



Consultation on the proposed closure of Westcott Church of England School

It is with deep regret that the Governing Board of Westcott CE School, with the support of the Oxford Diocesan Board of Education (ODBE) and Buckinghamshire Council (BC), is seeking the views of parents/carers, staff and other stakeholders on a proposal to close 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 Governing Board of Westcott CE School in consultation with the ODBE and the Local Authority, whether to publish a Statutory Notice to close the school. This document is part of a six-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 before the closing date of Wednesday 13 March 2024.

Summary reasons for proposal

The reasons that give rise to the proposal include:

- Low pupil numbers and a surplus of places in the local area
- Ofsted judging the school to be inadequate in June 2022. As a result, the Department for Education (DfE) have told the school that they must become an Academy and join a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) but no suitable MAT sponsor can be found.
- Increasing deficit budget situation meaning that the school is not financially viable.
- An issue with the lease on part of the school site that would need resolving to secure the long term future of the school.

Westcott CE School is classed by the 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:

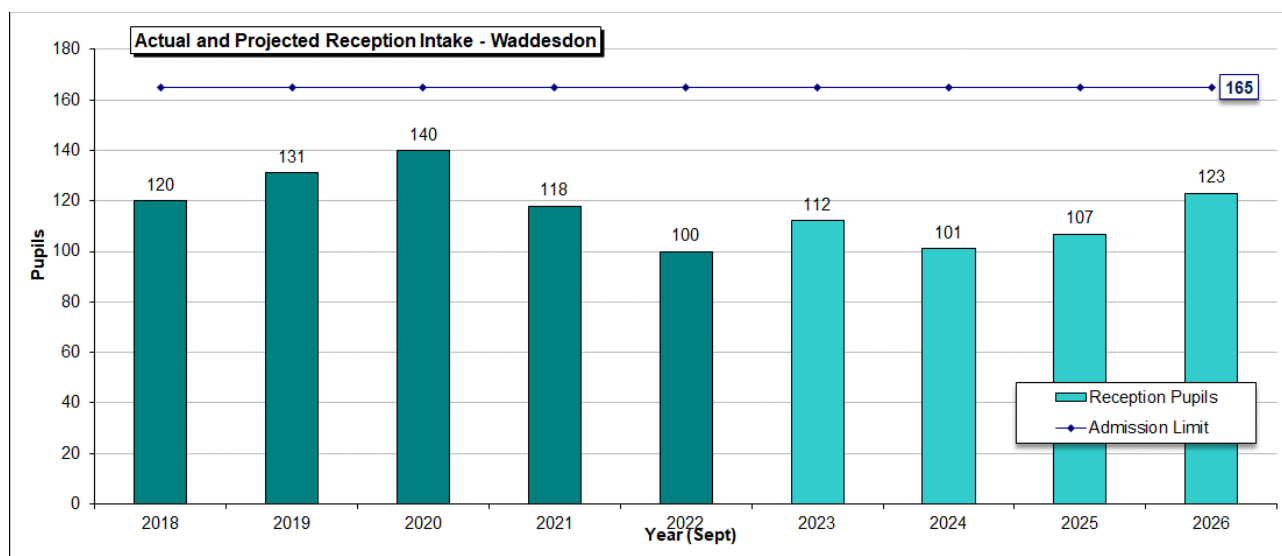
- demand for the school and availability of places across the wider area
- educational offer at the school
- transport and admissions implications
- the impact on the community
- alternatives to closure including joining a MAT

Governors have considered all these factors below and despite the best efforts of governors, staff and the support of the ODBE and the LA, the Governing Board is initiating the process for closure. If a decision is taken to close the school, it is proposed that this would take effect from 31 August 2024.

(i) Demand for Westcott CE School and availability of places across the wider area

Westcott CE School is a small, rural primary school for children aged 4-11 and has an admission number of 15 with a capacity for 105 pupils. The school heavily relies on attracting children from outside the area, in particular Aylesbury Town, due to its small catchment population. The school, as at October 2023 had only 34 pupils on roll (i.e. 68% surplus capacity); 14 of the pupils are in Year 6 and due to leave the school at the end of the school year and there are only 7 pupils across all of Key Stage 1 (i.e. Reception, Year 1 and Year 2). School admissions for September 2024 currently show one first preference for Westcott CE School.

The latest projections below for the Waddesdon planning area show that there is no significant change in the pre-school population for the foreseeable future and that therefore schools will need to rely on families from Aylesbury to fill places.



Projections forecast that there will be approximately 42-64 surplus intake places over the next three years (i.e. 25-40%). Approximately 500 homes have been allocated in the planning area within the Aylesbury Local Plan, however, most have already been approved/completed and have been incorporated within the projections above so there is little prospect that demand will significantly rise over the planning period to 2033. Based on the demographic data and current trends the closure of Westcott CE School could help to reduce the significant levels of surplus capacity in the area and increase the viability of other good schools in the area.

The school has a nursery to encourage more families to the school. The nursery children are taught together with Reception pupils to make the class more viable – although the nursery is also struggling to attract children and has only two pupils in attendance (as at October 2023).

(ii) Educational Offer

Ofsted's inspection in June 2022 and May 2023 recognised the school as "inadequate". Since then the school has had high teacher turnover and many pupils have left the school. The school is currently having to operate with three mixed age classes (i.e. one class for Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 2; one for Years 3-4 and one for Years 5-6). Due to falling budget share linked to

falling pupil numbers, the school may need to reduce to two classes by 2024/25. In addition, the school has experienced high teacher turnover. Despite the best efforts of staff, there is inevitably a risk that the educational experience of each pupil is therefore not 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 Westcott 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 and is not used by external organisations. There is a local cricket club in the village which is hired out for small functions and meetings.

The ODBE owns the school buildings and site apart from (i) the forest school area which is leased to the school by the church and (ii) the land to the north of the school building which is owned by the Woodward Trust, the lease to which expires in 2032. A decision on the future use of the site owned by the ODBE has not yet been taken and will not be taken by the ODBE until a final decision on the closure is made.

(iv) Alternatives to Closure

The school was recognised by Ofsted as being Inadequate in its inspection in June 2022. As a result, the school is the subject of a directive Academy Order i.e. the DfE have told the school they must become an Academy and join a MAT; the school needs to join with a larger organisation to build both operational and financial resilience and address small school issues (e.g. succession planning, headteacher workload, quality of teachers, recruitment & retention, fluctuating intakes etc). Whilst a MAT was initially identified, after working with the school and reviewing its current and future position, the MAT decided it wasn't viable to take them into their MAT and withdrew as a potential sponsor. Discussions with other MATs have indicated that other MATs would take the same view.

In September 2012, the ODBE invested in the expansion of Westcott CE School from an 4-7 infant school to a 4-11 combined school in response to parental choice and to try and make the school more sustainable. Despite this investment the school has failed to attract sufficient pupils to ensure its long term viability.

(v) Admissions and transport implications

Should Westcott School close on 31 August 2024, parents and carers would be able to express a preference for a place at an alternative school. BC will manage this process. Parents and carers would be asked to complete an in-year admissions application form and to name up to 3 schools they would prefer their child/ren to attend. The 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) and ensuring that the right levels of support continue to be in place for those pupils who require it.

The Council's Admission Officers would be available to support families in completing in-year applications for school places for start in September 2024. The earliest window to complete an in-year admissions application form for a September start is from 7th May to 3rd June 2024. All applications would be considered together 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 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.

As a result of placing displaced children, there is likely to be a short-term increase in transport costs. Longer term, children living in Westcott village itself (who can currently walk to school) would become eligible for travel assistance as there is no safe walking route from their home to another school. However, any increase in home to school transport costs is likely to be reasonable (i) due to the falling number of births in Westcott village (c. 2 children a year based on latest birth figures over the last six years and assuming all choose to attend their nearest suitable school) and (ii) when compared with the alternative options for reducing excessive surplus capacity in the area. Further, there is existing bus/taxi transport going to Westcott CE School serving the school's wider catchment area (due to unsafe walking routes) which could be used to offset any additional costs to transport these pupils to the nearest suitable school after Westcott CE School.

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

www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools-index/school-admissions/change-schools-in-year/check-for-vacancies/

If you are unable to access this link please contact BC by completing a school admission contact form:

www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools-index/school-admissions/contact-school-admissions/

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 consultation process will be arranged for staff regarding the possible closure. In addition, BC 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 proposed closure of the school has not been made lightly but is being brought forward by the Governing Board 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. Six week 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, the ODBE and the Local Authority will meet to review the consultation responses and decide whether or not to proceed to the next stage and publish a statutory notice to close the school. There would follow a 4 week representation period where stakeholders can submit comments to the decision maker on the proposed closure. The Leader of the Council in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services will then make the final decision on the proposal in July 2024. If closure is approved, then the school would close on 31 August 2024.

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

Start Date	End Date	Description
31 January 2024	13 March 2024	Six week public consultation
8 February 2024		Public Meetings at the School 2pm and 6.30pm
8 February 2024	14 March 2024	Five week staff consultation
14 March 2024	23 April 2024	Consultation responses assessed and decision taken by the Governing Board of Westcott CE School, the ODBE and BC whether to publish a statutory notice to close the school.
24 April 2024	22 May 2024	Publication of Statutory Notice with four week representation period (subject to the decision above)
23 May 2024	17 July 2024	The Leader of BC in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Education and Children's Services takes a decision on the final outcome
31 st August 2024		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/westcott-ce-school

You are invited to attend an information session at the school on 8 February 2024 at 2pm or 6.30pm with representatives from the Governing Board, BC and the ODBE.

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, the ODBE 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/westcott-ce-school

1. Do you agree with the proposal to close Westcott CE 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 Westcott CE 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 that has not been considered when developing the proposal to close Westcott CE School, please tell us here:

4. If you have any other comments about the proposal to close Westcott CE 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 Westcott CE School
- I work at Westcott CE School
- I am a Governor / Trustee for Westcott CE School
- I am a student at Westcott CE School
- I live near Westcott CE 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. 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 (go to question 8)
- On behalf of an organisation

On behalf of an organisation

7. Please provide the following details:

Name of organisation:

Your job title:

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.

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 information.

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

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 email this questionnaire to westcottceconsultation@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

Or post to:

**The School Commissioning Team
 Buckinghamshire Council
 1st Floor Walton Street Office
 Aylesbury
 HP20 1UZ**

before the closing date of 13 March 2024