

Options for the future of North Clifton Primary School

Introduction

Nottinghamshire County Council wishes to seek the views of interested parties regarding the future of North Clifton Primary School.

Background

North Clifton Primary School primarily serves the small villages of North and South Clifton and is alone in a rural Planning Area in the Newark district. The school is isolated; the next nearest Nottinghamshire school is Dunham on Trent Primary, which is 4.3 miles away by car.

North Clifton Primary School is a small school with a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 8, maintained by Nottinghamshire County Council. The last Ofsted inspection of the school (January 2018) rated the school as 'Good'.

On 21 June 2021, Nottinghamshire County Council's Children and Young People's Committee approved the undertaking of an initial statutory consultation to explore options for North Clifton Primary School including possible closure.

In this regard Nottinghamshire County Council is following the prescribed process described in '**Opening and closing maintained schools: Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers**' published by the Department for Education, November 2019. See:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/851585/Opening_and_closing_maintained_schools1012.pdf

According to the above, Stage One of the statutory process makes it a legal requirement to consult any parties the Local Authority (LA) thinks appropriate before publishing proposals under section 3: *Proposing to close (discontinue) a maintained school*.

North Clifton Primary School is designated as a rural school, Nottinghamshire County Council will therefore follow the guidelines regarding the presumption against the closure of rural schools.

The LA, which is the proposer, may use the consultation to consider a range of options for the future of a school (i.e. amalgamation, academisation, federation or closure). However, the proposer must then publish specific proposals according to Stage Two of the statutory process outlined at **Appendix One**.

Reasons For consultation

1. Declining Pupil Numbers

There are significant concerns about declining pupil numbers at North Clifton Primary School. The past 5 years have seen the number of children on the school roll reduce from 36 to 26. In October 2020, only 3 pupils were in the school's

Reception year, despite a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 8. This number is expected to reduce to 2 Reception pupils for academic year 2021/22 in September 2021.

Table 1: Number on roll (NOR) at North Clifton Primary School on DfE October census dates

Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
NOR	36	31	29	24	26

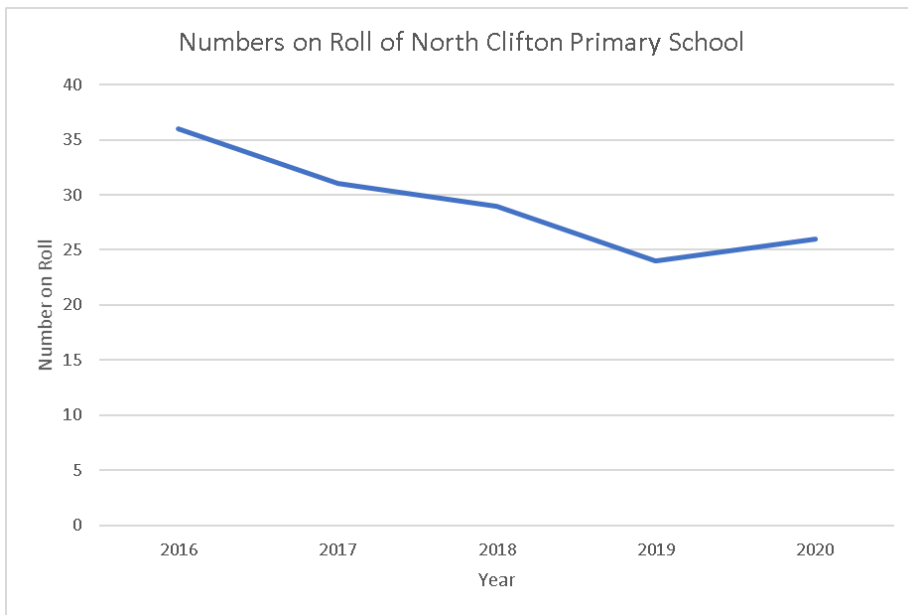


Table 2: Numbers on roll of North Clifton Primary School by year group

Year	Yr R	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6
NOR	3	4	4	3	6	4	2

The school also currently has four non-statutory school aged (early years) children on roll.

There is no new housing proposed for the immediate area in the Newark Local Plan. It is therefore not expected that admission numbers will increase in future years.

With such low numbers on roll, the school’s Governing Body, Headteacher and Council officers have serious concerns about the school’s viability given the small size of future pupil cohorts.

2. Difficulty in Offering A Broad and Balanced Curriculum

Schools are required to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum. The Governing Body of North Clifton Primary School is of the view that the projected numbers on roll will render this objective very difficult to achieve in the future – particularly if the school has no option but to offer a single class of children aged 4 to 11 (i.e. YR - Y6) in 2021/22.

3. School Financial Position

Due to the reduction in the number of pupils on roll, North Clifton Primary School has seen a reduction in the funding it receives to run the school in recent years. This has resulted in significant financial challenges.

Measures have already been taken to improve the school's financial position. These include the reduction to two primary classes, and the employment of an executive headteacher shared with another school.

The school ended the 2019/20 financial year with a small deficit revenue balance. However, this deficit increased significantly by the end of the 2020/21 financial year.

4. Safeguarding against future risk

Due to the low number of teaching staff employed by the school, it has become very difficult to cover absences that occur due to unforeseen circumstances.

5. Governor Body decision

Following a meeting between North Clifton Primary School's Governing Body, Executive Headteacher and Council officers to discuss concerns over the sustainability of the school, it is recommended that options for the future of North Clifton Primary School should be explored.

These could include amalgamation, federation or closure.

If it is decided that closure should be explored, then the consultation recommended in this report would constitute the first stage of the statutory process for closure, as set out in the Department for Education's (DfE's) guidance document; '*Opening and closing maintained schools, statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers*' (November 2019).

Figures from DfE school censuses carried out in January 2020 and 2021 indicate that an average of 32% of North Clifton's pupils lived outside its catchment.

Options available

1. Continue with no change

Should the school continue with no change, it would remain open with an unviable number of pupils on roll. This is highly cost inefficient and is not sustainable. It is anticipated that the school will receive extremely low pupil-led funding for 2021/22, so would find it highly challenging to provide a suitable learning environment. Nottinghamshire County Council has a responsibility to ensure the efficient use of public money.

2. Academisation

The DfE and Local Authority are not able to insist that North Clifton Primary School joins a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). To date, the school has not been approached by any interested MATs. Should the school join a MAT, then it is inevitable that the MAT would wish to change the way the school operates in accordance with its own core values.

With a declining number of pupils on roll, it is highly unlikely that any MAT would deem it viable to admit North Clifton Primary School into its Trust.

3. Federation

Federated schools operate in collaboration with each other, sharing senior staff and possibly governing bodies, which allows them to maximise good educational practice, while achieving economies of scale.

For this option to be feasible, North Clifton Primary School would be required to work with the Local Authority to identify another school that would see the benefits in federation.

North Clifton Primary School is already realising the benefits of having a shared headteacher, so one major benefit of federation has already been gained.

With minimal numbers of pupils on roll and uncertainty regarding North Clifton's future, it is highly unlikely that another school would deem it viable to federate with North Clifton Primary School.

4. Amalgamation

Should North Clifton amalgamate with another school it would close and reform as part of a new and bigger entity, i.e. a new amalgamated school.

For practical reasons, an amalgamation would need to be with another school within reasonable travelling distance. There is only one Nottinghamshire school within this category.

Table 3. Nottinghamshire schools within 5 miles of North Clifton

School	Latest Ofsted rating	Distance measured by road
Dunham on Trent C.of E. Primary School	Good	4.3 miles

A proposed amalgamation would be sponsored and led by the LA. The LA cannot compel another school to amalgamate with North Clifton Primary School - consequently this is not seen as a viable option.

With an unviable number of pupils on roll and uncertainty regarding North Clifton's future, it is highly unlikely that another school would deem it viable to amalgamate with North Clifton Primary School.

5. Closure

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure the efficient use of resources. Maintaining a school for very few or no pupils could not be considered efficient, given that there are surplus places in other local schools.

The Local Authority also has a duty to respond to the concerns raised by the Headteacher and the Governing Body of North Clifton Primary School regarding its ongoing viability.

Closure would require all pupils on roll at North Clifton Primary School to join the roll of another school. Parents/carers would be free to exercise preference in their applications for any primary school of choice, while the LA would allocate places at the nearest Nottinghamshire school with places available for those children for whom no places had been obtained prior to possible closure.

It is extremely important to note that at this point in time no definitive decision has been made about the future of the school.

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If you wish to respond to the consultation on this proposal please send written comments to:

- The Corporate Director of Children and Family Services
(for the attention of Jonathan S Smith),
Pupil Place Planning, County Hall, West Bridgford, Nottingham, NG2 7QP
- or by email to place.planning@nottscc.gov.uk
- Comments may be submitted online at www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk (insert link)

To be received no later than 23:59 hrs on 23 July 2021

Consultation Question

Please state your preference for which of the options outlined in the accompanying report should be adopted.

- **Continue with no change**

- **Academisation**
- **Federation**
- **Amalgamation**
- **Closure**

Please provide reasons for your views below:

It will help us to analyse responses if we know more about you.

**Please complete the following details:
(Please tick and complete all boxes that apply)**

I am a:

Parent / Carer	Which school / academy do(es) your child(ren) attend?
Governor	At which school / academy?
Member of Staff	At which school / academy?
Pupil	At which school / academy?
Other	Please specify (e.g. resident)
What is your post code?	

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Appendix One – Prescribed Stages and proposed timeline for the consultation process to consider the future of North Clifton Primary School.

Stage one: Pre-publication consultation	23rd June 2021 - 23rd July 2021	This is the start of the process when the Local Authority provides information about what is being proposed and gathers the views of interested parties to help them develop the proposals.
Stage two: Publication	Mid- September 2021 (date t.b.c.)	A legal notice is published in the local paper (usually the Newark Advertiser) and on the Council website which sets out brief details of the proposal and where more information can be found. It also gives details of where objections and comments can be sent and the closing date for these. It marks the start of the representation period or formal consultation.
Stage three: Representation	Mid-September 2021 to mid-October 2021 (dates t.b.c.)	This is the formal consultation stage. During this period, any person or organisation can submit comments on the proposal to the LA, to be taken into account by the decision-maker.
Stage four: Decision	Spring 2022	All the objections and comments gathered during the representation period are provided to the decision maker (Local Authority Elected Members) to enable them to make the final decision. A statutory notice outlining the decision will be published.
Stage five: Implementation	Summer 2022	The decision made in stage four is implemented.