



Consultation Document

Proposal to close
Fountains Earth, Lofthouse Church of England Endowed
(Voluntary Controlled) Primary School
from 31 March 2024

Fountains Earth, Lofthouse Church of England Endowed (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School

November 2023

This paper sets out details of a proposal by North Yorkshire Council to close Fountains Earth, Lofthouse CE Endowed VC Primary School with effect from 31 March 2024. It gives the background to the proposal. There will be a public meeting at Lofthouse Memorial Institute, Lofthouse, Harrogate HG3 5SN on Wednesday 29 November at 6pm.

Background

At a recent governing body meeting of the Upper Nidderdale Primary Federation representing the three schools of; Fountains Earth, Lofthouse CE Endowed VC Primary School, St Cuthbert's CE VC Primary School, Pateley Bridge and Glasshouses Community Primary School, it was resolved, with no pupils on roll, to take the heavy and sad decision, to ask North Yorkshire Council to consult on closure proposals for Fountains Earth, Lofthouse CE Endowed VC Primary School.

The Governing Body of the Upper Nidderdale Federation have not reached this decision lightly and have already worked to support the School through the Federation with St Cuthbert's CE VC Primary School and Glasshouses Community School.

St Cuthbert's Primary School and Fountains Earth Primary School formerly entered into federation in May 2017, following a collaboration between the two schools that had been in place since 2014. Glasshouses Community Primary School collaborated with and supported the Federation of St Cuthbert's Primary School and Fountains Earth Primary School in April 2021. Following the collaboration, a new federation comprising the three schools Glasshouses Community Primary School, St Cuthbert's Primary School and Fountains Earth Primary School was established in January 2022 under the name of Upper Nidderdale Primary Federation. An Executive Headteacher model is in place, and this is common under federation arrangements. The Governing Board and leadership have worked to maximise opportunities presented by the federation arrangements, including bringing pupils together to share activities and learning opportunities such as regular shared curriculum days during 'Federation Friday'.

Fountains Earth, CE Endowed Primary School, is located in the small rural village of Lofthouse in Nidderdale an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The school is defined by the government as a rural school that serves rural hamlets with isolated dwellings.

In June 2022 the federated Governing Board approached the Council to seek consultation on the proposed closure of Fountains Earth. There were 11 pupils on the school roll at this time and the available information showed no sign of any significant growth in the roll. This consultation request was subsequently withdrawn by the Federation Governing Board in July 2022 as it had been suggested locally that the school roll was going to grow in the near future.

The Governing Board subsequently undertook a detailed exercise with the community in Autumn 2022 to understand more fully the future potential pupil numbers at the

school. The exercise showed some minor change to the future forecast numbers originally held by the Council. Parents, carers and the wider community were informed of the outcome in January 2023. The revised forecast numbers communicated at the time were as follows; 23/24 – 11 pupils; 24/25 – 13; 25/26 – 13; 26/27 – 15; 27/28 – 18. Importantly, those predictions assumed that none of the existing pupils would leave Fountains Earth, other than to transfer to secondary school at the end of Year 6.

All of the school's pupils transferred to other schools before the start of the current academic year and there were no new starters in the Reception year group in September 2023. Therefore, the main factor prompting the Governing Board's request for consultation at this time, is there are currently no pupils on roll at Fountains Earth Primary School.

The school has in recent times experienced recruitment and retention difficulties associated both with the particular location of the school and the challenge of securing suitably skilled staff to deal with the differentiation required by whole school teaching in a single class structure.

Finance is also a key concern. The pupil numbers for the October 2023 census form the basis of a school's funding for the 2024/25 financial year. The Department for Education (DfE) have confirmed that where a school has no pupils in the October census, they will not allocate any funding for that school in the schools' block element of the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) funding that a local authority receives to fund schools and academies located within the local authority area.

Factors Affecting the School's Viability

Pupil Numbers

Fountains Earth is a small rural 4-11 CE VC Primary School and currently has no children on roll. The School has operated with 34 pupils or less for the last 15 years. Since the 2017/18 academic year there has been a downward trend with pupil numbers reducing as shown below:

October 2016 census – 19 pupils
October 2017 census – 29 pupils
October 2018 census – 25 pupils
October 2019 census – 21 pupils
October 2020 census – 15 pupils
October 2021 census – 12 pupils
October 2022 census – 15 pupils
May 2023 census – 10 pupils
October 2023 census – 0 pupils

The School has a Published Admission Number (PAN) of six pupils per year group. The School has capacity to accommodate around 50 pupils if all spaces are in use, and therefore has the potential to contribute 50 places in the local area.

The number of children of primary school age living in the school catchment area has reduced from 27 children in 2017 (the earliest records held by the Council) to 16 children in October 2022. This cohort figure is based on children living in the catchment area and attending a North Yorkshire area school at that time, be that Local Authority maintained or academy. The second column of figures in the table below shows how

many of those 'in-area' children were attending the school at that time. This shows the number of 'in-area' children at the school halved from 20 to 10 between October 2017 and October 2022.

	Primary school age children living in catchment and attending a North Yorkshire School	Of those how many were attending Fountains Earth Lofthouse Primary School
October 2017 Census	27	20
October 2018 Census	23	20
October 2019 Census	17	16
October 2020 Census	13	11
October 2021 Census	17	8
October 2022 Census	16	10

School Leadership, Standards and Curriculum

There is a Leadership Team across the three schools within the federation which is led by an Executive Headteacher. Subject leaders were appointed to work across the federation of three schools in April 2021.

The most recent full graded Ofsted inspection for Fountains Earth was in April 2017. At that time there were 22 pupils on roll. Ofsted judged the school, to be 'Good'. A short monitoring (section 8 inspection) took place in June 2022 when there were 11 pupils on roll. The report stated that the school continues to be a 'Good' school.

As numbers fall, it is increasingly difficult to provide the remaining pupils with access to the full range of experiences and the quality of education they require. At present, if any pupils were to apply to join Fountains Earth Primary there is no real prospect of them being able to get a full and balanced school experience in the absence of any peers.

St Cuthbert's was last inspected in October 2022 (section 5 inspection) and found to be 'Good'. St Cuthbert's was last inspected under SIAMS in November 2021 and found to be 'Good'. Glasshouses Community School was last inspected in March 2022 and the outcome was the school continues to be a 'Good' school.

Staffing

Over the last five years it has not been possible to recruit a permanent Teacher, which has been attributed to the remote location and the challenges of recruiting a high level of experience and skill required to teach a wide range of ages and abilities and with such small pupil numbers on roll in a single class structure from reception pupils to year 6. The Governors report that feedback from recruitment agencies is that many teachers with the necessary skills and experience do not choose to apply to work at Fountains Earth.

Staff retention has also proved difficult with a high turnover of staff over the last five years resulting in use of agency staff which comes with increased staffing costs. Supply staff only need to give a day's notice, and this leaves Fountains Earth, and the

other schools in the Federation, vulnerable to disruption and it adversely affects the consistency and quality of education provision at the school.

The Financial Position

Pupil numbers determine the funding for a school budget. The DfE have confirmed that in the exceptional situation where a school has no pupils, no funding would be provided to the local authority for that school through the DfE Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) schools block funding; this is the grant funding used to fund school delegated budgets. Therefore, North Yorkshire Council will not receive a school funding allocation for Fountains Earth Primary in the 2024/25 financial year as no pupils will be recorded on the DfE October 2023 school census. In the event of the school remaining open, the local authority would need to determine whether the school should continue to be funded through the school funding formula. If this were agreed, the school would receive the formula lump sum funding (2024/25 indicative value £134,400) and the school rates funding (£2,645). Any 2024/25 formula funding allocation for Fountains Earth, Lofthouse CE Primary would need to be funded from the DSG funding allocations provided for other schools and academies within North Yorkshire.

The Upper Nidderdale Primary Federation operate an amalgamated budget for the three schools within the Federation. The 2023/24 Start Budget for the Upper Nidderdale Primary Federation indicated the following revenue budget position:

	In year position	Accumulated balance
2023/24	£22.95k deficit	£69.44k surplus,
2024/25	£76.49k deficit	£7.05k deficit
2025/26	£104.81k deficit	£111.86k deficit.

There appears to be no reasonable long-term prospect of recovery for the Fountains Earth element of the budget given there will be no DfE funding allocation for the school for the 2024/25 financial year.

In the event of Fountains Earth closing on 31 March 2024 the individual school budgets would need to be separated out from the current amalgamated Federation budget. Any legacy costs associated with the operation of the school incurred in the 2023/24 financial year would need to continue to be charged to the Fountains Earth school budget. Any final deficit on the school budget, after all costs have been accounted for, would need to be met from local authority funds.

Primary School places in the local area

There are currently no pupils on roll at Fountains Earth, Lofthouse CE so there will be no immediate requirement to assist parents with seeking alternative places in the event of closure. However, it is important to ensure that there are sufficient school places in the local area.

In October 2022 there were 16 pupils living in Fountain's Earth discrete catchment area and attending a North Yorkshire school. Of the 15 pupils attending the school at the time of the October 2022 census, 10 pupils were from the Fountain's Earth,

Lofthouse catchment area and three were from the St Cuthbert's area. Two pupils were attending from the catchment areas of Harrogate Town schools.

There are two other neighbouring primary schools within an eight mile radius of Fountains Earth Primary School. Across the area there is a general surplus of places. Further details of school capacities and pupil forecasts are set out in an accompanying document.

The nearest school to Fountains Earth CE Primary Endowed is St Cuthbert's CE VC Primary School at Pateley Bridge where there are places available in all year groups. The next nearest school is Glasshouses Community Primary School where there are places available in all year groups apart from Year 3.

There is also capacity available at schools which are further away. Places are available at Summerbridge Primary School, Kirby Malzeard CE School and Grewelthorpe CE Primary although not in all year groups. Masham CE School has places available in all year groups. These schools were all judged 'Good' in their last Ofsted inspection.

The Proposal

For the reasons above it is proposed that Fountains Earth CE Endowed VC Primary School should close with effect from 31 March 2024.

It is also proposed that the catchment area of St Cuthbert's CE VC Primary School, Pateley Bridge (the nearest alternative school) should be extended to include the current Fountains Earth catchment area. This is shown on maps accompanying this consultation document. The Leeds CE Diocese have indicated early-stage support for this approach. These arrangements would be implemented from April 2024 only in the event of closure for Fountains Earth CE Endowed VC Primary School.

The Council would welcome views regarding the future catchment area proposal as part of this consultation.

Admissions and Catchment Areas

Free home to school transport would be provided for eligible pupils taking account of the revised catchment area arrangements in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.

Staff

A separate staff consultation process, including a meeting for staff and their professional associations and unions, will run in parallel with this consultation on the closure proposal. Staff are also welcome to comment on the proposal as part of this consultation.

The School Site and Buildings

The Council owns most of the school site and is currently clarifying the position regarding the remainder of the site with the Land Registry and the Diocese.

Decisions about the future of school sites following a closure are separate to the closure decision itself and would follow at a later date.

Additional Information

This consultation document should be read in conjunction with the following documents which can be found here www.northyorks.gov.uk/your-council/consultations-and-engagement/current-consultations

- Maps showing the current local catchment areas including the proposed extension of the catchment area for St Cuthbert's Church of England (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School at Pateley Bridge should Fountains Earth Lofthouse, Church of England Endowed Voluntary Controlled Primary School close.
- Other schools – capacities and forecasts

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 Council at the address below:

FREEPOST RTKE-RKAY-CUJS
Fountains Earth, Lofthouse
Strategic Planning
North Yorkshire Council
County Hall
NORTHALLERTON
DL7 8AE

Online responses may be submitted by following this link:

<https://consult.northyorks.gov.uk/snapwebhost/s.asp?k=169900829166>

Responses to the consultation will be published on the Council's website. Your personal details, and those of others you may refer to, will not be published.

The closing date for responses is 5pm on Friday 22 December 2023

All responses to the consultation received by this date are scheduled to be considered by the Council's Executive on 23 January 2024.

If the Council's Executive decides to proceed with the closure proposal, then statutory notices would be published in the local press on 1 February 2024. These notices would provide a further four weeks for representations to be made. A final decision is then scheduled to be taken by North Yorkshire Council's Executive on 19 March 2024. If agreed, the school would close on 31 March 2024.

Anticipated Key Dates

All dates are subject to approvals at each stage.

Consultation opens	17 November 2023
Public meeting	29 November 2023 at 6pm
Consultation closes	22 December 2023
Council's Executive considers consultation response	23 January 2024
Statutory Notices published (4 weeks for representations to be made)	1 February – 29 February 2024
Final decision by Council's Executive	19 March 2024
Proposed school closure date	31 March 2024

Fountains Earth, Lofthouse CE Endowed Primary School Consultation

This is a consultation on proposals to close Fountains Earth, Lofthouse CE Endowed Primary School from 31 March 2024.

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.

Reading our Privacy Notice will help you understand how and why we process your personal data. www.northyorks.gov.uk/privacy-notices

Do you have any comments about the closure proposal?
(Please do not disclose any personal information in your answer)

Do you have any comments about catchment areas?
(Please do not disclose any personal information in your answer)

What is your interest/status? Parent / Governor / Teacher / Community / Other

Other (please
state)

Name of school:
(if applicable)

To confirm your proximity to school and to prevent duplicate responses we are asking you to provide your name and address. This information will be removed from any analysis or reports.

Name:

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**

Please send this response sheet to the following "FREEPOST" address. You do not need to use a postage stamp.

FREEPOST RTKE-RKAY-CUJS
Fountains Earth, Lofthouse
Strategic Planning
North Yorkshire Council
County Hall
NORTHALLERTON
DL7 8AE

Or to submit your response online go to:

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To be received by no later than 22 December 2023