

The Manor School in Byfleet had been the main venue for Julie Sianne School of Dance for 12 years. However in 2005, the Council decided to close the school due to projected falling pupil numbers. Facing one of the first major challenges in the history of the school, Julie joined with parents and students, to fight this decision.

Sadly the battle to save The Manor School was lost and it was scheduled for closure in the summer of 2007. (The Manor site has stood empty for the last 10 years and Surrey County Council is still undecided on its future use. St Marys School, Byfleet and West Byfleet Junior and Infant Schools have both since expanded to cope with growing pupil numbers.)

The search for a new venue with enough facilities to accommodate the growing performing arts school began. After many months of meetings and visits - enter West Byfleet Junior School - which provided the perfect facilities and location for the school's 250 students. In Autumn 2008 the transition to their new home was complete and to this day West Byfleet Junior School continues to be a vibrant performance hub, providing the space that JSTA needs to carry on dancing, singing, acting and performing.

In 2016, with the demand for more and more studio space and increasing numbers of students the school began a Saturday morning programme of classes at The Bishop David Brown School in Sheerwater.

Dance teacher – a former pupil – joins battle to save threatened school



WE'RE BEHIND YOU!
Julie Evans with some of her younger pupils (Inset)
The Herald last week on the growing campaign

Lining up for a showdown

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A DANCE teacher who depends on The Manor School in Byfleet for her livelihood has added her voice to a campaign by parents and staff to keep it open.

Julie Evans, 37, is a former pupil of the infant school in Magdalen Crescent, and has been running her daily ballet and drama classes there for 12 years.

Now she is facing the prospect of having to look outside the area for an alternative venue because Surrey County Council wants to close the foundation school due to low pupil numbers.

Julie of Fullerton Drive, Byfleet, said: "This has caused me a huge amount of worry. I have been happy there for years and suddenly my business is under threat."

"I have fond memories of The Manor and I have lived in Byfleet all my life. It is a lovely school and I am clinging to the hope that something positive will happen."

She launched the Julie Sianne Theatre Arts School at the age of 17 and now employs six staff and teaches 300 youngsters aged two and a half to 18.

The workshops predominantly take place at The Manor and provide an important source of income for the school, but others

are held at St Mary's Church hall in Church Road, Byfleet, and at a branch in Weybridge.

Julie said it was near impossible to find somewhere suitable because she requires a venue that can offer 46 hours of hire time.

Ian Beck, the county school places and planning manager, who is spearheading the closure plans, has offered to help her relocate.

Chairman of the governors, Diane Heighes, suggested that Mr Beck was merely trying to stave off potential opposition to the closure from the wider community.

'I have been happy there for years and suddenly my business is under threat'

Dance teacher Julie Evans

She said: "This closure is a community issue and not just something that affects The Manor. Julie has been extremely supportive of the school and one of our major sources of funds, bringing in around £15,000 a year."

"We do worry that we could lose her income. A lesser person might have gone elsewhere because of this but she has stuck by us."

Parents, governors, teachers and supporters clashed with education officials, including Mr Beck, at a meeting last week. Further talks are scheduled for September 27.