

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 2/23

Date: 20 February 2023

Briefing paper to: All Members of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Purpose: To provide a briefing and an update on the premises situation at Bradfields Special Academy

Bradfields Special Academy Briefing

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Background

Bradfields is a special school which admits pupils with EHCPs across the full age range and covers a range of need and ability.

Bradfields is an Ofsted rated 'Outstanding' academy and the sole school within the Fortis Trust.

The site in Walderslade, comprises of several buildings, which has been added to over the years, some recently by the council and others by the Trust.

The school now has a capacity for up to 436 pupils, and currently has 373 on role, although that is a fluid position.

Since the school became an academy in April 2014, the Trust has been responsible for the maintenance of the building and has undertaken a significant level of work across the site. However, one of the buildings, the Lower building (formerly the Ridge Meadow Primary School building), has deteriorated over time and now is suffering from significant issues. There are serious concerns around the roof, the windows and the resultant effects on the wider structure that these issues are having.

The school has placed a number of bids to the DfE for funding through the Condition Improvement Fund (CIF) to remedy these issues in recent years, but

has not been successful, which has meant that the known issues have not been treated fully and continued to worsen.

Recent building problems arising

On Tuesday 10 January 2023 a visit by the DfE Estates team raised further concerns around the building. The DfE requested that the school undertake an immediate structural survey of the building as well as one for asbestos. Celia Buxton and Paul Clarke met with the school virtually on Tuesday 10 January 2023 and subsequently requested an urgent meeting with Terrance Thomas from the Regional Schools Directors office who was aware of the situation.

As a precaution three classrooms on the first floor were closed off and those pupils relocated to other class bases around the site.

Following receipt of the Asbestos survey no issues or concerns were highlighted in that regard.

The structural survey took some time to be completed and drafted and on 10 February the DfE advised that the survey results show that whilst the building is not any imminent threat to life, it is deteriorating rapidly and should be used for no longer than necessary.

Short- and longer-term solutions

Further to the above, we have been advised that Bradfields has been accepted as an emergency project onto central government's Schools Rebuilding Programme, for the subject building only. This requires ministerial sign off, but the DfE is progressing with the relevant workstreams. This will result in the current building being demolished and a new one erected in its place. In the meantime, temporary modular buildings will be placed on the site so that the building can be vacated and demolished.

The lead in time for the temporary buildings is around 15 weeks and they expect that the new build will then take up to 3 years to complete.

In the meantime, whilst the school awaits the arrival of the temporary modular classrooms, the current building can be partially utilised with risk and management measures in place to ensure the safety of the pupils and staff.

Funding and planning process

The DfE will be wholly responsible for funding and delivering the temporary and permanent buildings and no call on funding from the Local Authority is expected.

The DfE will use 'Threat to Life' emergency measures to bypass advanced planning permission before the temporary buildings are installed but will apply for

retrospective planning. The planning department have been advised and a planning officer allocated to work with the DfE on this matter.

A full planning process will be undertaken for the longer-term permanent project.

Local authority officers will work with the DfE to maintain progress on this matter.

School operation in the meantime

As only one of the buildings on site is subject to these measures, the remainder of the school is fully operational. The pupils displaced from the building will be housed across the site and in the temporary modular buildings and continue to use the specialist areas in other parts of the school as they currently do. The situation is not expected to have any impact upon the curriculum delivery nor the learning experience of the pupils. All parties have the safety and education of the vulnerable pupils at the focus of their considerations and decision making.

The temporary buildings will need to meet appropriate standards and the school will be ensuring that the classrooms are welcoming and provide the classroom experience the children are used to benefiting from.

Paul Clarke

Strategic Head of Education; Planning and Access

17 February 2023.