acknowledged this was 'in part due to financial constraints'.

Making A Significant Change

Any significant change that is expected to be in place for more than two years is considered a permanent change and requires a statutory process. At the end of the two-year suspension, if a proposal is made to close post-16 provision permanently, the decision maker is North Yorkshire Council (or the Regional Director if the school

has become an academy).

The Proposal

At a recent meeting of the Governing Board of Wensleydale School and Sixth Form, Leyburn it was resolved to ask North Yorkshire Council to consult on the permanent closure of the school's Sixth Form. For a community school like Wensleydale, the Council's Executive is the decision-making body for a permanent change, and a further period of consultation is required.

Sixth Form Numbers

The number of sixth form students at Wensleydale School and Sixth Form fell over the years, from a high of 86 sixth formers in 2013/14 down to 4, 10 and 8 in the years prior to the temporary suspension.

Year	Y7 –Y11	Year 12	Year 13	Pupil numbers 6th form	Total pupil roll
2013/14	426	44	42	86	512
2014/15	416	23	34	57	473
2015/16	405	26	18	44	449
2016/17	386	18	22	40	426
2017/18	366	17	16	33	399
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2021/22	325	10	0	10	335
2022/23	347	0	8	8	355
2023/24	367	0	0	0	367
2024/25	390	0	0	0	390
2025/26	406 ¹				406 ¹
2026/27					433 ²
2027/28					429 ²

Notes: 1. Forecast.

2. Forecast including additional children generated from housing.

Sixth form numbers fell to the point where the choice of courses and quality of experience that the school could provide was limited compared to the much wider range of vocational study routes offered at other FE colleges.

Alternative Larger Sixth Form Provision in the Area

There are benefits for young people of going to a larger external sixth form. Several larger secondary schools across North Yorkshire have already made a change in recognition that their sixth form is unable offer the full range of A Level courses that larger post-16 providers can.

The next nearest sixth form within North Yorkshire is at Richmond School (9.7 miles). However, traditionally many Wensleydale pupils looking to study A Levels have travelled to Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College in Darlington.

The range of practical courses and vocational qualifications offered by Further Education colleges in the surrounding areas has increased over recent years. These organisations, such as Askham Bryan Agricultural College and Middlesbrough and Darlington FE Colleges, also offer specialist vocational facilities, and their size bridges the gap between school and employment. They have become very popular with local families who broadly feel these organisations provide the widest offer for post-16 education and ensure that students are placed on a pathway that meets their needs and interests.

Funding

Pupil numbers primarily determine the funding for school budgets. The funding model for post-16 education has changed in recent years and now favours larger Sixth Forms than Wensleydale School has ever had. Historically, funding intended for those in years 7 to 11 at the school to some extent subsidised the provision of a Sixth Form, but this has become increasingly unsustainable as schools have faced increasing cost and funding pressures over recent years.

Standards

In May 2022 Ofsted judged the overall effectiveness of Wensleydale School as 'Good', with the quality of education rated as 'good', behaviour and attitudes as 'good', personal development as 'good' and leadership and management as 'good'. However, as well as highlighting the school's existing strengths in all these areas, the inspectors in this latest Ofsted report judged the sixth form provision as 'requires improvement'.

Staffing

The school has advised that there would be no changes to staffing as a result of the proposed permanent closure of the Sixth Form.

Transport

North Yorkshire Council publishes on its website a Post 16 Policy Statement by 31st May each year, which sets out the transport assistance available to young people moving onto sixth form or college who are resident in the county and who qualify.

North Yorkshire Council provides assistance with transport to the nearest sixth form or college to students who qualify. To qualify for assistance with transport to sixth form or college, the following applies:

- students must be over 16 and under 19 on 1 September and live in North Yorkshire
- students must be attending the nearest sixth form or further education college to their home address or the sixth form of the secondary school which is recognised as the normal school for their home address

- the course attended must be full-time, for instance, more than 12 hours a week
- the sixth form or college is the nearest establishment offering a course that the Council consider suitable to a student's career choice, or that is a pre-requisite for entry into higher education (see below for more details)
- the nearest sixth form or college is more than three miles from the home by the shortest walked route
- students must have agreement from their parent or guardian to pay for the assistance.

Transport assistance needs to be renewed annually and is not provided for students on apprenticeships or work placements.

Further details are available at:

<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/education-and-learning/school-and-college-transport/transport-sixth-form-or-college>

Any parents who may wish to seek transport assistance, should seek advice on transport entitlement prior to applying for a place on a post-16 course.

Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College, Darlington runs a minibus service from Leyburn at the beginning and end of the school day for sixth form students and there is also public transport to Richmond School and Darlington College.

Students attending post-16 courses in Darlington have tended to travel into Leyburn on public transport and then catch the College bus provided by Queen Elizabeth Sixth Form College.

The Proposal

For the reasons above it is proposed to change the age range at Wensleydale School and Sixth Form, from 31 August 2025, by ceasing the Sixth Form Provision.

What Happens Next?

Your views about this proposal are welcomed. You can either complete and return the attached response sheet or submit an online response.

Paper responses should be returned to North Yorkshire Council at the address below:

FREEPOST RTKE-RKAY-CUJS
Wensleydale School Sixth Form Proposal
Strategic Planning
North Yorkshire Council
County Hall
NORTHALLERTON

Online responses may be submitted by following this link:

<https://online1.snapsurveys.com/alldkk>

Responses to the consultation will be published on the Council's website. Your personal details, and those of others you may refer to, will not be published.

The closing date for responses is 5pm on 20 December 2024

All responses to the consultation received by this date are scheduled to be considered by the Council's Executive on 21 January 2025.

If the Council's Executive decides to proceed with the closure proposal, then statutory notices would be published in the local press on 31 January 2025. These notices would provide a further four weeks for representations to be made. A final decision is then scheduled to be taken by North Yorkshire Council's Executive in March or April. If agreed, the sixth form provision would cease from on 31 August 2025.

Anticipated Key Dates

All dates are subject to approvals at each stage.

Consultation opens	11 November
Public meeting	Thursday 5 December at 5.30pm at Wensleydale School
Consultation closes	20 December 2024
Council's Executive considers consultation response	21 January 2025
Statutory Notices published (4 weeks for representations to be made)	31 Jan – 28 Feb
Final decision by Council's Executive	March or April
Proposed implementation date	31 August 2025

Wensleydale School Sixth Form Consultation

This is a consultation on proposals to change the age range at Wensleydale School and Sixth Form, by ceasing the Sixth Form Provision from 31 August 2025.

We are collecting this information for the purpose of gathering views on the proposal. Your personal data will not be published or passed to any other organisation unless a legal obligation compels us to do so.

Reading our Privacy Notice will help you understand how and why we process your personal data. www.northyorks.gov.uk/privacy-notices

<p>Do you have any comments about the proposal? (Please do not disclose any personal information in your answer)</p>
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What is your interest/status? Parent / Governor / Teacher / Community / Other	
Other (please state)	

Name of school: (if applicable)	
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To confirm your proximity to school and to prevent duplicate responses we are asking you to provide your name and address. This information will be removed

from any analysis or reports.	
Name:	
Address:	
Postcode:	

To help us assess whether we have provided clear information, please let us know whether you found this consultation easy to understand? **Yes / No**

Please send this response sheet to the following "FREEPOST" address. You do not need to use a postage stamp.

FREEPOST RTKE-RKAY-CUJS
Wensleydale School Sixth Form Proposal
Strategic Planning
North Yorkshire Council
County Hall
NORTHALLERTON
DL7 8AE

Or to submit your response online go to:
<https://online1.snapsurveys.com/alldkk>

To be received by no later than **20 December 2024**