

Safeguarding Fencing Proposal

1. Executive Summary

This proposal outlines the installation of safeguarding fencing to improve safety, security, and risk management at the rear of Laughton Community Primary School site, namely the boundaries of Pelham Field. The primary objective is to provide a durable, compliant, and visually appropriate barrier that prevents vulnerable pupils from absconding into unsafe areas, including the land around the perimeter of the field, the car park and nearby roads.

Safeguarding fencing plays a vital role in enabling schools to create controlled, supervised environments that meet legal obligations and protect pupils throughout the school day. For primary-aged children—particularly those with SEND or identified vulnerabilities—clear boundaries significantly reduce risk and increase parental confidence. This proposal offers a child-centred solution that balances security, aesthetics, and community access.

Importantly, **the school does not seek to restrict public use of Pelham Field**. The field will remain fully accessible at all times. The proposed fencing is solely designed to reduce the risk of flight for a number of SEN and vulnerable pupils, ensuring they can safely enjoy the space.

2. Background and Rationale

Schools face increasing challenges related to site safety, safeguarding, and unauthorised movement. Inadequate perimeter protection exposes pupils to harm and increases the risk of accidents, operational disruption, and potential legal consequences.

Safeguarding fencing provides a clear physical boundary that supports supervision, prevents unauthorised exits, and upholds duty-of-care expectations. This proposal responds to an identified need for a robust, fit-for-purpose solution that aligns with best practice and the school's strong safeguarding culture.

3. Supporting Data

The need for fencing is evidenced by the following pupil numbers:

- **Total pupils:** 71 (capacity 105)
- **SEND pupils:** 10 (15%)
- **Pupil Premium pupils:** 10 (15%)
- **Vulnerable pupils:** 21 (29.5%)
- **Pupils currently deemed a flight risk:** 2

Incidents in the last 12 months include:

- Total number of incidents of runners in last 12 months (inc running off into secure areas of school) **25**
- Total number of incidents of runners in last 12 months to have used the car park gate or the boundaries of the field to escape site **10**
- Total number of incidents of runners in last 12 months to have used the car park gate and run out into the road **5**
- Total number of times police or social services will have been called or advised due to a runner: **2**

Additionally, **2 families withdrew their children** due to safety concerns about the unfenced field, and **4 prospective families chose not to enrol** for the same reason. Numbers for these may be higher but these are the ones we are aware of. This really damages our pupil numbers which are essential to keeping numbers as high as possible to keep school running and open and a vital part of the community.

3a. Impact of COVID-19 and Lockdown on Children

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns continue to be evident across the education sector, with a particularly significant impact on small rural schools such as Laughton. Current observations and sector-wide reporting suggest an estimated **25% increase** in a range of behavioural and developmental concerns among children, especially those currently in primary education. These include:

- Increased levels of anxiety
- Heightened behavioural challenges
- Greater emotional dysregulation
- Rising mental health concerns
- A noticeable increase in developmental delays

4. Project Objectives

The safeguarding fencing aims to:

- Protect vulnerable pupils and all site users
 - Create safe, clearly defined boundaries and controlled access points
 - Support effective supervision
 - Meet safeguarding and health-and-safety requirements
 - Provide a durable, cost-effective, low-maintenance solution
 - Maintain a natural and appropriate visual appearance
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4. Scope of Works

4.1 Site Assessment

- Review site layout and access points
- Identify risk areas and safeguarding vulnerabilities
- Consider environmental, community, and operational requirements
- See appendix 1 for proposal

4.2 Fencing Specification



Stock image of weld mesh fencing

Installation of **1.8m green weld-mesh safeguarding fencing**, the industry standard for schools due to:

- Non-climbable, anti-tamper, child-safe design
- High visibility for supervision
- Strong, corrosion-resistant steel construction
- Low maintenance
- Aesthetic, non-institutional appearance

To enhance visual appeal and mitigate concerns with aesthetics the school proposes planting hedging and trees along the fence line—species to be agreed with the Parish Council.

4.2a Local Examples

Comparable fencing is already in place at many schools in the area. The following are all within 10 miles of Laughton and have green weld mesh fencing in their fields.



Hawkes Farm Academy, Horsebridge (installed 2025)



Ringmer Primary School (installed 2023)



Blackboys Primary School (Installed 2012)



Park Mead Primary School, Lower Dicker (Installed 2017)

4.2c 1997 agreement

The school acknowledges the 1997 agreement with the Parish Council and its requirement for fencing around the playground. However, the school would like to highlight the following considerations:

- The agreement is nearly 30 years old and no longer reflects current circumstances.
- Pupil numbers have increased significantly since 1997, including the addition of the Underwater Class in 2007 and higher occupancy across all classrooms.

- Safeguarding requirements have evolved substantially in the last 5–10 years, resulting in more stringent expectations for pupil safety and site security.
- The original stipulation does not provide adequate security or safeguarding when the school accesses or uses the field.
- Introducing fencing along the playground boundary is likely to increase health and safety risks, particularly the potential for children to collide with the structure during play.
- The proposed fencing would negatively impact the visual character of the school grounds and detract from the rural setting.
- Please refer to Appendix 3, prepared by Julian Patmore (ESCC Strategic Resilience and Outdoor and Activity Provider Manager) in 2019, for additional supporting information.

4.3 Planning and environmental impact

- The installation of 1.8m weld mesh fencing falls under *permitted development* and therefore does not require planning permission.
- Laughton Parish Council have confirmed that there are no Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) on any trees located within Pelham Field.
- Fencing installation will be carried out with sensitivity to protect existing trees. An arboriculturist will provide specialist guidance to the contractors, and all work will be undertaken in accordance with BS 5837:2005 – Trees in Relation to Construction.

4.4 Gates and Access Control

- Existing gate appearance unchanged
- Infrared beam and pneumatic gate closer added
- Office notification system alerts staff when gate opens
- **No restriction** on public use or access to Pelham Field

4.5 Installation

- Delivered by East Sussex County Council's approved contractor
- Conducted in line with health & safety regulations
- Minimal disruption to school or community use
- Proposal for posts to be set in geotextile bags to avoid concrete leeching into surrounding soil

4.6 Inspection and Handover

- Full compliance inspection
- Handover pack and maintenance guidance provided to school

4.7 Funding and Maintenance

- **Fully funded by East Sussex County Council** (no cost to Parish Council)
 - Ongoing maintenance: Laughton Community Primary School
 - If the school permanently closes:
 - Fence can be transferred to Parish Council at no cost, **or**
 - ESCC will fund full removal
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5. Safeguarding and Compliance

The fencing will meet relevant safeguarding, health and safety, and industry standards. It will avoid all climbable features or hazards and will strengthen the school's safe-environment provision for vulnerable pupils.

OFSTED inspections centre around the school's safeguarding policy, training and reporting procedures rather than safeguarding concerns of the school site but ESCC safeguarding team have prepared a report in appendix 2.

6. Benefits

The proposed fencing will deliver:

- Significantly reduced risk of absconding incidents
 - Improved safety for pupils, staff, and visitors (including weekend users of the field)
 - Stronger safeguarding and duty-of-care compliance
 - Long-term cost efficiency
 - Enhanced parent and community confidence
 - Clear, visible, and safe boundaries for supervised play and learning
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7. Maintenance and Longevity

Weld-mesh fencing is designed for long-term service with minimal upkeep. Routine checks will be carried out by the school's Site Manager to ensure continued compliance and performance.

8. Project Timeline

Subject to obtaining the Parish Council's approval and the issuance of an ESCC purchase order, the indicative timeline from that point onward would be as follows:

- Site assessment & design sign-off: **1–2 weeks**
 - Manufacture & procurement: **6 weeks**
 - Installation: **2 weeks**
- A detailed schedule will be agreed prior to commencement.
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9. Legal agreement

- It is proposed that, in agreement with the Parish Council, the school and East Sussex County Council jointly draft a new licence agreement that encompasses all elements outlined in this proposal and is acceptable to all parties. The duration of the agreement would be determined collaboratively, with a suggested term similar to the 99-year period established in the 1997 agreement.
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10. Conclusion

This proposal provides a practical, community-friendly safeguarding solution that enhances safety without restricting public access to Pelham Field. The fencing supports the school's duty of care, protects vulnerable pupils, and strengthens overall site security while maintaining a visually sympathetic appearance.

The school welcomes further discussion and looks forward to working collaboratively to implement this essential safeguarding measure.

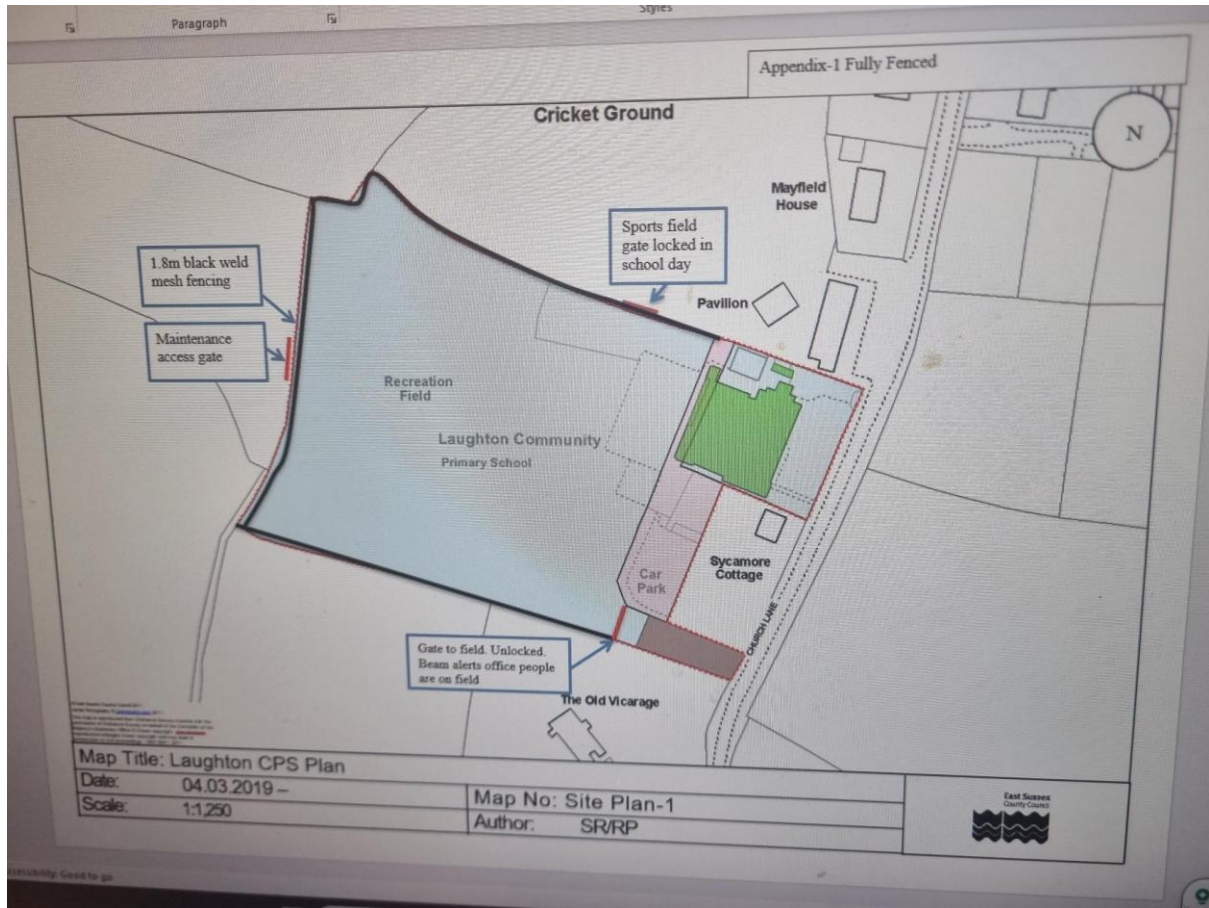
The school is also keen to ensure that all stakeholders — including the local community, parents, the Parish Council, and the landowner, the Earl of Chichester — are fully engaged and informed throughout this process.

We respectfully request that the Parish Council initiate a public consultation on the proposal. This consultation should be circulated to all relevant stakeholders, including residents and parents, to gather their views and feedback.

Once the consultation is complete, the school proposes that the Parish Council present both the details of the proposal and the results of the public consultation to the Earl of Chichester for consideration.

Appendix 1

Map showing proposed line of fencing and gates



Appendix 2

Report from Dion Page Hammond, ESCC Safeguarding team

Visit Report	
Name of school	Laughton Community Primary School
Date of visit	Wednesday 28 th January 2026
Reviewer	Dion Page-Hammond
Visit Focus	
• Site Security	
Key activities completed within the visit	
• Discussion with Executive Headteacher • Tour of outside spaces	
Visit Summary	
• School site security is increasingly important as part of a balanced and proportionate plan to keep children safe inside the school environment, and to keep unwanted visitors and other harms out. • Schools have a statutory and moral obligation to provide a safe environment for children, and this is recognised by school leaders at Laughton Community Primary School. • School leaders have taken reasonable steps to secure the school site, within the constraints of not owning the school field, hard stand, and adventure playground. • School leaders recognise that the school field, hard stand and adventure playground are parish assets and do not seek to deprive the community of these, but they also recognise that more could be done to strengthen the perimeter fencing to further mitigate the risk of children absconding or nefarious persons, not part of the school community, from engaging with children during the school day. • School leaders have formulated a detailed proposal to improve site security with the installation of additional fencing. • The ESCC Education Safeguarding Team support these proposals from a safeguarding perspective.	
Recommendation	
As owners of the field, hard stand and adventure playground, the Parish Council should work with the school to fully understand the safeguarding risks so that members can determine whether they believe that current arrangements adequately safeguard children or not. ESCC could support the Parish Council with risk assessment in order to aid partnership working.	
School personnel seen within the visit	

Appendix 3

Report of Julian Patmore, (ESCC Strategic Resilience and Outdoor and Activity Provider Manager) (Drawn up 2019)

Laughton School Security Options Paper

Following discussion between Laughton Community Primary School, Laughton Parish Council and East Sussex County Council, it has been agreed that three options which aim to achieve the twin objectives of maximising school site security and community access will be presented to Laughton Parish Council on 20 March.

With reference to **appendix-1** (Site-Plan-0) the field (in blue) abutting the school playground hardstanding (in red) was gifted to the people of Laughton by the Duke of Pelham in the early 1960s and is held in trust by Laughton Parish Council for that purpose. The interpretation of the gift is that it confers unfettered access to the field in perpetuity.

Since the gifting of the field, the school has expanded to incorporate a sports hall, and currently has a roll of 108 students. Also since the gift, the requirements on head teachers to comply with increasing demands in terms of their duties to children and staff in respect of health and safety, safeguarding and security (including counter-terrorism) have increased. In the case of maintained schools, East Sussex County Council takes the lead in assessing these governance arrangements at the local level. Governance arrangements are also audited by Ofsted in their assessment of a school's overall effectiveness.

In considering the three options, a pragmatic approach to risk has been taken to allow appropriate security measures to be put in place, whilst maintaining the rurality of the area and the unfettered access to the field desired by the Parish Council.

Option-1

This is the preferred option of the school, parish and county council.

With reference to annotated site plan-1 (**Appendix-1**), the consensus was to go with an idea presented by Parish Councillor Andrea Weller. The idea is that the gate at the entrance to the south west entrance to the field, adjacent to the car park, is fitted with a beam that once broken will alert reception staff that someone is on the grounds. This allows the school to check that whoever is on the field is bona fide, without access to the field being delayed.

The rest of the field will be fenced with 1.8m black weld mesh fencing that will have the effect maximising security from persons and rabbits (the black line on the plan). Hedging and foliage will be cut back before the fencing is installed in order to reduce maintenance. Any foliage etc., coming into contact with the fence will be managed by the school. A gate will be installed on the western stretch of the fence to give access to maintenance staff and machinery.

The gate into the field from the Sports Field will be locked during the school day. Visitors to the field will be invited to go via the gate described above.

East Sussex County Council has allocated capital funding of £61k for these works.

Option-2

With reference to the annotated site plan-2 (**Appendix-2**), this option involves the installation of weld mesh fencing in a line from the sports field gate to the edge of the hardstanding. There is little to commend this option except that it gives the children a little bit more space to play, rather than being confined to the hardstanding. The disadvantage is that putting the fence in the open is unsightly and loses the rurality of the field that is a prerequisite of the PC and makes maintenance (grass cutting, etc.) difficult.

Option-3

With reference to the annotated site plan-3 (**Appendix-3**), this option delivers the 1997 agreement to fence the edge of the playground hardstanding from the south gate to the field. There was a consensus that the increase in numbers since 1997 (to 108 children) means that the hardstanding is too small a space to allow children to run freely at break-time, and, as with Option-2, the positioning of the fence would compromise the rural feel of the school and make the children look penned in."

Julian Patmore
11.3.2019