

Woodfield Community Primary School

Closure Proposal

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) (14 June 2022)

1. Current Situation FAQs

1.1 What is the purpose of the consultation on Woodfield Community Primary School?

The consultation is to seek the views of parents and other stakeholders on the proposal that Woodfield Community Primary School should close from 31 December 2022.

1.2 Why are the Local Authority consulting on a proposal to close the school?

Woodfield Community Primary School was inspected by Ofsted in January 2020, who found the overall effectiveness to be inadequate and the school became subject to special measures. Following publication of the inspection report the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) issued a directive academy order (DAO) in June 2020 as the school was eligible for intervention under the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

In the period of time since the directive academy order was issued the Department for Education (DfE) has been unable to identify a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) to sponsor the school due to viability concerns.

Although no potential sponsor academy trust could be secured it was considered important to explore if a formal partnership with another local maintained school could be an option to retain education provision in the Woodfield community. The Local Authority approached potential partner schools in the local area, and developed proposals with the governing boards of Grove Road and Woodfield schools. North Yorkshire County Council consulted on proposals to amalgamate Grove Road and Woodfield Community Primary Schools during late 2021 and early 2022. However, in March 2022, the governing board of Grove Road Community Primary School decided to withdraw their support for the amalgamation proposal.

It is considered highly unlikely that a partnership arrangement with another local school, such as federation or amalgamation, can now be identified. Therefore, the school remains vulnerable as a stand-alone school due to low pupil numbers, financial challenges and the current temporary leadership arrangements.

The governors have worked incredibly hard to find a positive solution, exploring every available avenue, unfortunately they now feel that they have exhausted all options that are available. They have therefore had to ask North Yorkshire County Council to begin the process for consultation to close.

1.3 What other options were considered before approving this consultation?

The Department for Education tried to find a MAT to sponsor the school but could not do so due to viability concerns. The County Council proposed the amalgamation with Grove Road Community Primary School which ultimately could not proceed.

Since January 2020, there have been considerable changes in staffing at Woodfield School. Ofsted made a second monitoring visit to Woodfield School in November 2021. This repeated the judgement made in an earlier monitoring visit in June 2021 that that school leaders and those responsible for governance were taking effective action towards the removal of special measures. It

is important to recognise the efforts of all those who have been involved in this improvement journey. However, the current leadership arrangements can only be temporary and the absence of an academy sponsor means that Woodfield School faces an uncertain future.

1.5 What is the current financial position of the school?

Pupil numbers determine the level of funding that a school receives. Woodfield School has projected in-year budget deficits of £97k in the financial year 2021/22, £66k in 2022/23 and £87k in 2023/24, and a forecast cumulative budget deficit of £76k in 2021/22, £142k in 2022/23, and £229k in 2023/24.

These figures were based on a projected pupil number of 42 in October 2022, so the position is now expected to be worse.

1.6 Why was the proposed amalgamation with Grove Road rejected?

The proposal was rejected by the County Council's Executive in April as it was no longer supported by the governing body of Grove Road School.

When first approached about the amalgamation, the leadership and governors of Grove Road School could see the potential benefits of the proposal for the communities of both schools and were supportive of the consultation. However, a change of such significance also carries risk. During the consultation period they monitored factors such as the level of support for the proposal and the likely demand for school places. Ultimately, the Governing Body of Grove Road School concluded that they must prioritise the future of Grove Road School and so, sadly, they could no longer support the proposed amalgamation.

1.7 Why can't pupil numbers be increased, there are a lot in the area that go elsewhere?

Children attending a school other than their local school is common and this is a factor which impacts on the numbers at Woodfield Community Primary School. Over time it might be possible to build the numbers on roll at Woodfield Community Primary School, although this would mean attracting children from other local school areas. This is considered unlikely to happen until the school has achieved 'Good' as an Ofsted inspection outcome. The short-term financial situation and the presence of the academy order does not allow leaders and governors the time to develop the school in this way.

1.8 What is the capacity of the school? Have these proposals taken into account plans for new houses in the area?

Woodfield School has capacity for 150 pupils, although the school has been operating with fewer pupils than this for a number of years. There are no significant housing permissions within the Woodfield School catchment area, although there are several housing developments underway or planned outside the school catchment area. Given current forecasts, including the likely demand from new housing and current patterns of parental preference, there would appear to be sufficient primary places available in the local area, as overall birth rates are falling in Harrogate district. Pupils living in the Woodfield School catchment area already attend a wide variety of primary schools and the majority of those schools are experiencing under-subscription, particularly in the younger age groups.

2. Process and Timescale FAQs

2.1 Who makes the decisions about the future of the school?

The decisions will be taken by the Full Executive Committee of the County Council, or the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills.

2.2 What are the different steps and timescales of the process?

This is a Statutory Process and therefore there are number of prescribed stages that need to be followed.

On 24 May, the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills approved consultation which began after the half-term break on 6 June. During the following four-week consultation period all stakeholders including parents and staff will have access to a consultation document and be able to attend a consultation meeting to get further information on the proposal. Stakeholders will also be able to submit comments on the proposal, and they would be taken into consideration by the decision makers.

The consultation period will end on 4 July and then on 19 July the County Council's Executive will consider a report that would include all of the comments submitted during the consultation period. The decision for the Executive will be whether or not to approve the publication of Statutory Proposals, which would set out the proposal in a formal sense and notify the public of the intention to close the school.

If approved the Statutory Proposals would be published on 6 September and a further period of four weeks would be observed where stakeholders would once again have an opportunity to comment on the proposal before a final decision was taken by the Executive in October. If this decision were to approve the proposal, then the School would close on 31 December 2022.

2.3 Is closure the only possible outcome?

No, although at this stage it is considered the Governing Body, the Council and DfE have collectively explored all of the realistic possibilities to sustain the school, and it is on that basis that we consider it necessary to now consult on the future of the school.

2.4 Will the Council continue to consider other options put forward throughout the consultation process?

Yes. Although the Council has now reached the position where we cannot see any short-term prospect of a sponsoring MAT being put forward by the DfE, or a suitable collaborative arrangement with a maintained school. Currently the school is not financially viable on a stand-alone basis and for it to continue the Governing Body would have to find a permanent leadership team that could continue with the school improvement at the pace required, whilst also working to address the financial situation.

Should any options emerge during the consultation that could potentially place the school on a sustainable footing then they will be explored, and presented to the Executive who would then have the option not to proceed with the proposal.

3. Admissions FAQs

3.1 How is the Council assisting parents with their consideration of alternative schools?

The Council has communicated via the School with all parents about how the preference exercise for alternative school places will be managed and what advice and assistance will be available in that period.

3.2 When will the admissions process be decided?

The intention is that provisional school allocations (that would apply for January 2023 subject to closure, or September 2022 if specifically requested) will be notified to parents in July 2022.

3.3 Does the assistance being given with the admissions process mean that the decision has already been taken?

No. From the Council's perspective it is not ideal to undertake a preference exercise for alternative schools until much later in the process, where possible this would preferably take place after the end of the consultation period. This would allow for the future catchment arrangements to be confirmed, which may be of importance to some parents.

However, the Council always hopes to be responsive and supportive to the reaction and needs of parents in relation to admissions. The purpose of the preference exercise is to ensure fair opportunity for all parents and avoid a first-come first-served scenario.

Any alternative school allocations would be made provisionally and would be subject to a closure decision, unless otherwise requested by individual families. The Council is expressly not encouraging applications for transfer sooner than January 2023, but parents have the right to request early transfer if they wish.

3.4 What if parents apply to move their children earlier than September 2022?

Parents have the right to request early transfer if they wish and the Council is obliged to respond. All applications to transfer at any point between now and January 2023 will be considered together through a managed and co-ordinated process to ensure fairness for all.

3.5 Can parents with children due to start school in September 2022 still apply for a place at Woodfield Community Primary School?

Yes they can as no decision about closure has been taken. However they should be mindful that school closure on 31 December 2022 is proposed.

3.6 I have already nominated Woodfield Community Primary School as a preference for my child for Reception entry in September 2022, what do I do?

Parents who have already submitted their application and received their allocation should contact schooladmissions@northyorks.gov.uk if they wish to change their application or add to it.

3.7 What is the position for Secondary School transfers?

Children in Year 6 will transfer to secondary schools as normal in September 2022. There will be no change to the catchment area for secondary schools.

3.8 What will be the future catchment area arrangements?

This issue forms part of the consultation. Options for future arrangements include:

- The whole of the current Woodfield School catchment area to become part of the catchment area for Grove Road Primary School
- The whole of the current Woodfield School catchment area to become part of the catchment area for Bilton Grange Primary School
- Some form of shared or split arrangement involving both Grove Road and Bilton Grange schools.

The Council would welcome any feedback during the consultation period on these proposals and any alternatives to them.

3.9 What is the NYCC Policy on School Transport?

Free transport is provided to the catchment school, or nearest school to the home address, subject to qualifying distance:

- ✓ two miles for children under eight years of age;
- ✓ three miles for children aged over eight; or
- ✓ where the route to the catchment or nearest school is not safe to walk accompanied by a responsible adult.

Low income

Additional children from low income families are eligible for free home to school transport including;

Children aged eight, but under the age of 11 who are attending their catchment or nearest school and the distance to that school is more than two miles.

A low income family is where children are entitled to free school meals or whose parent are in receipt of the maximum level of working tax credit.

4. Other Options FAQs

4.1 Can the current leadership and governance just be made permanent?

The current leadership support from Priestley Academy Trust is only temporary. Leadership and staffing arrangements for September will be communicated to parents as soon as they are finalised.

4.2 Now improvements have been made, can the school be inspected and judged Good?

Ofsted will continue to make monitoring visits to Woodfield Community Primary School to assess its progress towards the removal of the inadequate judgement and this could result in a new judgement. However, to be assessed as 'Good', Ofsted would need to see that this performance has been sustained over a reasonable period and be confident that it can continue. Further improvements remain a challenge due to the uncertain nature of leadership beyond the current temporary arrangements.

4.3 Can the academy order be rescinded?

Ofsted do not usually return to undertake a full inspection for two full years following an inadequate inspection outcome and due to the pandemic routine inspections have not taken place. The DfE have

discretion to revoke academy orders in exceptional circumstances but this is not expected unless a school is judged to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding' following a full inspection. At that point, it would be a decision for the DfE whether or not to agree to a revocation of the DAO, and this is never guaranteed.

Although much work is being done to focus on securing the quality of education in school at the moment, this is under temporary leadership and may not be sustainable.

4.4 Can more schools, including those further away, be considered for collaboration?

The concerns ultimately expressed by Grove Road School are likely to apply to all schools. We also know that successful collaborations typically involve schools that are close to each other so the benefits of the collaborative arrangements can be maximised. All schools within a reasonable distance will receive a copy of the consultation document.

4.5 Can the school just recruit a permanent headteacher of their own?

No. Unless the school is a viable proposition, the Governing Body could not consider trying to employ a permanent Headteacher.

5. Academy Options FAQs

5.1 Have all MATs been approached?

Choice of potential MAT sponsors is managed by the Regional Schools Commissioner on behalf of the DfE, and they will have looked at possible options.

6. Further advice and assistance

How can I get further information about any admissions queries?

Email your query to: schooladmissions@northyorks.gov.uk

How can I get further information about the process?

Email your query to: schoolorganisation@northyorks.gov.uk