

North Clifton Primary School: Consultation on future options

Questions from the staff meeting, 12 July 12:00 – 12.45

1. Can the catchment for the school be reviewed and expanded? It is currently too small

Yes. It is possible to review the catchment area and propose changes. The earliest we could consult for changes would be for admission in 2023-2024. This would require statutory consultation which the LA would undertake within its annual consultation process (commencing 1 October 2021). If changes were proposed earlier (for 2022-2023), a variation would have to be sought with the Office of the Schools Adjudicator; again consultation with local schools/governing bodies would need to be undertaken as part of that process.

2. Can free transport be offered to families who wish to attend the school?

See Qs. 11-13 regarding Home to School Transport Policy

3. Could federation or academisation support the school to be more sustainable?

Both federation or academisation has the potential to support North Clifton to reduce some of its costs through shared delivery across more than one school. However, the current deficit of the school's budget is a barrier to either of these options. A clear deficit recovery plan, along with a successful marketing of the school, could make the school more attractive from a federation or academisation standpoint.

Issue raised

There is a lack of affordable housing in the village; as a result, there are insufficient families moving into the area.

Questions from 3 Public Meetings, 12 July 2021 (thematically grouped)

Demographics

1. As a result of Covid, more families are moving to rural areas including North Clifton. Therefore, can the place planning projections be changed to incorporate this movement into the area?

Actual movement into the area would show up in school census data (school-aged children) or Office of National Statistics (ONS) population data (for pre-school children), both of which strongly influence projections. However, any significant movement of children into North Clifton resulting from Covid would not yet be reflected in such data. In theory, an adjustment could be made but this would not be based on numerical evidence. While small changes in small planning areas can have an impact, any change in North Clifton would need to be particularly significant in order to materially affect discussions around the future of the school. Inward movement to North and South Clifton would presumably be limited by the size of the two villages and the availability of housing stock.

2. The nearby school in Collingham is full. Why is the LA considering closing North Clifton primary school when it will be required to take the overspill from Collingham?

2020 pupil projections for John Blow Primary, Collingham, show a surplus of places from 2020/21 to 2022/23. From 2023/24 there is a deficit of 3 places and in 2024/25, a deficit of 24 places. During this

period, it is projected that demand for some year groups will exceed the Published Admission Number (PAN) of 30 but these projections are based in part on previous trends in demand from both within and out of catchment. At any event, parents/carers living in the John Blow catchment are perfectly free to apply for places at North Clifton if they wish.

It should be noted that there are at least 15 schools nearer to Collingham than North Clifton, which is almost 7 miles distant by road.

For First Admission to YR in September 2021, there are places available in Collingham, which is 7 under PAN currently.

3. If North Clifton were to close, can neighbouring schools admit the current children on roll at North Clifton?

The combined PAN for Dunham on Trent CE Primary and Queen Eleanor Primary is 25; the table below indicates there would be capacity across the neighbouring schools to accommodate the children, with the exception of Year 5.

School	NCY							Grand Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	
Dunham-on-Trent CofE Primary School	16	15	14	12	10	13	14	94
North Clifton Primary School	3	2	4	3	5	4	2	23
Queen Eleanor Primary School	5	5	7	5	7	12	6	47
Total	24	22	25	20	22	29	22	164

4. What has caused the school's numbers to dip so significantly in the last few years?

The decline in the numbers attending North Clifton is a result of declining numbers of children living within the catchment area. There are also fewer parents/carers from outside the school's catchment making a preference for the school. Finally, there is a national decline in the birth rate across the country and across Nottinghamshire, which saw a fall of 2.5% between 2018-19 and 2019-20. Birth rate data is not available for North Clifton in isolation.

5. Can the LA provide more information about the demographic nature of the catchment area particularly in relation to primary school aged children?

See Appendix 1.

Catchments

6. The catchment for North Clifton is very small. Can it be increased?

Catchments are long established, mainly around Parish boundaries and do not follow symmetrical or straight lines. North Clifton's catchment is small compared to that of Queen Eleanor's, for example, as Q.E. gained the catchment of Besthorpe Primary when that school closed in 2008. This specific area could, possibly, become a shared catchment between QE and NC in future years. This would be the subject of consultation and would probably be objected to by neighbouring schools.

7. How can the school attract families who live outside the school's catchment?

There are various ways, which may take time to have an effect. These include:

- *Marketing; publicising the school and its events as widely as possible to make sure that other communities are aware of North Clifton primary and its activities*
- *Ensuring that standards stay high and that the school remains in an Ofsted Good category*
- *Encouraging out of catchment families to make a preference for North Clifton when applying for primary school places*

Finance

8. Why are teaching assistants employed in school when the school is in deficit?

Teaching assistants (TAs) have been employed for a number of years at North Clifton, before the budget situation dipped into deficit. A staff restructure of TAs may be appropriate for the reduction of the budget deficit (in full ,or in part) but this is the decision of the Governing Body and Executive Head Teacher.

9. How can the community support the school financially to reduce the deficit?

- *Through parents/carers of catchment children making a preference for North Clifton Primary rather than to other local schools when applying for places.*
- *Through parental donations/contributions (e.g. equipment/free services) to school, as seems appropriate*
- *By maximising take up of Free School Meals on census days in October & January, to ensure all available funding is received*

10. Can the Council extend the school's deficit recovery plan to provide the school with more opportunity to become financially and educationally sustainable?

NCC can be flexible with the Deficit Recovery Plan, possibly up to 4 or 5 years if there are extenuating circumstances. This would have to be with the approval of both the Directors of Children's & Chief Executive's departments. This could not be extended to seven / ten years or anything similar, as this would significantly contravene our Scheme for Finance, and would be unfair to other schools

11. What is the number of pupils required in a small school to ensure that the budget can balance, and high quality education delivered?

There is no set number whereby a school becomes, or is not sustainable, whilst at the same time "quality education" is subjective. All schools will have different circumstances as a starting point if their budgets go into deficit. Some may have the luxury of having significant surpluses they may draw on to mitigate a short-term deficit position; some may move straight to a reduction in salary and/or non-salary costs. Some schools may utilise a mixture of these options to manage a declining budget. Other schools may be able to rely on an increase in the budget due to increases in pupil numbers (or other factors), which allow them to transition through a deficit, without having to take significant remedial action.

Transport

12. Harby Queen Eleanor is supported by a school bus. Why does this bus collect children from Besthorpe and transport them to Queen Eleanor and not North Clifton?

The Besthorpe area is in Queen Eleanor's catchment and therefore children in this area qualify for free school travel assistance under NCC Home to School Transport Policy if they attend Queen Eleanor. School transport is normally put in place where there are children who are eligible under the Home to School Transport Policy to free travel assistance.

13. If John Blow Primary School is full, why can the LA not pay for a bus to transport children to North Clifton? Can parents who make a preference for North Clifton be supported with access to free school transport?

Free travel will only be awarded to children who are eligible under the Home to School Transport Policy. To be entitled to free travel a child must be attending their nearest available school to the home address or catchment school. If North Clifton is the nearest available school as other schools which are closer are full, then free travel may be awarded and if necessary, transport would be procured for those children. Free travel will not be awarded if parents/carers have not preferred all the closer schools and been refused a place.

14. Can Local Authorities work across county boundaries in order to accommodate children who live in Lincolnshire to access a school place in North Clifton?

Children living in Lincolnshire would need to apply to Lincolnshire County Council for travel assistance. If they are attending North Clifton as the nearest available school to the home address, they may be entitled to free travel assistance from Lincolnshire. It would be up to Lincolnshire CC. to put appropriate assistance in place.

Community Impact

15. How will the Local Authority 'measure' the impact on the community if the school closes?

The LA will consider all the responses made by the school, parents and wider community when the consultation closes. The consultation feedback will capture the view of the school and wider community and the report and recommendation will be informed by these views.

Local Authority support throughout the consultation and beyond

16. How can the LA support North Clifton school to become more sustainable?

The LA can look for partners to support a formal federation. The LA can explore options with Multi Academy Trusts to facilitate an academisation if the governing body requests this. The LA can seek to extend the financial recovery plan.

17. Will the Council provide the school with time to attract more pupils before making any recommendation as to the school's future?

NCC has until 23rd July 2022 to make a decision following this stage of the consultation.

18. The current consultation may 'scare' many potential parents who may not want to apply for a school at risk of closure. Is there an unintended consequence of the consultation ultimately putting parents off applying for the school?

This is a possibility, but Governors, the school and the community can use their influence to try to attract rather than put off potential applicants through the further marketing of the school.

19. By what date does the Council need to take a decision about the future of North Clifton primary School?

The Council has until 23rd July 2022 to make a recommendation about the school's future. A paper will be taken to Children and Young People's Committee in the autumn of 2021 which will provide Members with the feedback from this consultation.

Community Support for school throughout the consultation and beyond

20. What can the community do to ensure the school is sustainable and what are the immediate actions which parents, carers and the community can take to ensure the school remains open into the longer term?

- a. Engage with the consultation and provide formal feedback by the 23rd July 2021*
- b. Engage with the petition*
- c. Be open minded about alternative governance solutions such as federation or academisation*
- d. Participate in fund raising and practical work parties to undertake small tasks which will enhance the school*
- e. Explore funding options to run a before and after school club*
- f. Engage with effective marketing which will include social media as well as more traditional methods*
- g. Petition Parish Councils to actively promote the school through tools such as 'Parish Welcome Packs' when new families move into the immediate area*

Academisation

21. If the school academises, what happens to the assets?

The Department for Education will not approve the academisation of a stand-alone school. Schools considering academisation must join an existing Multi Academy Trust (MAT). All the assets of the school move to the MAT unless there are specific items identified in the school inventory which indicate ownership by a third party.

22. What are the benefits to the LA if the school academises? What are the 'threats' to academisation for the LA?

NCC's Schools Policy makes clear that it is for governors to decide on the nature of the school's governance arrangements. This means that it is ultimately the governing body which makes this recommendation and decision. Academisation poses neither opportunities nor risks to the LA - which is committed to all schools being Good or better.

Affordable Housing

23. How can councillors at County, District and Parish Council levels secure more housing in the area?

Local Members will be advised through the consultation feedback that concerns about the lack of affordable housing have been raised.

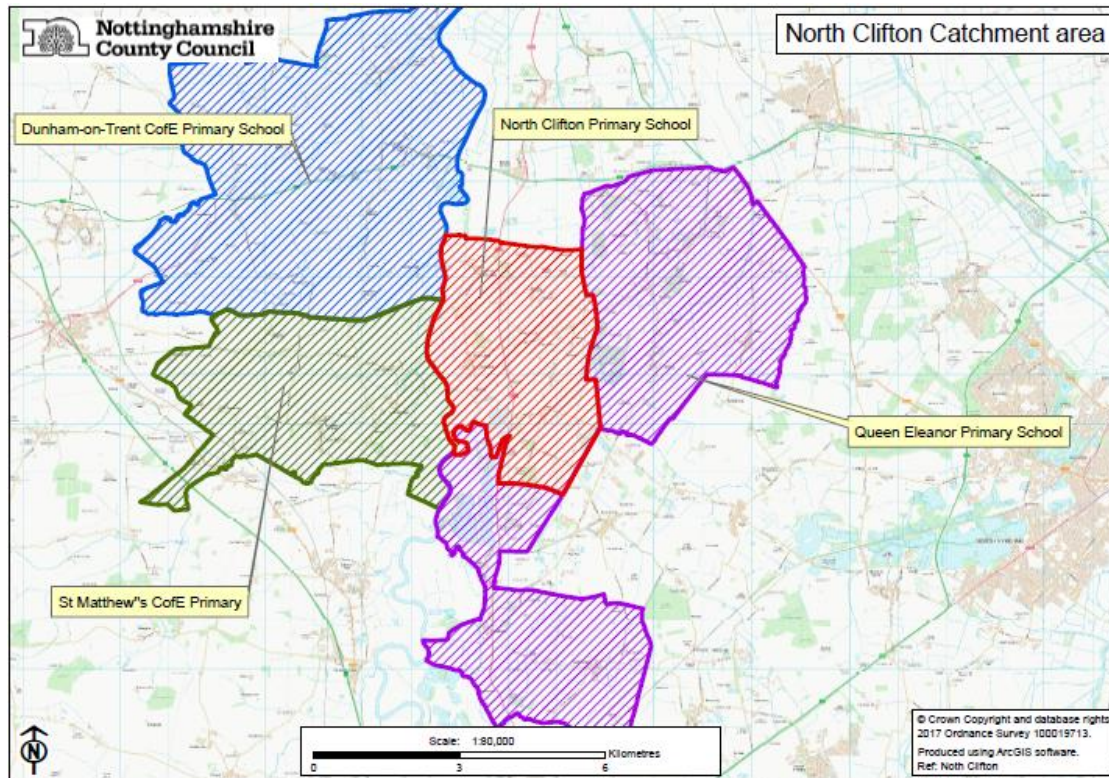
Comments made throughout all meetings

1. The closure of the North Clifton School would have an adverse effect on the community because:
 - a. The current school is in between North and South Clifton and therefore is key in unifying both communities.
 - b. The closure of the local pub means that the school and the church are the remaining two community 'services' which help to support and unite the rural community
 - c. Closing a rural school would effectively fracture the community with any children attending different schools reducing the opportunity to strengthen friendships with those who live nearby.

 2. Children are at the heart of any rural community and have a 'right' to walk and cycle to school if possible; closing the school would result in children travelling further for education.

 3. The church, Parochial Church Council and Diocese will be contributing to the consultation to state their support for the school and concerns around the negative impact on the community in the event of closure
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North Clifton Primary School - pupil distribution data



Key point 1: the North Clifton catchment is much smaller than that of Queen Eleanor, which lies to the east and south. Queen Eleanor gained the catchment of Besthorpe Primary which in closed in 2008.

The table below indicates the children that live in the North Clifton catchment area and where they currently attend school as at w/b 5 July 2021.

PRIMARY CATCH OLD	North Clifton Primary School								
Count of NCY	Column Labels	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	Grand Total
John Blow Primary School							1	1	2
North Clifton Primary School		3	2	3	2	3	1	2	16
Grand Total		3	2	3	2	3	2	3	18

Key point 2: 16/18 catchment children attend North Clifton.

2/18 attend one other school (John Blow)

There is, though, an overall gain of 5 pupils from out of catchment.

The catchment matrix below provides the number of North Clifton catchment pupils attending schools elsewhere in Notts, based on the January census over the last 5 years, as follows:

	Total catchment pupils	Schools attended			Total attending schools elsewhere	% of pupils attending schools elsewhere
		North Clifton Primary	John Blow Primary	Queen Eleanor Primary		
2017	33	25	7	1	8	32.0%
2018	30	22	6	2	8	36.4%
2019	26	20	5	1	6	30.0%
2020	19	16	3	0	3	18.8%
2021	21	19	2	0	2	10.5%

In January 2021, the school's roll (26 pupils) included 4 from Queen Eleanor (Harby) and 3 from Lincolnshire , while 2 pupils from North Clifton's catchment attended John Blow Primary – an overall gain of 5 pupils from out of catchment.

The numbers above tell their own story: the number of school-aged pupils living in North Clifton's catchment has decreased steadily and so has the proportion attending school elsewhere in Notts. However, the figures above do not show the complete picture, as NCC does not have access to census data for schools in other LAs.

The DfE has, for the first time, provided some supplementary data (from 2020), but it's inconclusive because it combines the catchments of North Clifton and Queen Eleanor. It shows 12 NC and QE pupils in Lincs. schools but doesn't differentiate between the two schools; the number solely from North Clifton could be anywhere between 1 and 12.

Key point 3: Early Years children in NC catchment – low numbers and no guarantee of application to North Clifton for First Admissions (to Year R in Sept. 2021)

The number of pre-school children living in the planning area / catchment is shown below:

	pre-school				
	Age 0	Age 1	Age 2	Age 3	Age 4
North Clifton: Adjusted Population 2021	9	8	8	7	5
North Clifton: Adjusted Population 2020		7	7	7	5

The above shows a slight increase from 2020 to 2021 but numbers look set to remain low. Also, it's important to note that there is no guarantee that all of those children will still be living in the area when it comes to their first admission, or that their parents will choose to send them to North Clifton. The best indicator of future demand for school places remains our projections, and the 2020 projected pupil numbers already reflect the majority of the children shown above.

Key point 4: First Admissions 2021 indicate very low numbers allocated for YR 2021/22

Admissions data currently shows that 2 places have been accepted for Sept 2021 (both living in catchment).