

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Lead Member for Children's Services
Date:	10 November 2021
Title:	The Future of Hatherden Church of England Primary School
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to outline the position regarding Hatherden Church of England Primary School.
2. In conclusion the improved standards at Hatherden Church of England Primary School are not able to be maintained without significant and continuing input from HIAS and the Diocese. The failure of the DfE and RSC to secure a sponsor to take the school on, when coupled with falling pupil numbers and an increasing financial deficit means closure of the school should be considered.

Recommendation(s)

3. It is recommended that the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services approve the commencement of a consultation to consider the closure of the school with effect from 31 August 2022.

Executive Summary

4. This report seeks approval to begin the process of undertaking a consultation process around the potential closure of Hatherden Church of England Primary School with effect from 31 August 2022.

Summary

5. Hatherden Church of England Primary School is a small rural Church of England (Aided) school. It's performance, as rated by Ofsted, has been inconsistent. Over the past seven years it has been judged to be failing in two Ofsted judgements, the most recent in July 2019.
6. The school has received further monitoring visits in February 2020, November 2020, January 2021 and May 2021. Following these Section 8 inspections the school remains in a category of concern, despite improvements that have been noted. These improvements rely heavily upon external support.
7. As the school is currently judged as Inadequate, the Department for Education (DfE) has served an academy order on the school. The DfE has been trying to secure an academy sponsor but have been unsuccessful owing to the low number of pupils and the consequent long term financial and educational sustainability of the school. A letter is attached from the Regional Schools Commissioner setting out their position.
8. Discussions have been held with the Diocese about the future of the school and the general consensus of opinion is that a consultation process should commence around the closure of the school. A letter is attached outlining the diocese position regarding the school.
9. The school had 47 pupils on roll in the October 2020 census, but this has reduced over the last year to 34 pupils as parents continue to choose other schools. Four pupils have joined in the Early Years reception age range this year so far against a PAN of 16, (9 September 2021).
10. Budget reductions, driven by smaller pupil numbers, have led to restructuring of staff and a consequential widening of responsibilities that continues to reduce management capacity.

School Performance and support from the Local Authority

11. In October 2014 Hatherden Church of England Primary School was categorised "Inadequate" by Ofsted. Although a subsequent inspection in September 2015 rated the school as "Good", following a period of Local Authority (LA) support, it has been unable to sustain this rating. It was last inspected in July 2019, when inspectors judged the school to have serious weaknesses (Inadequate). The inspectors noted that safeguarding arrangements required urgent review and sharpening. In addition, inspectors noted that leaders needed to improve the leadership and management of the school, including governance, the quality of teaching and learning, and the progress made by pupils in writing and mathematics.

12. The school has benefitted from intensive, and largely funded, support from HIAS in order to improve the educational experiences and safeguarding of children in the school. Further support has also been provided through the Diocese and DfE funded school to school support through a Teaching School.
13. Since the inspection in 2019, Ofsted have monitored the school three times. At each of the monitoring visits where Ofsted made a judgement, inspectors noted that leaders, and those responsible for governance were taking effective action. Despite this, inspectors also noted that the impact of the extensive external support provided to the school, by the LA and the local teaching school, has been impeded by ongoing changes in the school's structure and leadership related to the fall in pupil numbers, as well as the challenges of the pandemic. It is likely that, following the pattern seen before, when the LA reduces its support, the school will be unable to maintain the progress it has made to date.
14. In the January 2021 inspection it was acknowledged that leaders and those responsible for governance are taking effective action to provide education in the current circumstances. It was also noted that a number of pupils had left the school and the school was now running two classes for the number of pupils on roll.
15. The Section 8 inspection in May 2021 concluded that leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of the serious weaknesses designation. However, it also explained that "leaders' work to improve the curriculum remains ongoing. A number of factors have impeded the pace of this urgently needed work. Managing changes to the school's structure and leadership led to some initial momentum being lost." It further comments, "The local authority and diocese continue to invest heavily in supporting the school. By coordinating their work, this is enabling leaders to concentrate on a streamlined set of school-improvement priorities. Currently, local authority and diocesan support are focused on curriculum planning. This work is freeing up school leaders' capacity to focus on other priorities and the day-to-day running of the school."
16. It is also the view of the Local Authority School Improvement Team that the changes in staffing related to falling numbers, and associated budget pressures, has an adverse effect on leaders and teachers' collective capacity to improve the school at a sufficient pace, despite the considerable external support they receive. In addition, when the school is once again good, and no-longer receives additional support, it will be challenging for a school of this size, with the related reduced leadership and teaching capacity, to respond to the common place challenges faced by schools on a regular basis, such as the recent review of the primary curriculum. Similarly, the many and various leadership and management roles that are typically shared out amongst a range of school staff will, in this school, sit with only the headteacher and one teacher.

17. This presents leaders and governors with challenges around the effectiveness of leadership and management in addition to the workload and wellbeing of individual staff. There are also implications for children of attending a school of this size, not least the social and emotional effects of a reduced peer group or indeed of being the only child in the school in a year group. The school has already lost pupils because parents want them to attend a school with children their own age and this leaves those pupils who remain at Hatherden increasingly isolated from their peers.

Finance

18. Set out in the table below is the budgetary position for the school for the next few years.

<i>Financial year</i>	<i>In Year +surplus / -deficit £</i>	<i>Cumulative position £</i>
<i>Balance from 2020/21</i>		<i>+88,222</i>
<i>2021/22</i>	<i>+31,306</i>	<i>+119,528</i>
<i>2022/23</i>	<i>-43,006</i>	<i>+76,523</i>
<i>2023/24</i>	<i>-32,387</i>	<i>+44,136</i>

19. The in-year surplus for 2021/22 is because the school received funding for 47 pupils as per the October census and the school has run three classes with the Headteacher teaching for part of the time.

20. The in-year deficit for 2022/23 assumes the school will be funded for 29 pupils (although this could be 31 depending on recruitment into YR) and will run two classes.

21. For the 2023/24 financial year there is an assumption that the school will be funded for 30 pupils and continue to run two classes.

Numbers on roll

22. As set out above there are now 34 pupils on roll at the school. Only 5 of these children currently live within the catchment area of Hatherden. There are 26 primary age pupils living in Hatherden so many parents are already choosing a school, other than Hatherden, for their children (mostly other small rural schools with a church connection). The forecast for the school shows a continued drop in pupil numbers (this assumes that parents will continue to choose other schools for their children during the academic year).

23. It has always been the case that for the school to be full it has needed to attract out of catchment pupils. For the 2019/20 academic year the school

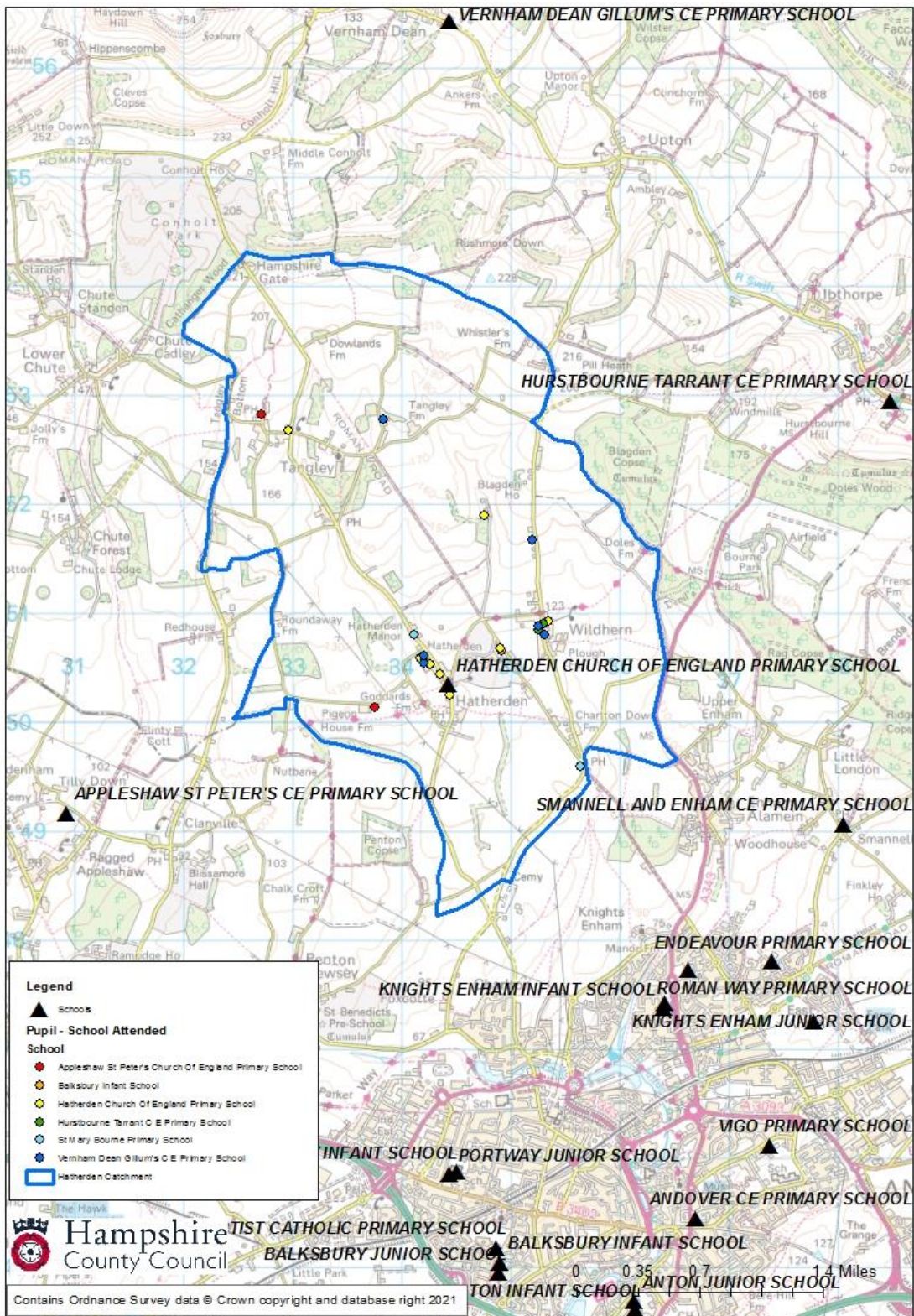
had 15 pupils join in YR. By the time this cohort had moved into Y1, for the following academic year, this number had dropped to 10. This trend is being seen in some other year groups within the school but not such a high level. Although current Y5 and Y6 is stable, all other year groups, with the exception of current Y1 where there is under-capacity in schools in the whole area, have declined from 2020/21 to 2021/22 school years.

24. The table below shows how the numbers in each year group has changed since the census day in October 2020 and 9 September 2021.

	October 2020	9 September 2021
YR	8	4
Y1	10	12
Y2	8	4
Y3	5	2
Y4	3	4
Y5	5	3
Y6	8	5
Total	47	34

Home to School Travel

25. Should Hatherden Church of England Primary School close there will be a Home to School Transport burden. The current forecasts of children living in nearby school catchment areas are such that Appleshaw St Peter's Primary School is best placed to become the catchment school for this area if Hatherden were to close. Primary phase home to school transport costs in the local area are currently ~ £1340 per pupil per annum. There are approximately 35 primary age pupils resident in the Hatherden Church of England Primary School catchment area although not all are known to attend a Hampshire County Council maintained school. This provides a maximum forecast estimate for the additional transport budget burden of £47,000 per annum. Considering the number of children from Hatherden's catchment area attending only Hampshire County Council maintained schools leads to a lower additional estimated burden of £28,000 per annum.
26. On the next page is a map of the area showing the position of each of the neighbouring primary phase schools.



Closure of the School

27. There is a presumption against the closure of a rural school but that does not mean that a rural school will never close although it does mean that the LA has to consider a number of issues before commencing a consultation to close the school. As an aided school one of the areas that needs to be considered is the availability of places at other schools in the area with church connections. For Hatherden there are other primary schools in the area with church connections as set out above, i.e. Appleshaw, Hurstbourne Tarrant, Vernham Dean and Smannell and Enham.
28. Should the consultation on the potential closure of Hatherden Church of England Primary School be approved a draft timetable of activity is set out below:

Decision day – report seeking to obtain Approval to Consult	10 November 2021
Public Consultation – 4 weeks as per HCC policy	12 November – 10 December 2021
Report to ELMCS on consultation seeking approval to publish a Public Notice	14 January 2022
If approved, Publish notice – 4 weeks	21 January – 18 February 2022
Closing date for representations	18 February 2022
Cabinet Decision on closure – must be within 2 months from the end of consultation period	15 March 2022
If agreed, school would close	31 August 2022

Human Resources Implications

29. Should the proposal be agreed discussions will take place with the staff at Hatherden Church of England Primary School and the recognised trade unions.

Performance Impact

30. Hatherden Church of England Primary School has failed two Ofsted inspections and with no possibility of a sponsor being able to be secured by either the DfE or RSC to take on the running of the school, the improvements made through the support provided by the local authority will not be sustained, therefore standards will drop as soon as that support is removed.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	Yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	Yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	Yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	Yes

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1. Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2. Equalities Impact Assessment:

See guidance at <https://hants.sharepoint.com/sites/ID/SitePages/Equality-Impact-Assessments.aspx?web=1>

Insert in full your **Equality Statement** which will either state:

- why you consider that the project/proposal will have a low or no impact on groups with protected characteristics or*
- will give details of the identified impacts and potential mitigating actions*

CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACT ASSESSMENTS

Climate Change Adaptation

The proposals set out in this report will have no impact on climate change and therefore no adaptation is required.

Carbon Mitigation

The proposals set out in this report will not require any form of carbon mitigation to be undertaken if approved.