

APPENDIX 1

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

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).

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.

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:

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.

Action RequestedCorporate Director
Date: