

Sutcombe Primary School Closure

Report of the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment; the Head of Education and Learning; and the County Treasurer

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendation: It is recommended that Cabinet approves the closure of Sutcombe Primary School following completion of the statutory process with effect from 31 August 2016.

1. Summary

This paper provides an update on the current position at Sutcombe Primary School and to proceed to closure.

2. Background/Introduction

Sutcombe Primary School has 21 pupils on roll and numbers are not forecast to improve. Admissions for September 2016 show 4 first preferences and 4 pupils in Y6 will be leaving at the end of the summer term. The School has a net capacity of 56 pupils. There is no early years' provision at the School.

Sutcombe Primary School is located in Holsworthy Local Learning Community. Pupil numbers at the School have fallen over recent years from 36 in 2012. The latest census data shows that 64 primary aged pupils live within Sutcombe's designated area but only 21 pupils attend the School.

Sutcombe Primary School was inspected on 24 November 2010 and was judged to be a good school. However, due to lack of sustainable leadership the School is currently inadequate and is likely to be judged as such should it be formally inspected.

The School joined the Holsworthy Federation in 2011 but then left the Federation 9 months later. The Head Teacher left in April 2014 and there was then a period of acting headship, brokered by our School Improvement Partners, until August 2014. Staff retention had previously been poor with constant turnover and a negative effect on standards and parental confidence at that time.

Working with our School Improvement Partners, a temporary management partnership was secured with East the Water Primary School from September 2014 and standards across the School improved but this management partnership ceased in August 2015 as the East the Water governing body could not see a viable future. Widespread urgent, prolonged canvassing and direct approaches to a number of schools resulted in the Headteacher of East the Water Primary School generously extending oversight of the school until December 2015.

Considerable efforts including searching for a partnership and Headteacher arrangements through;

- direct approach including by the governing body, to all schools in the local learning community [LLC],
- canvassing neighbouring LLC, including direct approaches to schools in that LLC,
- canvassing two teaching school alliances situated in and extending out of North Devon [in effect 57+ schools],
- direct approach to individual schools further afield - including Cornwall and
- direct approach to all known independent consultants in the North Devon area who might have an interest in leading a school.

Therefore due to the viability of the School it has proved over time to not be possible to secure sustainable leadership including arrangements such as federation, joining a multi-academy trust within Devon or with federations or academies in our neighbouring authority.

From 4 January 2016 the Governing Body found itself in a serious position of not being able to meet its statutory obligation of securing at least an acting Headteacher, ensuring the safeguarding and protection of pupils through an appropriate Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator, or set a balanced budget.

Urgent and challenging arrangements have been made to ensure that there is temporary leadership, albeit with part-time attendance only, to the end of the summer term to ensure that safeguarding and protection of pupils is fully compliant.

The presumption against closure contained within the Education Infrastructure Plan is clear that the educational sustainability of any small school must be demonstrated. Regrettably the School is not in a position to do this.

The future of this Learning Community is of concern for Education and Learning and Strategic School Place Planning as there has been falling demographics across the whole area for some time and the planned development is mainly in Holsworthy. A meeting with Heads and Chairs of all schools within the Learning Community has been held with further follow up meetings planned to look for an early strategic solution as pupil numbers continue to fall.

3. Proposal

The Governing Body of Sutcombe School took the decision to proceed to consult on its future as a result of being unable to secure leadership, being unable to provide continuity and consistency in the leadership of teaching and learning, low pupil numbers and precarious future financial viability.

There are sufficient school places in the area at adjacent schools to accommodate the displaced children.

4. Consultations/Representations/Technical Data

The statutory consultation on the future of the School took place between 8 September and 20 October 2015. A public consultation event was held on 16 September 2015 and was well attended by parents, staff, residents and community representatives. There were 37 objections to the possible closure of the school and one anonymous response in support of the proposal to close the school. Representations were made by the MP for Torridge and West Devon. None of the objections could be classed as "materially significant".

Following consultation Cabinet Member decision was given to proceed to formal consultation and a brief notice appeared in the North Devon Journal on 7 January 2016 with the period for representations ending on 4 February 2016. 14 objections to closure have been received including an electronic petition with 212 signatures. Representation made at County Council

on 18 February 2016 from MS Whinnerah included the original petition handed to the Leader.

5. Financial Considerations

Following the government's principle that more money must follow the pupil, over 90% of the schools funding formula is based on pupil led factors. Whilst there is still funding for small rural schools through the sparsity factor, schools with very low pupil numbers nonetheless become less viable. In recent years the pupil numbers at Sutcombe have fallen from 36 to 21.

The school budget is unable to sustain the costs of a substantive full time head teacher. The school is currently in forecast deficit position and is unable to set a balanced budget for at least the next two years.

6. Environmental Impact Considerations

An assessment of the transport and travel needs of the 21 pupils at Sutcombe Primary School will be made and sustainable travel and transport modes will be promoted in accordance with Devon County Council's Environmental Policy and School Transport Policy. There is already a route from Milton Damerel and some pupils could be accommodated within existing transport arrangements depending on the parents' school preference.

7. Equality Considerations

Where relevant to the decision, the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty requires decision makers to give due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

taking account of age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), gender and gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women/ new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage/civil partnership status in coming to a decision, a decision maker may also consider other relevant factors such as caring responsibilities, rural isolation or socio-economic disadvantage.

This may be achieved, for example, through completing a full Equality Impact Needs Assessment/Impact Assessment or other form of options/project management appraisal that achieves the same objective.

An Impact Assessment has been prepared on school organisation proposals that has been circulated separately to Cabinet Members and also is available alongside this Report on the Council's website at: <http://www.devon.gov.uk/cma.htm>, which Members will need to consider for the purposes of this item.

8. Legal Considerations

The Governing Body is unable to meet its statutory obligation of securing permanent leadership and the Local Authority is legally responsible for the safeguarding and protection of pupils at the School.

9. Risk Management Considerations

This proposal has been assessed and all necessary safeguards included in relation to the Council's position.

10. Public Health Impact

The proposals will take into account the requirements and health and wellbeing of its local community.

11. Discussion

Sutcombe Primary School is designated as a rural school and in relation to this careful consideration has been given to exploring alternatives for the school, including federation, scope for an extended school, transport implications, impact on the local community, future place planning, early years provision, standards, forecast of future pupil numbers, access to community services and financial viability.

12. Options/Alternatives

Over a period of time officers have worked with the School on alternatives, including considering federation, joining a multi-academy trust within Devon and with federations or academies in neighbouring authorities. However, due to the viability of the School and with falling rolls other schools have not come forward to share leadership. The management partnership with East the Water was for a limited period. Officers have also considered the impact of future housing in the area which is very unlikely to sustain the school in the short or long term.

13. Reason for Recommendation/Conclusion

The Governing Body of the School is now in a serious position of not being able to meet its statutory obligation of securing permanent leadership, and is unable to set a balanced budget. The Local Authority must give priority to the safeguarding and protection of the pupils, the impact on teaching and learning and the future educational and financial sustainability of the School and recommend the closure of the School with effect from 31 August 2016.

Dave Black
Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment
Sue Clarke
Head of Education and Learning
Mary Davis
County Treasurer

Electoral Divisions: Holsworthy Rural

Cabinet Member for Children, Schools and Skills: Councillor James McInnes

Strategic Director, Place: Heather Barnes

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
1. Impact Assessment		http://www.devon.gov.uk/cma.htm

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**Appendix
To PTE/16/??**

**Sutcombe Primary School: proposed closure
Brief Notice period**

Representing	Object/Support	Comments
Parent	Object	Parent of a child attending Sutcombe School and are very concerned about closure. He has made excellent progress, which we believe is a result of the excellent teaching staff and their commitment to the children. The small friendly school environment is just what is needed. The teaching is high quality and the individual needs of the child is met. We are very concerned for our child if he has to move school as he does not manage change and can become anxious and distressed.
District Councillor for Holsworthy Ward	Object	Concerns re. closure of school and raised queries about where the children would go to. Concerns over children from families being split up to attend different schools. Concerns about the transport arrangements for getting children to alternative schools and concerns that pupil numbers may rise in the future. Feels a wider strategy on rural schools should be looked at. As a District Councillor, very concerned about future of all our country schools and willing to help in anyway can.
unknown	Object	The closure is a mistake in the current climate. I understand the school is small with low numbers but I understand their numbers are rising and are also higher than the historical average. There has been a rise in the birth rate and affordable family homes being built in the area. There is pressure on places at Holsworthy Primary School and Bradworthy, whilst not being full would likely exceed capacity if all the current Sutcombe children were transferred there. A lot of the children attending Sutcombe currently walk to school, so the closure will result in a large number of additional car journeys. This will be of great detriment to the pupils and the wider community and other primary schools.
Residents	Object	Write in support of Sutcombe School. It should remain open. It is a very good school with excellent staff and facilities. The school plays an important part in our close knit community. It provides a first class education for the local children. Bradworthy and Holsworthy schools are full and future demands re. further housing are expected to be high - where will all the Sutcombe children go? Please consider the impact on the future of our local children and on the heart of the community.

Representing	Object/Support	Comments
Councillor	Object	Concerned that we are closing too many Parish schools without taking into consideration that the housing and population is increasing within these parishes. We need to take into consideration the travelling distances to other schools, the cost of transport, increase the green footprint and increase traffic on local and mostly single track roads. Every time a school closes, it never manages to reopen even when the volume of pupils increase. This rips out the heart of the community and it will never return. This closure also means that new pupils arriving in the area will also have to travel and this will give rise to an increase in travel and fuel costs. Why is there always an insistence on duplicating efforts and having to find increase funding for transport etc. when it could have been kept local all along?
Unknown	Object	This is not a school to close on economic grounds. There are many schools running on a deficit which are still open. School plays an important part in the community. You do not have sufficient places in other local schools. This a growing area for new housing. There is a fast growing party of discontent with this short term narrow view of how smaller schools are being shut down.
Resident	Object	The Council have stated that any decision to close the school will be based on educational factors. The last Ofsted in 2010 was a good one. The numbers on roll at the moment are low. It could be argued that one of the reasons for this has been the concentration of resources into key settlement villages and the restrictions and difficulty in obtaining planning consent in villages such as Sutcombe. In the late 1980s the Council were minded to close our school due to declining numbers. Thankfully the Chairman and Chairlady of the Education Committee visited Sutcombe and urged the village to get more houses built to increase pupil numbers. More were built and the school has remained open and central to community spirit of the village. Despite the assurances that the key consideration to close the school will be based on educational factors, one cannot discount the attraction to close the school for other reasons, i.e. the financial restraints on budgets. I urge the County Council to take a long term view noting the possibility of housing development in the village.
Parent/Resident	Object	The school is fantastic with great teaching staff, security and a focal point for the community. Please take a moment to have some compassion, put yourself in the position of a parent of a school that is under threat. Numbers will increase but only if you don't take that opportunity away from us to keep the school growing. Release funding and let us buy a Head Teacher and gives us the chance to survive and encourage another school to federate with us.

Representing	Object/Support	Comments
Resident	Object	No pupils have left the school recently with four planning to start reception in September. This may have been more if the school wasn't under a cloud of uncertainty. I think the education of the children is good. This school has excellent intervention, sometimes lacking in larger schools. Other small schools must be unsustainable in the next 2-3 years, how many of them can set a balanced budget with small pupil numbers? are they all to shut?
Unknown	Object	I have written so much on this subject, and to so many people, I am getting tired, and I have received no satisfactory answers. After hours of campaigning and research, it would appear to me that your reasons for closing the school have somewhat fluctuated. You said it was for educational reasons. This cannot be, because of its Ofsted rating, which is good. Then the argument was lack of leadership. This will be resolved. You said it was poor numbers but though small, our numbers have remained stable despite the threat of closure, and have marginally increased this year. There are 640 homes on the horizon, what a perfect opportunity to draw new blood to the school. Then it was the school's deficit. According to a statement put out in Summer 2015, of the 87 Devon Schools in a recent study 43% would be in deficit this year. This was set to rise to 85% within two years. There is a conflict of information about the supply of school places. Some of the alternative schools have poor outdoor facilities or require improvement. I think this is part of a programme to close all small rural schools. I presume this is the front line of cost cutting.
Torrige District Councillor Bradworthy and Hartland Ward	Object	Fully support Sutcombe Primary School staying open. This school has a wide and rich curriculum. It is so easy to destroy the very thing that is the hub of any village: the local school. With all the new build that Government legislation dictates we are going to need as many of these village schools as possible. It has been stated that children could move to Bradworthy Academy but that is stretched to its limits as are Holsworthy and Bradford Primary Schools. If we look at Ofsted reports for Holsworthy and Bradford you will find one has poor outdoor facilities and the other requires improvement. The Local Plan states the building of 640 houses in the Holsworthy area, which is why Sutcombe School should remain open. The school is very important to the fabric of village life. It would be a very sad day if the school were to close.
PETITION 'Save Sutcombe School Campaign' with	Object	Petition received from the 'Save Sutcombe School Campaign'. Strongly against the closure of our wonderful school. It is not just a 'Good' School (Ofsted), it is a fantastic school. Since the news of the threat hit, not one parent has removed their child and this is because the parents know what a rich

Representing	Object/Support	Comments
212 signatures		curriculum is delivered and the wide range of abilities catered for. The facilities are exceptional, home cooked lunches provided and free after school clubs. DCC has said that the children could go to Bradworthy Academy, Holsworthy Primary or Bradford Primary. Some schools are full in certain year groups and nearly full in others. One has poor outdoor facilities and one requires improvement. The Local Plan entails the building of 640 new homes in the area. Where will all these children go? The school is a fundamental part of village life. There are multiple events put on by the school that virtually the entire village attends, brining young and old together. Save Sutcombe School Campaign would also like it noted that there are at least three children who would have enrolled at the school if it weren't for the threat of closure and consider there may be more.
Torrige District Councillor	Object	Email sent to Cllr Barry Parsons objecting against the closure of the school.
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14 objections

Save Sutcombe
School Campaign

212 signatures

Against the Closure of Sutcombe Primary School