

Dear consultee,

### **Closure of Mounton House Special School**

I am writing to notify you of the Council's decision following the statutory consultation processes concerning the proposed closure of Mounton House Special School.

You will be aware from my previous correspondence that the Council's Cabinet met on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2019 and agreed to proceed to the next stages of the statutory process, namely to publish statutory notices concerning the proposed closure of Mounton House Special School with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020.

The statutory notices were formally published on **Monday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2019**, and allowed a 28 day window for any statutory objections to be submitted. The objection period closed on 5<sup>th</sup> November 2019. An objection report has been produced analyzing the feedback received during the objection period alongside the Council's response to these statutory objections. A copy of the Objection Report is available to view at [www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/schoolreorganisation](http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/schoolreorganisation). Hard copies of the Objection Report can also be posted on request.

The Council's Cabinet met on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 2020 to consider the content of the Objection Report, and made their final decision to proceed with the closure of Mounton House Special School with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020.

In determining the proposal, Cabinet Members gave careful consideration to key factors that concern school organisation proposals, particularly the closure of a school, identified within the School Organisation Code (November 2018). A summary of the considerations given to these identified factors can be found under appendix 1 overleaf. The full considerations can be found by studying the statutory documentation concerning these proposals, which can be accessed by visiting [www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/schoolreorganisation](http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/schoolreorganisation)

The closure of a school is always an extremely difficult decision for Cabinet Members to make, particularly when the school concerned supports some of our most vulnerable children. Whilst appreciating that this decision may cause some upset amongst the school community, the Council believes the decision is the right one to allow us to effectively support the wider (and growing) needs of our children and young people with additional learning needs.

The Council's focus will now be placed on continuing to support those directly affected by these proposals. The employees at the school will continue to receive the maximum levels of support available through this difficult time, and we will continue to assist them wherever possible during this process.

The Council will also continue its support to the parents and children and young people affected by these proposals to ensure that their preference for future

provision is incorporated wherever possible. Our focus will be to ensure their transition to their new provision in September 2020 is as seamless as possible.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. McLean', followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Will McLean

Chief Officer for Children and Young People

Mae'r Cyngor yn croesawu gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg, Saesneg neu yn y ddwy iaith. Byddwn yn cyfathrebu â chi yn ôl eich dewis.

Ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

The Council welcomes correspondence in English or Welsh or both, and will respond to you

## **Appendix 1**

### **Considerations given by the Council to the key factors of the School Organisation Code (September 2018) in determining the decision to close Mounton House Special School:**

#### **Quality and Standards of Education**

In recent times, Mounton House has been on an important recovery journey. Estyn placed it in Significant Improvement in 2015. As a result, the school was categorised as a red school i.e. a school requiring the highest levels of support. The school, its staff and partners have worked hard to address areas in need of improvement and as a result, the school was removed from the list of schools requiring significant improvement in November 2017. Since that time, the school continued its journey of improvement and has moved to yellow category, in the last two years as it now needs significantly lower levels of support.

In making its decision, the Council have confidence that the quality and standards of education of those children and young people affected by these proposals will not be significantly compromised.

#### **Need for places and the impact on the accessibility of schools**

In making this decision, careful consideration has been given to the demand for school places within the area, more specifically the provision required for the children of Monmouthshire with additional needs. The current designation of Mounton House special School provides education for those children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. This diagnosis accounts for only 13% of the total stated population within Monmouthshire.

The provision at Mounton House Special School is, due to its current designation, too narrowly focused on boys alone and those children of a secondary age. This means that the Council has been unable to meet the needs of many of our children with additional needs and vulnerabilities within their local communities.

The Council's decision to close Mounton House Special School enables investment into providing appropriate provision and support services to meet the needs of a wider range of children and young people with additional needs, including provision for the increasing number of children and young people with a diagnosis of ASD within the County.

The Council is also satisfied that there is suitable alternative provision available for those children and young people affected by the decision to close the school. As a result of this decision, officers will continue works with school staff, parents and the young people involved to discuss these suitable alternatives, ensuring preference is accommodated wherever reasonably possible.

## **Resourcing of Education and other Financial Implications**

Over the last seven years, the number of pupils on roll in Mounton House has reduced significantly. The school has a capacity of fifty-eight places of which forty-two could be residential. When the decision was taken to publish statutory notices, there were sixteen boys in the school with no residential students, offering a surplus capacity of 72.4% (and 100% within the residential offer).

The low numbers of Monmouthshire pupils in the school means that the residual cost to the Authority for the current academic year is currently £131,397 per Monmouthshire pupil. This was anticipated to rise to £262,794 in September 2020.

The Council in making its decision has determined that the provision does not provide the authority with value for money. The population of children with special educational needs in Monmouthshire is growing and bears a considerable pressure in both teaching and financial resource. The costs associated with Mounton House Special School are disproportionately focused towards a very small group of pupils. Monmouthshire has a clear commitment to support all our pupils in order that they 'have the best possible start in life', and the decision to close Mounton House Special School helps us to deliver on this commitment.

## **Specific Factors in Consideration of School closures**

The Council has completed a Future Generations assessment which both acknowledges and mitigates the impact on the community as a result of the decision to close Mounton House Special School.

The Council has also explored alternative options to the closure of Mounton House Special School. In 2018, the Council consulted on a series of reforms to Monmouthshire's Additional Learning Needs (ALN) provision. At the heart of these was the ambition to recreate Mounton House Special School as a broad range Special School and utilise the Mounton House site as a hub for pupils with SEBD and Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) across the county serving both boys and girls of all ages from seven to 16 (or potentially 19).

Following consultation, the proposals were not progressed largely due to the capital costs associated with that transformation. The final design costs were circa £6.4m compared to a prudential borrowing planning expectation of approximately £2m. The costs were calculated by Monmouthshire County Council's property services team using the existing floor area of the school and a median cost as provided by the Building Costs Information Service (BCIS) (Royal Chartered Institute Surveyors' (RCIS)) for the renewal or conversion of special schools. The current quality of the fixed asset is not at an acceptable level in mainstream education.