

Frequently Asked Questions- Ann Bernadt Nursery school

We understand that you may have questions about the decision to launch a consultation on the closure of Ann Bernadt nursery school. These are some of the questions that you may have immediately. Over the coming weeks, you may have more questions and we will respond to these at regular intervals. Please send your questions to

questions.education@southwark.gov.uk

General

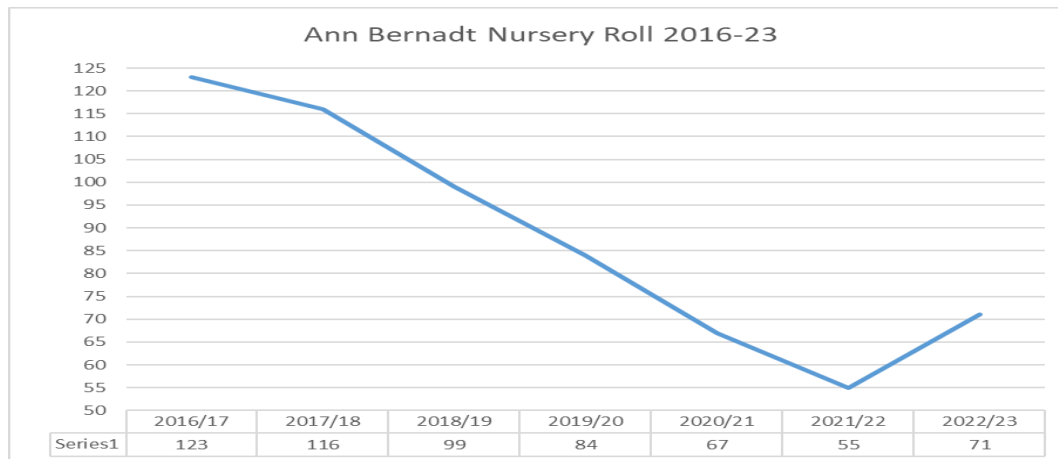
Q. Why are you proposing to close Ann Bernadt Nursery school?

Over the past few years, Ann Bernadt has seen a steady decline in the number of children attending the school. This academic year, starting September 2023, 15 children have so far taken up nursery places, 47 joined the school the previous year under a new reduced staffing structure. Ann Bernadt now has a capacity of 59 across the school, 45 places are currently filled with 14 places empty - 24% of the school, which is above the Southwark average vacancy level of 17%. Schools are funded through the number of children on the roll of the school so the 14 spaces that are vacant is creating a funding gap that is growing each year.

The impact of this is now felt in the school's capacity to adequately staff and secure resources to ensure a high quality of education for all children attending the school. Ann Bernadt takes the majority of its pupils from the Peckham ward. In terms of births in Peckham ward, numbers have reduced from 2018-2021 by 11 per annum (**6%**), and are projected to reduce further by **9%** by 2027/8.

This means there are potentially fewer prospective pupils to attend the school in future years. The falling number of children at the school means that the school's debt is increasing each year. As the number of children in the area have reduced dramatically, there is little prospect of the rolls growing again to such a degree where the school becomes viable organisationally and financially.

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Even with significant reductions in staff numbers, the governing body and the local authority do not think it would be able to achieve a balanced budget in 2023/24 with an estimated deficit of £300,000. The Council believe that, were the school to remain open, a new reduced staffing model would be required from September 2024, which would not enable children to continue receiving the high-quality education they deserve and need.

The decision to propose closure of the school has been taken to protect the education of children at the school, and ensure that, should the school close they can have a managed transition to other local schools. The Governing Body and Southwark Council both support this decision.

Q. Who made the decision to consult on closure?

The proposal to close the school was made by the governing body with the support of the LA in response to the requirement to achieve a balanced budget for the next academic year. The LA support this proposal and were fully involved in discussions of alternative options.

An assessment of the options available, including a reduction of staff, potential amalgamations and closure was undertaken, and the consensus of the local authority and the governing body was that closure was in the best interests of the children.

The final decision to close the school, however, remains solely with the local authority and will be taken on 5th March 2024 after all statutory consultation feedback has been considered.

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Q. Who do the Local Authority consult with on the proposed closure of the school?

The Local Authority has sent consultation communications to the following stakeholders

- Parents/ carers and staff at the school
- All schools/admission authorities in Southwark, governing bodies and academy trusts (via the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors).
- Neighbouring Councils (Lambeth and Lewisham)
- The Southwark Diocesan Board of Education and the Catholic Education Commission
- Southwark local ward Councillors and the local MP
- Trade Unions

Q. What other options were considered before the decision was made to propose closing the school?

A number of options were considered alongside their relative risks and benefits. These included

- *a restructure to reduce staff numbers*
- *potential amalgamation with another local school*
- *a delayed closure until academic year 2024-2025*

The governing body believe that the type of new staffing model that would need to be implemented as soon as possible to achieve savings would not enable children to continue receiving the high-quality education they deserve and need.

A potential amalgamation with another local school is unlikely because of the size of budget deficit the school is carrying; this deficit would have to be taken on by any school we amalgamate with. Ann Bernadt being a standalone nursery school would struggle to find a partner school to amalgamate with, either as part of another nursery, or a detached nursery to an existing primary school.

Delaying the closure until academic year 2024-2025 would rely on a reduced staffing structure from September 2024, which would impact on the quality of education that could be delivered. Staff and families could also choose to leave

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before the closing date, adding further financial pressure on the school, lowering morale resulting in a very negative experience for the remaining staff and children.

Q. When are you proposing to close the school?

The proposal is to close the school by the **31st August 2024**, effectively from the end of the summer term 2024.

Q. How big is the deficit?

The school needs to repay the accumulated deficit of £300,000 within a reasonable timeframe. As the number of children at the school falls further, this will become increasingly difficult, because the fewer pupils a school has, the less funding it receives. Even with significant reductions in staff numbers, we would not be able to achieve a balanced budget in 2023-24, and would just add to an already considerable debt, in relation to the school's annual income.

Q. Can the school not find savings on non-staff expenses such as cleaning or catering?

A significant proportion of the school's budget is staffing costs and the only area where it is possible to now deliver the required savings is on staffing costs. The falling number of children at the school means that the school's debt is increasing each year.

Even with significant reductions in staff numbers, the school would not be able to achieve a balanced budget in 2023-24. They would not be able to deliver the high-quality education that the children deserve and need if the budget is cut further.

Q. Have you considered amalgamations with other schools?

This option has been looked at but there are no suitable local schools that could be amalgamate with, given the size of the deficit and the costs associated with amalgamation. Ann Bernadt is also not able to join a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) as Maintained Nursery schools are not legally able to academise.

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Q. Where will the children displaced by the school go to?

Depending on their age, many of the children attending Ann Bernadt in the academic year 2023-2024 will be leaving to attend a primary school as part of a normal transition into statutory schooling.

For those children who are not yet old enough to attend primary school there are a variety of options for parents. There are two maintained nursery schools located within walking distance. [Nell Gwynn Nursery school](#) ([approximate distance and walking time](#) 0.9 miles and 18 minutes), which is the federation partner of Ann Bernadt Nursery school and Grove Nursery school ([approximate distance and walking time](#) 0.3 miles and 6 minutes).

There are also two maintained primary schools that have teacher led nursery provision within walking distance. [Oliver Goldsmiths Primary school](#) ([approximate distance and walking time](#) 0.3 miles and 5 minutes) and [Brunswick Park Primary school](#) ([approximate distance and walking time](#) 0.5 miles and 10 minutes).

In addition, there is also a choice of Private, Voluntary and Independent providers in the local area who offer early years provision. [Further information may be found on the Family Information Service website pages.](#)

Q. What will happen to children who have special needs? Are these children guaranteed a place in another setting regardless of additional needs?

For those children who will be remaining in nursery for another year, the school and the LA (where necessary) will work to support all parents to find suitable alternative provision. Where Early Years settings have spaces they must make provision for children regardless of their needs. There are resources available to support settings to do this successfully (e.g. the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Inclusion Fund). We would therefore expect that all parents would be able to find a place in an alternative provision. For those children moving onto Reception the usual admissions procedures will apply.

Q. If the school closes what plan are in place to repurpose the school building?

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The final decision on the proposal to close the school will not be made until Cabinet in March, however in the event of the closure of Ann Bernadt nursery school the building would be repurposed for other educational or training uses.

Staff

Q. Were staff consulted about the proposed closure?

The leadership team at Ann Bernadt have been closely involved in assessing the limited number of viable options. Their view is that the proposed closure would be in the best interests of children and staff at the school. The proposal has been shared with staff and trade unions since the decision to consult was taken in May 2023, and will now be discussed with staff through this statutory consultation, and their views will be considered as part of the process going forward.

Q. Were staff asked to develop alternative options?

There are a limited number of options, due to the falling rolls and the increasing deficit. The governing body have looked at a range of options including amalgamation but the large deficit we would carry makes this option unfeasible. Other options that were considered were making further reductions to achieve a balanced budget, which would mean further staff cuts, which was felt, would not be realistic.

However the consultation process now underway is an opportunity for everyone including staff to share their views on the closure proposal and suggest any alternative proposals.

Q. Would staff be offered alternative roles at schools in Southwark?

The first preferred option would be for school staff to find alternative employment in other schools. The school are working with Southwark Schools HR to effect this should it be necessary and to ensure that staff presently employed by the school are considered for vacancies that arise within Southwark schools prior to September 2024.

Q. Would voluntary redundancies be offered to staff?

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A redundancy process would need to be enacted for any staff who are unable to find suitable alternative employment within Southwark

Q. How would staff who are in the middle of training or qualifying continue their training or qualification?

The school will work with the Council's Human Resources leads to look at each individual circumstance and ensure that the correct procedure was followed to support staff in the middle of training, and that they would be given all possible support to complete this

Q. Would staff be offered health and wellbeing support as they go through this difficult process?

Yes, the LA have systems for this, and this is being offered to staff employed at the school.

Q. Would staff working on a one-to-one basis with children with special needs be able to transfer with that child to a new school?

The school will want to do whatever they can to reduce anxiety and ensure a smooth transition for every child with support from the local authority. They would work with parents and carers on a one-to-one basis to ensure they have the widest possible choice of provisions appropriate to their child's needs and education.

Where possible, where the capacity at the receiving school exists to accommodate the staff member, and where the staff member agrees to a transfer, we will consider redeployment of staff working with children who have an EHCP.

Parents

Q. Were parents and carers told of the financial situation and the falling rolls were a major cause for concern?

Parents were informed as soon as the school became aware of the fall in rolls and the governing body had the chance to discuss this and the implications for the school. The governing body and leadership team at the school have made every effort to come up with options to address the failing rolls and the growing deficit. As staff costs make up a significant proportion of the school's

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costs, there were limited options to consider and relatively little that parents could do to solve these issues.

The school did not want to cause unnecessary anxiety for families at this difficult time until the governing body and the LA had identified the best options for their children and their education. The consultation process is now underway and is an opportunity for everyone including parents and carers to share their views on the closure proposal.

Q. Were parents consulted before the decision was made to propose a closure?

The governors and leadership team at the school have been making every effort to come up with options to address the failing rolls and the growing deficit. As staff costs make up a significant proportion of the school's costs, there were limited options to consider and relatively little that parents could do to solve these issues.

No formal decision has been made to close the school and the consultation process is now underway and is an opportunity for everyone including parents and carers to share their views on the closure proposal.

Q. Can you guarantee that teachers and other staff will not leave before the end of this school year?

The school have a committed staff who will want to remain until the end of the year and make sure that children are secure in where they are going on to next. Whilst the school cannot guarantee that teachers and other staff will not leave, they aim to ensure they will have alternative employment opportunities in place to ensure they will remain with Ann Bernadt until the end of the summer term. The school understand staff will be looking for other employment, but they would hope that for most, new employment would begin in September 2024.

Q. What would happen if the Council's Cabinet refused the request to close the school in August 2024?

It would very much depend on what reasons they gave for refusing the closure. The school cannot close unless Cabinet agrees to the decision. In these circumstances, an urgent review of children on the roll of the school, and the staff available for September 2024 would be undertaken, and a continuity plan

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put in place by the governing body with medium- and longer-term plans also reviewed.

Q. What will happen to the buildings if the school closes?

In the event of a closure of Ann Bernadt nursery school the building would be repurposed for other educational or training uses.

Q. Would I qualify for additional transport costs if I have to travel a long distance because Ann Bernadt has closed?

The Council would expect parents to be able to access suitable provision within walking distance of the existing school. However, the Council would look at each case on its merits – whether there was a place available locally, and how far the pupil presently travels to get to school

Q. I want my child to go to a nursery school like Ann Bernadt. What other provision is available in the area that is like Ann Bernadt?

There are two maintained nursery schools located within walking distance. [Nell Gwynn Nursery school](#) ([approximate distance and walking time](#) 0.9 miles and 18 minutes), which is the federation partner of Ann Bernadt Nursery school and Grove Nursery school ([approximate distance and walking time](#) 0.3 miles and 6 minutes). Both nursery schools have an equivalent Ofsted rating (Good) as Ann Bernadt which was inspected in February 2018. Nell Gwynn was inspected in July 2023 and Grove was inspected in January 2019.

There are also two maintained primary schools that have teacher led nursery provision within walking distance. [Oliver Goldsmith Primary school](#) ([approximate distance and walking time](#) 0.3 miles and 5 minutes) and [Brunswick Park Primary school](#) ([approximate distance and walking time](#) 0.5 miles and 10 minutes). Both Oliver Goldsmith primary school and Brunswick Park primary school have an equivalent Ofsted rating (Good) as Ann Bernadt. Oliver Goldsmith was inspected in May 2022. Brunswick Park was inspected in April 2019.

In addition, there is a choice of Private, Voluntary and Independent providers in the local area who offer early years provision. [Further information may be found on the Family Information Service website pages.](#)

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Q. What do I do if I need support or help?

If you need support or have questions, your questions can be emailed to questions.education@southwark.gov.uk or if you would like to speak to someone, please email your number to the email address above and you will get a call back. You may need to leave a message, but a member of staff will call you back.