

Responses to the Statutory Proposal

To whom it may concern.

I am the NYCC councillor for Bilton and Nidd Gorge which includes Woodfield Community Primary School. I have also been a governor at the school since the end of 2018. I have been fighting, along with others, to save the school since then.

I believe passionately that we need a primary school in Woodfield to serve this wonderful community.

Education is the key to better opportunities in life and proven to help people out of poverty. It also helps working parents by having safe before and after school clubs so that they don't worry needlessly about their children while they are at work.

I know that the pupils and parents love the school - we get regular feedback to that effect. The school has always been a friendly welcoming hub with a strong sense of community.

Why what happens to Woodfield School matters not just to us but the impact it has on others:

This school has capacity for up to 155 pupils with a catchment area of 350 pupils, but if you add in the Claro Road area which has easy access to the school through the Nidderdale greenway, then it is even more.

Although North Yorkshire County Council state that there is sufficient capacity in nearby schools to accommodate the children, it may be that this is not the case for all years or any one with special education needs. I would also ask how much bigger will the class sizes be in those schools!

Will this lead to a dilution of the other schools' ability to look after emotional, social as well as academic needs of their pupils?

The other thing we should note, that although there is not a lot of building going on in Bilton and Woodfield, Harrogate continues to grow at a pace with many new homes being built. There will undoubtedly be a need for more school places, if not now then very soon. New Schools take time and money to build.

Why the school is in this near closure situation:

If you read the consultation to close document, NYCC start the history of the school as the inadequate judgement by Ofsted, however I would argue that this is not the start of the problem.

In spring 2018, the sudden death of the Head teacher led to instability in leadership and later that year there was an unfounded slur on social media that led to an exodus of about a third of the pupils.

The subsequent Ofsted judgment resulted in a much smaller loss in pupil numbers.

The School was exonerated of any wrong doing and the correct safeguarding procedures were found to have been followed and to be in place by the Local authority, as they were at the Ofsted judgement.

What failed to happen was a restoration of the reputation of the school and difficulty in getting permanent, long term leadership. It has taken time to get back to that equilibrium whilst protecting the interests and maintaining quality education of the children at the school.

The school is now much better than ever except that it lacks the pupil numbers to make the school a “going concern” - the school would need around 90 pupils.

And this is why the governors had to request a “consultation to close” They could not create a balanced budget without getting many more pupils in the school.

So is Woodfield a good School? – yes, it is in my unqualified opinion, but not just in my opinion. Please read the Ofsted reports that track the schools progress and look at the effort that NYCC has put into the school with the leadership and governors.

As a governor I have been responsible for monitoring the development of the new curriculum and I am delighted at what the leadership has developed – it is outstanding.

Would I send my children there (this is theoretical as I have no school age children) – well yes, I would but like any responsible parent, I would need to know that the local authority will back the school and the school leadership to enable it to deliver excellent, ongoing teaching to give children an excellent start in life.

But let’s go back in time in a bit more detail :

North Yorkshire County Council have really supported the school since the Ofsted judgement. **However this problem did not start there.**

In spring 2018, the sudden death of the Head teacher led to instability in leadership and later that year there was an unfounded slur on social media that led to an exodus of about a third of the pupils.

In 2017/2018 the school had 141 pupils on roll, in 2018/2019 that number dropped to 89. This is a massive drop in revenue for the school. 4000+ *52 that’s over 200K The subsequent Ofsted judgment resulted in a much smaller loss in pupil numbers. 80 -70 just 10 pupils lost.

With regard to the safeguarding situation, the School was exonerated of any wrong doing and the correct safeguarding procedures were found to have been followed and to be in place by the Local authority, as they were at the Ofsted judgement. It should also be noted that the school population had grown from 128 in 2013/14 to 141 prior to this social media incident. The catchment area is around 350 and this has not changed much over time, and it would be higher if you include the houses on Claro Road that can access the school through the rear entrance from the greenway. For an urban school this has the best quality air with plentiful playing fields and outdoor facilities.

The school did not get enough support to come back from this reputational damage - it needs to be a lesson learned for other schools because this will surely happen to others and we need to know how to react. The instability in leadership including the resignation of all the governors at that time, meant things were missed; for example the update of the curriculum.

Once the school got the judgement of inadequate and an academisation order NYCC resources kicked in and the support and effort of the teachers from Priestley Academy, alongside our own has been terrific. As a governor I am very proud of what they have

achieved whilst delivering quality education. The updated curriculum is second to none! It has taken time to get back on track whilst protecting the interests and maintaining quality education of the children at the school.

However the school has limped along with over £200k lost every year. Because the pupil numbers were not restored and the reputation repaired, the school was never going to get academised with the academies demanding a massive transfer fee of 400- 500k to take on the risk of the school. Unsurprisingly these monies were not forthcoming and the academisation was protracted ensuring the school missed its recruitment window. The school also missed its recruitment window the following year as a result of the failed amalgamation with Grove road who gave back word at the very last minute (please note the papers for the governors meeting where they made this decision would have been released 8 days earlier)

In my opinion the school was not let down on educational needs but on reputation restoration. The reduced pupil numbers cost the school the best part of £1m in lost revenue - (that's a lot of teaching hours). The school would not be consulting on closure if it was just about the Ofsted judgement. This about social media destroying the reputation of a perfectly good (at the time its Ofsted judgement was good) school and no-one helping repair it. This cannot be a good reason to close the school!!!

I would therefore contend that this school is being closed on the back of a social media post which led to the mass exodus of pupils which we know are the lifeblood of a school. Each pupil adds 4500 to the budget to run the school – this was a loss of 1/4million for each of 4 years. This is what broke the school. A lack of funds, not the ofsted judgement.

We needed to repair the reputational damage the school suffered some two years before the ofsted judgement. And maybe that's not something that happens every day but we need to be ready for such eventualities.

So today I ask that if the school closes (to be clear I am asking that it is not closed but returned to being a fully fledged school with the right capacity etc.) - , there be a full post mortem of what went on at Woodfield School so that we the LA can learn should something like this happen again and prevent the loss of a school.

And secondly, there is a perfectly functional school with excellent facilities and environment, with a new curriculum that is ready to go. It is at the heart of a community (please note this is considered an area of deprivation) with catchment area of over 350 pupils and that catchment has not changed very much the past 6 years, that wants and needs a school.

To: school organisation
Subject: Closure of Woodfield Community Primary School Harrogate.

Four pupils on school roll at 7th September 2022, and only twenty people bothered to turn up to the public consultation meeting.
Something tells me this school will be closed at the end of this year.

Sent from my iPhone