

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNCIL**

#### **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE**

#### **CORPORATE DIRECTOR MEETING WITH EXECUTIVE MEMBERS**

5 November 2024

#### **Hackforth and Hornby 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 Hackforth and Hornby Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School from 31 August 2025.

### **2.0 BACKGROUND AND SUMMARY**

- 2.1 At a recent meeting of the Governing Board of the Hackforth and Hornby Church of England (CE) Voluntary Controlled (VC) Primary School it was reluctantly resolved, following a full discussion about pupil numbers and financial prospects, to invite North Yorkshire Council to commence a consultation on closure of this school.
- 2.2 The Governing Body of Hackforth and Hornby CE VC Primary School, have not reached this decision lightly and have already worked to support the School through a collaboration with the Federation of Snape and Thornton Watlass Primary Schools, which has been in place since September 2021. As part of the collaboration, there is leadership across the three schools, which is led by the Executive Headteacher of the Snape and Thornton Watlass Federation. 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 April 2025. Following final determination by the Executive Committee in April, HR decisions would need to be made in May 2025 if the implications of closure for school staff are to be implemented in August 2025.
- 2.3 The main factor prompting the request is the current number of pupils on roll at Hackforth and Hornby. The School has operated with 32 pupils or below for the last decade. Since the 2020/21 academic year there has been a downward trend of pupil numbers. Pupil numbers fell from 32 in 2020/21 to 19 in 2021/22 and this trend accelerated across the subsequent academic years with the school having 8 pupils on roll in September 2024 and only 2 new starters commenced the term in September.
- 2.4 Finance is also a key concern. The pupil numbers for the October 2024 census form the basis of a schools' funding for the 2025/26 financial year. For the 2025/26 financial year the school is projecting an in-year deficit of £58.5k and a cumulative deficit of £81.6k.
- 2.5 Hackforth and Hornby CE VC Primary School is located in the rural village of Hackforth. Hackforth village lies 4½ miles north of Bedale. The school is defined by the government as a rural school 'that serves a rural hamlet and isolated dwellings'. 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.

### **3.0 HACKFORTH AND HORNBY CHURCH OF ENGLAND VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED PRIMARY SCHOOL**

#### Pupil numbers

**3.1** Hackforth and Hornby is a small rural 4-11 CE VC Primary School and currently has 8 children of statutory school age on roll. The School has operated with circa 30 pupils since 2016/17, reducing further each year since 2020/21. According to each October's pupil census, there has been a downward trend in the number of pupils on roll since 2016/17:

2016/17 – 45 pupils  
2017/18 – 30 pupils  
2018/19 – 29 pupils  
2019/20 – 23 pupils  
2020/21 – 32 pupils  
2021/22 – 19 pupils  
2022/23 – 15 pupils  
2023/24 – 15 pupils  
2024/25 – 8 pupils

**3.2** The current breakdown of the number of pupils of statutory school age at Hackforth and Hornby CE VC Primary School is as follows:

<b>Year Group</b>	<b>Number on Roll</b>
Reception	0
Year 1	0
Year 2	0
Year 3	1
Year 4	1
Year 5	3
Year 6	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>

Since these figures show a higher number of Key Stage 2 age pupils attending, it is likely that these numbers will drop further in the next academic year and this is supported by NHS data showing few pupils aged 2 and 3 (reaching Reception age in September 2025 and 2026) living in the school's catchment area.

Pupil forecasts (based partly on the falling birth-rate in the district) indicate that these numbers will not recover significantly in the longer term and may reduce still further. In these circumstances, it would be difficult to deliver and sustain quality education.

**3.3** The school has a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 6 pupils per year group. The school has a Net Capacity of 42 spaces, and therefore has the potential to contribute 42 places in the local area.

**3.4** The school catchment area had a primary age cohort of 20 children in 2020 and 20 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 table below is based on the number of primary children living in the school's catchment area at the time of the pupil census. The table shows the catchment area having an average primary-aged cohort of around 20 children. This is not usually enough to make the school viable, especially when very few children living within the catchment area attend the school and there are surplus places in other primary schools surrounding the catchment area.

The second column in the table shows the majority of Hackforth and Hornby's in-area children consistently attending other local primary schools. Each October the census records a very low percentage attending the school. It shows over 75% of the in-area children consistently attending other primary schools and in 2022 the percentage of in-area children attending reduced to circa 15%.

	<b>Primary school age children living in catchment</b>	<b>How many of these attended Hackforth and Hornby Primary</b>
2019 Census	16	6
2020 Census	20	5
2021 Census	21	4
2022 Census	19	3
2023 Census	20	2

- 3.5 It should be noted that many pupils attending Hackforth and Hornby CE VC Primary School are out of area pupils. The October 2023 Census shows that that there were only two pupils attending the school at the time from the Hackforth and Hornby catchment area. Three pupils attending were from the Michael Syddall CE VA Primary School's catchment area, two were attending from the catchment area of Crakehall CE Primary School and another two were attending from Wavell Community Primary School's catchment.

### 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.

The school is projecting deficits in year of £27.3k in 2024/25 and £58.5k in 2025/26, and cumulative deficit of £81.6k in 2025/26. These figures are based on current pupil assumptions, so the position could deteriorate further if pupil numbers fall.

The 2024/25 Start Budget for Hackforth and Hornby CE VC Primary School indicated the following revenue budget position:

<b>In year position</b>	<b>Accumulated balance</b>
2024/25 £27.3k deficit	£23k deficit
2025/26 £58.5k deficit	£81.6k deficit
2026/27 £85.6k deficit	£167.2k deficit

There appears to be no reasonable long-term prospect of recovery for the revenue element of the budget given the very low numbers of Reception age children for 2025/26 and 26/27 intakes living with the catchment area.

- 3.6 In the event of Hackforth and Hornby closing on the 31 August 2025, 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 is a leadership across the three schools within the collaboration which is led by the Executive Headteacher of the Snape and Thornton Watlass Federation. Some subject leaders work across the collaboration of three schools.
- 3.8 It is the Governing Board's view that Hackforth and Hornby CE VC Primary School has benefitted significantly from the experienced executive leader provided by the Federation since September 2021. 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, governors have expressed a desire to consult on the closure proposal, due to the low and falling numbers and questions over the viability of the school.

#### Standards and Curriculum

- 3.9 The most recent full graded Ofsted inspection for Hackforth and Hornby was in November 2022. Although the October 2022 pupil census recorded 15 pupils on roll, Ofsted recorded that there were only 12 pupils on roll at the time of their inspection in November 2022.
- 3.10 Ofsted's overall judgement, in their full inspection of the school in 2022, was Good and they commended the collaboration with the Federation of Snape and Thornton Watlass. Their Section 8 (ie Monitoring) Inspection of the school in 2019 confirmed the Good judgement previously made in their full graded inspection in 2010.
- 3.1 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. The Governing Body and the Local Authority have become increasingly concerned that pupils will not have access to the full range of experiences they need, particularly opportunities for working and playing with children their own age.

#### **4.0 PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES IN THE LOCAL AREA**

- 4.1 There are currently 8 pupils of statutory school age on roll at Hackforth and Hornby. 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 five neighbouring schools which are located within 5 miles of Hackforth and Hornby by road. These schools along with their distances from Hackforth and Hornby CE VC Primary School 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 20 pupils living within the Hackforth and Hornby's catchment area and attending North Yorkshire schools. Of those 2 were attending Hackforth and Hornby CE VC Primary School. Another 5 were attending

Bedale CE Primary School, 2 were attending Le Cateau CP Primary School, 2 were attending Crakehall CE Primary School and the remainder were attending a variety of local schools.

- 4.4 Appendix 5 provides projected numbers based on forecast birth rates, with potential additional pupils from outstanding housing permissions and proposed housing allocations in the Hambleton District Local Plan, prepared and adopted by the former Hambleton District Council. 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 Hackforth and Hornby 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 3 and 5 there is available capacity in the local area to ensure sufficiency of school places. Parents of future children living in the current Hackforth and Hornby 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, should Hackforth and Hornby Primary School close, the current school'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 share the catchment area of Hackforth and Hornby between its five surrounding local schools. In the event of the closure of Hackforth and Hornby CE VC Primary School, the school's current catchment area would be shared between Crakehall Church of England Primary School,, Michael Syddall Church of England Aided Primary School,, Aiskew Leeming Bar Church of England Primary School, Kirkby Fleetham Church of England Primary School, and Hunton and Arrathorne Community Primary School. It is proposed that the catchment areas of these schools should each be extended to include the current Hackforth and Hornby catchment area, as a shared catchment area. The current catchment and proposed catchments are shown on maps within Appendix 4. These arrangements would be implemented from September 2025 only in the event of closure for Hackforth and Hornby.

- 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 would be asked to apply for the preferred school(s) that they would like their child to transfer to in September 2025, should Hackforth and Hornby CE VC School close at the end of the current academic year. The overall intention would be to allow application of admissions criteria to each request and avoid 'first come first served'.

- 5.4 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. All Key Stage 1 pupils have applied to transfer early and Admissions officers have already allocated these younger pupils to their preferred school. The preference exercise would allocate places for the remaining Key Stage 2 pupils, in the event of closure.

## **6.0 SCHOOL SITE AND BUILDINGS**

- 6.1 The school building is owned by the Diocese of Leeds, rather than the Council. Decisions about the future of a school building are separate to the 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 Hackforth and Hornby Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School, a consultation paper (Appendix 1) would be circulated to all stakeholders.
- 7.2 A period of six consultation weeks is proposed. A draft timetable is set out below.
- 7.3 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.
- 7.4 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).
- 7.5 Suggested key dates are shown below:

Approval to Consult by Executive Members	5 November 2024
Consultation opens	11 November to 20 December 2024
Public meeting	4 December 2024
Executive considers consultation response	21 January 2025
Executive decision to publish statutory notices	21 January
Publication of statutory notices	31 January 2025
Representation period starts (4 weeks)	31 January
Representation period ends	28 February
Final decision by Executive	18 March 2025
Proposed school closure date	31 August 2025

## 8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills provide approval to consult on proposals that:
- Hackforth and Hornby Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary School should close on 31 August 2025
  - The current Hackforth and Hornby CE VC Primary School catchment area would be shared between Crakehall Church of England Primary School, Michael Syddall Church of England Aided Primary School,, Aiskew Leeming Bar Church of England Primary School, Kirkby Fleetham Church of England Primary School, and Hunton and Arrathorne Community Primary School.

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

Report prepared by Mark Ashton, Strategic Planning Officer

Action Agreed .....Executive Member  
Date:

Action Requested .....Corporate Director  
Date:

**List of Appendices:**

- Appendix 1 - Consultation Paper
- Appendix 2 - Map of the local area
- Appendix 3 - Indicative Table of Places Available in Local Schools
- Appendix 4 - Map showing Current School Catchment areas and Local Schools as well as potential future catchment proposal
- Appendix 5 - Local Schools Capacity and Forecast