



THE **Forest** SCHOOL



The Forest School
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Headteacher
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26 May 2023

Dear Parents, Guardians, Carers, staff members and other stakeholders

Consultation on proposal for The Forest School to become a co-educational school.

The Forest Academy Trustees have agreed that a consultation be undertaken to consider the proposal to change the status of the school from a single-sex boys' school to a co-educational school. The proposal is that the school would receive the first co-educational cohort in Year 7 from September 2024.

This document is designed to:

- Notify you formally of the proposal to change The Forest School to a co-educational provision
- Explain why this change is being proposed
- Invite your comments on this proposal and outline how you can take part in the consultation

Background and reasons for change

This proposal for change to co-educational provision at The Forest School is based on the following:

- A need to address the issue of surplus capacity at The Forest School
- A recognition of the accelerating pressure on secondary school places and requests from Wokingham Borough Council to help it address the significant shortage in secondary school places, particularly for girls
- A commitment to ensuring that the school prepares all pupils to navigate and thrive in the modern workplace and world
- A desire to continue to drive up the educational standards at The Forest School

Pressure on secondary school places

Wokingham currently has a significant lack of places available in the secondary phase, and this will continue to increase as the rise in primary school numbers moves through the



system (as referenced in the Wokingham Borough Educational Partnership Group and Forum Minutes). Currently there are only surplus places at The Forest School in September 2023.

As the numbers of children needing secondary school places grow, the pressure on secondary school places in the areas close to Winnersh will be particularly acute due to the lack of girls' places at The Forest School. This impacts other local schools that will be asked to expand beyond capacity.

The DfE Admissions Code requires allocation according to strict criteria. It precludes Wokingham Council from meeting the shortfall in places for girls by sending boys to The Forest School to free up spaces in local co-educational schools.

Numbers on roll and surplus capacity

The school was inspected and rated 'Good' in July 2021. The Ofsted report outlines the school's strengths as it continues its drive to "Outstanding". However, the Ofsted 'Good' rating has yet to have the hoped for impact on the numbers on roll, and as such, The Forest School continues to have surplus capacity. Without an increase in the numbers on roll, the Trustees consider it will not be possible to continue to improve standards at the pace they desire.

The current Published Admission Number (PAN) is 210 annually, and the school has not been to capacity since 2015. The Trustees have had to implement an operational capacity to ensure budget, staffing and year groups are secure. The current numbers for each year group are as follows:

Confirmed Year 7 2023	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
133	163	117	116	124	92

As of May 2023, the confirmed Year 7 intake in September 2023 will be 133, leaving 77 spaces available at The Forest School. On National offer day, Wokingham Borough Council had a shortfall in school places for 57 girls. These families were not offered a secondary school place on National offer day. The Forest School can help meet the future shortfall if it moves to co-educational provision and will also reduce pressure on other non-selective secondary schools in Wokingham Borough. This will help ensure enough local school places for students.

Benefits of a co-educational environment

A co-educational environment fosters respect for peers of both sex and exposes students to different viewpoints. Pupils will become more confident with the opposite gender which will prepare and enable them to navigate the modern workplace.

This proposal would benefit The Forest boys by enabling them to continue to develop their communication skills and confidence with all gender. They will also benefit from the drive that girls bring to education as we continue to drive up the educational standards at the Forest school. Statistically girls outperform boys at GCSE. The Forest progress scores are

above national average. However, we have witnessed in the sixth form that the girls provide an additional competitive edge that drives the boys to stretch and attain.

The proposal

The proposal is to change the status of The Forest School from a single-sex boys' secondary school with a co-educational sixth form to a co-educational secondary school allowing admission to future year 7s. The structure of the Forest day will not change. The earliest the first co-educational cohort could enter Year 7 would be September 2024. Current year groups would continue unchanged.

The proposal is being made with the support of Wokingham Borough Council.

The proposal provides an opportunity for the Trustees of The Forest School to build on current good practices and its Good Ofsted rating and develop a sustainable and exciting way forward for the school and the local community.

Consultation process

We are consulting widely to hear and collect your views. The formal consultation period commences on Friday 26th May 2023 and will close at midnight on Friday 30th June 2023. The consultation process, agreed by The Forest Academy Trust Board, has been designed to gather as wide a range of views as possible from all stakeholders including:

- Students
- Parents/Guardians
- Staff and their trade union representatives
- Local schools
- Local business
- Prospective parents and students
- Local Councils
- Local councillors
- Local community groups
- Any other interested parties

We are grateful to those who have already provided feedback on the proposal following our letter to parents on 16th May 2023 announcing the intention to consult. All responses received provide valuable feedback and will be collated. You can get involved in the consultation by:

- Attending the drop in information session on Monday 19th June 2023 between 4:30pm and 6:00pm at The Forest School
- Completing the online questionnaire on the [school website](#)
- Email the attached questionnaire to co-ed@forest.academy titling your email 'Co-educational consultation'
- Sending your response by paper copy. Please hand into the main school office, in a sealed envelope clearly marked 'FTAO The Academy Trust Board - Co-educational consultation'

What happens next?

No decision, other than to consult, has been made at this stage.

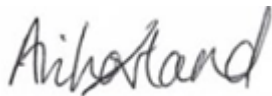
The Forest Academy Trust Board will assess the consultation responses and decide whether to approve the proposal. The Trustees will collate the responses and publish a summary document for stakeholders after the consultation.

If, following this consultation, the Trustees approve the proposal, then The Forest School will submit the business case to the Regional Schools Commissioner to request the proposed change. If the change is formally approved by the Regional Schools Commissioner, the new admissions arrangements would start from September 2024. The Forest School would start accepting girls and boys in Year 7, and over time the whole school would become co-educational in line with the school's current Sixth Form provision.

A separate statutory consultation on any consequent changes to The Forest School's admissions policy will be carried out alongside this consultation.

Naturally, any decision to become a co-educational school will divide some existing and potential parents and pupils. Some will wish to remain single-sex, while others may feel this is a logical and natural next step given that girls have been joining the Forest Sixth form for many years. We are interested in hearing from all stakeholders, and this consultation provides the opportunity for all stakeholders to offer their views in relation to the proposal, so please take part and let us know what you think.

Yours sincerely



Alison Løvland

Chair of Trustees of The Academy Trust Board

**PROPOSED CHANGE FOR THE FOREST SCHOOL TO BECOME
A CO-EDUCATIONAL SCHOOL**

Do you support the proposal to move to a Co-educational provision at The Forest School?

Please tick the box that indicates your view	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
I neither support nor object	<input type="checkbox"/>

Comments

Please give your reasons to help the Trustees understand stakeholder views.

Please tick the box that indicates the category you belong to:	✓
Current student	
Current parent/Carer	
Current staff and their trade union representatives	
Parent/carer of student(s) due to start secondary school September 2024	
Parent/carer of student(s) due to start secondary school at a later date	
Parent/carer of another school	
Member of staff at a local school	
Former student	
Former parents/carers	
Former staff	
Local schools	
Local community groups	
Winnersh resident	
Non-Winnersh Resident	
Other	

Please submit your feedback form by midnight on Friday 30th June 2023:

- online questionnaire on the [school website](#)
- electronically by email to co-ed@forest.academy
- paper copy in a sealed envelope addressed to the Chair of Trustees to the main school office.

Thank you for your response.