

## **Consultation about closure of specialist provision for pupils with Hearing Impairment (HI) at Gifford Primary School and Dormers Wells High School**

Ealing Council, the Governing Body of Gifford Primary School, and Dormers Wells Learning Trust (which is the academy trust that Dormers Wells High School is part of) want to hear your views about the proposed closure of specialist provision (Units) at Gifford Primary School and Dormers Wells High School that each support pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) as a result of a Hearing Impairment (HI). The consultation will end on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024. This document provides more detail about why this is being proposed and how to respond.

### **What is being proposed?**

This consultation is about two separate proposals:

- To close the designated provision at Gifford Primary School for up to 10 pupils with Hearing Impairment (HI) with effect from 1 September 2025; and
- To close the designated provision at Dormers Well High School for up to 10 pupils with Hearing Impairment (HI) with effect from 1 September 2025.

The consultation is being undertaken jointly because of the common rationale for the proposals.

### **Why is this being proposed?**

The closures of these two Hearing Impaired (HI) provisions are being proposed because demand for places in either of the provisions has been reducing and they are no longer educationally or financially sustainable.

The trend of reducing demand for specialist provision in mainstream schools for pupils with Hearing Impairment has been seen nationally. For pupils who are otherwise able to access a mainstream curriculum, the success of the Newborn Hearing Screening, the advent of cochlear implants and improved technology to support deaf children and young people has enabled more deaf children and young people to have their needs met successfully in local mainstream provision. Where pupils have significant learning needs in addition to being deaf that means a mainstream school curriculum is not appropriate, those needs often require attendance at a special school rather than a provision in a mainstream school.

As the demand for the provisions has declined, they have become financially and educationally unsustainable. Funding is provided per pupil, and so a small number of pupils means that the cost of a Qualified Teacher for the Deaf is shared amongst fewer places, making each place considerably more expensive. Smaller provisions are financially difficult for the Council to afford to sustain. Recruitment of Qualified Teachers for the Deaf has also become increasingly difficult, making it difficult for mainstream schools to meet needs if such a teacher is specified on the EHCP.

## **Why is redesignation to another type of SEND not proposed?**

The number of pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is increasing within Ealing, reflecting a national trend. An EHCP is provided when a pupil has a special educational need or disability (SEND) that requires support above the level that mainstream schools are expected to be able to support without additional funding. Ealing Council is working with schools to establish specialist resourced provision within mainstream schools for pupils with EHCPs.

The existing accommodation for the specialist provision at each school was planned for only 10 pupils, and so the physical space within the school for the provision is small. New provisions that have been established in Ealing in recent years are for approximately 30 pupils, as this provides greater staffing expertise and more educational opportunities for the benefit of pupils. There is insufficient physical space at either school to convert the existing 10 place HI provision into a 30 place provision for a different type of SEND need. At a time of falling pupil numbers in mainstream schools, it is an inefficient use of resources to build new accommodation at these schools for SEND when there is available space in other schools. In addition, both schools were built under Private Finance Initiative (PFI) contracts and so any investment in the buildings would require negotiation with the company responsible for the buildings which would be likely to mean any investment takes longer and costs more than at other schools.

## **Further information regarding the HI provision at Gifford Primary School**

There were just 2 pupils accessing the Gifford HI provision in 2021/2022 and 2022/2023, and no Ealing pupils in 2023/2024 or 2024/25.

In July 2024, Ealing had 17 primary age children and young people with an EHCP and a primary need of being Hearing Impaired. 9 pupils were attending a mainstream school, with the other 8 attending either a local special school, a HI specific special school which has a different approach to a unit provision, or a HI provision in a neighbouring local authority area.

## **Further information regarding the HI provision at Dormers Wells High School**

There were 4 young people attending the unit in 2021/2022, and 2 young people in 2022/2023 and 2023/2024. This has reduced to 0 young people in 2024/25. The 2 students who accessed the provision in 2023/2024 were both in year 11 and have moved to post 16 provision.

In July 2024, Ealing had 28 secondary age young people with an EHCP and a primary need of being Hearing Impaired. Of those 28 pupils, 13 are attending a mainstream school, 9 are attending 4 different special schools specifically designated for deaf children and young people. The 9 pupils span years 7 to 14 and the schools provide a different type of provision to unit provision. All are day pupils. The other 6 pupils have been attending either a specialist unit or a special post 16 provider, with a very small number being electively home educated (EHE).

## **How would pupils be supported if the provisions close?**

Children and young people will not be disadvantaged through the closure of this unit. Support is provided to children and young people with a hearing impairment through the Ealing Sensory Impairment Service which provides support for Children and Young People aged 0 -18 years who live in Ealing and have a diagnosed hearing impairment. The Advisory Teachers hold specialist qualifications in teaching and supporting children and young people who have a hearing impairment.

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The Service has strong links with the Speech and Language specialists who also work with hearing impaired children and young people, audiologists, hearing clinics in the local area, and the specialist hospitals such as Great Ormond Street.

The Advisory Teachers provide support to individual children and young people based on an assessment of their needs. Referrals are made to the service from the medical professionals who diagnose hearing impairments at the hospital clinics. Through the newborn hearing screening babies who have failed the screening are referred to the service so early contact with families can be made.

Advisory Teachers support schools and settings to make the appropriate adaptations and reasonable adjustments to include the child or young person in the school and provide full access to the National Curriculum. They also provide expert advice to the Local Authority for the decision-making process when a request for an assessment for an EHC plan is made and provide advice to be included in the final plan.

### **Where would the nearest HI provisions be if the proposal proceeds?**

A number of surrounding boroughs have designated HI provisions within mainstream primary and high schools. Further information is provided in the table below. It is considered that these provisions are more likely to remain educationally and financially sustainable if the provisions within Ealing close.

	Primary phase	Secondary phase
Brent	Kingsbury Green Primary School	Kingsbury High School
Hounslow	Norwood Green Infant and Junior schools	Heston Community School
Hillingdon		Vyners High School

Ealing currently supports pupils in these and other settings, each agreed to effectively meet the needs of individual learners.

### **How would the closure of the provision affect each school?**

Neither school is receiving any funding for the HI provision in the 2024/25 academic year as neither has any pupils within it. There would therefore be no financial impact upon either school. Similarly, neither school has dedicated staff for the provision now that there are no pupils, so there would be no staffing impact.

Each school would continue to be able to support pupils with a broad range of additional or special educational needs or disabilities, as all mainstream schools can.

### **Who are we consulting?**

We are consulting staff, parents and carers, pupils, associated professionals, and other interested parties.

### **How to have your say**

Please have you say on the proposal by

- Completing the online questionnaire that is available [here](#) or from the website of each school; or
- Writing to the Headteacher of each school at their school postal address.

A paper copy of the questionnaire is available at the school office of either school.

The consultation ends on Friday 25<sup>th</sup> October 2024.

## **What happens after the consultation?**

All responses to the consultation will be carefully considered by the Council and by the two Governing Bodies.

For each school, if the Council and Governing Body decide that the provision should remain open, no further action would be required.

If the Council and Governing Body decide to continue with the proposal to close the provision, the process is different for each school:

- For Gifford Primary School, as a community school, the Council would need to publish a Statutory Notice proposing the closure of the provision, which anyone is able to respond to during a representation period of four weeks. Within two months of the end of the representation period, Ealing Council's Cabinet would then consider the responses to the Statutory Notice and make the decision about whether to close the provision.
- For Dormers Wells High School, as an academy school, the academy trust would apply to the Secretary of State who would make the decision about whether to close the provision.