

St Dominic's School - Consultation on proposal to close residential care provision

Thursday 11 April 2019

Total Responses: 24

The Proposal

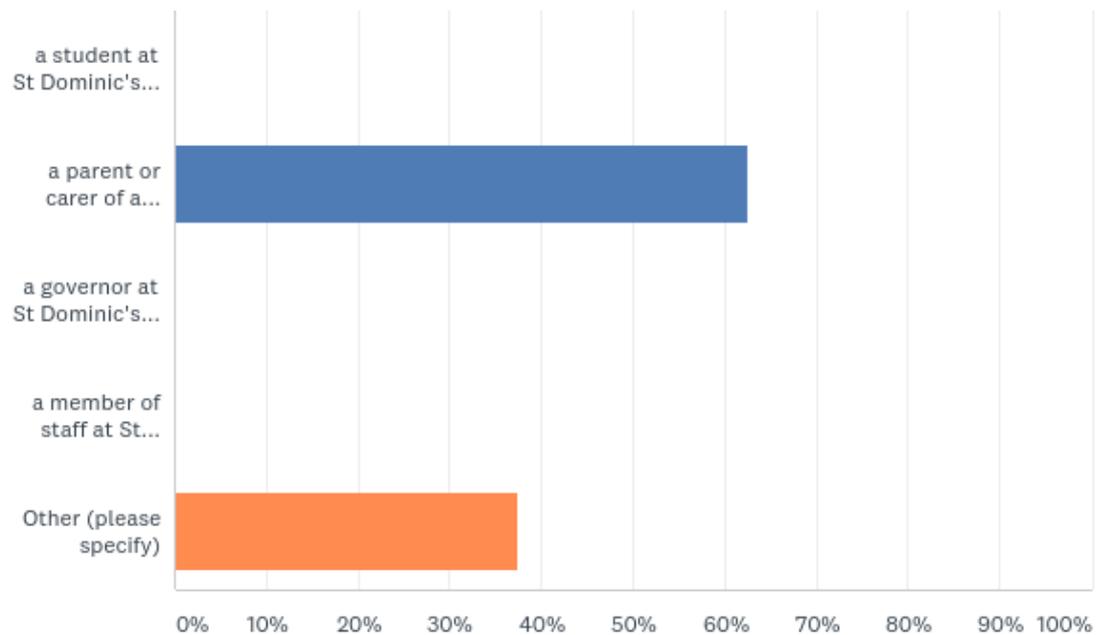
- We sought the views on the proposal to close the Residential Care Provision and redeploy the Residential Care Team at St Dominic's School for the academic year 2020/21.
- The key rationale for this proposal is to ensure the future financial viability of the school. It would also address a need from local authority commissioners for additional day places. The capacity of the school would therefore increase from 110 to 150.
- Numbers of residential pupils have been declining over the years and Local Authorities are now only funding residential places on an exceptional basis at St Dominic's School; we do not expect this situation to change. However, there is increasing demand for day placements. We want to continue to provide the highest quality of education and support for our pupils. A very small residential cohort will not provide the pupils with the peer group and breadth of residential care offer which pupils need and is not financially sustainable.
- Only three pupils are currently confirmed as residential in September 2019, based on the information to date. However, there may be short-term emergency placements that arise. In July 2020, there will be, based on the information to date, one Year 10 pupil. Two Year 11 pupils, who will have completed Key Stage 4, may request SDS Sixth Form or may be transitioning to local colleges.

The Process

- A formal consultation, to seek feedback on the change, took place over 6 term time weeks between Wednesday 30th January 2019 and Wednesday 20th March 2019.
- Comments on the proposal were sought via:
 - A paper based response form attached to the consultation letter
 - An online response form available from the school's website at www.stdominicsschool.org.uk
 - An email address of office@stdominicsschool.org.uk
 - And via post to St Dominic's School, Hambledon, Godalming, Surrey GU8 4DX
- A 'Frequently Asked Questions' document was also made available on the school's website.
- Feedback from the consultation will now be reported to the Regional Schools Commissioner at the Department for Education (DfE), as part of a 'Significant Change Business Case' process. Subject to any further information requested by the DfE, we hope to have a decision by July 2019.

Q1: Are you:

Answered: 24 Skipped: 0



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Answered: 24 Skipped: 0

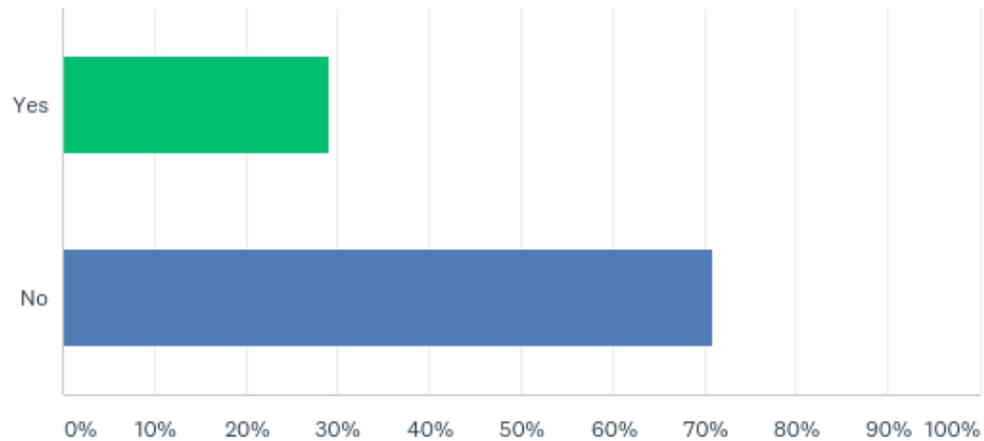
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
a student at St Dominic's School?	0.00%	0
a parent or carer of a child at St Dominic's School?	62.50%	15
a governor at St Dominic's School?	0.00%	0
a member of staff at St Dominic's School?	0.00%	0
Other (please specify)	37.50%	9
TOTAL		24

The 'other' respondents included:

- Former students
- Surrey County Council

Q2: Do you support the proposal?

Answered: 24 Skipped: 0



Q2: Do you support the proposal?

Answered: 24 Skipped: 0

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	29.17%	7
No	70.83%	17
TOTAL		24

Q3: Comments from respondents who supported the proposal – Part 1

- We do support the proposal. It seems like a logical plan to close the residential provision. We can also see the benefits in expanding the school capacity. However, we have some concerns on how this is done:
 - KS2 Provision: There have been discussions about a separate KS2 area/building. We feel this would be hugely beneficial. Our son is currently in Year 4 and we don't always think it's appropriate/beneficial for him to be mixing with much older boys. If this separation is planned, will it happen before or alongside the expansion?
 - Current classroom provision: The plan mentions using some of the residential buildings for KS2. Many of the classrooms are currently in temporary buildings. Would they stay like this? Would that mean that KS2 is split over the school?
 - Speed of expansion: This seems quite fast, particularly given the above queries
 - Car Parking: Are there plans to improve this? There simply aren't enough places. Recent changes (new signs stating no use of staff car park and barriers which mean 2 cars can't pass each other once the car park is full) have made it worse. Whilst we support the basic ideas of the plan we would be very interested to hear more detailed plans and have more opportunities to feedback. It would be very interesting to discuss this at a parent forum and have an opportunity to ask more questions.
- Surrey County Council supports the intended closure of the residential provision, we would like to have detailed discussions with the school about the exit plan for those pupils, their placing local authority and the nature of their placement so that we can involve the appropriate teams in transition planning. With regards to the expansion of the places within the school the LA would be in broad agreement with the proposals but that these would need to be ratified with the placing local authorities and that the data supports this increase in numbers. The authority would be happy to broker both meetings to discuss the opportunities available for future long term placement. We would appreciate the opportunity to work in partnership with the school to develop the basic need requirements and any resulting capital proposals relating to any proposed growth.

Q3: Comments from respondents who supported the proposal – Part 2

- Looking at the evidence it is clear the residential provision is causing a strain on school funds and the demand for day places is high leaving the school with little option but to respond to the needs of the county and become a day school. I am broadly supportive of the change; however, I have two serious concerns that I would like to raise with regards to this consultation.
 - The speed of school expansion: We have already seen the school expand significantly (in percentage terms) over the last year. This would be an increase of another 44 students over a one-year period, which is a huge percentage increase in a very short period. I have considerable worries about the pressure that adding another 44 students will have on teaching staff, infrastructure and other students in the school. I would like to see a more graduated increase of say 20 per year over a two-year period to mitigate the impact and enable the school to absorb the changes.
 - The loss of teaching functional skills in an extended day environment: While I understand that keeping a full residential provision is untenable, I would like to see some opportunity for current students to learn in an extended day environment from time to time. Our children do not get opportunities to work out how to relate to people and manage themselves outside of the home environment. I would love to see each class or year group have the opportunity of two/three residential nights per year in order to enrich their functional skills curriculum. This would mean that a smaller area could be maintained for this 'flexi-residential' and would not need to be staffed full-time. I would be willing to fund two or three nights a year for our son out of my own pocket to ensure he developed these skills – it would not be compulsory. This would also provide some brief respite for parents, as I am aware there are a high proportion of single parents in the school and the pressure can be intense. Although not directly the objective, it would also give these parents a short break (potentially a funding stream for short breaks might be accessed?)
 - Short day on Fridays: If the school is now going to be a day school, it would be preferable for the pupils to finish at 3.20pm on Friday as they will no longer have to allow for longer journey times of the residential students.

Q3: Comments from respondents who supported the proposal – Part 3

- I support this proposal as there seems to no longer be a financially sustainable requirement for boarding. I would hope this means that more funds can go into supporting day students. I would support the increase in student numbers, assuming the quality of care and education remains at the same high level, as this would mean more peers for the students to mix with and also more families will have the opportunity of joining this fantastic school.
- I think the opportunity for as many children as possible to access the wonderful teaching at St Dom's would be improved by a focus on day provision.
- Whilst the financials and lack of residential numbers make sense to close residential I feel it would be a significant loss. Perhaps the sixth form could remain residential for all pupils. I am concerned at the increase of pupil numbers both in making the school busier and noisier for children currently attending, but also have concerns for drop off and collection times. The driveway and car park already over crowded and the increase in vehicles will make the situation worse.

Q3: Comments from respondents who did not support the proposal – Part 1

- I understand that for financial reasons keeping the residential provision open after July 2020 will not be viable. This is sad for the families who really need this provision for their children. It is also sad that there will no longer be the option for flexi-boarding which would be a very positive and beneficial experience for some children. Regarding the increase in pupil numbers from 110 to 150 I understand that having more spaces in the school will be very welcome for families who need specialist placements for their children. However, I have some concerns about the planned timescale for this increase in numbers. It seems a big increase in capacity in a very short time if 40+ students will be joining the school by September 2020. One of the wonderful qualities about St Dominic's School is that it has such a lovely ethos and that staff across the school know all the children. I hope that this ethos will be able to be maintained with so many children joining within a relatively short time period. I wonder if it may be possible to increase capacity over a longer time period so that the school has time to assimilate new pupils more gradually. It would be interesting to know if the new children are going to be joining across all the Key Stages and also to know if there is going to be an increase in class sizes. Another concern is parking, as the visitor car park is already full and overflowing at afternoon pick up.
- Our son is currently in residential. If this was removed, it would invalidate the compromise agreement that we have with our local authority and he would probably have to leave the school.
- Our son lives too far away from St Dominic's School to commute each day. Closing residential will create uncertainty and potentially disrupt our son's future education at a very important time in his life. The residential provision has been excellent for developing social and independence skills and has been hugely important to our son.
- The residential provision at St. Dominic's School has been a quintessential part of it's success. In the years it has existed, it has helped change the lives of numerous students, including myself. If that provision is taken away, then you risk letting down the tens of children who stay at the school every year. They would not be able to receive the quality of help and support they need to adapt to their individual difficulties. Because of this, I'm afraid I cannot support this proposal.

Q3: Comments from respondents who did not support the proposal – Part 2

- We can see from the information set out in the letter that the residential provision is becoming financially challenging. However, it seems to have been a very strong point of the school and of its offer, being highly rated by OFSTED. It was certainly a positive point for us when we initially visited the school and we had hoped that our son would be able to take advantage of this at some point as part of his journey towards gaining independence, e.g. as part of the 6th form. The residential offers pupils the opportunity of an extended day and this is something we believe the current 6th form pupils greatly benefit from. The main concern regarding this proposal, however, is the very rapid increase in the number of pupils planned by September 2020. Relative to the current number of pupils on the school roll, the increase is significant and we worry about how the current infrastructure and school model as it is can cope. Some day to day practical examples of this would be parking, drop off / pick up, activities in the chapel, space in the teaching areas and main school and much busier break times and lunch hall, access to therapy areas and staff, not to mention the personalised and flexible staff approach towards pupils. We would want to be reassured that class sizes and pupil-staff ratio would remain the same so that pupils continue to receive the support they need in order to be able to access the curriculum and participate in the school community.

The increase in numbers since our child joined the school in year 5 has already been felt. The increase in numbers to his year group meant that there was a “bulge year” going into year 7 (secondary). It seems that this bulge year group has been very challenging for the school to manage and, as far as we can see, since year 7 there has been an unusually high number of pupils being excluded and / or removed from the school by their parents in this year group. Our own experience has been extremely positive and our son continues to benefit greatly from the school environment and approach. A feature which makes the school unique for current and prospective parents is the noticeably calm atmosphere and spaciousness of the school environment. This latter point refers not just to the physical space on offer but also importantly to the number of pupils within it. There is not the usual feeling of the hustle and bustle of school which causes such high anxiety for pupils; the relief our son experienced on his first visit to the school was dramatic. After a number of years of being unable to cope with school, resulting in school refusal, exclusions, a part-time timetable and periods out of school, our son was able to go straight into attending full-time, being part of a class, enjoying school life and making academic progress. This calm atmosphere is important for all the pupils with sensory difficulties and high anxiety. Integrated therapy in small classes with flexible staffing is also key. We would be concerned about how such a relatively considerable and rapid increase would impact on these unique and crucial advantages that the school currently has to offer - we certainly found no other school like it during the process of visiting very many special schools in and around Surrey.

Q3: Comments from respondents who did not support the proposal – Part 3

- Worried about the increased capacity for day pupils. Will there be enough teaching space and teaching staff? Will the current cohort be disadvantaged by the mix of pupils coming in? Current pick up arrangements would not be safe running at the new capacity. Also, would the pupils feel safe and well supported with that kind of number increase?
- Our son attends the residential provision and it has been invaluable for him. If the residential unit was closed it would be unlikely he would be able to attend sixth form at St Dominic's (which is the current plan) and it would be a great shame if this didn't go ahead.
- Closing the residential part of this school limits the access to the school's amazing facilities for students that don't live in the local area. If this is purely for financial reasons then the benefits to students should come ahead of this. This would never have happened when the school was run by the Covenant of Sacred Hearts and not run as a business purely for profit.
- I would like more information to back this proposal up so I am a maybe. My concerns are:
 - When we look around the school, one of the USPs was the fact that students can stay overnight and develop independent skills after school. We did want to use this provision when he is in KS3 upwards. Albeit not 4 days a week, but maybe once a month or week - see how it went. Could this be an option and parents pay for the overnight provision? I totally understand it is not viable at the moment.
 - The current state of the school KS2 classrooms are not in very good condition and not appealing to work in with paint peeling off the walls and looking shabby. There are other areas around the school that could also do with a bit of TLC. Will these areas stay like this when the refurb of the residential block is changed to classrooms?
 - Recruitment is a problem - how do you intend to grow and retain staff?
 - Another USP of St Doms is the size of the school. Growing to 150 is quite a lot more. How will you deal with current sensory needs?

Q3: Comments from respondents who did not support the proposal – Part 4

- Closing the residential service , will lead to job losses , staff redundancies and residential students who have to travel miles to get into the school (which getting a placement in the first place is a fight in itself) being unable to make it and having to change schools, which will be traumatic for some children with the autistic spectrum.
- I attended St. Dominic's between 2005-13, boarding between 2010-13 when I moved up to their sixth form. As such, during this time, the residential area was an integral element of my education during that time, in terms of learning about independent living and sociability within the context of interacting with my peers and staff! This helped me greatly in building my confidence and self esteem while also allowing me to have a greater degree of confidence in myself by the time I left St. Dom's and then subsequently joined Guildford College over the summer of 2013. I therefore firmly believe that, were you to close the residential areas at St. Dominic's, you would therefore be depriving hundreds and hundreds of potential students, many of whom have probably struggled previously confidence-wise as a result of their difficulties, if the exact kind of education that the need in order to learn the same basic values and abilities I learned, of greater self-confidence, improved self-esteem, greater independence skills and, most importantly of all, social skills including interaction with peers and/or friends and family!
- I was hoping to have my son access your residential provision in a couple of years time to support him gaining more independence.
- The residential provision, including Sixth Form, have been essential for lots of people like myself to get independence, open us up to moving out of home from our parents. I am aware that the school has been moving away from it's roots since being taken over by the Radius Trust when the Sisters Of The Sacred Heart Of Jesus and Mary sold the school. I'd like to hope you would reconsider this. As for some people residential placements would be the only way they could get the support they need from St Dominic's School which has helped so many of us go onto bigger things.

Q3: Comments from respondents who did not support the proposal – Part 5

- Refusing to fund places for residential care for St Dominic's and then saying there is no demand is akin to refusing to feed someone and then saying they are not hungry. I know many parents who would benefit from using the residential facilities but it is impossible to access this service. When we applied to St Dominic's I was told that respite and emergency care would be available and that the school would facilitate overnight sleepovers with the children throughout their time to help with independence skills. None of these services have been available to access and any requests for support have been met with paperwork and no action. I believe St Dominic's should:

- maintain a small residential care;
- make it easier for parents to access and use this service;
- make it possible for parents to pay to access this service;
- extend after-school hour care for students.

I would immediately make use of all of the above - I am currently prevented from doing so by bureaucracy and impossible funding approaches, not by need. If residential must be closed down (and I assume this decision is already made and this survey is for box-ticking rather than input) it is essential that St Dominic's look at more after-school hours care. Available services to support children with autism are shrinking across the county. We need more resources that are easier to access with more flexibility. Not less.

- The school struggles with behaviour & safeguarding of 106 pupils, how will they manage 150!!!! Classes will be too big... glad my child is leaving. The school is becoming a business & not an educational setting. Shame... its gone so downhill.

Responses to comments raised during the consultation – Part 1

- The current Key Stage 2 facilities are no longer appropriate for the pupils as many of the classrooms are temporary buildings
 - *Our aim is to accommodate pupils in areas that lend themselves to the age of the pupils and space required for their curricular provision and delivery. We are looking to phase out and remove the temporary buildings as soon as possible.*
 - *We are currently awaiting the outcome of a bid for funding from the government to build a new KS2 facility and we intend to further utilise former residential areas to create more appropriate learning spaces for pupils.*
- The speed of expansion to a capacity of 150 seems quite fast considering the other issues the school faces
 - *We are confident that in fully utilising the spaces available we can accommodate 120 pupils/students in September 2020. With the additional performing arts centre and use of the empty residential areas, the school will grow up to 150 over the following two years.*
- The increase in capacity will exacerbate the current car parking issues
 - *We will improve the layout for vehicles entering and leaving the site and the car parking as part of the performing arts centre construction, which will be commencing in the summer term 2019.*
- Could the residential provision remain for sixth form pupils?
 - *We currently have two sixth form boarders and none will be transitioning into sixth form for boarding in September. We have not seen the demand for sixth form boarding places in recent years, nor have the commissioning local authorities indicated that there will be a future need.*
- Taking the residential provision away will risk letting down the tens of children who stay at the school every year. They would not be able to receive the quality of help and support they need to adapt to their individual difficulties.
 - *Residential provision is a real strength of the school, as highlighted in our recent Ofsted report. However, we have not had the interest in or take up of residential places from commissioning local authorities over the last 10 years, i.e. numbers have declined.*

Responses to comments raised during the consultation – Part 2

- Concerns raised that the increase of pupil numbers will make the school busier and noisier for children currently attending and that the lovely ethos at St Dominic's, whereby the staff across the school know all the children, will be lost
 - *We intend to use all available spaces to ensure that all pupils and students get the best possible provision throughout their journey at St Dominic's. We will preserve spaces and build upon the current calm atmosphere and ethos that permeates through the school to ensure we maintain an appropriate sensory environment. We want to extend the offer of our wonderful school to even more pupils and students. Class sizes will be determined by age, stage and need, to minimise the impact of a larger school population.*
- It is sad that there will no longer be the option for flexi-boarding which would be a very positive and beneficial experience for some children. This is one of the school's current USPs, whereby students can stay overnight and develop independent skills after school. We believe St Dominic's should maintain a small residential care; make it easier for parents to access and use this service; make it possible for parents to pay to access this service; and extend after-school hour care for students.
 - *We intend to investigate the viability and demand for planned, short, residential/independence opportunities as part of a programme running through the key stages across the academic year based at residential centres we have used previously.*
 - *We also intend to explore the option of offering a range of extra curricular activities after school at St Dominic's that pupils/students could opt to stay for.*
 - *We will consult with the Student Voice (council) pupils and students and families to understand the demand and interest across the whole school population.*
- Our son lives too far away from St Dominic's School to commute each day. Closing residential will create uncertainty and potentially disrupt our son's future education at a very important time in his life. The residential provision has been excellent for developing social and independence skills and has been hugely important to our son.
 - *We are intending to engage closely with other residential care partners, so that pupils attending during the day at St Dominic's will benefit from our partnership work with their residential arrangements.*

Responses to comments raised during the consultation – Part 3

- If the closure of the residential provision is purely for financial reasons then the benefits to students should come ahead of this. This would never have happened when the school was run by the Covenant of Sacred Hearts and not run as a business purely for profit.
 - *St Dominic's School is run by Orchard Hill College Academy Trust which is a not for profit organisation and an exempt charity, and is answerable to the Secretary of State for Education. It receives all its funding from the commissioning local authorities and central government. If a school becomes financially unviable, the government has the power to close the school.*
- How fast will the school grow to a new capacity of 150?
 - *The school will grow to 150 over a period of 4 to 5 years.*
- Closing the residential service will lead job losses, staff redundancies
 - *We do not envisage any redundancies as we will be offering redeployment to staff who enjoy positive relationships and strong skill sets that can be utilised to support pupils, students and colleagues throughout the school day.*
- We're worried about the increased capacity for day pupils. Will there be enough teaching space and teaching staff?
 - *Our staffing will grow proportionately with the size of our student cohort. We will continue to develop and seek creative ways to grow and retain our expert staff as part of our sustainability plan through access to CPD and teaching and learning strategies from across the Trust.*