

MATTERS TO BE SPECIFIED IN SECTION 15 PROPOSALS TO DISCONTINUE A SCHOOL

Extract of Schedule 4 to The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools)(England) Regulations 2007 (as amended):

Contact details

1. The name of the LA or governing body publishing the proposals, and a contact address, and the name of the school it is proposed that should be discontinued.

Proposal published by Oxfordshire County Council, County Hall, New Road, Oxford, OX1 1ND

Proposal to close Culham Parochial Church of England Primary School, High Street, Culham, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 4NB

Implementation

2. The date when it is planned that the proposals will be implemented, or, where the proposals are to be implemented in stages, information about each stage and the date on which each stage is planned to be implemented.

31 August 2011

Consultation

3. A statement to the effect that all applicable statutory requirements to consult in relation to the proposals were complied with.

All applicable statutory requirements to consult have been complied with.

4. Evidence of the consultation before the proposals were published including:

- a) a list of persons and/or parties who were consulted;
- b) minutes of all public consultation meetings;
- c) the views of the persons consulted; and
- d) copies of all consultation documents and a statement of how these were made available.

a) Consultation was carried out with staff, governors and parents at Culham Parochial Primary School; local residents; local councillors (parish, district and county) and MPs; trade unions representing staff at the school; other local primary and nursery schools; CE and RC dioceses; and other interested parties.

b) A meeting was held at the school on 7 December 2010, attended by 60-70 members of the public, Roy Leach (OCC) and Gordon Joyner (Oxford Diocese).

The following points were raised :

- The number of children who had recently left the school
- Cost of providing alternative provision
- Steps taken to recruit a Headteacher.
- Whether there had been sufficient prior information about the school's difficulties.
- Praise for quality of education (in years past) and at present.
- Previous years' budgets.
- Traffic issues, especially re Culham to Sutton Courtenay.
- Loss of village amenities and facilities would be compounded by loss of school.
- Importance of school to the community. OCC has let the community down.
- Concerns about leadership/governance of the school had not been addressed.
- Role of Governing body (placed school in this situation).
- Impact of possible closure on potential recruitment of headteacher.
- Success of small schools versus large.
- Insufficient time to put forward other proposals. Extension to consultation period requested.
- Quality of care in small school.
- Fate of buildings if school closed?
- Should prospective parents continue to apply for Culham?
- Failure of management.
- Academy option/free school.
- Parish council – supportive keeping school open.
- LA advice always taken by governors, implies culpability
- Is top up funding possible if number on roll increased post pupil census?

c) 175 responses were received. 95% of responses objected to the proposal. The reasons for objection are summarised in the table below:

Community value of the school	31%
The school is vital to its local community	22%
The village has no other (non-church) meeting place	9%
Young families will leave/not move to the village	3%
Local schools help children become members of their community	4%
Value of local schools in general	5%
Educational value of the school	25%
Culham provides a high quality of education	19%
Culham meets demand for a small school – value of small schools	3%
Alternative schools are not as good	1%
Closure would harm transition from the pre-school	1%
Traffic and travel	12%
Difficult for parents to transport children to other schools	10%
Increased traffic	5%
Need for school places	10%

Population rising locally and beyond	6%
Forecasts/numbers of young children in village indicate school will be full/have rising numbers	5%
Causes of current problems	19%
Weaknesses in recent leadership and management have undermined the school	7%
Pupil numbers have fallen because of concern at current situation	4%
Current problems are short term and can be overcome by new governing body	5%
Not enough time allowed/ effort made at recruiting head; flaws in HT recruitment process/requirements	7%
Not enough time was allowed/effort made for federation	2%
Lack of headteacher insufficient reason to close school	2%
European Academy proposal has harmed viability of Culham School	1%

A small proportion of contributions (6%) to the consultation included specific proposals about how the school's future could be secured:

Alternative solutions	
Allow more time to find a headteacher/reconsider previous candidates	6%
Close Key Stage 2 until numbers rebuild	1%
Close the school and reopen it on the same site	1%
The European School to provide leadership for the school	1%

Detailed responses were also received from the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council and Culham Parish Council, requesting that more time be made available to the governing body to secure a permanent headteacher for the school.

A detailed response from the recently appointed Chair of Governors on behalf of the "governors and local support group ['Save Culham School', SCS]" was produced with the support of county council officers (who provided financial and other information, along with guidance about what might constitute a viable 'recovery plan').

d) The consultation leaflet is attached as Appendix 1. These were sent via the school to parents. Consultation leaflets were also sent to local primary and nursery schools, the three local secondary schools, local councillors and MPs, and other stakeholders. The leaflet was also available on the county council's website.

Objectives

5. The objectives of the proposal.

The viability of Culham Parochial Primary School has been called into question due to a combination of factors: inability of the governing body to
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recruit a headteacher, falling pupil roll and deficit budget. Efforts have been made by the governing body, supported by the council and the Oxford Diocese, to address these issues, including through attempts to federate with other schools, but it has not been possible to put in place a viable recovery plan. Reluctantly, council officers, the Diocese and governors in post at the start of the 2010-11 academic year, concluded that the school does not have a future and the council is proposing to close the school with effect from the end of the current academic year.

The closure of Culham Parochial Primary School will ensure that all current and prospective pupils are educated in local schools with secure leadership and sustainable budgets.

The decision to publish a statutory proposal was initially taken to OCC Cabinet on 16 February 2011, at which the school's governors requested a delay to allow the decision to be informed by interviews for a new headteacher on 1 March. Cabinet agreed to move the decision to 15 March 2011, and set out the following conditions to be met by that date to evidence the future security and sustainability of the school:

- a. Appointment of permanent headteacher *or* a full federation agreed with another school. [Interviews were subsequently held on 1st March, and no candidate was appointed.]
- b. Finances: Whilst a surplus is anticipated at the end of the 2010-11 financial year, a deficit of c.£50,000 [approximately 25%] is forecast for 2011-2012 due to the fall in pupil numbers. A 3-year balanced budget to be produced, with evidence of fundraising efforts to address the 2011-12 deficit.
- c. School roll: Evidence of how the school will secure sufficient pupils to allow a balanced budget (calculated by the governors as being a roll of 40).

At the meeting of 15 March 2011, Cabinet decided to publish a statutory notice to close Culham Parochial Primary School. However, it was made clear that the final Cabinet decision (planned for 24 May 2011) would take into account any developments in the meantime, for example whether permanent leadership for the school is secured before this time, and the financial and pupil demand evidence is confirmed by council officers.

Standards and Diversity

6. A statement and supporting evidence indicating how the proposals will impact on the standards, diversity and quality of education in the area.

Culham Parochial Primary School was last assessed by Ofsted in 2008, and rated as "good". The very small number of pupils at the school makes year-on-year comparisons based on KS2 results statistically unreliable. However, since 2008 the school has been without a permanent headteacher in post, and despite repeated efforts has been unsuccessful in recruiting a

headteacher. The lack of a full-time permanent headteacher, and the budgetary difficulties resulting from falling pupil numbers, are not conducive to maintaining or improving standards.

The closure of Culham would reduce the number both of schools rated as “good” by Ofsted, and also of CE schools in the area. However, as at the January 2011 pupil census the school had 27 children on roll (since fallen to 24), this impacts on a relatively small number of pupils (1.5% of pupils at schools within a 3 mile radius).

The surrounding schools within a 3 mile radius, to which pupils are likely to be dispersed, are:

Carswell Community Primary School (COM) – Satisfactory (2009)

Sutton Courtenay CE Primary School (VC) – Satisfactory (2010)

St Nicolas CE Primary School (VC) – Good (2009)

St Edmund’s Catholic Primary School (VA) – Good (2009)

Clifton Hampden CE Primary School (VC) – Good (2010)

Thomas Reade Primary School (COM) – Good (2009)

Caldecott Primary School (COM) – Good (2010)

Dunmore Primary School (COM) – Satisfactory (2009)

Provision for 16-19 year olds

7. Where the school proposed to be discontinued provides sixth form education, how the proposals will impact on:

- a) the educational or training achievements;
- b) participation in education or training; and
- c) the range of educational or training opportunities,

for 16-19 year olds in the area.

n/a

Need for places

8. A statement and supporting evidence about the need for places in the area including whether there is sufficient capacity to accommodate displaced pupils.

There is sufficient capacity in the local area to accommodate all displaced pupils, as detailed in section 11. Across the schools within a 3-mile radius, as of the January 2011 pupil census there were 123 spare primary places (approx 7% of total capacity). However, due to rising pupil numbers in recent years, these spare places are disproportionately concentrated in older year groups. In year 2 there are 9 spare places available for the 6 Culham pupils; in Year 1 there are 6 spare places for the 6 Culham pupils. The only year where there are currently insufficient spaces for displaced

pupils is the Foundation Year, but sufficient places could be added to the nearest school (Sutton Courtenay CE Primary School) if required. In addition there is currently before the Department for Education a proposal to open a Free School on the site of the current European School in Culham (0.6 miles from Culham Parochial Primary School) with a proposed admission number of 50. However, the earliest this could happen would be 2012.

9. Where the school has a religious character, a statement about the impact of the proposed closure on the balance of denominational provision in the area and the impact on parental choice.

Culham Parochial is a CE voluntary controlled school; 3 other CE voluntary controlled schools will remain within the 3 mile radius. The nearest alternative school, Sutton Courtenay Primary School, which has been identified as having potential to expand sufficiently to accommodate displaced pupils, is also a CE voluntary controlled school. Should such an expansion be justified by parental demand, this would therefore balance the reduction in CE places at Culham, leaving the proportion of denominational places in the area unchanged.

Current School Information

10. Information as to the numbers, age range, sex and special educational needs of pupils (distinguishing between boarding and day pupils) for whom provision is made at the school.

As of 9 March 2011 the school had 24 children on roll: 9 girls and 15 boys. There are 6 children in each of F1, Year 1 and Year 2; 4 children in Year 3; and 1 in each of Years 4 and 5. At the January 2011 pupil census, one child had a statement of special educational needs.

Displaced Pupils

11. Details of the schools or FE colleges which pupils at the school for whom provision is to be discontinued will be offered places, including:

- a) any interim arrangements;
- b) where the school included provision that is recognised by the LA as reserved for children with special educational needs, the alternative provision to be made for pupils in the school's reserved provision; and
- c) in the case of special schools, alternative provision made by LAs other than the authority which maintains the school.

It is expected that parental choice will lead to displacement to a number of other schools. The following schools lie within a 3-mile radius and are expected to take the majority of pupils:

Surrounding schools	Miles	PAN	Type	Capacity	On roll	Spare places
Sutton Courtenay All Saints' Church of England Primary School	2	20	VC	90	83	7
Carswell Community Primary School	2	30	COM	225	154	71
St Nicolas Church of England Primary School, Abingdon	2.4	60	VC	349	361	-12
St Edmund's Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary School, Abingdon	2.6	30	VA	180	200	-20
Clifton Hampden Church of England Primary School	2.7	10	VC	48	58	-10
Thomas Reade Primary School	2.7	30	COM	180	177	3
Caldecott Primary School	2.8	45	COM	270	240	30
Dunmore Primary School	2.8	60	COM	383	329	54
Total for 3 mile radius				1725	1602	123

(Pupil numbers as of the January 2011 pupil census.)

However, it has been identified that accommodation at the nearest alternative school (Sutton Courtenay), which is also a CE voluntary controlled school, could be adapted to accommodate all the displaced pupils if required. The county has recently consulted on adding Culham village to the catchment area of Sutton Courtenay as well as Culham School, thus ensuring that 2012 applicants will have a designated school even if Culham School closes in the meantime.

12. Details of any other measures proposed to be taken to increase the number of school or FE college places available in consequence of the proposed discontinuance.

If additional places need to be created, these are expected to be provided at Sutton Courtenay CE (VC) Primary School, 2 miles from Culham. In the first instance this will not require any additional buildings, as existing accommodation can be adapted to take greater numbers. If pupil numbers remain high, alternative options for increasing capacity will be assessed in due course, but this will need to be decided on in light of patterns of parental preference.

Impact on the Community

13. A statement and supporting evidence about the impact on the community and any measures proposed to mitigate any adverse impact.

It is recognised that the school is an important part of its local community,

as the village has no other (non-church) meeting place, such as a village hall. The nearest other villages with village halls are Sutton Courtenay (2 miles), Clifton Hampden (2.7 miles) and Drayton (3 miles).

The Local Authority recognises the contribution that schools make to their local communities and this is reflected in the 'Primary Strategy for Change' where the aim is for a 'good school at the heart of the community. Whilst consideration has been given to the impact closure would have upon the community, the Council cannot continue to maintain schools primarily for non-educational reasons. Community commitments to make greater use (and thereby financial contributions) to the school would help to address one of the key issues, the budget deficit, but have not been forthcoming.

Oxfordshire County Council has established a "Big Society Fund" against which communities can bid in order to help them establish viable alternative uses and/or funding streams for existing premises. If there is sufficient demand for a non-school community facility then it is possible that the school buildings could be used for this purpose. However, the buildings are the property of the Diocese of Oxford, and future use of the buildings will be a matter for the Diocese to determine.

14. Details of extended services the school offered and what it is proposed for these services once the school has discontinued.

The only extended service based at the school is a breakfast club - this is presently run by the pre-school staff in the pre-school room. This also caters for children from the pre-school, and would be expected to continue if Culham Parochial Primary School closes, subject to the continuation of the pre-school's lease. Children attending alternative schools would benefit from the extended services offered by those schools.

Travel

15. Details of the length and journeys to alternative provision.

Alternative provision for all pupils will be available 2 miles from the current school, as shown in section 11 above, although it is recognised that parental choice may lead to some children travelling further.

Of the 24 children at Culham Parochial Primary School (as of March 2011):

- 14 live within Culham and would face longer journeys to an alternative school.
- 2 live within Sutton Courtenay village but live closer to Culham Parochial Primary School than Sutton Courtenay Primary School, and would therefore face a longer journey to their nearest school (approximately 1.4 miles instead of 0.6 miles).
- 4 live within Sutton Courtenay village (2 miles from Culham), and would be able to attend Sutton Courtenay Primary School, which would reduce their journey length.
- 2 live within Drayton village (3 miles from Culham) slightly closer to

Sutton Courtenay Primary School than Culham Parochial Primary School. Alternatively they may be able to attend Drayton Primary School, approximately 0.6 miles from their home.

- 1 each lives within Abingdon and Aylesbury, and would be able to attend schools in their towns of residence, which would reduce their journey lengths.

Overall, 16 children will need to travel further if Culham Parochial Primary School closes, and 8 children will be able to attend a school closer to their home. The net effect will depend on parental choice as well as residences of pupils.

16. The proposed arrangements for travel of displaced pupils to other schools including how they will help to work against increased car use.

OCC's Home to school transport policy 2011-2012 states that 'Children attending the designated (catchment) school for their address are eligible for free transport if the distance from home to school is over the "statutory walking distance" of 3 miles if 8 or over or 2 miles if less than 8 and of statutory school age... It is measured along the shortest route along which a child, accompanied by a responsible adult, may walk with reasonable safety. The route may include footpaths, bridleways, and other pathways, as well as recognised roads. All such routes need to be open to the public. When there are issues raised over the possible safety of a walking route the Admissions Team will arrange for an initial assessment by the Integrated Transport Unit and if necessary a full risk assessment by Road Safety.'

In accordance with this, free transport will be provided for children currently at Culham Parochial Primary School who, as a result of the decision to close the school, now need to attend a school beyond the statutory walking distance from their home. This is likely to include approximately 10 children who live in the Culham catchment area, while they are still aged under 8, but there will need to be detailed assessments based on actual addresses and journeys.

Related Proposals

17. A statement as to whether in the opinion of the LA or governing body, the proposals are related to any other proposals which may have been, are, or are about to be published.

n/a

Rural Primary Schools

18. Where proposals relate to a rural primary school designated as such by an order made for the purposes of section 15, a statement that the LA or the governing body (as the case may be) considered:

- a) the likely effect of discontinuance of the school on the local community;
 - b) the availability, and likely cost to the LA, of transport to other schools;
 - c) any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the discontinuance of the school, and the likely effects of any such increase; &
 - d) any alternatives to the discontinuance of the school,
- as required by section 15(4)

- a) At the 2001 census Culham village had a population of 415. The school is an important part of its local community, and the village has no other (non-church) meeting place, such as a village hall. There are village halls in the neighbouring villages of Sutton Courtenay, Drayton and Clifton Hampden. Whilst consideration has been given to the impact closure would have upon the community, the Council cannot continue to maintain schools primarily for non-educational reasons. (See 13 above)
- b) As detailed in section 15, some, but not all, of the children who live in the Culham catchment area are likely to qualify for free transport. If a significant number qualify then the local authority is likely to provide a minibus from Culham to Sutton Courtenay Primary School, at a daily cost of £80-100.
- c) 8 children from outside the Culham catchment, who are currently transported to school by car, would be able to move to schools closer to their homes and within walking distance, reducing the need to use motor vehicles. 14 children who live within Culham village, and 2 who live between Culham and Sutton Courtenay, will need to travel further to an alternative school, but if the majority transfer to Sutton Courtenay Primary School, the provision of a minibus from Culham to Sutton Courtenay would minimise the traffic impact of this. The net effect could be a reduction in the use of motor vehicles, but this will depend on parental choice. (See also 15-16 above)
- d) For three years the Culham Parochial Primary School's Governing Body, with the help of Oxfordshire County Council and the Oxford Diocese, tried to secure permanent leadership and a long-term future for the school. Despite several attempts to appoint a new Headteacher, they were unable to appoint a suitable candidate on a permanent basis. In the meantime, the school has been led by acting headteachers on a temporary basis, shared with other schools. During this time of uncertainty about the school's future, concerns over long-term staff absence and social limitations for pupils in Key Stage 2 have caused some parents to move their children to other schools. This has had a great effect on the school budget, which has had to be supported with additional funding from the local authority in order to ensure necessary school improvement activities were undertaken. The Governing Body, supported by the Local Authority and the Diocese, has explored in detail the idea of federation with three different schools, but without success. Other possibilities, such as a tie in with the European Academy to work as its feeder school, have been explored, but have not been fruitful. In response to the closure proposal the governing body was reformed with a new chair

and members. A further attempt was made to recruit a headteacher and, despite a shortlist of three, it was not possible to appoint a suitable candidate at interview on 1 March 2011. The governing body has re-advertised again, and the local authority has confirmed that if a permanent headteacher is secured during the statutory representation period, this will be taken into account when making the final decision.

Maintained nursery schools

19. Where proposals relate to the discontinuance of a maintained nursery school, a statement setting out:

- a) the consideration that has been given to developing the school into a children's centre and the grounds for not doing so;
- b) the LA's assessment of the quality and quantity of alternative provision compared to the school proposed to be discontinued and the proposed arrangements to ensure the expertise and specialism continues to be available; and
- c) the accessibility and convenience of replacement provision for local parents.

n/a

Special educational provision

20. Where existing provision that is recognised by the LA as reserved for pupils with special educational needs is being discontinued, a statement as to how the LA or the governing body believes the proposal is likely to lead to improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of the educational provision for these children.

n/a