



Maplewell Hall School

Response to Statutory Notice

February 2018

School Organisation Service
Leicestershire County Council

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Key findings

- In total, 131 responses were received. The majority (113) responded to the email address provided, with the remainder returning a paper response (18).
- The highest proportion of people who responded to the Statutory Notice are responding as a parent/carer of a pupil attending Maplewell Hall School (52).
- All respondents (100%) sent in objections to the Statutory Notice.
- The most frequently occurring themes in the objections taken from the responses are:
 - The value of the residential provision to improving pupil educational outcomes.
 - The value the overnight stays provide as an opportunity for pupils to develop their social and independence skills and confidence.
 - The value of the residential provision to improving family life for parents/carers and siblings through the respite provided.
 - The expectation that the closure of the residential facility will result in higher costs for the Council, principally for transport and overnight short breaks.

All feedback reflected the view that the residential provision should be kept open and not closed. Some specific suggestions were referenced amongst the responses, including:

- I do understand the need for savings but have some concerns that the short-term financial benefit could increase costs in the medium term in supporting vulnerable young adults in the community. As a result, I would like to see the projected impact assessment on independent living of young adults in five years' time please. I did raise this when the council representatives attended the school and gave my contact details but have not yet received a reply. This economic modelling would appear to be an important part of due diligence. My other concern is many of the children attending this specialist school have social interaction difficulties and complex needs. They travel long distances and are somewhat isolated from their communities. Residential provides opportunities to improve social skills, which are vital when it comes to finding future useful employment.

Other options might include:

- 1) Increase parental contributions through use of disability living allowance,
- 2) Reducing access to lower costs,
- 3) Using the facility privately in the holidays to make money

- Any Budget savings would be small in relation to the potential long-term gain of essential life skills for the students. Promoting the welfare of young disadvantaged and vulnerable people is unequivocally an essential service for the County Council and should be prioritised in the Council's spending review. As there currently appears to be some uncertainty about the financial deficit of the school and the

fiscal budgeting by the Council for the School, it seems sensible for there to be a formal audit before any irreversible decision is taken on the provision of residency.

- I don't think residence should close because it helped me learn new skills and improve on my sports skills. Also it helped me to spend more time with my friends because they live further away than me.
- He enjoys the many activities on offer, the chance to socialise in a safe, calm and accepting environment where he can meet with friends out of the classroom that he would not otherwise have a chance to see as they are from across the county. He also really enjoys the sleepover element as a chance to learn a little independence and an opportunity to try and think about how he can cope away from home. This time away also brings huge gains to our family life for our other children as it is a chance for them to have some focused parental attention which they wouldn't usually have as we have no family help locally.

Background

Maplewell Hall School, built in 1857 and located in Woodhouse Eaves, currently has capacity for 195 pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), in addition to a residential facility with a maximum nightly capacity of 24 pupils. The school is maintained by Leicestershire County Council.

The school caters predominantly for pupils with moderate learning difficulties. There are 183 pupils enrolled in the school, including 20 pupils with a designated Autism Spectrum Disorder.

Figures provided by the school indicate that the use of the residential facility is up to 24 students per night Monday to Thursday, with each pupil having on average 12-14 nights' attendance per school year.

The proposal is to close the residential facility from September 2018. This would enable a phased closure over several months, allowing sufficient time to work with any pupils/families affected by the closure to put alternative support in place if considered necessary after a social care assessment.

Discussions have commenced with the school about:

- The removal of funding from September 2018.
- Any necessary support for families/pupils as a consequence of this.
- The process to be followed.

Overview of the process

On 24th November 2017 the County Council Cabinet agreed a recommendation to implement the next stage of the proposals to remove/close the residential facilities for

pupils at Maplewell Hall Special School. The next steps of the process required the County Council to publish a Statutory Notice and further detail of the full proposals, in keeping with the legal obligations placed on the Council for making 'prescribed alterations' to maintained schools. The Statutory Notice ran for four weeks from 15 January 2018 until 12 February 2018.

Communications

The Statutory Notice was published in the Leicester Mercury and was published online at Leicestershire County Councils website and Maplewell Hall Schools website along with the full proposal. Every parent/carer of a pupil attending Maplewell Hall School had their own copy of the Statutory Notice and full proposal posted to them.

Further copies of the Statutory Notices were posted at the school and Loughborough Library and every Governor of Maplewell Hall School was emailed a copy of the Statutory Notice and a hard copy was hand delivered to the school for the Chair of Governors.

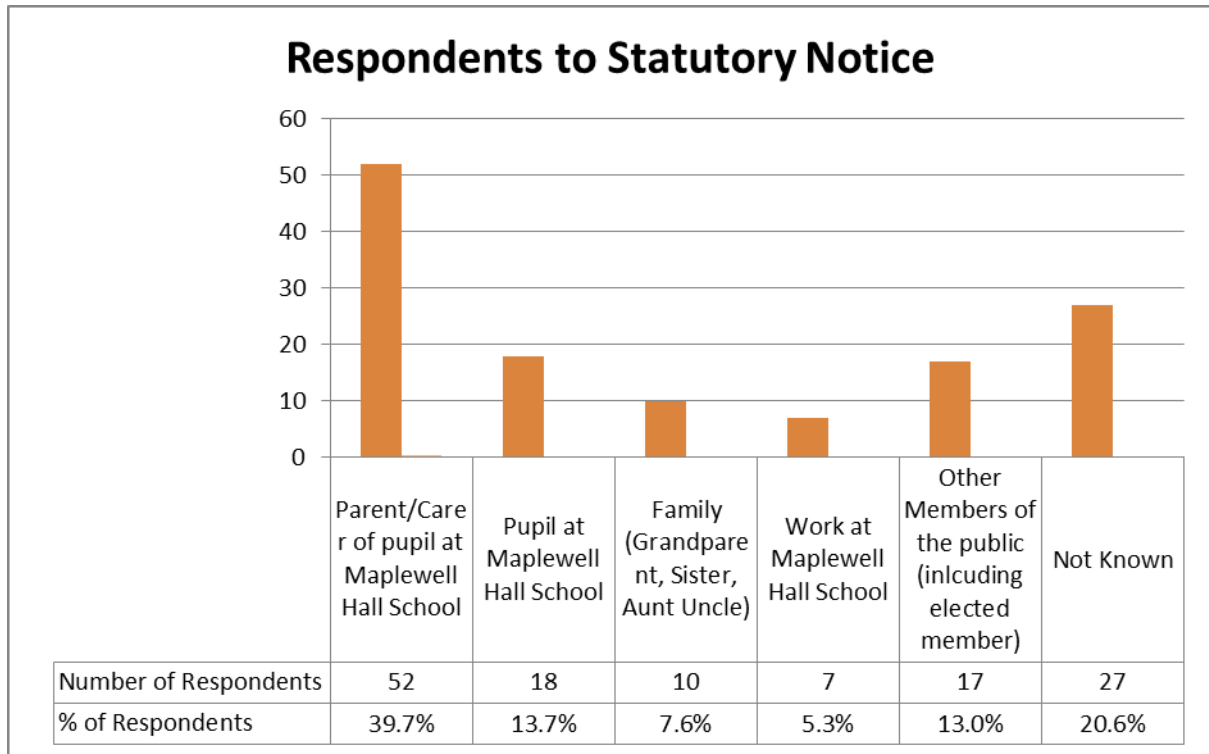
Other recipients included:

- All Head Teachers of Special Schools in Leicestershire County Council
- All County Councillors
- MPs – Edward Argar and Nicky Morgan
- Woodhouse Parish Council

An email address was made available for responses and return address was also made available for those who wished to respond by letter.

Results

- During the consultation period, 131 people responded to the Statutory Notice. The majority (113) responded to the email address provided, with the remainder returning a paper response (18).



Analysis of comments

The responses focussed on five areas of concern:

1. Social Skills/Friendship Groups
2. Financial
3. Respite
4. Life Choices
5. Education Health Care Plan

The 131 comments were coded from the responses to reflect the above five areas. For the purpose of analysis, the responses were coded 1-5 to enable a summary of comments to be provided to the objections.

Comments

1. Social Skills/Friendship Groups

78 respondents highlighted the positive benefits of the residential provision and the effect it has on pupils' social skills and friendship groups.

Examples include:

“He gets to be like any other child having a sleepover somewhere away from home, this would not happen anywhere else as he is not invited to sleepovers. He gets to manage his belongings, make his own breakfast and organise himself ready for the day ahead. These are all valuable life skills necessary for promoting independence. You state in your proposal that there are no pupils who “have a need for educational residential provision” but surely they all need to be away from their parents for one or two nights to gain independence? This may be a cost cutting exercise now, but you will have to spend more money in the future when all of these children need support to get on with their daily lives.”

“My son attends Maplewell Hall school. He has epilepsy & is autistic, but this does not make him WHO he is. He is simply a boy wanting to feel normal. As a parent of a special needs child I know this is nearly impossible. However a huge slice of normality comes from Maplewell offering Residential care. This gives my son the opportunity to feel Normal. A feeling he seldom gets in Any other aspect of his life. He wants to spend time with his friends & this is a safe environment where this is achieved. Above that the offer of INDEPENDENCE is huge for these children. There can be NO price put on this. I understand money makes the world go round but to raise a generation who believe in themselves & have had the best years despite their personal battles is a major prospect. “

“I must stress my sheer anger at such a decision to strip these disadvantaged young children of their independence and a chance of trying to fit into an already judgmental society when it comes to adulthood. The lessons these children learn go beyond the curriculum and beyond what is expected of the facility. To lose one of the most important aspects in these children’s lives will only have a devastating effect on their lives and take away what bright futures they once had.”

2. Financial

28 respondents highlighted concern over the removal of the £293,000 budget that currently funds residential facilities at Maplewell Hall School. Requests were made to reconsider withdrawing the budget and look at a full review.

Indicative comments:

“Any Budget savings would be small in relation to the potential long-term gain of essential life skills for the students. Promoting the welfare of young disadvantaged and vulnerable people is unequivocally an essential service for the County Council and should be prioritised in the Council’s spending review. Since there currently appears to be uncertainties concerning the financial deficit of the school and the fiscal budgeting by the Council for the School, perhaps a formal audit on both parts should be completed before any irreversible decision is taken on the provision of residency.”

“ My understanding is that this decision is being based purely from a financial point of view, and has not considered the huge benefits that it plays in helping these young adults prepare for their future, the normality it gives to their lives and the benefit of some respite that the other family members experience. This is something that my own daughter has benefitted from greatly, as we had time to concentrate on her throughout my son's time at residential. The amount of money that it costs to run this facility is small in comparison to what is spent in other areas. It is just sending out the message to those involved that because you're different, you are not worthy of the best start to adulthood, even if it needs to be delivered in a slightly different way to mainstream education to meet your needs. There is strong opposition from all these groups of people, for this not to happen. Surely, there must be another way, as closing it would have a dramatic effect on these children's futures. Knowing that this decision is being fought against so strongly, why are there not other options being considered, and offered to us, for example, increasing the fee paid by parents, before this experience is lost forever.”

“From a financial perspective I fully appreciate the pressure placed on the council to save money. However I do not believe that this necessitates the full removal of the provision. A significant reduction in the funding would still enable the service to operate whilst still saving the council money. Maplewell has already worked with the authority to enable significant savings to be made from the High Needs budget. The development of the Maplewell Autism Provision will save the local authority over £2 million pounds over a 3 year period by providing places for students previously placed in non LEA establishments. By returning a fraction of that saving to the school then residence could continue.”

“I am aware that the Council is under financial difficulties, but this seems to disproportionately affect Maplewell Hall School. If the schools funding is cut by £293,000 this would be a cut of around 11% at a time when the other SEN schools under the Councils control aren't facing any cuts at all. The argument that taking money from Maplewell Hall is ok because they focus on children with moderate learning difficulties and funding should be more focused towards children with more severe learning difficulties does not hold water. Funding for SEN schools is already skewed in favour of those with more severe learning difficulties. At every meeting there were serious concerns raised about the lack of accurate financial information relating to the effect this cut would have on the school. It is clear that the Residential provision does not cost anything like £293,000, so even if the school closes that, there will still be a large impact on the rest of the school. Has this been taken into account?”

3. Respite

3 respondents referenced the positive role that residential provision has in providing family support and respite. The comments highlighted the value not just for parents but for siblings.

Indicative comments:

“This service is invaluable to children with special needs in terms of providing vital life lessons and preparedness for adulthood and independence. The service is also unparalleled in its benefit to the parents, affording them a rare opportunity of respite.”

“Having the opportunity for a spell in a residential unit has a huge benefit for the children both on their learning and welfare. The money spent on the residential provision will be clawed back by less money needing to be spent on additional help later. Also the benefit for families by having respite care based on their individual needs is enormous. The use of the facility will vary depending on these needs but it must be available at all times. Consideration also must be taken of the whole family especially siblings who often miss out on their learning because of necessary family time taken up with the disabled child. “

“This facility that my son has used on many occasions not only gives the kids and the parents a bit of respite from each other, it also increases the students personal confidences, improves their general attitude towards school, helps them to improve their communication and learning skills in preparation for their adulthood (i.e. changing bed sheets, ironing clothes, cooking etc, etc.) and gives them a greater exposure to learning over a wide range of areas.”

4. Life Choices

4 respondents raised specific concerns including a lack of alternative support and the concern that removal of the provision would create further long term issues and costs.

Indicative comments:

“When services such as these are terminated the challenge in restarting them is enormous, and can actually be impossible. I draw to your attention that suicide rates are rising fastest among young people than any other age group. We must all be very very careful in decisions such as these because lives are at risk, and societal health is too, which will cost much more in the future than money saved now.”

“These young people are so disadvantaged in our society that it is surely our duty to support them for as long and as caringly as we can and this is no area to consider making savings. Life will be hard enough for these young people and their carers when they leave school, and we should do everything in our power to help them learn independence whilst providing an enriching and enjoyable experience.”

“These children sit on a knife edge and can either become adults that can live independently, work and contribute to society or they can end up with significant needs and drains on the social care system with future costs. This small investment in their future now can ensure the best outcomes are achieved. These children do not have significant needs and the majority therefore have no access to other forms of funding - PIP/DLA etc. They do not therefore have access to other services that these residential facilities provide that more seriously impaired children can access. If this residential facility is closed these children will be further isolated and a step closer to failing in life. The closure seems sudden from full facilities to none in September 2018. If the residential facilities do close surely a phased approach that reduces these services and increases others will be less disruptive for these vulnerable children and their families.”

5. Education Health Care Plan (EHCP)

2 comments specifically raised concern regarding reliance on EHCPs

Indicative comments:

“Mental disability is an invisible disability and is very often overlooked. Even the government has acknowledged this and are looking to address this, most recently they are looking at providing people with an invisible disability the opportunity to now apply for blue badges. I strongly feel that the closure of the residential facility of Maplewell Hall School is a discriminatory act against people with the invisible disability; mental health is nearly always overlooked and never given the resources it so desperately needs. The residential facility is offering the very needed resources to address this in children and young people before they become adults and then become part of the adult system. To say that “no pupils have been assessed as having a need for educational residential provision stated in their Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP)” is very unfair. This is a relatively new scheme brought in to replace IEP’s and it has never been clear from the start as to what is required to be recorded in the new EHCP. You have never provided clear and concise guidelines of what is to be included, to this point they are very vague. If we do not know what we need to stipulate as a requirement, how can we defend this or justify it as a valid need. It is very misleading for yourselves to say that it is not a valid need for children at the school if we were never told that we needed to state it was. We have never been advised that this is missing from the EHCP, nor have we been given the opportunity to make any necessary changes to the EHCP to include the need for a residential facility, which we have never been advised of. How can you use this as justification for your proposed plan if you have never advised people of the fact. It appears to be a very convenient loop hole for you use to get out of continuing to provide an existing service for which there is most definitely a “need” for.”

“It was stated in the officer’s report that “Closure of the facility will allow savings to be made and be directed to other areas.” My response to that is that our young people at Maplewell Hall are entitled to be educated in a way that prepares them for adulthood and as such would lose out should the facility close. Parents would be entitled to request that this was taken into account in their child’s EHCP and the opportunity for residential education and also short breaks and respite care provided elsewhere would need to be taken into account when calculating any savings to be made. This must be done on an individual basis. It is simply unacceptable to say that all EHCPs have been reviewed and this is not deemed necessary. When an EHCP is reviewed it is a legal right that parents and students must be involved. There needs to be rigorous, joined up calculations across multiple departments that take account of all of the different streams of potential costs that could be incurred as a result of this proposal. I cannot see that there is a genuine attempt at this. “