

PRESS RELEASE

Wednesday 10th November

High Weald Academy (Leigh Academies Trust)

Secretary of State confirms closure plan for High Weald Academy (HWA).

The listening period on the closure plan for HWA closed on Monday 25th October. Having considered all of the evidence, the Secretary of State for Education has now approved the final closure plan.

We are grateful to all of those who gave their views as part of the listening exercise. In total, 285 responses were received, including 125 from existing parents. The Secretary of State did not consider that any new evidence emerged during the listening period which required the closure plan to be changed.

As explained in the listening period exercise pack issued by Leigh Academies Trust (LAT) on 27th September 2021, the reasons for the closure of HWA relate to long-term issues with low pupil numbers resulting in financial difficulties and in turn contributing to poor educational performance. Since the start of the listening exercise, significant numbers of parents have chosen to find places in other local schools for their children ahead of the published closure dates for each year group. This means that just 75 pupils now remain on roll in years 7-10. In addition, we are pleased that all 53 year 11 pupils are continuing at HWA for the rest of the academic year to complete their GCSEs before transitioning to another setting in September.

We will ensure that the quality of education provided for pupils remaining at the academy for the rest of the academic year is as positive as possible. To cater best for a much-reduced number of pupils, we have rewritten the timetable as we begin this half-term to ensure every child receives the support they need. Our focus is to ensure that year 11s are well-prepared for their forthcoming examinations and that pupils in other year groups are ready for new destinations when the time comes. Our dedicated and hard-working staff will continue to strive tirelessly to ensure each child's journey at HWA ends positively.

All year 10 pupils remaining at HWA for the time being will move to Mascalls Academy or another setting if preferred on 1st January 2022 when this year group will close at HWA. Pupils in years 7-9 will do the same on 1st September 2022 when all remaining year groups at HWA will close and its funding agreement is terminated by mutual agreement by the Secretary of State.

All eligible year 10s joining Mascalls in January will be offered the opportunity of free transport. We are now working closely with Kent County Council to finalise these plans. We will do the same for pupils in years 7-9 ahead of next September. In addition, any pupil joining another academy at any point, whether this is Mascalls or an alternative destination, will be offered financial support for school uniform.

We understand that this has been a challenging period for everyone, but now is the time to put differences aside and come together to ensure that the transition for pupils, staff and the facilities at HWA is as positive as possible. We look forward to the rest of the time each child spends at HWA before moving onto their new destinations being as positive and productive as it can be.

About us

Leigh Academies Trust is a non-profit making charitable company, based in Strood, Medway. The Trust exists to support and assist schools to build upon their existing strengths and to help them achieve educational improvements in order to positively shape the lives of our students and the communities we serve. We now operate 31 academies along the South Thames Corridor, structured into 4 clusters. Our clusters contain all phases of education, from nursery to post-16. Each one has a passionate commitment to inclusion. The Trust was formed in 2008 with the linking of the Leigh Technology Academy and Longfield Academy under one governing body. It now encompasses 20,000 students between the ages of 2 and 19 and we employ over 2,500 staff across the South East. For more information go to <http://www.leighacademiestrust.org.uk/>