

## **Clapham and Patching C of E Primary School**

### **Questions and Answers guide on small schools (for public meeting brief, public Q&As for the consultation can be adapted from this)**

#### **1. Why are you closing schools?**

- Where schools are identified as being at risk, they need to consider options for change. Between the 7<sup>th</sup> October and 25<sup>th</sup> November 2019 for 5 schools there was a consultation on options:
  - Amalgamating or merging two or more schools to become an all through primary school.
  - Expanding the age range of a group of schools so each becomes and all through primary school.
  - Federating two or more schools
  - Relocation to a new site
  - Closing a school
  - No change
- For a school that's under capacity it is even harder for it to make ends meet and provide the resources and teaching staff necessary to deliver a broad curriculum into the future.
- Individual schools receive funding from central government based on how many pupils they have.
- West Sussex schools receive some of the lowest per pupil funding nationally.
- A school with low numbers is financially vulnerable and receives less funding than it might. These schools will inevitably face financial pressures in the long term, even if they have been financially viable so far.
- West Sussex County Council has a responsibility to all schools and pupils and where a school is vulnerable - whether it's a failing school, or is not attracting a sufficient number of pupils from within the community it serves, we must act to ensure the school has long term stability if that is possible.
- We have been speaking to many of our small schools for over two years to support them to make necessary changes to safeguard their futures.
- We have a number of surplus places in schools across West Sussex and it means that overall we're not making the most of our school provision.
- The county council does not save money if a school closes and these proposals are not about saving the county council money.

#### **2. Why are you considering closing this school?**

- We appreciate that Clapham and Patching C of E Primary School is highly thought of and valued by parents and the school community.
- The school was identified as at risk because of its low enrolment, particularly from the community in which the school is sited. This makes its financial outlook challenging and limits resources to offer a broad curriculum to its students.
- Almost all (92%) of the school's pupils are from outside of catchment, which shows there are not enough pupils locally to sustain the school into the future.

- This makes a school vulnerable to factors outside of their control – parent/carer choices changing, schools nearby becoming more popular etc.
- We encourage alternatives to closure and are aware that the school is in discussions with an academy sponsor.
- We fully appreciate this is unsettling and we will continue to offer support to pupils, parents/carers and staff.
- Proposals to close any school are never taken lightly. However, we have a responsibility to ensure all schools are sustainable and provide a high quality of education to children across West Sussex, now and into the future.
- Our SENAT team have contacted every parent/carer of a child with an EHCP to discuss options should the school close.

### **3. How did you select this school for closure?**

- West Sussex County Council's role is to make sure education across the county is of a consistently high standard for all children and, at the same time, to make sure schools offer a broad curriculum, attract pupils from the local community and are of sufficient size to be viable in the future.
- Five schools were initially identified at risk against these criteria and four remain under consultation.

### **4. This school is best for my child. I'm not convinced alternatives are better because I've already tried them and I know they're not.**

- We understand how important the school is to children, parents and local community.
- The reality is this school can't continue as it is (options are being pursued to be more viable through for example federation or academisation) but we have to plan for no viable alternative being available.
- **All** our schools are working hard to meet the needs of children with SEN and we are investing significant funding and resources to improving SEN provision in mainstream schools around the county.

The Code of Practice makes clear the process of 'plan, do, review' which is required to support learners with SEND. All schools have a SENCO whose role it is to support adults in the school context to identify and appropriately support all learners with an additional need.

### **5. Consulting on these schools before all options have been explored, threatens to drive down numbers, which they may never recover from. How can you justify this and what are you going to do protect them?**

- Discussions with schools have been going on for some time. We appreciate the impact and the discussions around options for closure are having.
- This is not something we've rushed into. We have been engaging with some schools during the last two years to encourage them to look at options for partnerships with other schools so they can benefit from shared resources.

- This is the second round of consultation which is gathering a wide range of views and we are confident the process has been robust and thorough.
- Closure is a last resort and we have been supporting the schools in exploring different options. The reality is there is no good time to propose to close a school.
- We continue to support the schools to explore partnerships but where a school might have to close we have a responsibility to manage the process in a timely manner to limit the period of uncertainty.

**6. If these proposals are about improving educational outcomes for our children why are the alternative schools you're suggesting to my child's school performing at a lower standard than the school they're at?**

- We understand your concerns especially as this school is rated "good" by Ofsted.
- Our job is to raise the standard of education in all schools in West Sussex.
- Ofsted inspections provide a snapshot of the school at a particular point in time
- However there is a range of information which is relevant to the provision and future viability of schools. In some cases there may have been a change in leadership or teachers.
- We need to recognise that despite Ofsted results, some schools are not attracting sufficient pupil numbers or attracting pupils from the local community to make them financially viable and sustainable into the future. In some cases, other information including data on achievement and progress may provide a broader perspective on the schools. Changes to these schools are therefore necessary.

**7. All you talk about are numbers, stats, grades, inspections and money. Why aren't you talking about the children at the school, the staff at the school? These are the people who you are damaging and upsetting but you just don't seem to care**

- We understand how important the school is to children, parents and local community
- This **is** about children. Our aim is to make the education provision in West Sussex as a whole more robust and sustainable so our children, your children, get the best educational outcomes.
- Where a school is at risk we have a responsibility to act.

**8. How can you say you want what's best for children when you can't even run children's services well?**

- We recognise we need help with our children's services and we are working with partners to support us. We have a partner in practice in Hampshire County Council to help improve our children's services, and East Sussex County Council is helping us to improve the overall management of the Council.
- We want to reassure you that we have been making progress in education skills in recent years.

- Outcomes for children and young people in West Sussex schools continue to improve and gains made over the last three years have been well above the national trend.
- The number of pupils in Good or Outstanding schools are the highest they have been for over three years.
- An Ofsted inspection of our special educational needs, disabilities and inclusion service less than two years ago was very positive and adult education in West Sussex is currently rated "good" by Ofsted.

**9. You say you have the best interests of children at the forefront of your work ...look at woodlands Meed? What's happened there is a disgrace.**

- We are aware of the situation regarding a building at Woodlands Meed College and are addressing it. This is a complicated project and our buildings team have commissioned a report to make sure we understand exactly what work is needed at the school. We are expecting a decision after February.
- There are more than 5, 000 children with EHCPs across West Sussex and more still needing SEN support and the demand is increasing every year.
- We are investing £9M in specialist support centres as part of our new strategy to improve provision in mainstream schools and creating a more nurturing and supportive environment for the children who have those higher needs.

**10. Why have you ignored the scrutiny committee's recommendation to delay the consultation until after all options have been explored?**

- We have considered the recommendations by the scrutiny committee.
- We have been talking to a number of schools over the last two years about issues they face and helping them to explore options to ensure their long-term viability, whether that's merger federation etc.
- We continue to support the schools in looking at options other than closure but where a school might have to close we have a responsibility to manage the process in a timely manner to limit the period of uncertainty.

**11. What reassurances can you give us that if our school was to close we would get a school that meets our child's needs?**

- We know that every single child is unique and their needs are unique.
- We have some very good teachers across all of our schools who work hard to teach and nurture children so they reach their full potential.
- We have confidence that our staff can support children with a range of needs and the county council provides additional support and help where appropriate.
- If a school does end up closing, we will meet with parents at each school to explain the process to find a new school for their children. Meetings will be set up when the Consultation ends and the decisions are made.

**12. This is going to seriously disrupt my child's education and moving to their final year of primary school. (Year 5)**

- We appreciate the disruption and don't take a decision to consult on closure lightly.
- We have been talking to a number of schools over the last two years about issues they face and helping them to explore options to ensure their long term viability... whether that's merger federation etc. .
- We continue to support the schools in looking at all options, but where a school might have to close, we have a responsibility to manage the process in a timely manner to limit the period of uncertainty
- We appreciate the disruption closing a school would have to all children there, but we have to do what is best for all children across West Sussex. Our admissions teams will work with parents/carers to ensure any transition is as smooth as possible.

**13. What's your overall vision? To create big factory style schools?**

- This is not about closing small and rural schools. There are 53 small or rural schools in West Sussex and we acknowledge and value the work they do. A small school is classed by the DFE as having a published admission number of less than one form of entry (30 places per year of age, 210 pupils in total).
- We value the make-up of education across West Sussex provided by schools of varying sizes.

**14. How many more schools are you going to close?**

- Our intention is only to consider closure of schools as a last resort We don't have a list of schools we intend specifically to close but we are discussing with a number of our small schools options for their future.
- We know that as a result of the work we are doing with school leaders, a number of schools are exploring partnership/federation arrangements to strengthen them, which we welcome.
- However, we will continue to talk to schools at risk because of, for example, unstable or falling pupil numbers.
- West Sussex County Council's role is to make sure education across the county is of a consistently high standard for all children and, at the same time to make sure schools offer a broad curriculum, attract pupils from the local community and are of sufficient size to be viable in the future.

**15. SEN children tend to be more vulnerable to change. How will you minimise the impact?**

- Any parent with a child who has an EHCP will be contacted by our SENAT team. They will discuss what the options are available as early as possible should the school close.
- We are aware that there are also pupils with SEND who do not have EHCPs we will ensure, where required, that support is available from our advisory teacher teams to aid smooth transition and ongoing support if they have to move.

**16. My child has special educational needs but does not have an EHCP as they can cope in their school. If they move to another school I am concerned that my child will need an EHCP.**

- Every child is different and we support a range of needs using a range of professional services – always taking into account the needs of the child.
- All mainstream schools have access to the same support and guidance associated with supporting pupils with SEND.
- Whilst we appreciate your personal position regarding the smaller size of your school, it is not the case that pupils with SEND cannot be supported in larger school environments.
- Inclusive practice is successful in a range of mainstream environments and we can support this through access to our specialist advisory teacher teams, which we will happily make available as required to support transition and ongoing support arrangements.
- The West Sussex Local Offer has lots of information about the SEN support individual schools offer and guidance on the amount of support you are entitled to. <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/education-children-and-families/special-educational-needs-and-disability-send/send-local-offer/>
- Teachers from the Advisory Teacher teams (Autism and Social Communication and Learning and Behaviour teams) will be supporting pupils on SEND Support at the school to make a smooth transition into their new placements. The pupils at Clapham and Patching are already known to these teams so they will be able to support transition planning and identify where support is needed in the receiving schools. They are intending to work with families as part of this process and will be making contact with the school this term to discuss ways forward for individual children.

**17. What will happen to the children if the school closes?**

- The local authority will meet with the parents at each school to explain the process to find a new school for their children. Meetings will be set up when the Consultation ends and the decisions are made.
- There will be a mini admissions round for all parents affected by the decisions ie if a school closes, this will take place in the second half of the summer term, the window will open from the 15<sup>th</sup> June until the 29<sup>th</sup> June where all applications will be considered together using the schools oversubscription criteria to order priority.
- Any siblings for example those starting school for September 2020 who have been allocated a place at a school that closes, these siblings will where possible be placed at the same school and given the sibling priority.

**18. How will you ensure I will get a place at the school of choice – wont all the places be already allocated?**

- We always try to meet parental preference, if at all possible.
- You will be asked to express three preferences and our aim will be to try to ensure your child goes to a school you are happy with.
- We cannot however breach Infant Class Size Regulations and will work in accordance with the School Admissions Code.

**19. Will there be job losses and if so, how are you supporting staff?**

- We understand the uncertainty this creates to staff and pupils.
- We are exploring what measures we can put in place to support staff at schools under threat of closure and have begun to meet with staff in the schools involved.
- If a decision is made to close a school, staff and trades unions representing them will be consulted on measures to avoid redundancy, including redeployment to other schools where possible.

**20. Going to an alternative school will entail a commute which is not environmentally friendly and will cause congestion?**

- The majority of parents currently drive to these schools, mainly because they're out of catchment.
- Whilst we will be looking with parents to find schools that are more local to where they live, there may be some parents who will have to drive for a longer period and we will consider whether we can offer them support in line with our transport policy.

**21. Will you be funding additional transport costs so parents won't be worse off?**

- In the majority of cases, parents are responsible for their children's travel and costs.
- However, some children may be eligible for help with transport, depending on the school they attend, the distance between home and school, and their particular circumstances.
- The Council gives transport assistance to pupils who attend their nearest available school or their catchment area school and live over 2 miles away (for those up to the age of 8) or 3 miles away (for those age 8 and above). Children may continue to be eligible for transport assistance beyond the age of 8 where they live over 2 miles but under 3 miles from the school.
- If parents send their children to a school other than the nearest available school, or the catchment school, transport assistance is not usually provided.
- If a child has an EHCP, transport will be provided if eligibility is confirmed by the SENAT team.

**22. How can we stop staff leaving before the consultation ends?**

- We completely understand this uncertainty and we're working with schools to limit the impact on staff and the whole school community.
- We have a statutory duty to make sure all schools have the teaching staff they need.
- If a teacher leaves we will resource through supply or fixed term contract staff.
- Unfortunately there is no guarantee we can keep teachers but we aim to keep the period of uncertainty to a minimum.

