

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE
CORPORATE DIRECTOR MEETING WITH EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

20 October 2020

St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School, Whitby

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Member's approval to consult on a proposal that the County Council should close St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School, Whitby from 9 April 2021.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 At a governing body meeting at St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School on 7 January 2020 it was resolved, with regret and reluctance that: *'Due to the continued falling rolls and associated significant financial challenges faced by the school, coupled with the continued lack of applications for admission to the school from Catholic pupils, the Governing Body propose to enter into consultation to seek to close (discontinue) St Hilda's RC Primary School.'*
- 2.2 In February 2020 the Executive Member for Education and Skills approved the commencement of the consultation on the closure of St Hilda's R.C. Primary School from 31 August 2020. On 3 March a public consultation meeting was held in Whitby to discuss the closure. During the consultation period a group of stakeholders made the case that they would like more time and some further engagement with the Local Authority (LA) to explore further any options for keeping the school open. However, due to the Covid 19 Pandemic which closed the School, and the restrictions placed upon gatherings, it was not considered feasible to hold these kind of discussions within an appropriate timescale given the proposed closure date of 31 August. Having first extended the consultation period, a decision was then taken by the LA in early April to not proceed with the proposal at that time and therefore allowing the opportunity for stakeholders to look at alternatives to closure.
- 2.3 As part of the work to satisfy themselves that all options had been considered, three local stakeholders, comprising two parents and County Councillor Joe Plant, joined the Schools Governing Body. Alongside this the Roman Catholic Diocese appointed further Foundation Governors to ensure a full range of expertise were available to look at the options. The changes constituted a complete restructure of the Governing Body as only two members remained from the previous board a new Chair and Vice-Chair were appointed. The LA funded a piece of detailed financial analysis on options for the school going forward and provided additional professional support.
- 2.4 Following a short but intense period of review the LA received a letter from the Governing Body of St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School in early September 2020 in which they stated: *'With enormous sadness and deep regret, and after many months of sustained efforts to identify a solution to the funding crisis faced by the school, the governors of St Hilda's RC Primary School feel they must once again ask North Yorkshire County Council to commence formal consultation on the proposed closure of our St Hilda's.'*

- 2.5 The Governing Body of St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School has not reached this decision lightly. Prior to the previous consultation process being initiated they had already worked hard to try and increase pupil numbers at the school notably by working alongside the Diocese to bring an Early Years education provider onto the school site and foster relations with these families. The governors have also attempted, where possible to make cost savings and have explored the possibility of sharing a headship in order to reduce expenditure. As stated above these efforts redoubled following the decision to end the previous consultation on closure.
- 2.6 The Roman Catholic Diocese of Middlesbrough has been undergoing a process of converting all of their maintained schools into Academies under the leadership of a number of multi-academy trusts. In December 2018 an academy order was signed for St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School. However, as with all academy conversions a process of due diligence was required before any conversion would be approved. In the case of St Hilda's, the current financial situation and projected financial outlook precluded the school from being accepted into the Trust at that time. The Governing Body had therefore continued with the measures referenced in paragraph 2.5 with a view to making the school sustainable.

Reasons for the Closure Proposal in January 2020

- 2.7 There were three main factors leading to the closure proposal. First, the number of children at St Hilda's had fallen from 51 in 2015/16 to 24 in 2019/20. The school had only received 2 first preference applications for Reception places in September 2020 and with capacity available in every other school within Whitby Town it was unlikely that the school would be allocated any lower preference applications.
- 2.8 Secondly, the predicted financial position was a concern. The school had an accumulated budget deficit at the end of the 2018/19 financial year and the cumulative deficit was forecast to significantly worsen over future financial years.
- 2.9 Thirdly, for the Roman Catholic Church their mission and purpose is to provide education with a Catholic character to Catholic children. Out of a total roll of 24 children on roll at St Hilda's at that point, only 4 of these pupils were Catholic. The Diocese confirmed that there was no evidence to support the continuation of Catholic education in Whitby, as there appeared to be no other Catholic children seeking to attend the school.

Reasons for the Closure Proposal in September 2020

- 2.10 Since the previous closure proposal ceased in April, the position regarding these three main factors has actually become more pronounced. In their letter of 4 September the Governors referred to a '*sustained funding crisis*'. At this time there were 19 pupils on roll at St Hilda's. With this school roll and the projected number of pupils going forward the Governors could not find a sustainable future for the school. The Roman Catholic Diocese had already previously made it clear that the school would not be able to enter an academy trust without a financially sustainable future being identified.
- 2.11 Since the Governors and the Diocese met with parents to notify them of their decision to ask the Local Authority to consult upon closure the number of pupils on roll has fallen to 2 pupils. The majority of these pupils have taken advantage of the Diocese of Middlesbrough's offer to ensure that places at, and transport to, St Hedda's R.C Primary School, Egton Bridge would be made available for any pupils from St Hilda's. There is no reasonable prospect of the numbers of pupils at St Hilda's returning to sustainable levels.

- 2.12 The Diocese of Middlesbrough's position remains that their mission and purpose is to provide education with a Catholic character to Catholic children. With only 2 pupils on roll the Diocese confirmed that there was no evidence to support the continuation of Catholic education in Whitby, as there appeared to be no other Catholic children seeking to attend the school.

3.0 ST HILDA'S ROMAN CATHOLIC PRIMARY SCHOOL

Pupil numbers

- 3.1 St Hilda's is a 4-11 Roman Catholic Primary School and currently has 2 children on roll. The school is located in Whitby, the school does not have a discrete catchment area but traditionally offers a Catholic education to children in Whitby and the surrounding rural area. The number of children at St Hilda's Roman Catholic School has been falling gradually but has dropped more steeply since 2015/16:

2013/14 – 54
 2014/15 – 51
 2015/16 – 51
 2016/17 – 46
 2017/18 – 31
 2018/19 – 28
 2019/20 – 24
 8 September 2020 – 19
 1 October 2020 - 2

- 3.2 There are currently 2 pupils on roll in the school and this is not predicted to increase. The school is designed to accommodate up to 105 pupils.
- 3.3 The current numbers in each year group at the school are:

	Total	Published Admission Number
Reception	0	15
Year 1	2	15
Year 2	0	15
Year 3	0	15
Year 4	0	15
Year 5	0	15
Year 6	0	15
Total	2	105

Finance

- 3.4 Pupil numbers determine the school budget. With reducing pupil numbers, and a reduced budget, the finances are not sustainable. At the beginning of the 2020/21 academic year the school was projecting deficits in year of £39.6k in 2020/21, £53.4k in 2021/22 and £30.7k in 2022/23, with a cumulative deficit of £144.7k at the end of the 2022/23 financial year. These projections were based on pupil number assumptions of 20 in Autumn 2020 and 26 in Autumn 2021. The pupils numbers have now fallen to two pupils on roll since the Governors requested that the Local Authority recommenced closure proposals. The financial outlook has significantly worsened in line with the fall in pupil numbers and there is therefore no prospect of financial recovery.

Schools Standards/Ofsted

- 3.5 The School's last Ofsted judgment was published in December 2017 and confirmed that the school continued to be 'Good'. This proposal is not based upon the quality of the education provision at St Hilda's. However, it should be noted that where numbers of pupils at a school fall very low and budgets become restricted it provides an additional challenge to maintaining educational standards.

4.0 PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES IN THE LOCAL AREA

- 4.1 In addition to St Hilda's Roman Catholic School there are five other primary schools within the Whitby school place planning area. Across the area there is a very large surplus of Primary school places. The table below shows the current level of surplus places as well as a range of projections based upon pupil yields from housing developments:

Table of Surplus Primary School Places				
	Surplus Places at Present	Projected Surplus in 24/25 with no additional pupils generated from existing housing permissions	Projected Surplus in 24/25 including additional pupils generated from existing Housing Permissions *	Projected Surplus in 24/25 including additional pupils generated from existing housing permissions and proposed Local Plan housing allocations **
Whitby Town	361	430	362	334
Whitby Town (without St Hilda's)	256	325	257	229

* Including a pupil yield of 1 pupil for every 4 houses that currently have planning permission in Whitby.

**Including a pupil yield of 1 pupil for every 4 houses that either have planning permission or are allocated within the SBC Local Plan in Whitby.

(Based upon January 2020 Census)

- 4.2 As shown in 4.1 there is a significant surplus of school places across Whitby Town. For comparison, where possible, we would seek to maintain a 5% to 10% surplus of places in a planning area to allow for flexibility within the system and parental preference to be exercised. In Whitby there is currently a surplus of over 30%. Even if all housing identified within the local plan was constructed at expected rates the surplus is projected to stand at 28% in 24/25.

If St Hilda's were to close the surplus across the town would drop to 23% based on current figures, and if all local plan housing was constructed at expected rates that surplus is projected to stand at 21% in 24/25.

- 4.3 There are places available in all year groups at various schools across the local area. In addition, the Roman Catholic Diocese will seek to provide school places and transport for any current St Hilda's pupils who may wish to continue receiving a Catholic education at the next nearest Catholic primary school, St Hedda's Roman Catholic Primary School, Egton Bridge, which is 7.3 miles from Whitby.
- 4.4 Parents would be able to express a preference for any local school and if there are places available they will be accepted. Schools may agree to accept children above

their admission number. The other primary schools in Whitby Town are academies and so are their own Admission Authorities.

4.5 **Appendix 2** provides projected numbers based on forecast birth rates, with potential additional pupils from outstanding housing permissions and proposed housing allocations.

5.0 CONSULTATION PROCESS AND TIMESCALE

5.1 Should a decision be made to initiate a consultation on the proposed closure of St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School, a period of six term-time weeks is recommended. A draft timetable is set out below. A draft consultation document is attached in Appendix 3.

5.2 A separate staff consultation process, including a meeting for staff and their professional associations and unions, would run in parallel with the consultation on the closure proposal.

5.3 The final decision on closure would be taken by the Executive (or by the Executive Member for Schools if there are no objections during the representation period).

5.4 Suggested key dates are shown below:

Approval to Consult by Executive Members	20 October 2020
Consultation opens (6 weeks during term time)	2 November 2020
Public meeting – may need to be held virtually tbc	November 2020 (date to be agreed)
Consultation closes	14 December 2020
County Council's Executive considers consultation response	12 January 2021
Executive decision to publish statutory notices	12 January 2021
Publication of statutory notices	22 January 2021
Representation period starts (4 weeks)	22 January 2021
Representation period ends	19 February 2021
Final decision by County Council's Executive	9 March 2021
Proposed school closure date	9 April 2021

5.5 The school building and part of the site is owned by the Diocese of Middlesbrough with the remainder owned by the County Council. Decisions about the future use of the school building and playing field will be taken by the owners after the closure proposal has been determined.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The Executive Member for Education and Skills is recommended to provide approval to consult on a proposal to close St Hilda’s Roman Catholic Primary School, Whitby from 9 April 2021.

Stuart Carlton
CORPORATE DIRECTOR – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S SERVICE.

Report prepared by Matt George, Strategic Planning Officer

Action AgreedExecutive Member
Date: 20 October 2020

Action RequestedCorporate Director
Date: 20 October 2020

- Appendix 1 – A map of the local area**
- Appendix 2 – Other schools – capacity and forecast (based on January 2020 Census)**
- Appendix 3 – Draft consultation document**

Appendix 1

Map to show location of St Hilda's RC Primary School , Whitby and neighbouring schools.



Appendix 2

Based on January 2020 Census.

	St Hilda's RC Primary School	Airy Hill Primary School	East Whitby Primary Academy	Ruswarp CE VC Primary School	Stakesby Primary Academy	West Cliff Primary School	Total
		Academy	Academy		Academy	Academy	
Distance from St Hilda's RC School by road	NA	0.1 miles	1.1 miles	1.6 miles	0.9 miles	0.9 miles	
Last Ofsted inspection	Good – June 2013	Not applicable	Not applicable	Good – March 2018	Not applicable	Not applicable	
Net Capacity (places available at the school)	105	210	315	105	233	210	1178
Current pupil roll	24	179	188	94	144	188	817
Current capacity -/+	81	31	127	11	89	22	361
Pupil roll 2020/21	15	176	183	90	137	197	798
Pupil roll 2021/22	15	173	181	85	138	198	790
Pupil roll 2022/23	14	175	178	87	137	196	787
Pupil roll 2023/24	14	173	172	86	135	198	778
Pupil roll 2024/25	13	170	168	83	133	198	765
Pupils from outstanding permissions by 2024/25*	0	16	17	14	18	3	
Potential pupils from future housing – Local Plan (over 15 yrs)*	0	0	85	0	15	8	

*Based on 1 primary-aged pupil from every 4 houses



Appendix 3

Draft Consultation Document

**Proposal to close St Hilda's Roman
Catholic Primary School, Whitby.
from 9 April 2021**

St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School

2 November 2020

This paper sets out details of a proposal to close St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School with effect from 9 April 2021. It gives the background to the proposal. There will be a public meeting on:

#####at 6.30 pm

at ###

Current Situation

In January 2020 the Governing Body asked the Local Authority (LA) to enter into consultation to seek to close St Hilda's RC Primary School due to the continued falling rolls and associated significant financial challenges faced by the school, coupled with the continued lack of applications for admission to the school from Catholic pupils.

This proposal was approved by the Executive Member for Education and Skills and the consultation was initiated. However, when the Covid 19 Pandemic imposed significant restrictions and temporarily closed the School it was not considered possible to complete a meaningful consultation. The LA had received a request from stakeholders for significant further discussion with LA Officers which would not have been possible at that time. The process was therefore terminated in April 2020.

Following the termination of the previous closure proposal there was an intense period of activity in which further governors were recruited to the Governing Body and further work was carried out alongside the Local Authority to consider options going forward.

As a result of this work the LA received a letter from the Governing Body of St

Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School in early September 2020 in which they stated: 'With enormous sadness and deep regret, and after many months of sustained efforts to identify a solution to the funding crisis faced by the school, the governors of St Hilda's RC Primary School feel they must once again ask North Yorkshire County Council to commence formal consultation on the proposed closure of our St Hilda's.'

The Governing Body of St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School, have not reached this decision lightly. Prior to the previous consultation process being initiated they had already worked hard to try and increase pupil numbers at the school notably by working alongside the Diocese to bring an Early Years education provider onto the school site and foster relations with these families. The governors have also attempted, where possible, to make cost savings and have explored the possibility of sharing a headship in order to reduce expenditure. As stated above these efforts were redoubled following the decision to end the previous consultation on closure.

The Governing Body decided that pupil numbers had fallen to an unsustainable level and they were not able to set a balanced budget which is a legal requirement. The Diocese of Middlesbrough has confirmed that there is no evidence to require the

continuation of Catholic provision in Whitby and the LA have confirmed that the school is not required to meet their duty to maintain sufficient school places. On this basis the governing body has written to request that the County Council begin consulting on a proposal to close the school. The Local Authority and the Diocese of Middlesbrough support this consultation. The County Council is therefore now consulting on the proposal to close the school with effect from 9 April 2021.

Background

St Hilda's Roman Catholic School is a small school located in Whitby that has no distinct catchment area but has historically served a wide area consisting primarily of Whitby and the surrounding rural area.

Pupil numbers at the school have been low compared to the other schools in Whitby Town for many years and governors and leaders of the school as well as the Diocese and the Local Authority have been aware of the school's vulnerability. As a small school operating in an area with a significant surplus of school places the school is particularly susceptible to the effects of falling numbers due to parental preference.

The Governors have attempted to tackle this issue through measures, including those listed above, designed to increase pupil numbers and therefore income whilst cutting expenditure where possible.

In parallel with the Governing Body's attempts to set a balanced budget the Roman Catholic Diocese of Middlesbrough has been undergoing a process of converting all of their maintained schools into Academies under the leadership of a number of

multi-academy trusts. In December 2018 an academy order was signed for St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School. However, as with all academy conversions a process of due diligence was required before any conversion would be approved. In the case of St Hilda's the current financial situation and projected financial outlook precluded the school from being accepted into the trust at that time.

Governors were aware that the Local Authority cannot license deficits without clear measures to rectify the situation and following confirmation from Diocese of Middlesbrough that they see no evidence to require the continuation of Catholic education provision in Whitby, they reached the conclusion that there is no available solution that will sustain the school in the long term.

There are three main factors leading to the closure proposal. Firstly, the number of children at St Hilda's had reduced from 51 in 2015/16 to 19 in September 2020/21. The pupil numbers have now fallen to 2 pupils on roll since the Governors requested that the LA recommence closure proposals

Secondly, with pupil numbers largely determining the school budget the finances are not sustainable. The financial outlook has significantly worsened in line with the recent fall in pupils numbers and there is therefore no prospect of financial recovery.

Finally, the Diocese of Middlesbrough's position remains that their mission and purpose is to provide education with a Catholic character to Catholic children. With so few pupils on roll the Diocese confirmed that there is no evidence to support the continuation of Catholic education in Whitby, as there appeared to be no other Catholic children seeking to attend the school.

Pupil Numbers

The number of children at St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School has been falling over the past few years. There were just 19 pupils on roll at the beginning of September 2021 and they have fallen to 2 since the closure proposal was announced. This is well below the capacity of the school – which is designed to accommodate 105 pupils if all spaces are in use. Forecasts indicate that these numbers will not recover significantly in the longer term.

There is a significant surplus of school places across Whitby Town. Where possible school place planners seek to maintain a 5% to 10% surplus of places in a planning area to allow for flexibility within the system and parental preference to be exercised. In Whitby there is currently a surplus of over 30%. Even if all housing identified within the local plan was constructed at expected rates the surplus is projected to stand at 28% in 24/25.

If St Hilda's were to close the surplus across the town would drop to 23% at present, and if all local plan housing was constructed at expected rates that surplus is projected to stand at 21% in 24/25.

The Financial Position

Pupil numbers determine the school budget. With reducing pupil numbers, and a reduced budget, the finances are not sustainable. At the beginning of the 2020/21 academic year the school was projecting deficits in year of £39.6k in 2020/21, £53.4k in 2021/22 and £30.7k in 2022/23, with a cumulative deficit of £144.7k at the end of the 2022/23 financial year. These projections were based on pupil number assumptions of 20 in Autumn 2020 and 26 in Autumn 2021. The financial outlook has significantly worsened in line with the

recent fall in pupils numbers and there is therefore no prospect of financial recovery.

Schools Standards/Ofsted

The School's last Ofsted judgment was published in December 2017 and confirmed that the school continued to be 'Good'. This proposal is not based upon the quality of the education provision at St Hilda's. However, it should be noted that where numbers of pupils at a school fall very low and budgets become restricted it provides an additional challenge to school standards.

The Proposal

For the reasons above it is proposed that St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School should close with effect from 9 April 2021.

The nearest local school, 0.1 miles from St Hilda's Roman Catholic School, is Airy Hill Primary School, Whitby.

The nearest Roman Catholic School at 7.3 miles away is St Hedda's Roman Catholic Primary School, Egton Bridge.

For children currently at St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School, North Yorkshire County Council will work with each family to try to meet their individual preferences for other schools regardless of the catchment area defined. Governors at St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School are also committed to supporting families in their choice of school and in making a smooth transition. The Diocese of Middlesbrough will seek to ensure that spaces are available at the nearest Catholic Primary School (St Hedda's Primary School, Egton Bridge) and to provide transport for those pupils currently at St Hilda's who wish to continue to receive a Catholic education. Some schools may be able

to admit over their published admission numbers for some year groups.

Parents have a right to express a preference for any school and, in the case of community and voluntary controlled schools, the LA is the admissions authority and will meet that preference, provided there are vacant places or the school is happy to admit above the published admission number. In the case of Voluntary Aided schools or Academy schools, the governing body decides the conditions for admission to their particular school, whilst still bound by the Admissions Code.

Eligibility for home-to-school transport will be determined in line with the County Council’s current home-to-school transport policy and procedures, based on travel distances from each child’s home address and individual circumstances. Where a child attends a school, which is not their normal school or nearest school, parents are normally responsible for making transport arrangements.

North Yorkshire County Council’s Admissions Team is always happy to give advice to parents – please contact #####

Staff

A separate consultation process will run in parallel with the School closure process.

The School Site

The school building and part of the site is owned by the Diocese of Middlesbrough with the remainder owned by the County Council. Decisions about the future use of the school building and playing field will be

taken by the owners after the closure proposal has been determined.

What Happens Next?

Your views about this proposal are welcomed. You can either complete and return the attached response sheet, or submit an online response

Paper responses should be returned to North Yorkshire County Council at the address below:

FREEPOST RTKE-RKAY-CUJS
St Hilda’s
Strategic Planning
North Yorkshire County Council
County Hall
NORTHALLERTON
DL7 8AE

Online responses may be submitted by following this link:

[#####](#)

The closing date for responses is Monday 14 December 2020

All responses to the consultation received by this date will be considered by the County Council’s Executive on Tuesday 12 January 2021.

If the County Council’s Executive decides to proceed with the closure proposal, then statutory notices would be published in the local press on Friday 22 January 2021. These notices provide a further four weeks for representations to be made. North Yorkshire County Council’s Executive would then make a final decision on Tuesday 9 March 2021. If agreed the school would close on Friday 9 April 2021.

Anticipated Key Dates

All dates are subject to approvals at each stage.

Approval to Consult by Executive Members	20 October 2020
Consultation opens (6 weeks during term time)	2 November 2020
Public meeting (arrangements tbc – may need to run virtually)	November 2020 (date tbc)
Consultation closes	14 December 2020
County Council's Executive considers consultation response	12 January 2021
Executive decision to publish statutory notices	12 January 2021
Publication of statutory notices	22 January 2021
Representation period starts (4 weeks)	22 January 2021
Representation period ends	19 February 2021
Final decision by County Council's Executive	9 March 2021
Proposed school closure date	9 April 2021

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St Hilda's Roman Catholic Primary School
A consultation on whether the school should be closed

Observations and/or suggestions:

Interest/Status

e.g. Parent/Governor/Teacher/Community

Name of School

Signed

Date:

Name (Block Capitals)

Address:

.....

Postcode:

To help us assess whether we have provided clear information, please let us know whether you found this consultation easy to understand? YES/NO

Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

.....

Under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, responses to the consultation may be published on the County Council’s website where it may be accessed by members of the public. Your personal details will not be published. Please send this response sheet to the following “FREEPOST” address. You do not need to use a postage stamp.

FREEPOST RTKE-RKAY-CUJS
 St Hilda’s
 Strategic Planning
 North Yorkshire County Council
 County Hall
 NORTHALLERTON, DL7 8AE

Or go to:

[#####](#)

and submit your response there

To be received by no later than 14 December 2020

We are collecting this information for the purpose of gathering views on the proposal. Your personal data will not be published or passed to any other organisation unless a legal obligation compels us to do so. We may contact you to discuss your views further. For more information about how your personal data is handled at North Yorkshire County Council please visit: www.northyorks.gov.uk/privacy