

## APPENDIX 4

### Notes of Public Consultation Meeting concerning Hackforth and Hornby CE VC Primary School Closure Proposal.

Meeting held on 4 December 2024 at Hackforth Village Hall.

**Present:** Cllr Annabel Wilkinson (Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills, North Yorkshire Council (NYC)); Jon Holden (Strategic Planning Manager, Children and Young People’s Service (CYPS), NYC); Amanda Newbold (Assistant Director, Inclusion, CYPS, NYC); Rachel Conyers (Admissions and Appeals Officer, CYPS, NYC); Lisa Herdman (Lead for Admissions, CYPS, NYC); Karen Butler (Senior Education Adviser, NYC); Dorothy Longstaff (Chair of Hackforth and Hornby Primary School’s Governing Body); Dan Spencer (Parent Governor); David Keep (Co-opted Governor); Laura Moss (co-opted Governor); Jane Wood (Executive Headteacher, collaboration with the Snape and Thornton Watlass Federation); Simone Bennett, Director of Education, The Church of England Diocese of Leeds; Graeme Dodd, Hackforth Combined Parish Council; School staff, pupils, parents, residents and other interested parties

**Apologies:** None  
32 people were present.

#### AGENDA

5.30	Meeting Opens – Brief welcome	Jon Holden
5.35	Opening Remarks	Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills
5.40	Presentation from NYC on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The proposal</li><li>• Background to the proposal</li><li>• How can people comment</li></ul>	Local Authority Officer
5.55	Questions and Answers	Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills
6.25	Closing Remarks	
6.30	Meeting Closes	

#### 1. Welcome

Jon Holden, Strategic Planning Manager, NYC, opened the public meeting at 5.30 pm and he welcomed those present.

He then introduced Councillor Annabel Wilkinson, the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills at NYC; Jane Wood, Executive Headteacher of Hackforth and Hornby Primary, and the Snape and Thornton Watlass Federation; Rachel Conyers and Lisa Herdman from School Admissions, NYC; and Karen Butler, Senior Education Adviser, NYC.

Jon Holden introduced Dorothy Longstaff, Chair of the Governing Board of Hackforth and Hornby Primary School, saying he was grateful for her attendance and the attendance of some of the other school governors.

He also introduced Simone Bennett, Director of Education, The Church of England Diocese of Leeds. Simone Bennett said that the closure proposal was a sad reflection of a national issue amongst small church schools and encouraged everyone present to put in their comments regarding this consultation.

## **2. Executive Member's Opening Remarks**

The Chair, Cllr Wilkinson, said it was good to see so many people in attendance. She recognised that this was a difficult period for many people and hoped that everyone would contribute to the discussion. She referred to the agenda and said that first there would be a presentation by the Local Authority on the proposal.

Cllr Wilkinson said, between them, representatives of the Local Authority and the School would then answer questions on the proposal. She said there would be an opportunity to hear people's views in the question-and-answer session following the presentation.

## **3. Presentation from NYC**

The Strategic Planning Manager, NYC, Jon Holden presented several Powerpoint slides. He explained that the proposal was to close Hackforth and Hornby CE VC Primary School, from 31 August 2025. He said that the purpose of the meeting was to listen to views on the proposal with all comments noted and referred to the NYC Executive Committee.

Jon Holden explained the roles and responsibilities in determining the proposal. The Executive Committee of NYC is the decision maker, Cllr Wilkinson is impartial in this process, and officers of the Local Authority are conducting the consultation on behalf of the council. The Governing Body had requested the consultation, however the Council then determines the proposal and it is not a decision the Governing Body can make.

Jon Holden presented further slides on the background to the proposal. These included information on how pupil numbers in the school had declined steadily from 2017, when there were 47 pupils in the school, up to the present date when there are only 8 pupils on roll. Since these 8 pupils are Junior aged pupils, and there are no Infant aged pupils on roll, the number could decline even further.

Jon Holden used pupil forecasts to explain the rationale behind the proposal to cease to maintain the school from 31 August 2025. NHS data on children in the catchment area show only one Reception age child living in catchment for the 2025/26 intake and none for the 2026/27 intake. With falling birth rates, numbers are unlikely to recover. Many in-area children currently attend other local schools.

Jon Holden then explained the financial impact of the fall in numbers, since revenue funding is largely determined by pupil numbers. He explained how this has led to a forecast in-year deficit of £27,300 in 2024/25 and £58,500 in 2025/26k and cumulative deficit of £87,000 in 2025/26, which could deteriorate further as numbers fall.

If the school does close, there is available capacity in the local area to ensure sufficiency of school places and a table was shown to illustrate this. In the event of closure it is proposed that the catchment of area of five local schools could be extended to include the current Hackforth and Hornby catchment area, as a shared catchment area.

The statutory guidance relating to 'discontinuing' a school were referenced, together with how the building and land would potentially be utilised going forward. Jon Holden stressed that the LA would focus on working with parents of existing pupils at the school as a priority, with issues relating to the land dealt with later.

Jon Holden concluded by explaining the consultation and he emphasised that a two-stage consultation process would take place before any decision on the proposal is taken. All views expressed at this public meeting would form part of the report which is considered when the decision on whether to proceed to the second statutory consultation is taken. The statutory consultation is a further 4-week period when there is a further opportunity for comments and responses.

He then handed over to Cllr Wilkinson, who thanked him and re-iterated that this is a consultation, and a decision has not yet been taken. Cllr Wilkinson then chaired the question-and-answer session.

#### **4. Questions and Answers – chaired by Cllr Annabel Wilkinson.**

Cllr Wilkinson invited questions from those present.

A parent asked why the Catterick Garrison schools could not be asked to take pupils from Hackforth and Hornby Primary.

Jon Holden said that the LA cannot compel parents to make applications to schools.

A teacher said she knew of a parent who had moved into the school's catchment area and had been given information from the LA about other schools in the area who are oversubscribed. She asked why the LA were not giving details of Hackforth and Hornby and asked how people would know they exist otherwise.

Jon Holden responded that the LA does provide that information when parents ask about schools within the vicinity of their home address. He referred to the online tool on the NYC school website which parents can use to find out their catchment and nearest schools. Ultimately however, the LA must try and meet parental preference over which they have no control.

A parent said that local schools are oversubscribed which is a reason for promoting Hackforth and Hornby Primary. She asked what the LA is doing to promote this. Ms Walton said she has four children who may eventually be at four different schools.

Jon Holden said the LA would support parents to find alternative schools if necessary.

A parent said she knew of parents who had applied for places at schools listed in Mr Holden's presentation who had been turned down. She wanted to know why the presentation showed places being available.

Jon Holden said that the information he had presented was the details provided by those schools and it would be better to discuss individual cases at the end of the meeting.

A teacher asked how children at the school with specialist needs would be supported, given that other local schools are at capacity in dealing with SEND. She was aware that parents are anxious about this.

A former parent and school governor asked what role the LA and Diocese play in ensuring that small schools have pupils in them.

Simone Bennett, Director of Education, The Church of England Diocese of Leeds, said that they are working at national level to ensure support for smaller Faith schools. However, it must be recognised that falling rolls in small schools is a challenge for everyone and there is

not an easy fix. The staff at the Diocese speak to the LA on a termly basis to look at the issue strategically. Parents have a choice in which school their child attends and several children in this area attend schools out of catchment due to work arrangements. Affordable housing within some rural communities is not always available to younger families.

Councillor Wilkinson said that any consultation to close a school is a difficult decision. The LA and School Governing Body looked at a number of options to try and find a workable solution for the future of the school, but this was not possible with the reduction in pupil numbers and the limitations in the social environment and breadth of curriculum they could provide for the children.

Jon Holden said that the LA works with the Governing Body of schools to ensure that they are managed correctly. However, the school funding arrangements at national level are not designed with small schools in mind. The LA are lobbying for this to be considered at national level given that this is where funding formulas are set.

A teacher asked who is eligible for transport to school.

Jon Holden gave a brief overview of the home to school travel policy – children are eligible for transport if they live above the statutory walking distance from their nearest suitable school that has places. The LA takes account of safe walking routes (as per Road Safety GB guidance).

A teacher asked if this applied to all children?

Jon Holden confirmed that it did.

A teacher asked who would be responsible for severance pay to staff if the school closed and if that would be part of the redundancy package. Could the sale of the building and land form part of that?

Jon Holden said that this particular consultation is about the school as an entity and any budgetary issues would be dealt with at a later point if the school closed.

A parent asked Mr Holden to go over the transport policy again.

Jon Holden reiterated the travel policy.

A parent asked for clarification of the term 'suitable' in this context.

Mr Holden said it referred to all schools (community, academy, faith) but not independent schools.

A parent asked if the travel policy took away parental choice.

Jon Holden said no, the travel policy and the admissions policy are separate.

A parent said her children were not eligible for transport to their current school and so it did impact her choice. She felt that 'suitable' related to a school deemed suitable by the LA which may not be suitable in her opinion for her children.

A teacher said the comments made by Mr Holden seemed to juxtapose each other and asked how does a parent have choice if they don't have transport to a school? She thought the LA should consider admissions and transport together rather than separately.

A local resident said that in a previous school closure there had been different measurements used to determine how far someone lived from a school, including 'as the crow flies'.

Jon Holden explained that the LA uses its own measuring system which takes the nearest walked route.

Simone Bennett said that it was important to remember there are different arrangements in place for school closures, depending on the individual circumstances.

A parent said there were no footpaths along the walked route to the school that her children may attend and wanted clarification on whether her children would get transport on safety grounds.

Jon Holden said that the LA would deal with these matters during discussions with parents at a later date.

A former teacher at Hackforth and Hornby said that when she started work at the school there were five children in key stage 1 and pupil numbers had always gone up and down. They had to fight to attract children to the school. She wanted to know whether there was anything else the LA could do to promote this school as it seems tragic for it to close.

Councillor Wilkinson said that the Headteacher and Governors had worked very hard to keep pupil numbers up but falling birth rates, and the element of parental choice had prevented this.

Jon Holden said the decision to run a consultation was not made lightly. There is no suggestion that educational standards or management of the school is poor. However, the Governing Board does need to address the budget deficit.

A parent said the reputation of the school is good and seems a very hard decision.

A School Governor said no stone had been left unturned in trying to redress the budget deficit, but it was very difficult to get parents to choose the school for their children and the level of funding issues meant that the school could no longer provide a suitable level of education for children.

The Chair of the Governing Board of Hackforth and Hornby Primary School said new housing in the area was not suitable for families with young children and parents had exercised their right to choose where to educate their children.

Amanda Newbold, Assistant Director, Inclusion, clarified that it was the responsibility of the Headteacher and the Governing Body to promote the school and the advice and options provided to parents by the LA has to be done for all schools. The numbers of parents phoning the LA to ask about Hackforth and Hornby as a school has reduced, the birth rate in the area is falling so provision of a nursery on the school site would not make sufficient difference. The School Improvement Team gives advice and support to the Governing Body. It's important to remember what is done for one school has to be done for all schools.

A parent asked if the transport policy was local or national and if there was any discretion in what is provided.

Jon Holden said that there are statutory elements which all LAs follow. There is some room for discretion but not much.

A parent wanted clarification on some details relating to the arrangements for her children.

Jon Holden reminded her that this information will be dealt with as part of the LAs individual discussions with parents.

A parent asked if it was true that children over the age of 8 travel alone.

Jon Holden said that the age of 8 relates to the age at which the statutory walking distance changes from 2 miles to 3 miles.

The decision as to whether a pupil walks alone rests with parents

A teacher asked if advertising schools is allowed and what support a school can expect from the LA in terms of raising its profile amongst the public.

Jon Holden clarified that schools can advertise and that this is a school level responsibility. The LA lists all schools on the NYC website.

Councillor Wilkinson asked the teacher if she had raised the issue of advertising with their School Improvement Adviser.

A parent said that people only know of the school by word of mouth.

A teacher said that the public don't know the school exists and asked why the LA don't recommend the school.

Jon Holden said that the LA does not recommend individual schools, that is not their job, staff in school admissions can only give advice to parents on the schools within the parent's local area (e.g. catchment, nearest, schools within a particular radius).

Simone Bennett said that if you drive around some areas of the county there are banners on railings advertising schools.

A teacher said they had put banners up but asked what the LA do.

Councillor Wilkinson said this was down to the school leadership team and the Governing Body but acknowledged the difficulties faced by small rural schools.

A Governor said that any marketing done by an individual school must not encroach upon the catchment areas covered by other local schools.

Dorothy Longstaff, chair of Governors, said the Governors had worked very hard on publicising the school, taking banners to every church function in the diocese area, putting articles into church magazines and leaflets through doors. She confirmed that parents and pupils like the school once they get through the door.

A governor said they had updated the school website which had also been an initiative to improve the information available to prospective parents.

Doreen Longstaff said that parents and children like the school once they visit.

Cllr Wilkinson thanked everyone for their comments.

## **5. CLOSING REMARKS**

Jon Holden drew the meeting to a close by thanking everyone for their comments and questions.

Cllr Wilkinson said the comments about the proposal had been useful. She assured those present that all their comments would be included in the minutes and considered in the final report.

The Meeting Closed at 6.30pm.