

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

20 February 2024

St Hilda's Ampleforth Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Executive Member approval to consult on a proposal that the Council should close St Hilda's, Ampleforth Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School from 31 August 2024.

2.0 BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY

- 2.1 At a meeting of the Governing Board of the St Hilda's Ampleforth Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School on 17 January 2024 it was reluctantly resolved, following a full discussion about pupil numbers, financial prospects and future sources of leadership, to invite North Yorkshire Council to commence a consultation on closure of this school.
- 2.2 St Hilda's Ampleforth CE VC Primary School, is located in the rural village of Ampleforth. Ampleforth village lies partially within the North York Moors National Park and partially in the Howardian Hills, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The school is defined by the government as a rural school that serves a rural village. The Department for Education expects all decision makers to adopt a presumption against the closure of rural schools. However, in their statutory guidance they make it clear that this does not mean that a rural school will never close, but that the case for closure should be strong and clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area. The school was previously in a Federation with Hovingham CE VC Primary School from April 2015 until Hovingham's closure in March 2023.
- 2.3 Governors have brought forward this proposal to consult on the closure due to low pupil numbers and an expected Reception intake of 0 pupils in September 2024 leading to a decline in the overall number on roll. This has led to financial pressures, meaning that the school would have an in-year deficit in 2024/25 and a cumulative deficit by 2025. The school's current leadership arrangement is only in place until the end of the summer term 2024. Governors have requested the consultation at this time as they have identified the importance of a decision on the school's future being made before the end of the academic year

3.0 ST HILDA'S AMPLEFORTH CHURCH OF ENGLAND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED PRIMARY SCHOOL

Pupil numbers

- 3.1 St Hilda's is a small rural 3-11 CE VC Primary School and currently has 13 children of statutory school age on roll. The School has operated with 36 pupils or less for the last 15 years. According to the October census each year there has been a downward trend in the number of pupils on roll since 2018/19:

2016/17 – 20 pupils
 2017/18 – 27
 2018/19 – 36
 2019/20 – 35
 2020/21 – 28
 2021/22 – 29
 2022/23 – 20
 2023/24 – 13 (October 2023)

3.2 The current breakdown of the number of pupils of statutory school age at St Hilda’s CE VC Primary School is as follows:

Year Group	Number on Roll
Reception	1
Year 1	4
Year 2	0
Year 3	0
Year 4	3
Year 5	1
Year 6	4
Total	13

Therefore with 4 pupils in the current Year 6 and the school projected to have no new Reception pupils in September 2024 it likely that the number on roll will have dropped to 9 by Autumn Term 2024.

3.3 The school has a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 7 pupils per year group. The school has capacity to accommodate up to 49 pupils if all spaces are in use, and therefore has the potential to contribute 49 places in the local area.

3.4 The school catchment area had a primary age cohort of children of 93 children in 2017 (the earliest records held by the Council) and 94 children in October 2023. This cohort figure is based on children living in the catchment area and attending a North Yorkshire area school at that time, be that LA maintained or academy. The St Hilda’s School catchment area was extended in 2022 following the closure of Hovingham CE VC Primary School, to include an area that St Hilda’s had formerly shared with Hovingham, so the figures prior to 2022 include children who lived in the discrete St Hilda’s catchment area and the area it shared with Hovingham. The second data set in the table below shows how many of those ‘in-area’ children were attending St Hilda’s school at that time. This shows the number of ‘in-area’ children at the school reduced significantly from 35 to 13 between October 2019 and October 2023.

	Primary school age children living in catchment and attending a NY School	Of those how many were attending St Hilda’s CE Primary School
October 2017 Census	93	27
October 2018 Census	97	34
October 2019 Census	86	35
October 2020 Census	78	32
October 2021 Census	96	29
October 2022 Census	99	25
October 2023 Census	94	13

- 3.5 It should be noted that Ampleforth is quite unusual in being a relatively small rural village that is currently served by two primary schools. Although there were 94 pupils living in catchment at the October 2023 census only 13 of these were attending St Hilda's with 55 attending St Benedict's Catholic Primary School which is located only a short distance away.

Finance

- 3.5 Pupil numbers are a significant factor in determining the school budget under the national funding formula, and the fall in pupil numbers has undermined the school's future financial position.

Based on the 2023/24 Revised Budget submitted in December 2023 the school had a budget surplus of £84.7k at the end of the 2022/23 financial year; the funding for the 2023/24 financial year was based on 27 pupils. The school is projecting an in year budget surplus of £10.4k giving a carry forward budget at the end of March 2024 of £95.1k.

However, the school is projecting in-year budget deficits of £66.8k in 2024/25 and £84.5k in 2025/26 and an overall cumulative budget deficit of £56.2k at March 2026. The budget projections are based on pupil number assumptions of 13 in 2024/25 and 11 in 2025/26, so the position will deteriorate further if pupil numbers fall below that level. It is understood that these current budget projections assume future leadership costs continue at the same level as the current interim arrangements. However, it is likely that the leadership costs would significantly increase if the school were to appoint a substantive headteacher (either full time or part-time) which would result in a further deterioration of the budget position. Therefore, there appears to be no reasonable prospect of longer-term financial viability for the school.

- 3.6 In the event of St Hilda's closing on the 31 August 2024, any legacy costs associated with the operation of the school incurred in the 2024/25 financial year would need to continue to be charged to the 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. Any annual savings to the Dedicated Schools Grant arising from the closure, if approved, would remain within the ring-fenced Dedicated Schools Grant as part of the funding for all schools. Any surplus revenue or capital balances would be allocated in line with the Closing School Accounting Policy.

School Leadership

- 3.7 There have been changes in leadership at the School in the recent past and the following paragraphs describe the position from the Governing Board's perspective.
- 3.8 In late August 2022 the Governing Board learned that the headteacher of the Federation would not be returning at the start of the autumn term. This left the Governing Board having to source alternative leadership at very short notice. Council officers provided guidance and assistance to secure Executive Leadership from another Federation, with a main focus on securing the education provision at St.Hilda's CE VC Primary School. At the start of autumn term 2022 there were no pupils on roll at Hovingham which would in turn affect the future financing of the school, so in October the then Federated Governing Board invited NYC to embark on a consultation on closure of Hovingham school. With intense efforts on exploring all options to help secure the future of both St Hilda's and Hovingham, the Governing Board contacted the Ryedale Learning Trust (RLT) to ascertain what leadership support they could offer the Federation Governing

Board and schools in the short term. It was the view of Governors that the RLT had the vision and resources to provide inspirational leadership the schools required. In addition, the affirmative response to the question of whether the Trust was open to exploring the possibility of both CofE schools joining the Academy Trust in the medium term (or St Hilda's in the event of Hovingham being closed) was key to the decision. Following positive discussions and having reviewed all other options, the Federation Governors voted unanimously on 1 December 2022 to become Associate Members of the RLT from January 2023, with a view to one, or should it remain open, both schools joining the Trust in the future.

- 3.9 The statutory consultation process on the closure of Hovingham school between autumn 2022 and March 2023 had a significant impact on St. Hilda's as the other school in the Hovingham & St. Hilda's Federation, and Governors feel that the uncertainty may have impacted pupil numbers in the last academic year. It is the board's view that St Hilda's CE VC Primary School has benefitted significantly from the experienced executive leader provided by RLT since January 2023, and the school has been on a journey of transformation to being a vibrant local primary school providing high quality educational provision and delivering strong outcomes. Sadly, despite this improved educational provision and a lot of publicity and promotion of the school, pupil numbers have not grown sufficiently to ensure that the funding available will be sufficient going forward. Consequently, while the diocese had positive dialogue about the required steps for the school to join the trust and RLT discussed academy conversion with DfE although an application did not reach the DfE's advisory board due to the low and falling numbers and questions over the viability of the school. Governors have expressed that despite this, RLT have been very generous in agreeing to continue their support of the school to try and make it a viable and sustainable school for the community it serves.
- 3.10 RLT provided the support for the school free of charge for the spring and summer term in 2023 and is providing the executive leadership support for the school this academic year (2023-24) for a contribution of £5k, as they understand the financial pressures St Hilda's is facing and want to help. RLT has offered to continue to provide executive support for the school for the next academic year (2024-25) on the same basis if the school's circumstances changed and the Council determined not to proceed with the closure of the school.

Standards and Curriculum

- 3.11 The most recent full graded Ofsted inspection for St Hilda's was in March 2020. At that time there were 38 pupils on roll. Ofsted judged the school to be 'Good'.
- 3.12 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

4.0 PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES IN THE LOCAL AREA

- 4.1 There are currently 13 pupils of statutory school age on roll at St Hilda's Ampleforth. The Council has a Statutory Duty to ensure the sufficiency of school places. This section will consider the availability of school places in the local area.
- 4.2 There are six neighbouring schools which are located within 10 miles of St Hilda's by road. These schools along with their distances from St Hilda's are listed in Appendix 2. This Appendix highlights which schools currently have spaces and in which year groups.
- 4.3 At the October 2023 school census there were 94 pupils living within the St Hilda's

catchment area and attending North Yorkshire schools. Of those 13 were attending St Hilda's CE VC Primary School, 55 were attending St Benedict's Catholic Primary School, 10 were attending Helmsley Community Primary School and the remainder were attending a variety of local schools.

- 4.4 Appendix 4 provides projected numbers based on forecast birth rates, with potential additional pupils from outstanding housing permissions and proposed housing allocations in the Ryedale District Local Plan, prepared and adopted by the former Ryedale District Council in 2013. The figures contained within Appendices 2 and 4 illustrate that there is currently a surplus of school places across the local area and it is not necessary to maintain St Hilda's CE in order to ensure a sufficiency of school places.

5.0 CATCHMENT AREAS AND ADMISSIONS PROCESS

- 5.1 As set out in section 4 and Appendices 2 and 4 there is available capacity in the local area to ensure sufficiency of school places. Parents of future children living in the current St Hilda's catchment area will be able to express a preference for school places at any school. However, catchment areas are an important factor in the event of a school being oversubscribed. Therefore, the current St Hilda's catchment area will need to be subsumed into the catchment area for one or more of the surrounding schools.
- 5.2 Officers have identified a proposal to split the catchment area of St Hilda's between three other local schools. The current catchment and proposed catchments are shown on maps within Appendix 3.

The current St Hilda's Ampleforth CE VC Primary School catchment area would be split between Husthwaite CE VC Primary School, Helmsley Community Primary School and Terrington CE VA Primary School. This would mean the parishes of Gilling East, Grimstone, Cawton and Coulton would become part of the catchment area for Terrington CE. The parishes of Oswaldkirk and Stonegrave would become part of the catchment area for Helmsley Community Primary School. The parishes of Byland with Wass and Ampleforth would become part of the catchment area for Husthwaite CE. This would mean that the majority of the St Hilda's catchment area would continue to have a Church of England school nearby as their catchment school, with the exception of Oswaldkirk and Stonegrave which would be in catchment for the school which is nearest to them by road. As is currently the case, parents of pupils from any part of the existing St Hilda's catchment area and beyond could choose to apply for places at St Benedict's and would be entitled to places where available in line with St Benedict's Catholic Primary School admissions policy. As part of the consultation process the Council will ask for views on the future catchment area options.

- 5.3 North Yorkshire Council, alongside the Governing Board are currently considering when a 'preference exercise' for provisional school transfers should be undertaken.

Through this exercise parents/carers of children on roll at St Hilda's Ampleforth CE VC Primary School would be asked to apply for the preferred school(s) that they would like their child to transfer to in September 2024, should St Hilda's, Ampleforth, CE VC School close at the end of the current academic year.

Once the full picture of all parental preferences is known, the Council would liaise with the schools regarding potential allocations and seek to meet the highest stated preferences wherever possible.

The overall intention would be to ensure fairness around the school transfer process in the event that a decision is ultimately taken to close the School. It would allow application of admissions criteria to each request and avoid 'first come first served'. Undertaking this co-ordinated 'preference exercise' approach would provide parents/carers with the support they need and reduce uncertainty.

Parents/carers can apply for an earlier date of transfer for their child, as is their right, but there is no requirement to do so.

6.0 SCHOOL SITE AND BUILDINGS

6.1 The ownership of the school site is split between the Diocese of York and North Yorkshire Council. Decisions about the future of the school site would be separate to any closure decision itself and would follow at a later date.

7.0 CONSULTATION PROCESS AND TIMESCALE

7.1 Should a decision be made to initiate a consultation on the proposed closure of St Hilda's Ampleforth Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, a period of seven consultation weeks is proposed. This would take account of the two-week Easter school holiday. A draft timetable is set out below.

7.2 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.

7.3 The final decision on closure would be taken by the Executive (or by the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills if there are no objections during the representation period).

7.4 Suggested key dates are shown below:

Approval to Consult by Executive Members	20 February 2024
Consultation opens (5 weeks during term time)	1 March 2024 to 19 April 2024
Public meeting	18 March 2024
Council's Executive considers consultation response	7 May 2024
Executive decision to publish statutory notices	7 May 2024
Publication of statutory notices	17 May 2024
Representation period starts (4 weeks)	17 May 2024
Representation period ends	14 June 2024
Final decision by Council's Executive	16 July 2024
Proposed school closure date	31 August 2024

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills provide approval to consult on proposals that:
 - St Hilda’s Ampleforth Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School should close on 31 August 2024
 - The current St Hilda’s Ampleforth CE VC Primary School catchment area would be split between Husthwaite CE VC Primary School, Helmsley Community Primary School and Terrington CE VA Primary School. This would mean the parishes of Gilling East, Grimstone, Cawton and Coulton would become part of the catchment area for Terrington CE. The parishes of Oswaldkirk and Stonegrave would become part of the catchment area for Helmsley Community Primary School. The parishes of Byland with Wass and Ampleforth would become part of the catchment area for Husthwaite CE.

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

Report prepared by Matt George, Strategic Planning Officer

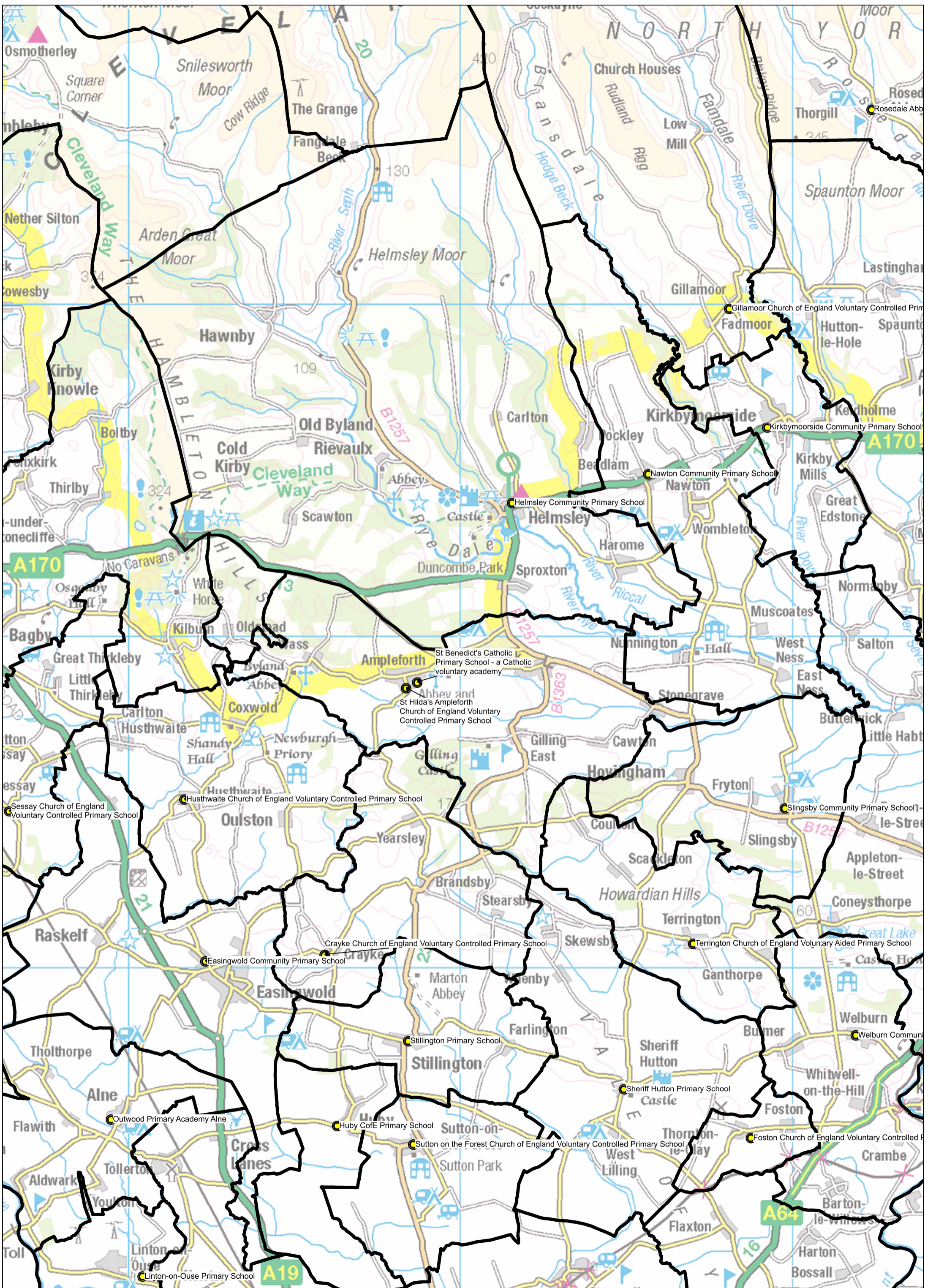
Action AgreedExecutive Member
Date:

Action RequestedCorporate Director
Date:

List of Appendices:

- Appendix 1 - Map of the local area
- Appendix 2 - Indicative Table of Places Available in Local Schools
- Appendix 3 - Map showing Current School Catchment areas and Local Schools as well as potential future catchment proposal
- Appendix 4 - Local Schools Capacity and Forecast

Map to show location of Ampleforth St Hilda's CE Primary School and other local schools



Appendix 2: Indicative table of primary school places available in local schools February 2024

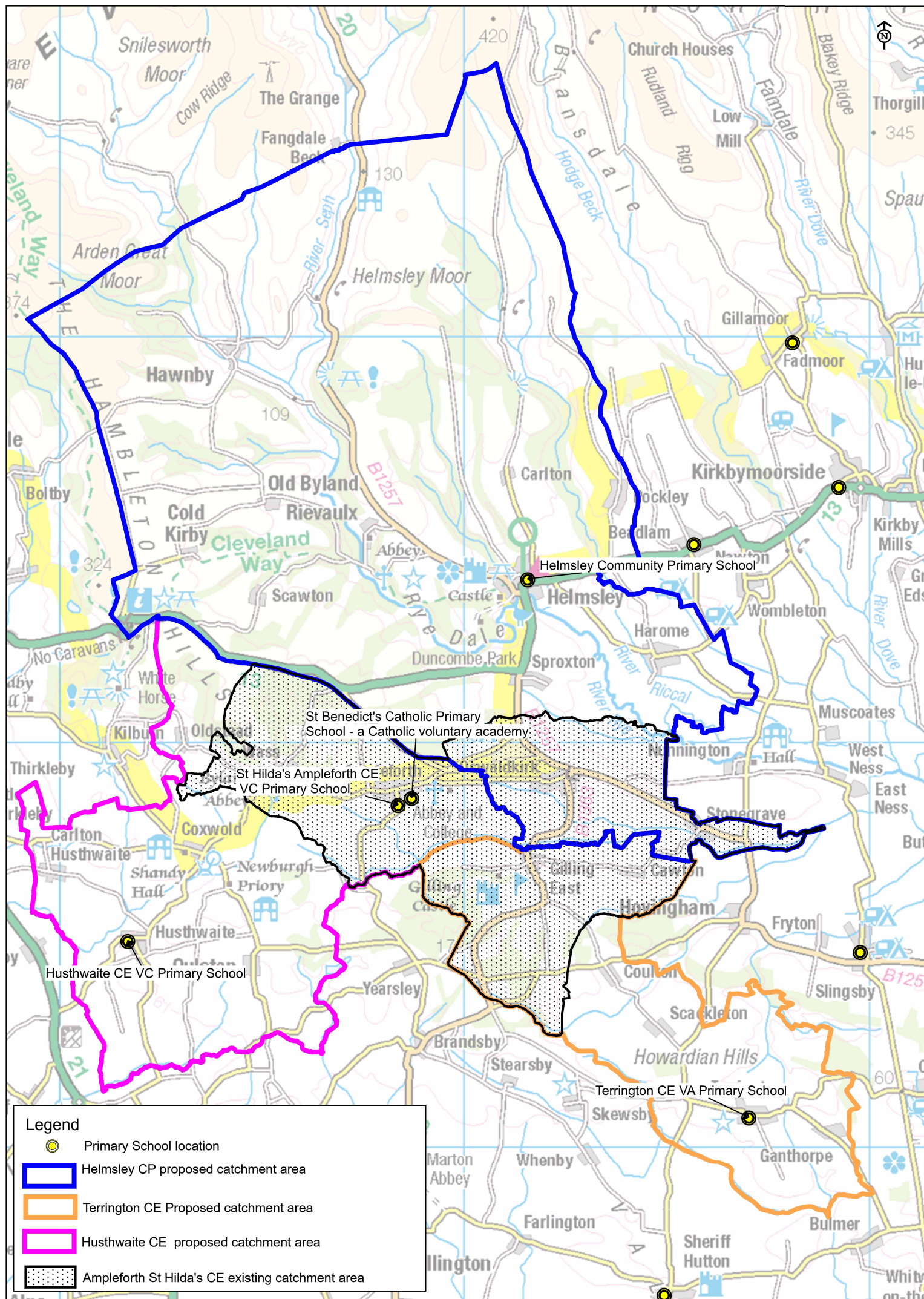
Primary School	Distance by road from St Hilda's, Ampleforth CE VC (miles)	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total on roll	Net Capacity
St Hilda's Ampleforth CE VC	N/A	Places	Places	Places	Places	Places	Places	Places	13	49
St Benedict's Catholic Primary School, Ampleforth	0.3 miles	Places	Places	Places	Places	Places	Places	Places	76	105
Helmsley Community Primary	4.9 miles	Places	Places	PAN	Places	Places	PAN	Places	150	168
Husthwaite CE VC	6.4 miles	Places	Places	Places	Places	Places	Places	Places	53	105
Crayke CE VC	7.6 miles	Places	PAN	Places	PAN	PAN	PAN	Places	101	105
Slingsby CP	9.4 miles	Places	PAN	PAN	PAN	PAN	PAN	PAN	91	77
Terrington CE VA	9.7 miles	Places	Places	Places	Places	Places	Places	Places	27	63

PAN = School is at planned admission number, all applications will be dealt with on an individual basis and Admissions Team will have discussions with appropriate Headteacher to see if the school are in a position to take additional pupils in that year group.

OFFICIAL

OFFICIAL

Proposed catchments map



Legend

- Primary School location
- Helmsley CP proposed catchment area
- Terrington CE Proposed catchment area
- Hustwaite CE proposed catchment area
- Ampleforth St Hilda's CE existing catchment area

Appendix 4: Pupil number projections, including future demand from housing developments

	St Benedict's Catholic Primary School – a Catholic Voluntary Academy	Helmsley Primary School	Hustwaite CE VC Primary School	Crayke CE VC Primary School	Slingsby Community Primary School	Terrington CE VA Primary School
	Nicholas Postgate Catholic Academy Trust	Ryedale Learning Trust	Federated with Sessay CE Primary School			Federated with Foston CE Primary School
Distance from Ampleforth St Hilda's CE by road (miles)	0.3	4.8	6.2	7.5	9.4	9.4
Last Ofsted inspection	17 November 2023 - Good	21 September 2016 – Good *	11 October 2022 – Requires Improvement	23 October 2012 - Outstanding	13 May 2020 - Good	15 November 2023 - Good
Net Capacity (total places at the school)	105	168	105	105	77	63
Current pupil roll 23/24	76	150	53	101	91	27
Current capacity -/+	29	18	52	4	-14	36
Pupil roll 2024/25	81	158	57	103	89	29
Pupil roll 2025/26	84	158	56	101	87	31
Pupil roll 2026/27	83	161	56	98	82	30
Pupil roll 2027/28	82	168	56	95	79	34
Pupil roll 2028/29	81	168	55	94	78	37
Pupils from outstanding permissions by 2028/29 **	0	0	9	3	11	1
Potential pupils from future housing – Local Plan (over 15 yrs)	0	0	0	0	0	0

*Inspection date prior to academy conversion **Based on 1 primary-aged pupil from every 4 houses