

Consultation on closure of Clapham & Patching C of E Primary School

Response from Clapham Parish Council

Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires that those proposing the closure of a rural primary school must have regard to the likely effect of the closure on the local community and any alternatives to the closure of the school.

Whilst the current consultation process may seek to ascertain the likely effect of closure on the community, the general feeling is that both questions 1& 2 are poor, the wording appears very leading and has a negative spin. Neither question appears fit for purpose.

The school building itself is not used for community activities, but that does not mean that the school itself is not an integral part of the community. The school has been at the heart of the village for almost 200 years and over the years there has been a seamless integration, with children participating in community events such as carol singing at the local care home, harvest festivals and flower-arranging at the church. The village has a hall with ample parking and there are no other facilities that this small rural school could offer the community beyond human interaction. This process is not about bricks and mortar but preserving the unique and nurturing educational setting with close ties to the community.

The proposed closure of the school coincides with a renewed community spirit in the village. The community run tearooms have undergone a refurbishment in the past year and the parish council has taken on the lease of the recreation ground, securing government-backed funding of £25500 to support its restoration. The village has also benefited from 'Community Infrastructure Levy' funds from a local development and consulted with residents how they might be spent. Parents of pupils from outside the catchment also responded, reflecting the inclusivity of Clapham and just how much they feel a part of this community.

Academisation through Worthing High School (as part of the South Downs Educational Trust) is the alternative to closure and it is unclear why this was not included for Clapham and Patching C of E School at the start of the process.

Disappointingly, notwithstanding the amendment to the proposed resolution to consult on the closure of the school "*whilst continuing to discuss academisation proposals which the County Council will encourage and support*" this was not reflected in the subsequent consultation briefing. In fact, this omission was only rectified after the parish council intervened. Further, as WSCC has passed a resolution in support of academisation it is unclear why the consultation on closure continues.

The school is rated 'GOOD' by OFSTED, financially viable, valued in West Sussex and its local community and has the offer of academisation, which WSCC purports to support. It therefore makes no sense to continue the consultation on closure, particularly as it has been withdrawn for other schools originally in the statutory consultation.