



Consultation on the future of The Mary Towerton Primary School

It is with deep regret that Buckinghamshire Council, with the support of the Governing Board of The Mary Towerton Primary School, is seeking the views of parents/carers, staff and other stakeholders on the future of the school. This document is part of the consultation process and at the end of the consultation period, a decision will be taken by the Local Authority and the Governing Board of Mary Towerton Primary School whether or not to proceed and make a formal application to close the school through a Statutory Notice. This document is part of a five-week public consultation and provides information on the reasons for this proposal as well as asking for your views about it. Please read the document and respond to our short questionnaire at the end before the closing date of 2 April 2023. Views will be considered by the Governing Board and the Local Authority, who will decide whether to issue a statutory notice stating their intent to close the school.

Background

Mary Towerton Primary School is a small, rural primary school for children aged 4-11. The school has a published admission number of 14 with a capacity for 98 pupils. The school has been under-subscribed for a number of years and pupil numbers fall significantly short of the school's published admission number. The school, as at September 2022, had only 33 pupils on roll with only 8 pupils across all of Key Stage 1 (i.e. Reception, Year 1 and Year 2). Initial indications from the current primary admission round is that there are no first preferences for admission to the school in September 2023.

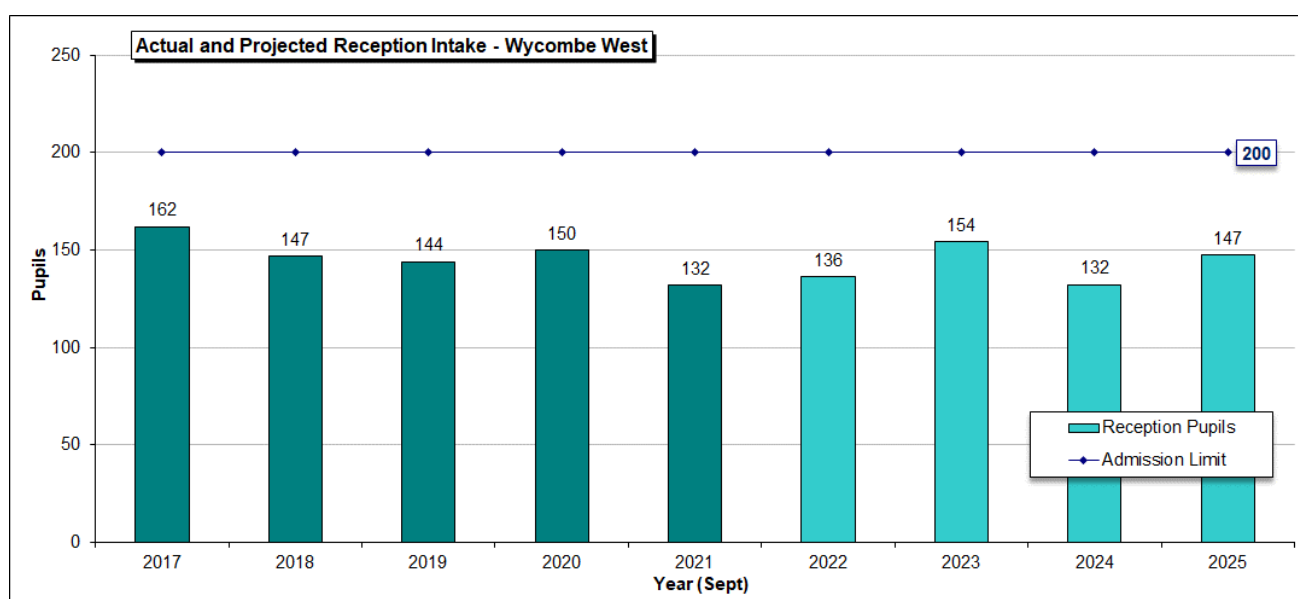
The school was recognised by Ofsted as Requiring Improvement in its inspection in October 2019. Since then, the school has had high teacher turnover and many pupils have left the school. Schools are mainly funded by an amount of money for each child attending the school. As a result, delivery of a full and balanced curriculum at Mary Towerton Primary School is difficult with such a small and decreasing number of children and staff. Based on these factors and despite the best efforts of governors, staff and the support of the local authority, the Council is initiating the process for closure effective from 31 August 2023, although no decision to close the school has yet been made.

Rural Schools and the presumption against closure

There is a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean a rural school will never close, but the case for closure should be strong and in the best interests of educational provision in the area. Proposers must show that they have carefully considered the following factors: (i) availability of places across the wider area (ii) educational offer at the school (iii) the impact on the community (iv) alternatives to closure including collaboration with other schools/trusts (v) admissions and transport implications. The Local Authority and Governors have considered these factors before bringing forward this proposal.

(i) Availability of places across the wider area

The projections below for the Wycombe West planning area forecast significant surplus places for the foreseeable future i.e. approximately 50 surplus intake places (25%) over the next 3 years.



Wycombe West is in an area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with large parts in the Green Belt. There is therefore only small-scale housing allocated in this area within the Wycombe Local Plan (i.e. no sites of more than 100 homes) so little prospect that demand will significantly rise over the planning period to 2033. Government expectations are that Local Authorities manage the school estate efficiently and reduce excess surplus capacity to avoid the detriment to schools' educational offer or financial position.

(ii) Educational Offer

The school heavily relies on attracting children from outside the area, in particular High Wycombe, due to its small catchment population. The popularity of the school has declined rapidly since the Ofsted Inspection. As a result of this, together with falling births in High Wycombe, the school's intake has dropped considerably and has been losing pupils in other year groups. There are small cohorts in each year group, so the school has to operate with three mixed age classes – Reception/Year 1/Year 2; Years 3/4; Years 5/6). The Local Authority and the Governing Board

believe the school to be unviable and unable to guarantee the quality of education for the pupils that they would wish.

(iii) Impact on the Community

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. Notwithstanding this, it is recognised that the closure of the school will result in the loss of school provision in the village. Studley Green has a well maintained/used facility community centre including youth club, leisure/adult learning, church groups, playing fields, children's play areas and ample parking. The school itself is not used by any community groups or for community use.

A decision on the future use of the site has not been taken yet and will not be taken until a final decision on the closure is made.

The impact of the loss of the school on the community has been carefully considered against minimal local demand for school places or use of its buildings and the sustainability of delivering quality education and financial viability into the future.

(iv) Alternatives to Closure

The Local Authority has explored alternative options to closure which have included the opportunity for the school joining a Multi-Academy Trust (MAT) or federating with other schools. Although joining a MAT or federation could offer benefits in terms of economies of scale, collaboration across schools, shared learning and resources etc., the Council considers it unlikely that a trust would, through its due diligence, consider the school viable into the future. Despite discussions with a number of Multi Academy Trusts and other Schools, to date we have not received any expressions of interest in taking on the school.

(v) Admissions and transport arrangements

Should Mary Towerton School close on 31 August 2023, parents and carers would be able to express a preference for a place at an alternative school. Buckinghamshire Council will manage this process and due to the high level of surplus places in the area would expect to be able to place all families at a local school. Parents and carers would be asked to complete an in-year admissions application form and to name up to three schools they would prefer their child/ren to attend. Buckinghamshire Council would try to meet parent and carers' preferences wherever possible but cannot guarantee to do so as it would depend upon vacancies at that time.

We will have particular focus on those vulnerable pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) by ensuring that the right levels of support continue to be in place for those pupils who require it.

Our Admission Officers would be available to support families with completing in-year applications for school places for start in September 2023. The earliest window to complete an in-year

admissions application form for September start is from 8 May to 5 June 2023. All applications would be considered together and not on a first-come, first served basis. Applications can be made and places held before the final decision whether to close the school or not is made. All children would be automatically entitled to free home to school transport if they attend their nearest available school subject to qualifying distance:

- two miles for children under eight years of age;
- three miles for children aged over eight; or
- where the route to the school is not safe to walk accompanied by a responsible adult.

However, due to the low number of children living in the Mary Towerton School catchment area and the high degree of surplus places in the area, we would not expect there to be a significant increase in motor vehicle usage/travel distances as a result of closure. The school has historically had to rely on attracting the large majority of its children to travel in from neighbouring towns to fill places.

Please use the link below to view school places available at other schools within the area:

[List of in-year school vacancies | Buckinghamshire Council](#)

If you are unable to access this link please contact us by completing a school admissions contact form on the Buckinghamshire Council website:

[Contact school admissions | Buckinghamshire Council](#)

Staff

The staff group is aware of the circumstances, and the recognised trade unions have been notified of the consultation. Staff are invited to submit responses to the public consultation. A separate redundancy consultation process will be arranged for staff regarding the possible closure. In addition, Buckinghamshire Council offers the opportunity to join the Employee Transfer Register and all staff affected by the closure will be provided with support and details in relation to this and the redundancy process.

Consultation and decision-making process

The decision to consult on the future of the school has not been made lightly but is being brought forward in light of the low demand for school places and the challenges the school faces in delivering the curriculum to such a small number of children. No decision to close the school has yet been made. A statutory process must be followed and is a legal requirement. Consultation will take place with all pupils, parents, staff of the school as well as other stakeholders, for example Unions, MP, local Councillors. Following the end of this consultation period, the school Governing Board and the Local Authority will meet to review the consultation responses and decide whether or not to proceed to the next stage, which is the publication of a statutory notice and a formal representation period lasting four weeks.

We expect the final decision on the future of the school to be made in July 2023 by Buckinghamshire Council’s Leader in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services. If closure is approved, then the school would close on 31 August 2023.

The proposed timetable below, which may be subject to change, sets this timeline and next steps out:

Start Date	End Date	Description
28 th February 2023	2 nd April 2023	Five week public consultation
14 th March 2023 2.30pm and 7pm		Public Meetings at the school
8 th March 2023	12 th April 2023	Consultation with staff
3 rd April 2023	27 th April 2023	Consultation responses assessed and decision taken by Buckinghamshire Council and the Governing Board of Mary Towerton School whether to propose closure of the school.
28 th April 2023	26 th May 2023	Subject to the decision above: Publication of Statutory Notice and formal representation period
27 th May 2023	21 st July 2023	Buckinghamshire Council and School Governing Board review the responses from the consultation The Leader of Buckinghamshire Council, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Children’s Services, takes a decision on the final outcome
31 st August 2023		Subject to the outcome above, the School may close.

All documents and updates will be provided on the school website and also on Buckinghamshire Council’s consultation website, Your Voice Bucks www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/the-mary-towerton-school

You are invited to attend an information session at the school on 14th March at 2.30pm or 7pm with representatives from the Buckinghamshire Council and the Governing Board.

Consultation on the future of The Mary Towerton Primary School - Have your say

We want to hear your views on this proposal. The views of parents, pupils and the wider community will be considered by the Governing Board and Buckinghamshire Council when determining whether to publish a Statutory Notice stating their intent to close the school.

You can complete this survey online at www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/the-mary-towerton-school.

1. Do you agree with the proposal to close The Mary Towerton School?

Please tick (✓) one option

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

Please tell us the reasons for your previous answer:

2. Do you understand why the proposal to close The Mary Towerton School has been made?

Please tick (✓) one option

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

If 'No' or 'I don't know', please tell us why:

3. If you think there is anything we haven't considered when developing the proposal to close The Mary Towerton School, please tell us here:

4. If you have any other comments about the proposal to close The Mary Towerton School, please tell us here:

About you

We will use the information you provide here only for the purpose of this activity. We will store the information securely in line with data protection laws and will not share or publish any personal details.

5. Which of the following describe you?

Please tick (✓) all that apply

- I am a parent or carer of a student at The Mary Towerton School
- I work at The Mary Towerton School
- I am a Governor / Trustee for The Mary Towerton School
- I am a student at The Mary Towerton School
- I live near The Mary Towerton School
- I work at another local school in the area
- I represent or own a business in Buckinghamshire
- I represent a community or voluntary group in Buckinghamshire
- I am an elected representative in Buckinghamshire
- I represent a Parish / Town Council or Town Committee in Buckinghamshire
- I work for Buckinghamshire Council
- Other (please give details below):

6. How did you find out about this consultation?

Please tick (✓) all that apply

- Letter from school
- School staff briefing
- Local media (newspaper, radio or TV)
- Buckinghamshire Council website or Your Voice Bucks website
- Buckinghamshire Council newsletter
- From Buckinghamshire Council staff
- Through working at Buckinghamshire Council
- Word of mouth
- Local Community Board
- Local Councillor
- Local Parish / Town Council or Town Committee
- Other (please give details below):

7. Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation (e.g. a business or a voluntary group)?

Please tick (✓) one option

- As an individual
- On behalf of an organisation (please provide name of organisation and your job title below):

End of survey if responding on behalf of an organisation

More about you

We want to hear from as many people as possible to understand the views and needs across Buckinghamshire. The following questions help us see if the communities we serve have had the opportunity to be heard through this activity.

All questions are optional. You can skip any questions you do not wish to answer, or you can skip all the questions by clicking 'Continue' at the bottom of the page.

8. What is your postcode?

We want to understand the views of people living in different areas. You don't have to provide your postcode, but it helps us plan and make considered decisions.

9. What is your age?

Why we ask this: We want to understand the experiences and views of different age groups.

Please tick (✓) one option

- Under 16
- 16 to 24
- 25 to 34
- 35 to 44
- 45 to 54
- 55 to 64
- 65 to 74
- 75 to 84
- Over 85
- Prefer not to say

10. Are you:

Why we ask this: We want to understand the experiences and views of different sexes.

Please tick (✓) one option

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say

11. Do you consider yourself to have a disability / disabilities, impairment(s) or long term health condition(s)?

Why we ask this: We want to understand the experiences and views of disabled people, people with impairments and people with long-term health conditions.

Please tick (✓) all that apply

- Disability / disabilities
- Impairment(s)
- Long term health condition(s)
- No
- Prefer not to say

12. How would you describe your ethnicity?

Why we ask this: We want to understand the experiences and views of different ethnicities.

Please tick (✓) one option

- Asian - British
- Asian - Bangladeshi
- Asian - Chinese
- Asian - Indian
- Asian - Pakistani
- Any other Asian background - Please give details below

- Black - African
- Black - British
- Black - Caribbean
- Any other Black, African or Caribbean background - Please give details below

- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White and Asian
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White and Black African
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White and Black British
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - White and Black Caribbean
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups - Mixed or Multiple Ethnic backgrounds British
- Any other Mixed or Multiple ethnic background - Please give details below

- White - English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British
- White - Irish
- White - Gypsy or English traveller
- White - Irish Traveller
- White - European
- Any other White background - Please give details below

- Other ethnic group - Arab
- Other ethnic group - Arab British
- Other ethnic group - Please give details below

- Prefer not to say

Please give other details here:

End of the survey

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Your comments are important as we do not simply take account of the numbers of people expressing a particular view when considering representations made on proposals.

Please return your completed survey by midnight on Sunday 2 April 2023. You can:

- Email it to themarytowertonconsultation@buckinghamshire.gov.uk
- Post it to The School Commissioning Team, Buckinghamshire Council, 1st Floor, Walton Street Office, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP20 1UZ