

# Wynstones Parents' Voices on the School Closure

## Introduction

A very simple questionnaire was recently sent to a number of Wynstones parents, inviting their comments on their and their children's experiences of the recent school closure. It was compiled in the spirit of genuine and open inquiry, as we wished to discover what the experience of the school's closing had been like for families. We were careful to ask for parents' positive as well as negative experiences of the closure, so in this sense the wording of the questionnaire was impeccably neutral.

Below is a distillation of the responses we've received to date – approaching 30 in all. This is in no way a 'scientific', representative sample – in the circumstances in which this data has been collected, there is no conceivable way in which it could be, as we had no way of contacting all parents in the school. However, what we present below is a distillation, with verbatim quotations, of the responses we have received to date – and in that sense it provides important information about the impact of the closure on the parents who have responded to date. And it makes for deeply distressing reading. All respondents have given their express permission for their comments to be quoted verbatim – anonymously, of course (and disguised when someone's identity might be revealed by the quotation being used. e.g. by removing gendered statements about children).

The negative experiences reported dwarfed any positive ones – but all of the positive comments we did receive are reproduced in a sub-section below. Note also that some respondents did have criticisms of the school; but they can be shared in a separate document, if felt to be helpful. This document is purely confined to reporting verbatim parents' experiences of the school closure.

**Please note** that what follows is a drastically shortened version of a very much longer document (of around 20 pages) – the full version of which will soon be available here (currently this summary version is at this link) >> <https://tinyurl.com/ugwxzjy>. It has been necessary to shorten the report substantially in order to make the production of multiple copies for hard-copy dissemination manageable. But this is emphatically not a 'cherry-picking' summary: we've tried to produce a shortened document which fairly represents the tenor and content of the whole – e.g. by retaining all of the section headings of the full report. Note also that the letter designation below simply refers to the order in which we received questionnaire responses.

Please contact us for the questionnaire if you would like to complete it, and so add to the information we're amassing on the impact on families of the school closure; and our thanks and appreciation to those parents who've taken the trouble to complete and return the questionnaire, and for having the courage to share what in many cases are deeply distressing experiences. Thank you, and respect.

Richard House and Richard Brinton  
Stroud, 5 March 2020

## SELECT GENERAL COMMENTS

... Words don't capture the impact the closure has had on our family.

...we are reeling from the shock that the DfE has the power to shut down a school with no notice and no support. [A]

...I can't see that this [closure] is an effective way to improve teaching and learning in any way shape or form. The trauma and disorientation it creates for a large number of individuals and families has been experienced by us as a total contradiction to any notion of a 'duty of care' that could have led to such a decision. [X]

## THE SCHOOL CLOSURE PROCESS

...Angry with the school that they did not have a parent meeting that week of closure to inform us right away of what is going on and why the school has been closed. All the secrecy is not necessary as I have learned more and more what the closure was all about. [C]

... I don't question that some things needed to change or improve but to close the whole school is ridiculous! [D]

...The impact on children throughout the school - whether those too young to understand what has happened, right up to those whose exam schedules have been upset – amounts to a form of organisational abuse. [M]

...It's been devastating. We've felt isolated and unsupported, completely at sea with very little to navigate by. The tone of letters from the school has gone from being personable to cold and distant and often from people we don't know. [S]

## STRESS AND ANXIETY

...We've had the most stressful month, as have so many other parents, with less than 24 hours notice that school was closing and following that a desperate panic to find alternative schools. [A]

... I have heard from parents whose children are at the school that they have been suffering from anxiety and some are even not sleeping as a result of worrying about their school. [B]

...Stress and distress. This has been ongoing for the whole family from the moment of the closure. There is huge uncertainty, incredible strain on the children in trying to keep up with their exam work, impacts of isolation from the group, anxiety about exam results and the impact on further education plans for university and 6th form. [E]

...My health is suffering greatly. I am totally stressed out – a bag of nerves. I hope the powers that be won't let the children take exams don't sleep at night because I'm not. [H]

...Since the closure..., for the first time in his life, s/he has been having daily screaming tantrums, waking crying in the night, and his/her behaviour has been hard to manage and completely new for him/her – throwing things, hitting, pushing etc. This is obviously enormously distressing for him/her and for me. [N]

...Emotional: The closure has led to 6 weeks of stress, anxiety, disorientation, de-motivation and confusion for xxxxs and their parents at the most crucial point of their education. [X]

## TRAUMA AND LOSS

...My xxx was very upset, lost and without a structure that s/he needs. I was upset as I did not know / was not given options for my xxx, and we were unable to contact the teachers – how ridiculous! [C]

...The school's closure has been really difficult for our entire family. My children have been shocked and traumatised – my oldest child has heard people talking and now thinks s/he is not good enough academically... Sh/e is angry and bored and missing his/her friends. [D]

... We are all devastated and heartbroken by the closure. [D]

...My heart is broken but I will never give up on Steiner education! [G]

...The closure of the school has been a catastrophe for us on many levels. On a practical level the children are bereft of the education that we had invested in, they have lost their friendship group, their confidence and their faith in school. [O]

...This closure has helped to take a great love of learning out of our child in a matter of weeks, this is so sad and upsetting for us. [P]

...Impact on the children: Unable to see, speak or hear from their teachers – with whom they have been with for up to 7 years – it is like there has been a mass death. [V]

## ANGER AND OUTRAGE

...We are angry and annoyed, it seems like such an overreaction from the D of E [sic], but sadly it also seems that this sort of homogenisation is the way things are going. [K]

...I feel a terrible grief and anger that he has had to go through this complete wrong-footing and I fear for the impact it will have on his ability to make confident, trusting starts in his education in the future. The emotional cost of it is enormous. [N]

...I remain furiously angry with OFSTED, the Department of Education and the mindless bureaucratic regime behind it which is controlling, faceless, unaccountable, devoid of common sense and cannot be challenged. [O]

## FEELING UNSAFE, AND UNSAFE CHILDREN

...The Ofsted report says that students were at 'significant risk of harm'. We think the class 10 students have been actually harmed by the closure of the school. [T]

...By attempting to avoid potential safeguarding issues, Ofsted has created actual safeguarding incidents. [V]

...In the beginning, due to no other option and time to plan alternative arrangements, we have had to leave our children on their own on occasions. [V]

## EXAMINATIONS [PREPARATION]

...As a parent having to spend every waking hour trying to come up with solutions for my daughter finishing her year 13 education with some qualifications. Making pleas to other schools to take her for A-levels and getting nowhere (in Xxxxxx). Trying to find tutors for her. Calling up her Art School to make dispensation for maybe not having ANY A-LEVELS. [H]

...Trying to find somewhere for our son to take his exams was very time consuming and very frustrating. Educational because our son has missed lots of quality teaching time, half way through his GCSE year! [T]

...With one xxxx 4 months away from sitting her A-Level exams and another xxxx 4 months away from sitting his/her GCSE's this immediate closure and ban from any contact with their teachers (and a

total lack of any guidance or support of contingency from the DfE for supporting students facing the most poignant moments in their education careers to date) is negligent, inexcusable and totally unnecessary. [X]

## **CHILDCARE, WORKING PARENTS AND FINANCIAL EFFECTS**

... It has also been a very difficult and trying time for parents who work and who have had to find child care for their children. This has also incurred extra expense for them. [B]

...The childcare issues are very difficult. My business as a xxxxxxxxxx is difficult as I am having to juggle childcare around seeing patients.....my wife will possibly have to give up work in order to look after her while we await the fate of Wynstones and / or await the appeals process trying to get her into a state primary school. [K]

...We have had to find many hours of childcare which has impacted on us professionally, financially and emotionally. [M]

## **FINANCIAL COST**

...As well as loss of income, we are having to pay for private tutoring and to register privately for some exams. I estimate that the final cost of getting both children through their exams will be in the region of £5,000 (although we will not be paying school fees to Wynstones, so some of this will be recouped). [E]

...Financial [negatives] – extra costs of tutors, extra travel, loss of earnings because of the time spent on the above logistics instead of working. Also now expecting extra costs for exams because we missed the 21st Feb deadline. Stress - including worry and anger - from all of the above – for us and our son. [T]

...The school closure has caused us added expenses for travel and tutors while we attempt to provide some interim schooling for our children. [U]

## **LASTING HARM**

... I'm in no doubt that this has done lasting harm to young people's lives and that of their families too. [A]

...The long term impact of a school she loved being at and felt safe at and then was ripped away for her, will be immense. I feel this will take a long time to get over and many hours of therapy! [F]

## **THE DfE AND OFSTED**

... The closure of the school by the DfE single-handedly traumatised far more children and parents in one fell swoop than school could ever have done. Would it not have been more constructive and less damaging if Ofsted were to say – yes there is a problem – how can we help you to sort it out? [D]

... I am shocked by the lack of accountability and the refusal by the DfE to take any responsibility for their decision to close the school and for the consequences of this. It is hard to believe that they have made absolutely no provision and offered absolutely no support for our children, and when challenged on this - I have complained to the DfE, Ofsted and my MP - there is no acknowledgement that any of it has anything to do with them. [E]

... The DfE have had no regard for any of Wynstones' pupils in the [throes] of their exams; no contingency plan has been put in place and the teachers have not been allowed to send out work or have any contact with students to support them at this time. [F]

... How can the DfE justify closing a school due to a so called Safeguarding issue that only involved a few members of staff and some pupils on the one hand, but create an even bigger problem, with regards to the well-being of all pupils, parents and staff, on the other? (What about the safeguarding of children who are likely to be left at home alone while parents go to work)? How legal is this process? How accountable can the DfE and Ofsted be over this situation? [F]

...This bullying organisation have [sic] ruined our school. I believe that this is part and parcel of the fascist regime we are under in this country to rid itself of any education system which produces free thinking open minded individuals instead of the 'cannon fodder' raised in Dickensian institutions that pass for state schools! [G]

...The Department of [sic] Education have shown absolutely no responsibility towards these children. They appear not to care two figs about the educational prospects of the children taking exams. They should let the school open as an exam centre. [H]

### **SOME 'POSITIVES' FROM THE CLOSURE**

...I think the closure gave xxxxx this chance to discover his own capacity to manage himself. [B]

... The only possible positive of the schools closure has been that the teachers and admin staff have had time to complete training and paperwork. [D]

...I see very little real positive impact of the schools closure, other than the financial relief of not having to pay fees. [K]

...At best, a rude awakening for the school management to some of the poor communication experienced in the last year. [U]

...The only positive aspect of the school closure on our family has been the financial relief of not having to pay school fees. [V]

...I think to a certain extent the school needed a wakeup call in both the way it is run (trustees), but also to us the parents... [W]

### **WHAT CAN WE DO? – A FUTURE FOR THE SCHOOL?**

...what next? What can we all do to expose this appalling injustice and be heard more publicly? I used to be a press officer and I was wondering if you've been in contact with Richard Adams or any of the education editorial team at *The Guardian* as this strikes me as something they might be prepared to investigate. [A]

...This temporary closure is likely to kill off Wynstones, because many pupils are moving to different schools so that their education is not interrupted for an indeterminate period. If Wynstones reopens, it might not have enough pupils to be viable.... Wynstones might be fatally damaged by having lost too many pupils in the interim to be able to stay afloat. [I]

...If the school is forced to close because of financial starvation, then all the good work being carried out to improve the school will have been in vain. This will be an act of sheer educational vandalism – the like of which I never thought could be perpetrated by a taxpayer-funded institution in a supposedly free country. [M]