

Abbey MAT Consultation

Proposal to close
sixth form provision at
Lightcliffe Academy

from September 2021



Consultation on the Proposal to Close the Sixth Form at Lightcliffe Academy from September 2021

Key Information:

- Existing Year 12 and 13 students to complete their qualifications
- Suspend recruitment to Year 12 of the Sixth form for September 2020
- Sixth form to close fully in August 2021

1 Introduction and Background

Lightcliffe Academy is part of the Abbey Multi Academy Trust (Abbey MAT). This proposal and the associated consultation has been approved by the Abbey MAT Trust Board, following discussion with the Local Governing Body, Principal, and the Senior Team of the Academy.

Following much consideration and taking into account the long-term viability of post-16 provision, particularly in view of the financial challenges facing the school, the Abbey MAT Trust Board has decided to consult on a proposal to close the Sixth Form at Lightcliffe Academy with effect from Summer 2021.

If agreed, the proposal would mean that no new students would be admitted into Year 12 in September 2020. The proposal would only affect the sixth form and would not mean any changes to the rest of the academy. While the Trust acknowledges that the proposals are very sensitive and may be disappointing for some students, parents and staff, we believe it is necessary to preserve the future viability of the school, and indeed strengthen Lightcliffe Academy in the longer term.

Significant changes to the way post 16 students are funded in schools and colleges were introduced in the 2013/2014 funding year. Since then, funding has gradually declined, and this has had particular impact on small school sixth forms.

The average sixth form college has around 1,700 students, while the average school sixth form has a little over 200. Economies of scale apply, so it is more expensive per student for schools to provide a sixth form, meaning they often have to subsidise sixth form students from other funding streams, including that received for 11 to 16-year-old students.

The Department for Education (DfE) recognises that sixth forms with fewer than 200 students are not financially viable. Historically, the Lightcliffe Academy Sixth Form has hovered around this figure, averaging 190 students in each academic year since the Academy joined Abbey MAT. Since 2016, the number of students recruited to the Lightcliffe Academy Sixth Form has been in continual decline, culminating in only 77 joining Year 12 in the 2019/20 Academic Year.

The declining sixth form numbers have made it more and more difficult to offer courses that are viable educationally and economically at Lightcliffe Academy. Further to this, a small sixth form does not provide as broad a social experience, nor prepare students for the wider environment of higher education or the work place.

Overall, these factors have affected the demand for sixth form places at Lightcliffe Academy to such a level that the Trust believes that closure of the Sixth Form is the right option to ensure the best opportunities and learning experiences for our students. Changing the age range from 11-

18 to 11-16 will allow us to focus more resources on ensuring our students at Lightcliffe Academy achieve the highest outcomes at GCSE and secure places on a quality post 16 learning pathway of their choice.

2 Consultation: Proposal to close the Sixth Form at Lightcliffe Academy

Abbey MAT is proposing full closure of the Sixth Form at Lightcliffe Academy in Summer 2021 with no new pupils admitted to the sixth form in September 2020. This proposal would therefore change the age range of the Academy from 11-18, to 11-16. Abbey MAT is therefore also consulting on a variation to the Lightcliffe Academy Admissions Arrangements for September 2021 to remove the provisions for admission into Year 12.

As part of the transition process, every current Year 11 student would be supported in securing the most appropriate post-16 learning pathway for September 2020. In addition, all current Year 11 students would be entitled, as they always have been through UCAS Progress, to apply for a place at another sixth form provision of their choice.

3 Rationale for the Proposal

3.1 Insufficient Sixth Form Recruitment

A school or college sixth form has to be large enough to be viable and sustainable in order to be able to provide a wide enough range of high quality courses. It has been recognised that sixth forms with fewer than 200 students are unviable, particularly in the light of the more recent funding changes where sixth form provision is now funded per student, instead of per qualification. The implications of these reforms have meant that some providers have been forced to cut the courses they offer, whilst others have been forced to close.

The Lightcliffe Academy Sixth Form operates within a highly competitive market across Calderdale, where there are a number of exceptional and specialist post-16 providers. Many of these have a large, specialist curriculum offer and student facilities against which any small sixth form would find it difficult to compete.

Many of our own students, and those from other non-sixth form schools who could choose to attend Lightcliffe Academy, instead choose to attend other sixth forms with larger capacity and dedicated student facilities, such as dining spaces and common rooms. The result has been an inability to recruit sufficient numbers to our sixth form roll to ensure financial viability. A school or college sixth form has to be large enough to be viable and sustainable in order to be able to provide a wide enough range of high-quality courses.

How many students choose Lightcliffe Academy Sixth Form?

	Pupil numbers (Autumn census)			
	Year 11	Year 12	Year 13	Total (Sixth form)
2019/20	235	77	67	144
2018/19	254	80	102	182
2017/18	221	121	120	241
2016/17	257	146	56	202
2015/16	264	73	112	185

	% of Year 11 students joining Lightcliffe Academy Sixth form in Year 12 (based on Autumn Census numbers)
2019/20	30.3%
2018/19	36.2%
2017/18	47.0%
2016/17	55.3%

For a number of years, the majority of our Year 11 students have chosen to pursue post 16 education at a school or college other than Lightcliffe Academy. We are unable to offer the breadth of subjects or levels that students would like to follow. This means that students must either go elsewhere or pick from a limited range offered, rather than choose what they would either like to do, or would be more suited to, in preparation for Higher Education or employment.

As part of the Calderdale 6 partnership, Lightcliffe Academy has collaborated with other local schools to offer a wider range of courses in an attempt to attract more Year 11 students to remain

with the academy for their post 16 education. Unfortunately, this has not attracted sufficient numbers to make the Sixth form viable.

Alternatives to Sixth Form provision

Many of our students choose alternative sixth form and further education colleges over Lightcliffe Academy's Sixth form. Some of the reasons for their decisions include:

- Students are seeking a broader range of courses than Lightcliffe Academy Sixth form is able to provide
- Students are able to access a wider range of facilities at larger institutions
- Students seek the social aspect that can be provided by larger institutions
- Students recognise that larger further education institutions provide an education that is more similar to higher education, and could therefore be seen as better preparation for study at university
- Students recognise the change in trend to moving to specialist sixth form colleges, i.e. more of their peers moving on to local colleges

There are many dedicated 16-19 providers in and around Calderdale, including:

- Calderdale College – the largest provider of post 16 courses and work-based learning
- A new sixth form centre to be located at Northgate House, Halifax, opening in 2020
- New College Bradford, opened September 2019

For those students who would prefer to continue their education at post 16 in a school sixth form setting, there are a number of schools offering post 16 education across Calderdale:

- Brighouse High School (Brighouse High Sixth Form College)
- The Brooksbank School Sports College
- The Crossley Heath School
- The North Halifax Grammar School
- Ravenscliffe High School
- Ryburn Valley High School
- Trinity Academy

3.2 Financial Implications

Funding for school sixth forms declined by 26 per cent per full-time student from between 2010/11 and 2018/19.

Analysis carried out by the Education Policy Institute (EPI) for their May 2019 report, '16-19 Education Funding: Trends and Implications', reveals that financial sustainability has worsened across institutions offering 16-19 education. The proportion of academies with sixth forms, such as Lightcliffe Academy, with in-year deficits rose from 39% in 2012/13 to more than half (51%) in 2016/17. The report also found that schools with sixth forms had seen their financial health worsen faster than schools without: in 2017/18, 22% of schools with sixth forms had accumulated deficits, up from 12% in 2010/11, versus 6% of schools without sixth form in 2010/11 (9% in 2017/18).

This suggests that schools providing 16-19 education, which have suffered the impact of lower funding rates, have experienced faster increases in their accumulated deficits. This is very unlikely to be sustainable over time, and makes 16-19 providers more vulnerable to funding shocks that may compromise their provision.

To meet the deficit between post 16 funding and expenditure, many schools with sixth forms have subsidised their sixth form provision from the funding designated for 11-16 pupils.

Abbey MAT believes that closure of the Sixth form provision at Lightcliffe Academy, and the resulting change of age-range to 11-16, will allow resources to be focused on improving the learning experiences and outcomes for students in Years 7 to 11.

Abbey MAT's aim is for Lightcliffe Academy to become an outstanding 11-16 school and to do so, we believe that we must concentrate our energies and expertise on that age range.

4 Implications of the Proposal

4.1 What would closure of the Sixth form mean for current Lightcliffe Academy students?

What would closure mean for the current Year 12 and Year 13 students?

Abbey MAT is committed to ensuring that students who have already embarked on two-year courses continue to receive high quality teaching at Lightcliffe Academy until the end of those courses in July 2021.

What would closure mean for the current Year 11 students?

There would be no entry into Year 12 for current Year 11 students in September 2020. Every student would be guided and supported to apply to an alternative provider of their choice. We have Careers Advisers and pastoral staff who can work with every student, guiding them personally through their options, supporting them with their applications and supporting them through any interview process. Students who have expressed an interest in an apprenticeship will be supported to do so.

What would closure mean for the current Year 7-10 students?

There would be no entry into the Lightcliffe Academy Sixth form for current Year 7-10 students. The closure of the Sixth Form would allow the academy to focus efforts on delivering education for students in Years 7 to 11. This will be crucial in securing strong examination results to ensure they can move on to their chosen Post-16 courses and destinations in September 2021 and beyond. They would be supported to apply to alternate providers in the same way as the current Year 11.

4.1 What would closure of the Sixth form mean for Lightcliffe Academy staff?

Abbey MAT believes that the recruitment and retention of high quality staff is essential for the success of our academies. Many of Lightcliffe Academy's current staff are experienced in teaching students in Years 7-11, as well as delivering post 16 courses. The vast majority of academy staff currently involved in the delivery of post 16 courses would have the opportunity to remain with the academy and work wholly on the delivery of the 11-16 curriculum.

Following a suspension of recruitment into Year 12 in 2020 and full closure of the sixth form in 2021, there would be an associated reduction in demand for teaching staff engaged in teaching post 16 courses. It is anticipated that most of the surplus staffing time would be redeployed to the delivery of the 11-16 curriculum.

5 Consultation Process

5.1 Requirements for Consultation

Any proposal from schools or academies wishing to close a sixth form provision must be approved by the Secretary of State for Education. The Department for Education specifies that any consultation to close a sixth form must be published at least four months prior to the planned closure, and that the consultation period must last for a period of at least one month. Where a proposal would require a variation to an academy's admissions arrangements to remove a relevant year group for admission (e.g. Year 12), the change must be consulted on for a period of not less than six weeks in accordance with the Admissions Code. Abbey MAT has therefore decided to run both consultations concurrently over a six-week period.

Members of the Abbey MAT Trust Board invite comments from all stakeholders on the proposal set out in this paper. All views expressed during this consultation will be reported to and considered by the Trustees after the consultation period has ended and will, on request, publish the report to parties who explicitly request this information.

5.2 The Consultation Process

This consultation will run from Wednesday 27th November 2019 to Wednesday 8th January 2020, during which time you are invited to respond to this proposal. In order for you to ask any questions you need to inform your understanding of this decision, we are holding two public meetings. The format of the meetings will be an open Question and Answer session with the Abbey MAT CEO's and the Chair of Governors of Lightcliffe Academy, who is also an Abbey MAT Trustee.

You may wish to attend one of the public meetings before responding to the consultation. The public meetings will take place as follows:

Monday 9th December 2019 at 4.30pm

Wednesday 11th December 2019 at 6.30pm

Lightcliffe Academy, Stoney Lane, Lightcliffe, Halifax, HX3 8TL

Interested parties are then invited to complete either the online consultation survey available via the Lightcliffe Academy website, or alternatively, you may obtain a copy of the consultation response form via email from kerry.weatherill@abbeytrust.org or paper copy on request from Reception at Lightcliffe Academy.

All consultations must be completed and returned by noon on Wednesday 8th January 2020.

5.3 Consultation List

The list below identifies the extent of the consultation, and therefore those who are invited to respond:

- Students currently on roll at Lightcliffe Academy
- Parents and carers of students on roll at Lightcliffe Academy
- Staff at Lightcliffe Academy
- Local Authority (Calderdale Council)
- Headteachers/Principals and Chairs of Governors of other schools, academies and special schools in the Calderdale area and in neighbouring local authorities.
- Further Education institutions in the Calderdale area

- Local Councillors
- Local Member of Parliament
- The Chief Executive of the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)
- Other community members who may be affected by the proposal

5.4 Consultation Methods

- Electronic survey for parents and students
- Consultation form (email or paper copy)
- Public meetings

5.5 Timeline for Proposed Closure of Sixth Form

Action	Proposed Timeline
Consultation period commences	27 th November 2019
Public Meeting 1	9 th December 2019
Public Meeting 2	11 th December 2019
Consultation period closes (12 noon)	8 th January 2020
Consultation analysis and decision by Abbey MAT Trust Board	10 th January 2020

If a decision is taken to proceed with the closure, the following timelines will then apply:

Application for closure/ Consultation findings to the Education Funding Agency and the Regional Schools Commissioner	13 th January 2020
Recruitment to Year 12 suspended for September 2020 (no new students to be admitted)	13 th January 2020
Senior Leadership ensure all current Year 11 students have applied to alternative appropriate Post 16 destinations	w/c 13 th January 2020
Decision of the Secretary of State	Summer 2020 (approx.)
Post 16 study programmes conclude	Summer 2021
Full closure of Sixth Form	31 st August 2021