



Oldbury Wells

Consultation Document

Re: Bridgnorth 6th Form - Potential Closure

(Published: Monday, 11th September 2023)



Consultation on the potential closure of Bridgnorth 6th Form from September 2025

(Consideration of no new student intake in September 2024 and potential closure in September 2025, no impact on existing Year 12&13 students who would complete all qualifications)

The Trustees and Governors of Trusted CSAT Alliance and Oldbury Wells School have put together the following information to help parents, staff, students and other interested parties comment on the potential closure of Bridgnorth 6th Form at Oldbury Wells School.

There will be a public consultation evening in the WEST side school hall at Oldbury Wells School on

Thursday, 28th September from 6:30pm to 8:30pm

where our school community can find out more.

Should you wish to attend the evening, we would ask that to help support arrangements you complete the details on the following link:

<https://forms.office.com/e/3YAWLK7NWF>

We would also like to invite interested parties to submit any comments regarding the consultation by adding details on the following form:

<https://forms.office.com/e/4Dhzn0XQk7>

**The consultation will run from Monday, 11 September 2023 until
10:30am on Monday, 9 October 2023**

We would like to thank everyone for their contribution towards the consultation process.

Aspire | Enjoy | Achieve

Contents

- School Vision
- Proposal Outline
- Background
 - Potential Closure of 6th Form
 - Outline of variation to admission arrangements
- Context
 - The National Picture
 - Bridgnorth 6th Form
- Rational for the potential closure of the 6th Form
 - Change of trends in Bridgnorth
 - Size and provision at sixth form colleges
 - Funding at 16-19 and what this means in our setting
- What would the Sixth Form Closure mean for students?
 - Current Year 13 and 12 students
 - Current Year 11 Students
- Who is part of the consultation regarding this change?
- Frequent Q&A as part of the consultation.

School Vision

We are a dynamic, forward-looking school with a shared vision to 'inspire education' and 'inspire lives'.

As a school, we are alive with learning, ensuring everyone continually improves to be the best they can while developing individual interests and talents.

Our Ethos is built around three core principles (ENJOY, ASPIRE, ACHIEVE), alongside ensuring students follow the Oldbury Wells Way in which all students are READY, RESPECTFUL and SAFE. We aim for all those within our community to always promote these ways of working.

Following our further successful OFSTED inspection in April 2023 where all aspects of school were judged 'Good', we aim to continue the school's successful development with a key focus on continued school improvement resulting in the very best provision for the young people and families we support.

This will be achieved by delivering an outstanding academic and personal development curriculum which is financially viable and ensures that our students are able to make the very best progression into their future educational and career pathways.

Proposal Outline

1. To consult on the proposal **not** to recruit new sixth form students from September 2024 at Bridgnorth Sixth Form. This will mean that the Sixth Form would close when the current Year 12 students complete their studies in July 2025.
2. Due to the 6th Form provision being part of Oldbury Wells School's educational offer, we also aim to consult on an 'outline of variation to admission arrangements' which is a Department for Education requirement.

Should a decision be made to close Bridgnorth 6th Form, there would be no change to the Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) for years 7 to 11 at Oldbury Wells School, which will remain at 168 per year group; however, as the Sixth Form currently has capacity for up to 188 students, the published capacity of the school would reduce from 1028 to 840 students.

Background

Potential Closure of the Sixth Form

The current financial climate has left all organisations in a more challenging position with regards to managing their budgets. Despite actions taken by the Government to financially support all schools and good financial management within our Trust, funding for sixth form provision in schools has created a financial challenge for governors and school leaders in setting budgets. There has been an increasing need for schools with small sixth forms to top up post-16 funding from the 11-16 budget, therefore having to take allocated funds away from Key Stage 3 & 4 (Years 7-11) students.

In addition, schools with small sixth forms (fewer than 200 students) find it increasingly difficult to deliver a wide curriculum offer due to the risk of non-viable class sizes. The introduction of 'T Levels' has also resulted in the withdrawal of some of our popular BTEC qualifications, as due to the similar course content, funding has either been or will be withdrawn from these subjects, therefore further reducing the curriculum offer.

In our locality this has been compounded further over the last eight years due to the number of students being educated in the town of Bridgnorth falling by 24% percent and the number of students staying in Bridgnorth to study post-16 courses falling by 66%. We have seen a higher proportion of students consider post 16 provisions offered by some of the larger organisations due to the wider offer of courses, alongside additional transport provision which is often well subsidised by these organisations.

Despite the quality of provision at Bridgnorth 6th Form being good and working hard on recruitment into the 6th form to ensure its long-term viability, we have not seen the increase in numbers needed to ensure that provision is financially viable. With the reduction in numbers and looking at resources available for our 11-16 provision based on demand, our forecast shows that should the 6th form provision continue, we would see a significant and rising deficit budget. This is an important component for consideration by Trustees and Governors as part of the consultation.

The potential removal of Bridgnorth Sixth Form at Oldbury Wells School would result in more resources being available to support the school's mission to deliver an *outstanding academic and personal development curriculum which is financially viable ensuring that all our students are able to make the very best progression into their future educational and career pathways.*

Our 11-16 provision would remain unchanged and provide places for up to 168 students per year group. This will continue to allow a school structure that provides effective staffing and resource, alongside financial stability in the long-term.

Outline of variation to admission arrangements

There is no intended change to the Pupil Admission Number (PAN) of students within the Oldbury Wells School secondary level provision for years 7-11.

Due to Bridgnorth 6th Form being part of Oldbury Wells School offer, we are also required to consult on an 'outline of variation to admission arrangements' which is a Department for Education requirement.

Although there will be no change to the Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) for years 7 to 11 which will remain at 168 per year group, the current published capacity of the school is 1028 students, this would be reduced to 840 students should the 6th form was closed.

Context

The National Picture

- Funding for all educational settings continues to be a challenge, despite government intervention all organisations are having to look carefully at resources and provision.
- Many small school-based 6th forms will find themselves in a similar situation where there is a need to supplement 16-18 provision from funding which is allocated to 11-16 provision, which will be resulting in consideration of long-term viability.
- The introduction of T'level qualifications means that organisations which are offering similar BTEC qualifications are having to withdraw these from their offer as in most cases funding has been or will be discontinued due to the similarity of the courses. This means that in many cases, it is difficult to enhance what would otherwise be an academic A'level pathway only, therefore further reducing the accessibility of a range of qualifications for students.

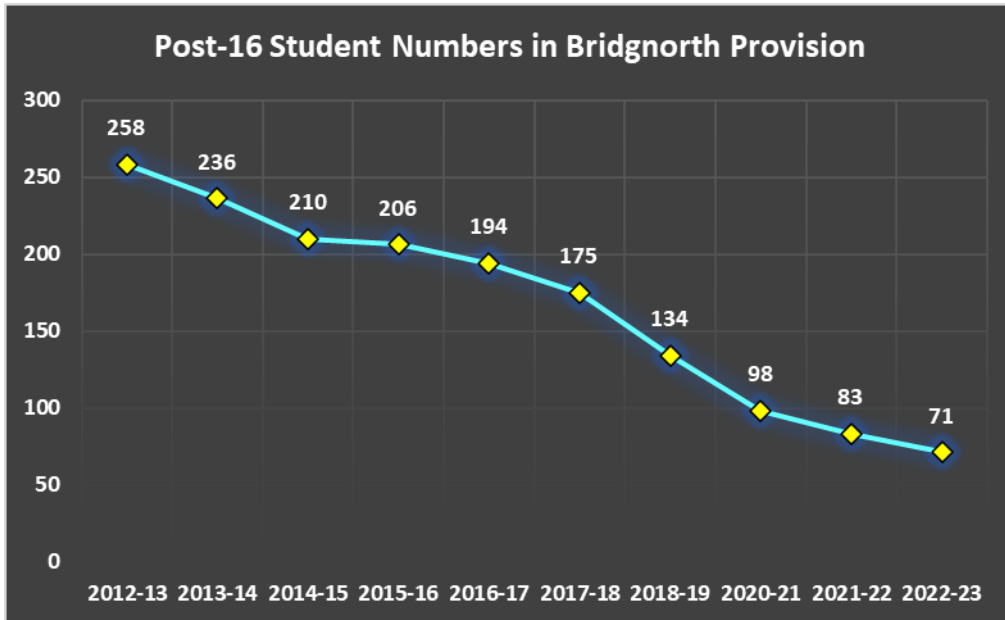
Bridgnorth Sixth Form

- The 2022-23 Bridgnorth Sixth Form consisted of 71 students, with an average class size of 5.66 students per class, with some containing as few as one or two students.
- With a significant number of Bridgnorth based students seeking 16-19 provision outside of town there are fewer students, resulting in Bridgnorth 6th Form being able to offer only a limited number of A-level courses and reducing number of vocational subjects.
- With reduced numbers, the proportion of the budget required from the 11-16 funding to maintain the sixth form is increasing to a level which would result in an increasing deficit budget which is not sustainable.

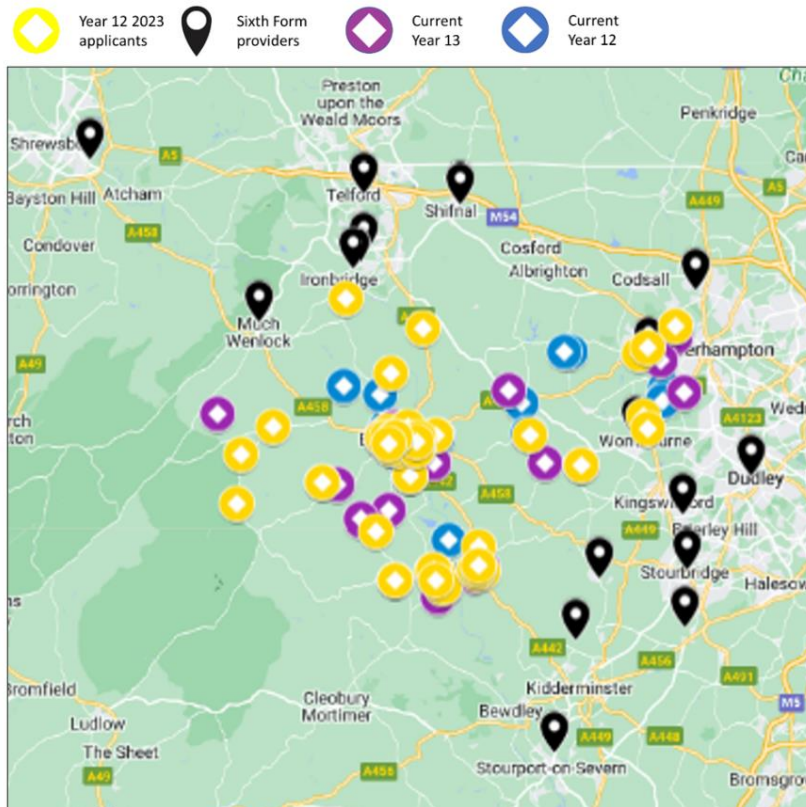
Rationale for the potential closure of the Sixth Form

Changing trends in Bridgnorth

The number of students remaining in the town of Bridgnorth for their 16-19 provision has decreased by 72% since 2012 as shown in the graph below.



For 2023-24, over 50% of students choosing Bridgnorth 6th Form provision live outside of the direct Bridgnorth area and in many cases have alternative post 16 provision closer to their home address, as shown below (data compiled from information available in May 2023):



Size and Provision of Sixth Form Colleges

An average sixth form college has around 1000 students, while an average school sixth form has approximately 200. The management of finances which is dictated by the number of students creates different types of challenge for both types of institution.

The Department of Education recognises that the financial challenges for smaller 6th form settings are acute, indeed should a school be wishing to open 6th form provision it sets out the following criteria:

1. **Quality:** The quality of pre-16 education must be good or outstanding (as rated by Ofsted) and the school must have a most recent Progress 8 score of at least the national average.
Oldbury Wells School meets this criterion.
2. **Size:** The proposed sixth form will provide places for a minimum of 200 students.
Bridgnorth 6th Form does not meet this criterion. Whilst it has provision for up to 188 students the average post-16 numbers over the last 5 years is 85.2 .
3. **Subject Breadth:** The proposed sixth form should - either directly or through partnership - offer a minimum of 15 A level (or equivalent) subjects.
Bridgnorth 6th Form meets this criterion in terms of courses offered. However, several courses do not run each year due to low numbers.
4. **Class Sizes:** The DfE recommend a minimum class size of 15 across all subjects.
Bridgnorth 6th Form does not meet this criterion, with only one teaching group out of 38 meeting this requirement in 2022-23, and an average class size of 5.66.
5. **Demand:** There should be a clear need for additional post-16 places in the local area (including evidence of a shortage of post-16 places and a consideration of the quality of Level 3 provision in the area). The proposed sixth form should not create excessive surplus places or have a detrimental effect on other high quality post-16 provision in the local area.
Data would suggest that the level of demand does not provide the numbers of students to meet this criterion.
6. **Financial viability:** The proposed sixth form should be financially viable (there must be evidence of financial resilience should student numbers fall). The average class size in the school should be at least 15 unless there is a clear educational argument to run smaller classes – for example to build the initial credibility of courses with a view to increasing class size in future.

With the existing curriculum, the total cost of staffing 6th form provision is approximately £690,000. Given that government funding for each post-16 student is £4,188, the income received for our estimate of 70 6th form students in 2023-24 will be £293,000. This leaves a shortfall of £397,000 on staffing alone, not taking into account the costs of resources and examination fees. This effectively means that our 16-19 provision is heavily subsidised by public funding which is intended for 11 to 16 provision.

The detail above demonstrates that Bridgnorth 6th form does not meet all of the criteria set by the DfE for a viable provision.

Trends over recent years show that the majority of 6th form students arrive from Oldbury Wells secondary school. We have asked students about the reasoning behind the decisions made with regards to 16-19 provision, for those looking at alternatives to the offer made by Bridgnorth 6th Form their response include:

- Students are seeking a combination or breadth of curriculum that Bridgnorth 6th Form is not able to provide.
- Students are able to access a wider range of facilities and opportunities at larger institutions.
- Students feel there is a wider social aspect that can be provided by larger institutions.
- Students feel larger further education institutions provide a step change in experience that is more similar to higher education and is therefore seen as better preparation for study at university.

What would the sixth form closure mean for students?

Current Year 13 and 12 students. Bridgnorth 6th Form is committed to providing students who have already embarked on their two-year courses with high quality teaching until the end of those courses in July 2025.

Current Year 11 students. Students wishing to pursue A level and Level 3 courses would need to apply for places with alternative post-16 providers.

We recognise that some of our students and families may be disappointed by this consultation and its potential outcome. However, many local students already access a range of high-quality provision within the area which over time has been made more accessible due to developments with subsidised transport and more availability of specialist provision.

Should this consultation lead to the closure of Bridgnorth 6th Form, we will be fully committed to providing the very best education, supported by strong partnerships with all further and higher education organisations, which will enable young people across our community to reach their goals and ambitions.

In anticipation of this possibility, members of the leadership team at Bridgnorth 6th Form have met with the Principals at King Edward VI College in Stourbridge, the Shrewsbury Colleges Group, Telford College, Kidderminster College and Thomas Telford to discuss how partnerships can be further developed to build on the existing strong links. These meetings have allowed a sharing of ideas and a joint commitment to ensure that all students would continue to receive high quality Information, Advice and Guidance with appropriate individual support to access their institutes' provision and check elsewhere on other further education pathways.

Who is being consulted regarding this change?

Bridgnorth 6th Form is consulting the following groups:

- Parents/carers of students at the school
- Students at the school
- Staff currently employed or due to take up post at the school
- Other local Secondary Schools
- Feeder/Partner primary schools
- Local post-16 sixth form and further education providers
- The local authority
- The wider local community.

Consultation for our school community.

How do I take part in consultation:

1. Respond by sending views on the following link : <https://forms.office.com/e/4Dhzn0XQk7>
2. Attend our consultation evening on from 6:30pm to 8:00 on **Thursday, 28th September 2023** in the West Hall at Oldbury Wells School.

Trustees and governors are interested to know your thoughts on this important matter.

The consultation will run from Monday, 11th September to Monday 9th October at 10:30am.

Anticipated questions and answers (should decision be made to close 6th Form provision)

- Why is this change being proposed?
The number of students choosing to remain in Bridgnorth for their 16-19 education has been decreasing steadily over several years. The number has reduced to such a level that the financial viability of the 6th form when matched against the financial requirements of the school's 11-16 provision is becoming no longer viable.
- Has any consideration been given regarding potential partnerships which would support 16-18 provision in the locality?
The leadership team have been in contact with a range of current post 16 providers locally to explore any viable potential options, these discussions are ongoing throughout the consultation process.
- Would all students who are already studying at Bridgnorth 6th Form be able to complete their courses?
Yes, all current sixth form students at Bridgnorth 6th Form would be able to complete their chosen courses.
- Would students in Year 11 and below at Oldbury Wells School who want to study 16-19 courses still be able to do so?
Yes, we would be working with all partner Post 16 providers to ensure that all students receive appropriate Information, Advice and Guidance to make the best decisions regarding 16-19 provision.
- In future, would students be able to access the same courses which have previously been offered at Bridgnorth 6th Form?
Yes, all of the courses currently offered at Bridgnorth 6th Form are available across our partner 6th Form Providers.
- How would the changes affect my child who is attending a primary school in the Bridgnorth area?
The changes will not adversely affect primary school students that would normally choose Oldbury Wells School for their secondary education. Resources currently used to maintain the sixth form will be targeted at continually improving the quality of education for students aged 11-16.