



# OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

## STATUTORY PROPOSAL

The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance) (England)  
Regulations 2013

### **Closure of Culham Parochial Church of England Primary School**

#### **1. Contact details**

**This proposal published by:**

**Local Authority:** Oxfordshire County Council

**Address:** County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND

**This proposal relates to:**

**School:** Culham Parochial CE Primary School (voluntary controlled)

**Address:** High Street, Culham, Abingdon OX14 4NB

#### **2. Outline of proposal**

Oxfordshire County Council, working with the Thames Bridge Church of England Federation, proposes to merge Culham Parochial Church of England Primary School and Clifton Hampden Church of England Primary School, leading to the formal closure of Culham Parochial Church of England Primary School.

Clifton Hampden's intake will increase from 10 pupils per year to 15 pupils per year to accommodate the displaced pupils. No additional accommodation will be provided at Clifton Hampden CE Primary School, as their existing accommodation is already sufficient for up to 105 pupils.

#### **3. Implementation**

It is proposed to close Culham Parochial Primary School by the end of the 2019/20 school year, either at Easter 2020 or at the end of the school year. The exact timing will depend on how quickly it is possible to achieve the necessary processes.

In the meantime, pupils enrolled at Culham Parochial CE Primary School will be taught on the site of Clifton Hampden CE Primary School.

#### **4. Reasons for closure**

Closure of Culham Parochial CE Primary School is considered necessary because of persistently low pupil numbers, and the consequent impact on the financial viability of the school and the curriculum offer it can provide.

Culham Parochial Church of England Primary School is now the smallest primary school in Oxfordshire, with pupil numbers falling to around 30 primary pupils on roll by the end of the 2018/19 school year.

When inspected by Ofsted in February 2017 and May 2019 it was judged as 'Requires Improvement' on both occasions. Pupil attainment data over the last three years show that pupils have lower scores in reading, writing and maths than the county or England average, and in general made below average progress.

Government guidance is that a school can be closed if:

- It is to be 'amalgamated' with another school.
  - It is proposed to amalgamate Culham Parochial with Clifton Hampden Primary School.
- There are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils.
  - Clifton Hampden CE Primary School, with which Culham Parochial is federated, can accommodate all pupils who would be displaced in Culham Parochial closes.
  - In the wider area there are surplus primary school places (see section 8, below). There is currently no evidence that the local pupil population will grow, at least in the short to medium term. Because the birth rate has fallen in recent years, there would continue to be sufficient school places in this area should Culham Parochial be closed.
- It is no longer considered viable.
  - The school's pupil numbers are too low to generate sufficient funding to cover the costs of staffing and maintaining the building. The school has a significant budget deficit.

#### **5. Pupil numbers and admissions**

Culham Parochial CE Primary School is a coeducational mainstream school which currently offer places for 10 primary pupils per year group, in the age range 4-11, with a total capacity of 67 pupils. It previously operated a nursery class for 3-year-olds, providing 15 part-time equivalent places, but is not currently admitting into the nursery class due to low demand.

#### **6. Displaced pupils**

Displaced pupils will be offered places at Clifton Hampden Church of England Primary School, High Street, Clifton Hampden, Abingdon OX14 3EG, which has sufficient accommodation for the pupils currently on roll at Culham Parochial Church of England Primary School. Parents may also choose to apply to other schools which have available places, and which in some cases may be closer to where pupils live.

The transfer of pupils can be accommodated at Clifton Hampden CE Primary School through the school increasing its intake from 10 pupils per year to 15 pupils per year. It does not require an enlargement of premises at Clifton Hampden CE Primary School.

As of September 2019, Culham Parochial CE Primary School has 15 pupils on roll. The distribution across year groups is as follows:

Reception	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
0	1	4	4	0	5	1

As of September 2019, Clifton Hampden CE Primary School has 82 pupils on roll. The distribution across year groups is as follows:

Reception	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
15	12	11	10	17	10	7

From September 2019, all 97 pupils enrolled at Culham Parochial CE Primary School and Clifton Hampden CE Primary School are being taught at Clifton Hampden CE Primary School, which, following a reorganisation of how it uses its accommodation, can provide places for 105 pupils.

The combined numbers on roll, by year group, are as follows:

Reception	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
15	13	15	14	17	15	8

If the closure of Culham Parochial CE Primary School is approved, the pupils currently enrolled at the school would continue to be taught at Clifton Hampden CE Primary School on a permanent basis, unless their families choose to transfer them to an alternative school.

## **7. Impact on the community**

A consultation was carried out in June/July 2019 into the potential impact of the proposed reorganisation of education in this area. This identified a potential negative impact on the community, specifically:

- The loss of an important community facility in a village with no other (non-church) meeting place.

- The school site and building is owned by a charitable trust, and so the decision on whether to keep the building open to the community would be made separately to this consultation process.
- The loss of the primary school would deter families from moving to the village.
  - There is another school in Culham, The Europa School, which attracts some families because of the bilingual education it provides, but there is a risk that some families will be deterred from moving to Culham. However, children from Culham would be able to attend Clifton Hampden CE primary School, a popular school rated “Good” by Ofsted.
- Increased traffic and parking issues in Clifton Hampden.
  - Travel is dealt with below. A Travel Plan for Clifton Hampden CE Primary School will consider the increased pupil numbers. Parking for Clifton Hampden School is available at the village hall and at the social club, and parents will be reminded to use these rather than parking near local residents’ driveways.

## **8. Rural primary schools**

Culham Parochial CE Primary School is designated as a rural primary school under The Designation of Rural Primary Schools (England) Order. In making this proposal, the local authority has considered section 15(4) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, and the statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers relating to opening and closing maintained schools. In particular, it has considered:

- The likely effect of the closure of the school, and of the loss of the building as a community facility, on local people and the community.
  - This is considered in section 7, above.
- The proportion of pupils attending the school from within the local community i.e. is the school being used by the local community.
  - Data for pupils on roll at Culham Parochial CE Primary School for the 2018/19 school year show that under half of the pupils on roll at this time lived within the school’s designated (“catchment”) area. Pupils mostly travel from Abingdon, Sutton Courtenay and Berinsfield, where school places are available.
  - School census data for the school year 2018/19 show that over half of state primary school pupils living in Culham attended schools other than Culham Parochial CE Primary School, with a significant number attending the Europa School, also in Culham.
- Educational standards at the school, including whether the size of the school puts the children at an educational disadvantage (e.g. in terms of breadth of curriculum or resources available) and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools.

- Culham Parochial CE Primary School has an Ofsted rating of 'Requires Improvement', and pupil attainment scores show below average progress at the school.
- Because of Culham Parochial CE Primary School's small size, it is more difficult for the school to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, and to balance its budget. To maintain the educational opportunities for pupils, some activities are already carried out jointly by Culham Parochial CE Primary School and Clifton Hampden CE Primary School.
- The proposed merger would improve educational opportunities and standards of children living in this area. The Thames Bridge Church of England Federation would be able to concentrate resources in one school rather than spread them across two separate schools. This would improve outcomes for pupils at both existing schools.
- The availability, and likely cost to the LA, of transport to other schools.
  - Transport will be provided by the county council as set out in Section 10, below.
- Wider school organisation and capacity of good schools in the area to accommodate displaced pupils, and whether the school is now surplus to requirements (e.g. because there are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils, and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium or long term).
  - Clifton Hampden CE Primary School was judged as 'Good' at its last Ofsted inspection in February 2016. Pupil attainment data over the last three years show that pupils have higher scores in reading, writing and maths than the county or England average. The school has sufficient space to accommodate displaced pupils from Culham Parochial CE Primary School. There are also sufficient spare places at other nearby schools in the area for families who choose those.
  - As of May 2019, there were 24% spare primary school places overall in the Abingdon East planning area (which comprises Culham Parochial CE Primary School, Clifton Hampden CE Primary School, Abbey Woods Academy, Dorchester St Birinus CE School and Europa School). The proposed merger of the two schools would reduce this to 22% spare capacity, still a significant surplus of places. (Advice from the Audit Commission is that 5-10% spare capacity is reasonable.)
  - Due to declining birth rates, forecasts do not suggest a significant increase in demand for places in the area in the future. While the draft SODC Local Plan proposes large-scale housing developments in the surrounding area, this is not yet confirmed, and there is no timescale for significant local housing growth.
  - School places are available in Abingdon, Sutton Courtenay and Berinsfield, where a significant number of Culham pupils live.
  - The merger of these two schools would therefore be in line with wider school organisation and capacity planning.
- Any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the closure of the school, and the likely effects of any such increase.

- This is considered in Section 10, below.
- Any alternatives to the closure of the school.
  - Following a previous consultation (2012) into closing the school, it instead federated with Clifton Hampden CE Primary School as part of the Thames Bridge Church of England Federation. This has not resulted in significant improvements to the educational standards at the school or its financial viability.
  - As pupil numbers in the area are not expected to grow significantly, conversion to academy status is unlikely to increase demand for places at the school. Conversion to academy status and joining a multi-academy trust is not considered a realistic option, as sponsors would be reluctant to take on a school with sustained budget difficulties.
  - There is not expected to be sufficient local demand for use of the school site to provide services such as childcare to increase its viability. Culham Parochial CE Primary School hosted a pre-school for many years and subsequently offered their own nursery places for two years but these did not prove permanently viable (at the time of the nursery's closure in May 2019 there were only 4 pupils on roll).

## **9. Balance of denominational provision**

Culham Parochial CE Primary School is a Church of England School, and the proposed closure would involve amalgamation with Clifton Hampden CE School, which has the same religious designation. Other Church of England schools nearby or in the surrounding area include Sutton Courtenay CE Primary School, St Nicolas CE Primary School and Dorchester St Birinus CE Primary School. There is also a Catholic school (St Edmund's Catholic Primary School and Foundation Stage Unit in Abingdon) and a number of schools offering secular education within reasonable distance of Culham Parochial CE Primary School. As a result, it is not considered that the proposed closure would have a significant impact on the balance of schools offering faith-based and secular education, or on parental choice in this respect.

## **10. Travel**

As the majority of pupils on roll at Culham Parochial CE Primary School live outside the designated area, they are already transported by motor vehicles, and therefore closure of the school is unlikely to significantly increase the use of motor vehicles to transport children to school. In some cases, parents living outside the designated area will choose to send their children to closer schools, and travel distances and use of motor vehicles for school transport may therefore decrease.

For the 2019/2020 school year, pupils on roll at Culham Parochial CE Primary School will be educated at Clifton Hampden CE Primary School, and a bus will be provided by OCC to transport these children between the two schools at the beginning and end of the school day. The estimated cost to the county council of providing this transport over the time period September 2019 – July 2020 is £45,410.

Beyond this, if Culham Parochial CE Primary School were to close, and parents chose to transfer their children permanently to Clifton Hampden CE Primary School, the county council will provide free transport to Clifton Hampden for pupils currently enrolled at Culham Parochial CE Primary School, until they leave Clifton Hampden CE Primary School. The cost to the county council of providing this transport will apply over a maximum time period September 2020 – July 2025 (when the youngest pupils currently enrolled at Culham Parochial CE Primary School will transfer to secondary school) and would be expected to decline as the affected pupils transfer to secondary school.

For new intakes of pupils after the school year 2019/2020, free transport will be assessed according to the Home to School Travel & Transport Policy, which provides for free home to school transport for children under 8 who have to travel more than 2 miles, and children of 8 and over who have to travel more than 3 miles, to the nearest school with available places.

## **11. Objections and comments**

If you wish your view to be taken into account when the county council makes a decision on this proposal, it is important that you submit a response through this statutory representation process, even if you have already responded to the informal consultation held in June/July 2019.

Comments or objections, or statements of support, must be received by the local authority by **Monday 14 October 2019**.

Respond by:

- Using the online questionnaire at [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/culhamclosure](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/culhamclosure)
- Emailing [school.planning@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:school.planning@oxfordshire.gov.uk) (*please quote 'Culham Closure' in the header*)
- Handing in a written response at the reception office of Clifton Hampden Church of England Primary School
- Posting a written response to **Joanne Booker, Access to Learning, Oxfordshire County Council, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor County Hall, Oxford OX1 1ND**, marking your envelope CULHAM CLOSURE

There will also be a public meeting held to discuss this proposal at 6.30pm on Monday 23 September 2019, at Culham Parochial CE Primary School.

## **12. Decision-making**

The decision-maker for this proposed change is Oxfordshire County Council. The decision will be made by the Cabinet at a meeting which is open to the public, and publicised on the county council's website. The decision must be

made within a period of two months of the end of this representation period, and is currently expected on 19 November 2019.