



## **Statutory Notice to close Little Marlow Church of England School**

### **Contact Details**

Notice, published by the Federated Governing Board of Little Marlow and Holy Trinity CE Schools, to discontinue:

Little Marlow CE School ("the School"), School Lane, Little Marlow, Buckinghamshire, SL7 3SA, on 31 August 2026.

The School caters for pupils aged 4-7 and is a Voluntary Aided School supported by the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education (ODBE). Little Marlow CE School is part of a federation with Holy Trinity Church of England (Aided) School. If the School were to close, the federation would be automatically dissolved and Holy Trinity would need to establish a new governing board and issue a new instrument of government.

### **Implementation**

It is proposed to close the School on 31 August 2026.

The Federated Governing Board of Little Marlow and Holy Trinity CE Schools wrote to Buckinghamshire Council (the Council) stating they wished to consult on closing Little Marlow CE School. The governors ran an initial public consultation on the proposal in November 2025. Officers at Buckinghamshire Council, ODBE and the Governing Board have considered section 15(4) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the School Organisation Regulations 2013, together with the responses received during the consultation stage, and do not believe there are any factors which support the school remaining open.

Based on these factors, it is with deep regret that the Federated Governing Board of Little Marlow and Holy Trinity CE Schools, with the support of the ODBE and the Council, is publishing this statutory notice to close Little Marlow CE School.

### **Procedure for making representations (objections and comments)**

Within four weeks of the date of publication of this notice, any person may agree, object to, or make comments on the proposal online via the Council consultation website:

<http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/little-marlow-ce-school-statutory-notice>

Alternatively, representations can be made by email to:

[LittleMarlowCEConsultation@buckinghamshire.gov.uk](mailto:LittleMarlowCEConsultation@buckinghamshire.gov.uk)

or by post to: The School Commissioning Team, Buckinghamshire Council, 1st Floor, Walton Street Office, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, HP20 1UZ.

The closing date for submitting any representations is 11:59pm on Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2026.

The Leader of the Council in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services will consider all representations before making the final decision on the proposal to close.

## **Reasons for Closure**

The reasons that give rise to the proposal to close Little Marlow CE School include:

- Low current/projected pupil numbers and a surplus of places in the local area;
- Low proportion of pupils attending from the Little Marlow Community;
- Increasing deficit budget situation meaning that the school is not financially viable and makes curriculum planning and delivery challenging;
- Safeguarding concerns due to low pupil and staff numbers. (With very few pupils on roll and the projected further fall for next academic year, it would be essential to combine classes even further. This would leave a dramatically reduced number of staff which could create safeguarding risks; low staffing levels make it difficult to maintain essential safeguarding standards).

Little Marlow CE School is classed by the Department for Education (DfE) as a rural school for which there is a presumption against the closure. While this does not mean that a rural school will never close, the case for closure should be strong and the proposal clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area. Proposers must show that they have carefully considered the following factors:

- demand for the school and availability of places across the wider area
- educational offer at the school
- transport and admissions implications
- the impact on the community
- alternatives to closure including joining a MAT

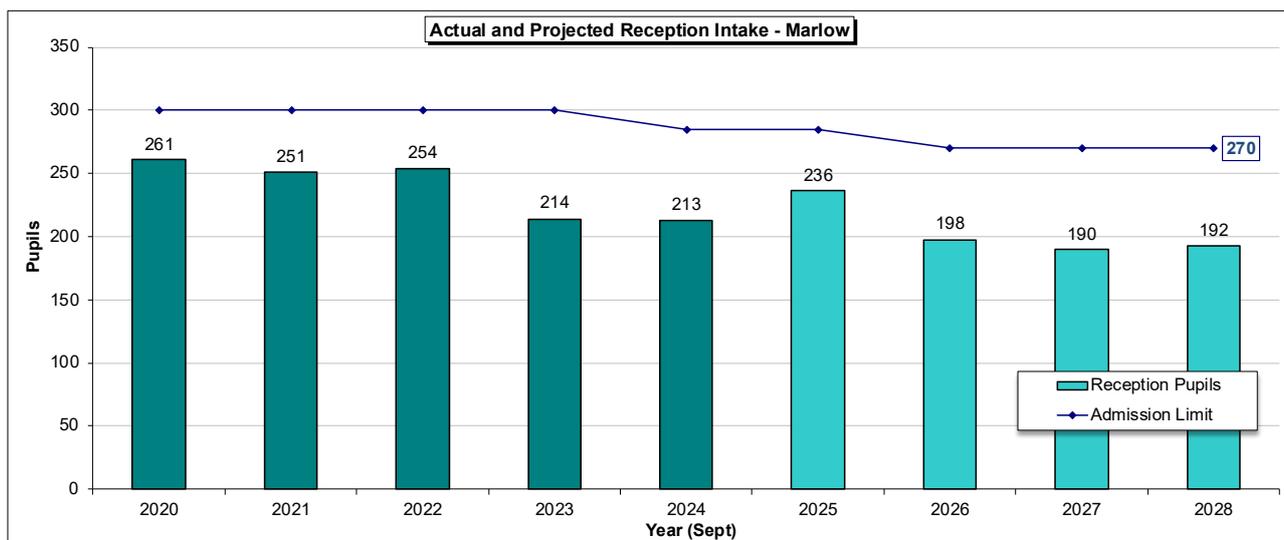
The Federated Governing Board of Little Marlow and Holy Trinity CE Schools have considered all these factors, which are explored in more detail below, and despite the best efforts of governors, staff and the support of the ODBE and the Council, the Governing Board have decided to initiate the statutory process for closure.

### **(i) Demand for Little Marlow CE School and availability of places across the wider area**

The school currently has a published admission number (PAN) of 30 with a capacity for 90 pupils. Little Marlow only has a small catchment population (with on average less than one child applying for any school place over the last seven years) such that the school heavily relies on attracting children from outside the area. In November 2025 the school only had 18 pupils on roll (i.e., 80% surplus capacity) with five pupils in Reception, seven pupils in Year 1 and six pupils in Year 2. In summer 2021 the school had 81 pupils on roll, but numbers have been falling consistently every year since then. Since the governors launched their initial consultation on the possibility of closure

numbers have fallen further as parents have chosen to move their children to other schools ahead of any decision being taken. There are currently only five children on roll (as at 23 February 2026) and all of these are in Year 2 and will leave at the end of the academic year. None of the preferences expressed for a Reception place in Little Marlow for September 2026 were listed as a first preference, so children would only be allocated to Little Marlow if they could not get a place at a higher preference school and parents will be unlikely to accept the place once they are aware of the current situation. It is therefore a very likely that there will be no children at the school in September 2026 even if it remains open.

The latest pupil projections below for the Marlow planning area show that there has been a fall in the pre-school age population and, with limited housing planned in the area, will remain low for the foreseeable future.



Projections forecast that there will be approximately 80 surplus intake places from 2026-27 (i.e. 30%), even allowing for the closure of nearby St Peter’s Roman Catholic Primary School. Based on the demographic data and current trends the closure of Little Marlow CE Infant School would help to reduce the significant levels of surplus capacity in the area and support the viability of other schools in the area.

Schools are mainly funded by the number of pupils attending the school. As a result, delivery of a full and balanced curriculum at Little Marlow Church of England School is difficult with the small and decreasing number of children and staff.

**(ii) Educational Offer**

Despite receiving a positive Ofsted report with an overall judgement of ‘Good’, with two areas graded ‘Outstanding’, new pupil admissions for September 2025 were very low with just five pupils joining the school. Because of the low pupil numbers, at the start of the 2025/26 academic year the school was operating with one Reception class and one mixed age class (i.e. Year 1 and Year 2). Due to falling budget share linked to falling pupil numbers, the school would need to reduce to one class by 2026/27 with all year groups taught together. Despite the best efforts of staff, there is inevitably a risk that the educational experience of each pupil in such a situation would not be as good as it might be in another context in terms of breadth of curriculum and resources available.

**(iii) Impact on the Community**

It is recognised that the closure of the school in Little Marlow will result in the loss of school provision in the village. This has been carefully weighed up against minimal local demand and the sustainability of delivering quality education and financial viability into the future.

While the impact on the wider community is an important consideration, the key consideration is to determine whether the proposal is in the best interests of children who are educated at the school. The school itself is on a small site with constrained facilities, very limited parking and is not used by external organisations. The Little Marlow Parish Council website currently advertise three buildings available to hire in the parish: the cricket pavilion (used by the local pre-school), Abbotsbrook Hall and The Chapel.

The site trustees own the school buildings and site and a decision on the future use of the site has not yet been taken and will not be taken until a final decision on the closure is made. However, there is a reverter clause<sup>1</sup> on the deeds for the school site that may come into effect if the school closes, meaning the land may revert back to the heirs of the original donors.

#### **(iv) Alternatives to Closure**

Little Marlow CE School federated with Holy Trinity CE School in 2014. The current acting Head Teacher works across both sites and some staff work across the federation. Despite federating, the decrease in pupil numbers is continuing to have a significant impact on the viability of the school. The Governing Board also considered the option to relocate Little Marlow onto the Holy Trinity site to achieve further savings in terms of building maintenance/running costs. However, to facilitate this, the Holy Trinity site would require additional accommodation to be provided. The school has no budget for this and it was felt that, even if funding could be found, there is very little space on the Holy Trinity site and the resulting loss of valuable outside space could impact on the educational offer to the existing pupils. Given the very low pupil numbers in key stage one across Marlow, it was also felt that there was no guarantee that pupil numbers would increase over time or and, if they did, it could impact negatively on other local schools.

The Government suggest considering alternatives to closure such as joining a multi-academy trust (MAT) to improve financial resilience. However, given that the school is already federated with Holy Trinity CE School and has implemented budget efficiencies through running this model (e.g. by having one head teacher working across both sites) and in light of the falling pupil numbers across the area, it is highly unlikely that any MAT would be willing to take Little Marlow CE School into their MAT as a separate entity, given their current situation. The governors have investigated options around MATs and approached three Academy Trusts. None of the Academy Trusts could see a future for Little Marlow CE School, even as part of the Holy Trinity federation, due to decreasing numbers and the deteriorating financial position of the school. Additionally, the Oxford Diocese have confirmed that the DfE have recently not approved a small school (also in a federation) joining a MAT as it was deemed unviable; it is therefore unlikely the DfE would grant an Academy order for Little Marlow CE School in any case.

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<sup>1</sup> A reverter clause is a provision in a deed or contract that automatically returns ownership of property or rights to the original grantor if certain conditions are not met or a specific event occurs. This ensures property is used for a designated purpose, such as a school, and allows the grantor to reclaim it if that purpose ceases.

It should be noted that should Little Marlow CE School close, then the federation with Holy Trinity would naturally come to an end.

#### **(v) Admissions and transport implications**

When determining proposals to discontinue (close) provision, decision makers should be satisfied that there is sufficient capacity elsewhere in the local area to accommodate displaced pupils, and in the medium and long term whether the proposal will result in unreasonably long journey times/increased travel costs for families/local authorities, as well as any increase in the use of motor vehicles.

Should Little Marlow CE School close on 31 August 2026, it is proposed that the following actions are implemented:

- New school places would need to be found for children currently in Reception and Year 1. However, there are currently no children in these year groups on roll at the school, so this will not be necessary. Year 2 pupils will transfer as usual at the end of the academic year through the normal junior transfer process.
- We will have particular focus on those pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and ensuring that the right levels of support continue to be in place for those pupils who require it. As at February 2026 there are currently no pupils attending the school who have an EHCP.

Any parents who had expressed a preference for a Reception place at Little Marlow for September 2026 as part of this year's annual admissions round have been contacted by the admissions team and offered the opportunity to amend and add preferences for inclusion in the first round of offers should they wish to (noting that no decision to close the school has yet been made). There were no first preferences made for Little Marlow School.

All statutory aged children would be automatically entitled to free home to school transport if they attend their nearest available school and meet the following criteria:

- children who live beyond the statutory walking distance (up to 2 miles if below the age of 8 or up to 3 miles if aged between 8 and 16);
- children from low income families;
- children whose walking route to school is unsafe;
- children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), a disability or a mobility difficulty.

It is not expected that the proposed closure will generate any significant savings or increased transport costs (if any) in the long term. There is currently no school transport going into Little Marlow, as for most children for whom it is the nearest school, it is within walking distance, and all other pupils are there through parental choice. If Little Marlow CE School were to close, based on current trends there would be capacity at other schools within 2 miles of Little Marlow for the few children living there.

School places available at other schools within the area can be viewed in the link below on the Council website:

[www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools-index/school-admissions/change-schools-in-year/check-for-vacancies/](http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools-index/school-admissions/change-schools-in-year/check-for-vacancies/)

or by contacting the Council by completing a school admission contact form:

[www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools-index/school-admissions/contact-school-admissions/](http://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools-index/school-admissions/contact-school-admissions/)

## **Outcome of the initial Consultation Stage**

After discussions with the Council and ODBE, the Federated Governing Board of Little Marlow and Holy Trinity CE Schools took the decision in November 2025 to consult on the closure of the School. In line with statutory requirements the consultation letter was sent to the following consultees:

- Leader of the Council
- Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services
- Deputy Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services
- Local MP – Joy Morrissey MP
- Local councillors: Cllr Mark Turner, Cllr Alex Collingwood, Cllr Anna Crabtree, Cllr Carol Heap
- Town and parish councils: Little Marlow Parish Council and Marlow Town Council
- Parents/carers
- Pupils at the school
- School staff
- Teaching associations and Unions
- Northampton Roman Catholic Diocese and Oxford Diocesan Board of Education
- Local schools
- Buckinghamshire Council officers
- Local residents

Public consultation on this proposal started on 27 November 2025 and ended 22 January 2026. Two public meetings were held at the School on Tuesday 9 February at 2:15pm and 6pm to allow parents and other stakeholders to express their views. The meetings were attended by a total of 18 people (across the two sessions), in addition 12 staff members/governors attended across the two sessions. Numbers exclude representatives from the Diocese and council officers.

The School received 15 responses to the consultation proposal.

In summary of the 15 who responded, 2 (13%) agreed with the proposal to close the school; 9 (60%) did not agree; and 4 (27%) didn’t know or didn’t say.

The key comments made by those who responded are summarised below:

- Those who were in favour or didn’t know:
  - Acknowledged the low pupil numbers and likelihood that this would continue
  - Acknowledged other schools have places
  - Noted the lack of effective public transport to the village
  - Referenced the number of rental properties in the village and how expensive it was for young families with children to live there
- Those who were not in favour:
  - Referenced possible building projects in the area, including Marlow Film Studios and the possibility of this increasing demand in the longer term

- Referenced the closure of St Peter's RC School and the fact this could have increased numbers at the school
- Felt the school was an important part of the village and meant village children could walk to school
- Regretted the potential loss of a faith school, especially given the closure of St Peter's RC
- Felt the school could have been marketed better
- Valued the school and what it offered highly
- Were concerned on the impact the closure would have on the children

Of the 15 responses received, 13 (87%) said that they understood why the proposal had been made to consult on closure of the school (even if they didn't necessarily agree with it); 2 (13%) said that they didn't understand the proposal and 0 (0%) that they didn't know.

The governors, ODBE and the council have fully considered the responses received. Unfortunately, as shown by the projections above, the level of housing currently proposed in the Marlow area is not enough to raise pupil numbers significantly both in the short and long term. And while the closure of St Peter's RC School has reduced the number of school places in Marlow, there is still expected to be a large number of surplus places in Marlow and none of the children currently attending St Peter's RC School have so far chosen to move to Little Marlow CE School. The potential closure of the school, the impact of that on the village and the disruption to families is deeply regretted, but as no alternative proposals to ensure the future of the school were put forward during the consultation, it is the view of the Governing Board, ODBE and Buckinghamshire Council that the school remains unviable. Therefore, the governors have reluctantly decided to issue a Statutory Notice seeking the closure of the School.