

Pre-consultation correspondence between Upper Nidderdale Parish Council and Cllr Wilkinson:

- ***6 November email on behalf of Upper Nidderdale Parish Council to Cllr Wilkinson***

I have read the North Yorkshire Council report to seek Executive Member approval to consult on a proposal that the council should close Fountains Earth, Lofthouse Church of England Endowed Primary School.

I X, chairman of the Upper Nidderdale Parish Council would like to draw your attention to a number of points in relation to this report.

2.5 Whilst the community calculated numbers assumed that none of the existing pupils would leave, these numbers also assumed that no new families would move into the area. In fact, families with primary school age children have continued to move into this area and young children continue to be born in this catchment area.

2.6 It is correct to state that all of the school pupils transferred into other schools before of the start of the new academic year 23/24 and equally important to note that since the three schools federated, of those who left before completing primary education, all except one, have moved to schools outside of the federation. We would urge you to consider why this might be the case.

2.7 & 3.8 At the start of academic year 2021/22 there was a highly qualified teacher in post, it is therefore incorrect to state that “Over the last five years it has not been possible to recruit a permanent Teacher.” Moreover, the credibility of the reference to “feedback from.... former permanent staff is that the outlying location of the school is a material consideration in their decision to seek employment elsewhere” would seem questionable given the current Executive Headteacher has only known two former permanent teaching staff at Fountains Earth - one of which was committed to remaining in post and the other being her own personal partner.

It is also worth considering that whilst the remote nature of this catchment area will always be a significant deciding factor in the context of potential applicants, that this can vary entirely on the individual and that some would be attracted to the rural nature of this school. At no point has the leadership attempted to work with the parent body or wider community to assist with the promotion of vacancies after the abrupt departure of the longstanding permanent teacher in Autumn 2021. It would be worth understanding what proactive recruitment has taken place to date. Furthermore, on the subject of long journeys - is it now appropriate that children as young as 4 will be making an hour's round trip twice a day to attend school?

3.3 We want to draw attention to the points made in this section and ask that the fuller picture is considered. In the context of pupils who are eligible to attend Fountains Earth from this catchment area vs those who actually did attend – why do numbers notably decline in 2021? Additionally, in reference to Appendix 4 – why is the overall percentage difference between net capacity and current pupil roll so much lower across the Upper Nidderdale Federation than other schools provided in this table?

Since the initial application for school closure took place in June 2022, the parents of Fountains Earth requested to meet with the Executive Head and the Governing Board to work together in ways to increase pupil numbers. From June 2022 until July 2023 all requests were refused. No promotional efforts were made and no willingness to work with the parent body was demonstrated.

Finally, we want to note that the Parish Council and the former parent body now seek an independent investigation into the running of the Upper Nidderdale Federation prior to the NY council's decision to close Fountains Earth.

The whole of the Upper Nidderdale community are united in seeing our primary remain open for the benefit of all young children and families, both present and future generations, but in this case I am afraid, under new management.

If I or any other parish councillors, and ex-parents can be of any further assistance on this matter, do not hesitate to contact us.

- **8 November response from Cllr Wilkinson**

Thank you for your email regarding the request from the Governing Board of the Upper Nidderdale Primary Federation which asked North Yorkshire Council to consult on the closure of Fountains Earth, Lofthouse CE Endowed VC Primary School. The Council has agreed to consult on the closure of the school with effect from 31 March 2024.

A consultation process begins on 17 November 2023 during which the public will receive more information on the proposal, as well as details of how to respond. Further information will be available at <https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/current-consultations>

You will be able to submit comments via the online response form, by post, or by email to schoolorganisation@northyorks.gov.uk This is the only way to make a response to the consultation.

Consultation responses will be considered by the Council's Executive on 23 January 2024.

Thank you.

- **9 November email on behalf of Upper Nidderdale Parish Council to Cllr Wilkinson**

Thank you for your reply, and look forward to challenging NYC decision to close Lofthouse School.

It is a very black day for the community of young families and children of Upper Nidderdale.

I note your timetable below for the consultation process.

As part of the consultation process, I trust there will be "public meeting" where the school federation management, council officials and NYC councillors will be present to hear the many complaints of why we have ended up in this situation today.

I believe that our petition for "saving our school" has reached over 500, so we will all get to the bottom of the issues of why we have ended up in this situation today.

Thanks, X [on behalf of Upper Nidderdale Parish Council]