



Sixth Form Consultation Outcome: Frequently Asked Questions

Why are you going ahead with this proposal even though the majority of people disagreed? Are you ignoring their opinion?

The consultation was not a vote on whether we should proceed with the closure of the Sixth Form or not. That decision was always going to be taken by the Governing Board and the Trustees. The consultation was about inviting opinions and views that we should reflect on. This is precisely what happened, and while 86 respondents said they disagreed, 42 stated that they supported the proposal. And, of course, the vast majority of people invited to have their say chose not to express an opinion. We are grateful to those who responded but, having considered the views expressed, remain very firmly of the view that this is the best way forward for our successful school.

Are you saying 86 responses disagreeing is not significant?

No, and we have carefully considered all of those responses, as well as the 42 responses supporting the proposal. However, we did directly invite the families of all our 1,230 students and all 160 staff to let us know what they thought. The consultation also attracted media coverage and was shared through our social media channels. So, given how widely we sought views, we believe 86 is relatively small.

Is this decision being made too quickly and has it not properly been thought through?

Not at all. Our longer-term vision for the school is something that has always been our priority. We have also made every effort in recent years to increase our Sixth Form numbers and have made no secret of the fact that it is impossible to offer a wide range of study options with a small cohort of students. The timescales we are now following are in line with the statutory process we have to follow in order to have the decision in place for September 2023.

Some parents said the fact the school had a Sixth Form was one of the reasons they chose it for their child?

Yes, and we understand their disappointment. We hope that, while they don't agree with our decision, they at least understand the reason we are making it.

Why can't you introduce fees to fund the Sixth Form, as someone suggested?

Even if this was legally possible, which it isn't, this would go completely against the ethos of our school. By law, Free Schools are free to attend as they are Government funded and must have admission arrangements that are clear and fair. It's also difficult to see how introducing a fee would attract more students when there is free alternative provision elsewhere.

Could you have tried harder to find a way to keep the Sixth Form open?

We have been committed to making our Sixth Form sustainable, but it just hasn't been possible. Providing a wide range of high-quality courses is costly and with low student numbers it is simply not financially viable. Students deserve to be able to choose from a range of courses and we simply cannot provide that range with so few students.

Was the consultation thorough?

Absolutely. We directly invited all our students' families and our staff to have their say, held information meetings, made the consultation easily accessible, and publicised it through news media and through our social media channels. We were completely and proactively open about the proposal.

How can you be sure you are right?

We are very firmly of the belief that this is the right way forward for the school and our students. And that is a view endorsed by the Local Education Authority. It is a matter of fact that if you don't have sufficient numbers in your Sixth Form, you won't have the funding to provide a wide range of study options. If we divert funding from the rest of the school to support the Sixth Form, we risk compromising the success we have built.

Does this mean there are difficult times ahead for the rest of the school?

No. Gildredge House is a successful and popular school with more than 1,200 students. We are over-subscribed in every Year Group up to Year 11; such is our popularity. We have made a strong start and we have an exciting future.

So, this is all about money? Can't you lobby for more?

This is not a decision we have taken lightly, but we are not prepared to jeopardise or compromise our investment in the rest of the school. School funding is very much dependent on student numbers; whatever the rights and wrongs of that, it is a national position.

You say the school is popular but why not the Sixth Form? Why have you struggled to attract more students?

It's not that our Sixth Form is unpopular, it's just that there is a wider range of other opportunities and choices in the area.

My child is in the Sixth Form. What happens to them now?

The simple answer is that there will be no change for your child. Our commitment to them and their continuing studies remains absolute. Under this proposal, the Sixth Form would remain in place for them and would only shut for new admissions from September 2023. That said, we recognise this might be unsettling for some and so will continue to work hard to support and reassure all students.

My child is in Year 11 and about to do GCSEs. How will this affect them?

It means, unfortunately, that there will not be the option for them to remain at Gildredge House after their GCSEs. However, we fully support each and every one of our Year 11 students so they have information and advice about the wide range of opportunities that do exist for them. Of the current Year 11 students, only twenty students were considering Gildredge House after their GCSEs.

Why are you doing this now?

We believe it is the right time and it is the right next step for Gildredge House. To delay would only risk compromising our ability to properly resource the rest of the school and strengthen it for the future.

Why are Sixth Forms more successful in some other areas?

The areas where Sixth Forms are more successful tend to be in areas where there is not such a wide range of other post-16 options. In this part of East Sussex, there are strong alternatives able to provide a broader range of educational and vocational studies.

When will this happen?

We will submit the proposal and consultation feedback to the Government. Ultimately it will be for the Government and Secretary of State for Education to decide. If this happens, the Sixth Form will not take new admissions in September 2023 and will close completely once existing students have completed their studies in 2024.

How can you be sure this is the right course of action?

The Governors and the Trustees are firmly of the belief it is. We are duty bound to make decisions in the very best interests of the school. This decision is about building the future of our school and continuing to invest all our available resources into providing the very best learning environments where all our students can continue to thrive and fulfil their potential.