

Determination Report from the Executive Director of Children's Services, as the Local Authority Decision-Maker.

I have considered the Proposal:

- To close Marsham Primary (Foundation) School, on 31 August 2024

Reason for closure

Due to low pupil numbers, the school is no longer considered viable. The governing body of Hevingham and Marsham Primary School Partnership (Federation) undertook a consultation on their proposal to close the school.

Background on School organisation process for a school closure

The DfE guidance on 'Opening and Closing maintained schools', January 2023 sets out the school organisation process.

- Pre-publication consultation; statutory consultation, recommended to last a minimum of 6 weeks.
- Publication; of the statutory Public Notice and proposal,
- Representation period; it must be a 4 week formal statutory consultation.
- Decision; made by the Local Authority Decision-Maker and should be made within 2 months of the closing date of the Public Notice.
- Implementation stage; there is no prescribed timescale, but the implementation date must be specified in the published notice.

The requirements of the decision maker

In coming to a decision on school organisation proposals, I am required to address the following factors where the closure proposal affects a rural school, as there is a presumption against closure. Marsham Primary school is designated as a rural school (rural village) by the Department for Education, 2022.

1. Likely effect of the closure of the school on the local community
2. Proportion of pupils attending the school from within the local community i.e. is the school being used by the local community
3. Educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools
4. The availability and likely cost to the Local Authority of transport to other schools
5. Whether the school is now surplus to requirements
6. 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 increase
7. Any alternatives to the closure of the school.

Background to this proposal

Marsham Primary (Foundation) School is a small rural school, with a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 5. It has 13 pupils on roll (as at 1 January 2024) with a capacity of 51 pupils.

Marsham Primary School, with Hevingham Primary School, share a headteacher and governing body. They became full members of the Aylsham Cluster Trust (ACT) on 8 July 2015. Marsham Primary School changed its status from community to a foundation school.

The decision to consult on the closure of Marsham Primary School was taken by the governing body of the Hevingham and Marsham Primary Schools Partnership on 17 July 2023, due to the low numbers of pupils at the school, making it no longer viable.

The proposal is to close Marsham Primary School on 31 August 2024. This is a Foundation school. It does not have any provision reserved for children with special education needs.

This proposal is linked to a proposal from Norfolk County Council to change the catchment area of Marsham, to join the Aylsham catchment area, from 1 September 2024.

The governors published a consultation proposal on 6 November 2023, for six weeks and sent it to parents of pupils at Marsham Primary School, parents of pupils at Hevingham, as part of the Federation, parents of pupils at Aylsham schools, staff and governors at these schools as well as key stakeholders. The prescribed information (Appendix A) includes a copy of the consultation proposal and the consultation report.

Following the pre-publication consultation and reviewing the responses received, the governing body agreed on 3 January 2024, to proceed to the statutory Public Notice to close Marsham Primary School. The Public Notice was published on 8 January 2024 and copies of the notice were displayed at the school gates, on the Federation's website and published in the Eastern Daily Press, in line with regulations. The four-week representation period ended on Friday 9 February 2024.

I can confirm that all statutory requirements in relation to the statutory consultation, publication and decision-making have been complied with.

Representations:

One response was received during the public notice period, from a parent of a child attending the school. The parent objects to the closure of Marsham Primary School. The objection relates to;

- Not enough done to improve the numbers at the school, the focus has been on Hevingham and Marsham is overlooked.
- Lack of self-promotion by the school to new parents
- Why so much money spent on a new minibus, when governors were already discussing the closure of the school.
- Now having to drive children, instead of walking them to school, yet teaching our children to reduce their carbon footprint.

I have considered this representation, received during the statutory Public Notice period and note the following;

Governors have demonstrated that they have considered all options before proceeding with the closure of the school proposal. As a Federation, the governors are responsible for both schools and there is no evidence to suggest a lack of focus on one school.

It is for the individual schools and the Governing Boards to advertise open days and sessions but there is no specific guidance for how schools should do this. I acknowledge that it is felt that the Governors of Marsham Primary could have done more but the pattern of parental preference from those living in the village has shown that parents apply for alternative schools.

We, as the Local Authority, co-ordinate admission applications, respecting parental preference where possible and whilst undertaking this co-ordination, cannot promote one school over others. When parents are invited to make their admission applications, information is provided on all schools in Norfolk. To assist parents in making an informed decision, they are encouraged to;

- read information on individual schools which is provided via links to the School Admission pages on our Council's website,
- understand how places are allocated based on the published admission rules
- attend open events and obtain school information direct from school websites.

With regards to the concerns about money spent on a new minibus, it is a matter for governors to decide how to allocate their budget. However, governors have provided assurances that the purchase of the new minibus was discussed two years before any decision was taken on the school closure proposal. It is also noted that the funds to buy the minibus was from capital funding and not the budget associated with running the school.

Norfolk County Council is mindful of the impact of any school organisation proposal on travel and transport. However, this has to be balanced with the viability of a school and education offer to pupils.

Unfortunately, it is not always possible to keep schools open until numbers of pupils can increase, due to the financial implications and low numbers of pupils in the catchment area as well as impact of parental preference.

No new evidence has been received to discontinue with this proposal.

This Determination Report, is to be read in conjunction with the prescribed information and the consultation report prepared for the governing body, requesting permission to proceed to Public Notice. (Appendix A and Appendix 1)

1. Likely effect of the closure of the school on the local community

It is clear from the informal consultation that Marsham Primary School is a much-loved school in the local community. We know that there will always be sadness when proposing the closure of a school.

The closure of Marsham Primary School would remove primary education provision from the village. There are several other primary schools within a reasonable travelling distance of Marsham.

The school is a late Victorian built school with 2 class bases set on 0.30 hectares between residential housing. Extensions were added to the school in both 1998 and again in 2003. The school has two class bases, no hall and a shared practical area which also is used for the dining space of the school. It has a library space with a shared office used as both a main office and staff room.

The school is not used by any community groups, therefore the potential impact of the loss of the school as a community venue should be minimal.

2. Proportion of pupils attending the school from within the local community i.e. is the school being used by the local community

There are currently 13 pupils registered at Marsham Primary School. Catchment information as at January 2023, shows that of the 63 children of primary school age who live in the Marsham catchment area, only 15 attend the catchment school of Marsham Primary School.

Although forecasts indicate catchment maintains numbers that may be similar to PAN, unfortunately preference patterns are drawing children out of area. Consistently we see pupils going to Aylsham schools, their partner school Hevingham and then there is a mix of individual cases, over the last 3 years.

The number of parents from within Marsham catchment selecting their own school has reduced from 4 down to 1 in the recent two years. Therefore, it would be anticipated this pattern would continue and very few pupils would remain using the school in this village.

The school has the capacity for 51 pupils. In the last 10 years, the highest number of pupils on roll was in September 2018, with 39 pupils. The school has been operating under its full capacity for several years.

The School Sufficiency Plan 2024, does not indicate an impact of new homes on school places for Marsham and there are currently sufficient good quality places in the local area.

3. Educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools

Marsham Primary School was judged Good by Ofsted in January 2019.

Due to the low numbers of pupils at the school, the curriculum has been delivered via mixed age groups. There have been some opportunities to share activities with children at the federated school in Hevingham. The steady low numbers over the past years make it challenging to ensure that pupils receive teaching which is well matched to their age and abilities, have the necessary breadth of social experiences, sufficient peer interaction and the opportunity for children to work in groups.

4. The availability and likely cost to the Local Authority of transport to other schools

Norfolk County Council's policy is to provide school transport free of charge for those pupils who attend their catchment school or nearest available school, where this is

beyond the qualifying distance (over 2 miles for under 8s and over 3 miles for older children), as set out in our Home to School Transport Policy.

There would be 10 displaced pupils, as 3 pupils currently in year 6 will leave at the end of July 2024 to transition to secondary school. Marsham Primary School is in a federation with Hevingham Primary School. Hevingham Primary School has the capacity to accommodate all the children from Marsham Primary School.

The nearest schools to Marsham Primary with capacity for all the children from Marsham are Bure Valley School, Hevingham Primary School, John of Gaunt Infant and Nursery School, St Michael's CE VA Primary and Nursery School.

Distances from Marsham Primary School to nearby schools;
Bure Valley School 2.5 miles
Hevingham Primary School – 2.3 miles
John of Gaunt Infant and Nursery School 1.8 miles
St Michaels CE VA Primary and Nursery School 2.3 miles

As part of this school closure proposal, Norfolk County Council are proposing to change the catchment area for Marsham, to join with the Aylsham catchment area.

If the school closed, it is difficult to know the transport cost implications as they are based on where families live and parent preference of schools. The distances from Marsham Primary School to nearby schools is outlined above.

However, as a guide, to transport pupils from Marsham to the nearest or catchment school would cost per annum approximately £20,000 per school transported to. There are 3 primary phase schools in Aylsham.

5. Whether the school is now surplus to requirements

The evidence set out in earlier sections demonstrates that this school is sadly now surplus to requirements given that;

- There are low numbers of pupils registered at the school

If it is decided to close the school, Aylsham Cluster Trust will be responsible for the future use of the building, as owners of the freehold of the school building and land.

6. 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 increase

This will be minimal, as there are very few children at Marsham Primary School and several travel from out of the catchment area. Therefore, it is unlikely that there will be a significant increase in use of motor vehicles to take children to a school. There are several primary phase schools within 5 miles of Marsham.

7. Any alternatives to the closure of the school.

The Governing body of Hevingham and Marsham School Partnership have considered alternative options including academisation. However, as a very small school, Marsham Primary School is unlikely to meet the financial requirements through the due

diligence process for transfer to a Multi-Academy Trust, as the finances are unsustainable in the short, medium and long term.

My conclusion and recommendation

I have considered the demand and need for this school. It is clear that although this school remains a much-loved school, it was once a well-attended school, but for many years, has had low numbers of pupils registered at the school. Many of the pupils living in the school catchment area, are attending other schools in the local area. The impact of the low numbers of pupils makes it challenging for the school staff to ensure that pupils achieve their potential.

I am satisfied that our analysis of the growth, through our School Sufficiency Plan shows there are currently sufficient places in the local area for the children of Marsham Parish.

I have considered the likely impact on neighbouring schools and do not believe that the proposed closure of Marsham Primary School would have any detrimental effect on standards at these schools. All are judged 'Good' by Ofsted. They would therefore be able to adjust to additional pupils and provide them with a good quality of education.

I am satisfied that the admission arrangements in place are sufficient and follow Norfolk County Council and DfE policy. These arrangements will support parents to find an alternative place in a local school.

There will be an impact on travel and transport for the 10 pupils currently at Marsham Primary School. However, I have made the judgement that this will be minimal, both due to the low numbers involved and Norfolk County Council's Home to School Transport policy on sustainable travel and transport to school.

The impact of a decision to close Marsham Primary School on the local community cannot be underestimated and such decisions are only made if they are in the best interests of the children, now and in the future. It is a much-loved school and many will be affected by this proposed change, particularly the children currently in the school.

Taking the above factors into consideration, my recommendation is;

- **That the proposal to close Marsham Primary School, should proceed.**

Once the decision is made, Norfolk County Council will put in place support for the implementation of the proposal, from September 2024, and ensure that Aylsham Cluster Trust, as owners of the freehold of the school building and land, are responsible for the future use of the building.

Norfolk County Council will work pro-actively with all stakeholders to mitigate the impact and support staff, pupils and parents as best we can. Our priority is to make a decision that is best for the children's education both now and in the future.



Marsham Primary School (Foundation)

Statutory Proposal to close the school

1. School contact details

Marsham Primary School
High Street
Marsham
Norfolk
NR10 5AE

2. Local Authority details

Norfolk County Council
County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich
Norfolk
NR2 1DH

3. Implementation

The proposal is to close Marsham Primary School on 31 August 2024. This is a Foundation school. It does not have any provision reserved for children with special education needs.

The decision to consult on school closure was taken by the Governing body of the Hevingham and Marsham Primary School Partnership (Federation) on 17 July 2023. A consultation proposal was published on 6 November 2023, for six weeks and sent to parents of pupils at Marsham school, along with staff and governors at the school, as well as key stakeholders. A copy of the consultation report is attached at Appendix 1 and includes the consultation proposal in Appendix B.

4. Reason for closure

The proposal to close Marsham Primary School is based on;

- The school is no longer considered viable.

This is due to low pupil numbers. Therefore it is difficult to deliver and sustain quality education for children now and in the future.

5. Pupil numbers and admissions

The school's age range is 4 – 11 years and provision is available for boys and girls. Total pupil numbers have been significantly lower than the capacity of the school, which is designed to accommodate up to 51 pupils. In the past 10 years,

the highest number of pupils on roll was 39 pupils (Sept 2018) and during this period the school has been operating under its full capacity. There are currently 13 children in the school, as at 1 January 2024. All 13 children are compulsory school age. See table below for breakdown of pupil per year group. Two children have an Education, Health and Care Plan. There are several children with recognised Special Educational Needs.

Year	No of children
Reception	1
Year 1	2
Year 2	2
Year 3	3
Year 4	1
Year 5	1
Year 6	3
Total	13

As at January 2023 the number of children, of primary school age, living in the Marsham catchment area was 63 children. However, only 15 children living in catchment were going to Marsham Primary School.

The remaining children go to schools outside of their catchment area;
 6 children go to Hevingham
 21 children go to Aylsham schools
 21 children go to 7 different schools.

If it is agreed to close Marsham Primary School then Norfolk County Council will work with individual families of children attending Marsham Primary School to look to accommodate their preferences for alternative schools, where possible.

6. Displaced pupils

There would be 10 displaced pupils, as 3 pupils currently in year 6 will leave at the end of July 2024 to transition to secondary school. Marsham Primary School is in a federation with Hevingham Primary School. Hevingham Primary School has the capacity to accommodate all the children from Marsham Primary School.

The nearest schools to Marsham Primary with capacity for all the children from Marsham are Bure Valley School, Hevingham Primary School, John of Gaunt Infant and Nursery School, St Michael's CE VA Primary and Nursery School.

Distances from Marsham Primary School to nearby schools;
 Bure Valley School 2.5 miles
 Hevingham Primary School – 2.3 miles
 John of Gaunt Infant and Nursery School 1.8 miles
 St Michaels CE VA Primary and Nursery School 2.3 miles

As part of this school closure proposal, Norfolk County Council are proposing to change the catchment area for Marsham, to join with the Aylsham catchment area.

Please refer to Section 10; Special Education Needs provision

7. Impact on the community

It is clear from the informal consultation that Marsham Primary School is a much-loved school in the local community. We know that there will always be sadness when proposing the closure of a school.

The closure of Marsham Primary School would remove primary education provision from the village. There are several other primary schools within a reasonable travelling distance of Marsham.

The school is a late Victorian built school with 2 class bases set on 0.30 hectares between residential housing. Extensions were added to the school in both 1998 and again in 2003.

The school has two class bases, no hall and a shared practical area which also is used for the dining space of the school. It has a library space with a shared office used as both a main office and staff room.

The school is not used by any community groups, therefore the potential impact of the loss of the school as a community venue should be minimal.

8. Rural Primary Schools

As Marsham Primary School is designated as a rural school by the Department for Education, there are some particular considerations for the proposers of any closure. There is a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean rural schools should not close. It means that the 'case for closure should be strong and the proposal must be clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area'.

The Governors of Hevingham and Marsham Primary School Partnership, in formulating this proposal has given consideration to the matters under Section 15 (4) of the Education and Inspections Act 2016, being;

- a) The likely effect of closure of the school on the local community
- b) The educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools
- c) The availability and likely cost to the Local Authority of transport to other schools
- d) 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
- e) Any alternatives to the closure of the school.

a) The likely effect of closure of the school on the community

Please see the section 7: Impact on the Community

b) Educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools

The school was inspected by Ofsted in January 2019 and rated as 'Good'. The curriculum has been delivered via mixed age groups, although there have been opportunities to share some resources and activities at Hevingham.

The school has the capacity for 51 pupils. In the last 10 years, the highest number of pupils on roll was in September 2018, with 39 pupils. The impact of low pupil numbers over the past years makes it challenging to ensure that pupils receive teaching which is well matched to their age and abilities, have the necessary breadth of social experiences, sufficient peer interaction and the opportunity to work in groups.

The reduction in the number of pupils also impacts the school budget, which relies on the financial allocation per pupil to operate. The partnership with Hevingham this has enabled the governors to keep Marsham going, despite it having a deficit budget.

It is not considered that the proposed closure of Marsham Primary School would have any detrimental effect on standards at neighbouring schools. All are judged 'Good' by Ofsted. They would therefore be able to adjust to additional pupils and provide them with a good education.

Ofsted outcomes for nearby schools;
Bure Valley School – Good, October 2019
Hevingham Primary School – Good, March 2018
John of Gaunt Infant and Nursery School – Good, December 2023.
St Michaels CE VA Primary and Nursery School – Good, November 2023

c) The availability and likely cost to the Local Authority of transport to other schools

If the school closed, it is difficult to know the transport cost implications as they are based on where families live and parent preference of schools. The distances from Marsham Primary School to nearby schools is outlined in Section 6 – Displaced Pupils.

However, as a guide, Norfolk County Council has explained that to transport pupils from Marsham to the nearest or catchment school would cost per annum approximately £20,000 per school transported to.

d) Any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from closure of the school and the likely effects of any increase

There may be an increase in the use of motor vehicles if the parents of the 10 children currently at Marsham, choose to attend a school out of catchment, or do not qualify for School Transport. However this is judged to be minimal, due to the low numbers involved with this school closure.

e) Any alternatives to the closure of the school

The Governors have considered a number of alternative options including amalgamation and academisation. However have been unable to find a solution to keep the school open due to the low numbers of pupils, which means that the pupil numbers fall significantly short of the published admission numbers of 5 pupils each year. There is also very little in year demand for places at the school.

9. Balance of denominational provision

Marsham Primary School is not a school with a religious character and therefore this proposal has no effect on the balance of denominational provision in the local area.

10. Special Education Needs provision

Marsham Primary School does not include provision reserved for pupils with Special Education Needs (SEN). However there are 2 children with an Education Health and Care Plan. If the closure of this school is approved, it will be essential to review the provision required for these pupils and following consultation with individual parents, an alternative school where provision would be made available for their child will be named.

11. Travel

Norfolk County Council's policy is to provide home to school transport free of charge for those pupils who attend their catchment school or nearest available school, where this is beyond the qualifying distance (over 2 miles for under 8s and over 3 miles for older children), as set out in their School & College Transport Policy.

12. Procedure for making representation

Within 4 weeks from the date of publication, any person may object to, express support for, or make comments on the proposals by;

- by emailing Norfolk County Council at schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk,
- by writing to Norfolk County Council at: Marsham Consultation, Norfolk County Council, FREEPOST, 1H 2076, Lower Ground Floor, County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich, NR1 2BR. You do not need a stamp.

The closing date for all comments is 9 February 2024

Appendix 1 – consultation report



Consultation report to the Governors of Hevingham and Marsham Primary School Partnership (Federation)

The proposal;

- to close Marsham (Foundation) Primary School with effect from 31st August 2024.

Reason for the proposed changes	<p>The governors are reluctantly consulting on closure of this school as the school is no longer considered viable. Unfortunately, the number of pupils has consistently fallen over the past few years and the school currently has 13 pupils. The capacity of the school is 51 pupils. Therefore, it is difficult to deliver and sustain quality education for children now and in the future.</p> <p>The consultation document is available at Appendix B.</p>
Consultation details	<p>The consultation was delivered, as set out by the DfE statutory guidance 'Making significant changes (prescribed alterations) to maintained schools', January 2023. A consultation was held from 6 November to 15 December 2023. A total of 213 consultation documents were sent to governors, staff and parents at Marsham Primary School and key stakeholders. The consultation was promoted on the school website and there was an online consultation survey. A consultation event was held on 9 November 2023, in person, supported by the Chair of Governors, Headteacher as well as the Admissions Manager and School Organisation Manager, from Norfolk County Council. 8 people attended. See issues raised on Page 8. A meeting was requested by the local MP and took place on 17 November with the Headteacher. A further meeting was held with one parent on 28 November, who was representing the views from 5 parents. The Headteacher, Chair of Governors, County Councillor, School Organisation Manager, Norfolk County Council and Admissions Manager, Norfolk County Council attended.</p>
Number of responses	45 responses*

	<p>* Please note one respondent submitted 6 responses, so this has been collated and counted as one response, therefore the total number of responses is 40.</p>
<p>Summary of views expressed in favour of the proposal 4 responses (10%)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school is very small and cannot offer a varied and collaborative learning environment and parents are not choosing the school for their children (2 responses) • If school is not financially viable, it becomes a financial drain (2 responses)
<p>Summary of views expressed against the proposal 34 responses (85%)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important to keep small village schools open, which are vital for the local community and local children (14 responses) • Children with Special Education Needs at this school benefit from smaller classes and concerned about the pupils moving to a bigger school (9 responses) • There are not enough places in Aylsham, taking into account the new housing development, don't close the school so close to Aylsham (8 responses) • A child within my extended family attends this school (5 responses) • Address the reason why parents are going to Aylsham and not Marsham, recruit more pupils and promote the school more (4 responses) • Keep school open for a year to let us parents help turn school around, fundraise to support budget and recruit more pupils (3 responses) • The school has a good Ofsted report compared to others in the areas. (3 responses) • Fewer pupils in the school is better for children and allows more 1:1 time with teachers (3 responses)
<p>Commentary</p>	<p>It is clear from the responses from local residents, parents and other stakeholders that there is a lot of support for Marsham Primary School and it holds a special place in people's hearts within the community.</p> <p>However, the reality is that the school is no longer viable due to the low numbers of pupils, which impacts on the school budget and nothing has changed during the consultation process to identify a sustainable future for this school.</p> <p>Governors recognise the need for local school places for local children, however, when the school becomes this small, with only 13 pupils, the education offer and resources are more limited.</p> <p>The Governors have been reassured by Norfolk County Council that there are primary school places available in Aylsham. We also have places at Hevingham. These schools have good Ofsted ratings and are able to offer a wide range of support for children with SEND. Unfortunately, several local parents have already chosen to take their children to Aylsham rather than their local</p>

	<p>school. Several parents have told us, this is because the Aylsham schools can offer more childcare provision at the beginning and end of the school day.</p> <p>We appreciate that there is a small number of parents that have requested a further 12 months to find a solution to keep the school open, including fundraising and finding more pupils to attend Marsham School. The governors have considered this and other options. Unfortunately, any fundraising can only be used for certain budget items e.g. resources and not for the sustainable running costs of the school. Offers of voluntary help does not change the viability of the school long term.</p> <p>Parents who are looking for reception places, register with Norfolk County Council and the Local Authority co-ordinates these applications. Information on all schools is provided but parents can find details of their own catchment school, or schools, in their area at the Council's website or by contacting the Admissions Team. This process is the same for all schools in Norfolk. Norfolk County Council has also informed us, as governors, that the children living in the Marsham catchment (4 at reception age) have been choosing to go to other schools for the past few years and this pattern is likely to continue.</p> <p>The consultation has been run in accordance with the DfE statutory guidance 'Making significant changes (prescribed alterations) to maintained schools', January 2023. The response rate for the consultation is 19%.</p>
Resource implications	<p>The school is supported by the Hevingham and Marsham Primary School Partnership. The pupil numbers remain low at Marsham, which impacts on the viability to keep the school open due to forecasted deficit budget. The school budget has been consistently supported through the Local Authority.</p>
Recommendation	<p>It is clear from the responses from local residents, parents and other stakeholders that there is a lot of support for Marsham Primary School. It holds a special place in people's hearts within the community. However, the reality is that the school is no longer viable and nothing has changed during the consultation process to identify a sustainable future.</p> <p>It is therefore recommended that the Governors proceed to the statutory public notice stage of the school organisation process.</p>



Consultation on a proposal to close Marsham (Foundation) Primary School, Marsham, Norfolk

What is the proposal?

The Governors of Hevingham and Marsham Federation are proposing to close Marsham (Foundation) Primary School with effect from 31st August 2024.

Marsham Primary school is a primary school taking pupils from the age of 4 years to 11 years and is designated as a rural school (rural village) by the Department for Education, 2022.

Why are Governors proposing closure?

The governors are reluctantly consulting on closure of this school as;

- The school is no longer considered viable.

Unfortunately the number of pupils has consistently fallen over the past few years and the school currently has 13 pupils. The capacity of the school is 51 pupils. Therefore it is difficult to deliver and sustain quality education for children now and in the future.

Low pupil numbers

The school has been a small rural school for many years. It has the capacity to have 51 pupils in the school. However over the past 12 years, the school has always operated significantly below this capacity. The table below shows the numbers of pupils attending the school during this period.

Numbers on Roll

Year	Yr R	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6	Total
2011/12	2	3	3	3	8	2	6	27
2012/13	5	2	4	5	3	9	2	31
2013/14	2	7	3	5	8	3	8	36
2014/15	2	4	8	3	7	3	5	32
2015/16	3	3	4	6	5	6	3	30
2016/17	4	2	7	3	6	6	7	35
2017/18	5	4	2	5	3	6	7	32
2018/19	3	7	5	6	6	4	8	39
2019/20	2	6	6	6	6	8	4	38
2020/21	5	2	6	5	6	6	7	37
2021/22	6	4	2	5	5	6	6	34
2022/23	1	4	4	3	4	4	7	27

Please note that there has been a period of growth within Aylsham where some children could not be accommodated within the town schools, so were given places in the surrounding schools. These instances would have all helped support Marsham during this time period.

The numbers of children living within the Marsham school catchment area shows a steady decline over time and the expected catchment numbers of 5, 7, 2 over consecutive years which fits within their current PAN (Published Admission Number). Unfortunately parental preference patterns over the last 3 years are drawing children out of the area into the Aylsham schools, the partner

school at Hevingham or to a mix of other local schools. The number of parents from within the Marsham catchment selecting their own school has reduced from 4 down to 1 in the recent two years. It is anticipated that this pattern will continue and very few pupils will remain using the school in this village.

No sustainable budget

Pupil numbers determine the school budget. All schools receive a lump sum as part of their annual funding budget from the Department for Education, which is added to, with funding based on the number of pupils on roll. The predicted pupil numbers for the next few years are very low, making the school financially un-sustainable.

If this proposal goes ahead where will school places be available for children who currently attend Marsham Primary School?

There are sufficient places for pupils currently at Marsham Primary School, to attend primary phase schools in the local area.

Norfolk County Council's admission arrangements allow parents to state up to 3 preferences and parents are encouraged to include their catchment school as one of these preferences as most schools prioritise catchment children. As required by law, there can be no guarantee that a place will be offered at the catchment school. However, there are sufficient places in neighbouring schools to accommodate children from Marsham, if the proposal was agreed.

For children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan or Statement of Special Educational Needs, Norfolk County Council will undertake a review to determine the appropriate new placement in conjunction with the family. Every child with an EHC Plan has an allocated EHC Plan Co-ordinator who is responsible for this.

School transport will be provided free of charge by Norfolk County Council for those pupils who transfer to their nearest or nearest catchment school, where this is beyond the qualifying distance (over 2 miles for under 8s and older children from families on low income, and over 3 miles for other older children), as set out in our School Transport Policy.

What alternative options to closure have been considered?

A number of alternative options were considered before agreeing to consult on the proposed closure of Marsham Primary School. These included;

- **Federation.** Marsham Primary School is already in the Hevingham and Marsham Primary School Partnership (Federation). Although federations are recognised as a way of enabling smaller schools to work more formally in partnership to share costs, expertise and training, this has not addressed the low pupil numbers at Marsham Primary School.
- **Amalgamation.** Consideration was given to amalgamating Marsham Primary School with Hevingham Primary School, within the Federation. This option was discounted because there is a significant financial implication; when schools amalgamate, one school must close and therefore its budget is no longer available.
- **Academisation.** In undertaking their due diligence, academy trusts, both local and national, find some small schools to be financially unviable or too isolated to be included in their trust, unless they convert with other small schools as a local hub.
- **No change.** As outlined in this consultation document, Marsham Primary School has had low pupil numbers for 12 years and pupil numbers fall significantly short of the published admission number of 5 pupils each year. There is very little in-area demand for places at the school.

Proposal to change the catchment area

Our proposal is linked to a proposal by Norfolk County Council, who are consulting on the proposal to change the catchment area of Marsham Primary School from 1 September 2024. If the proposal to close Marsham Primary School proceeds, this means that current catchment area for Marsham will need to change. Details of this consultation can be found on <https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/marshamcatchment>

Who will be consulted?

Under section 16 (1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the Governors as the proposer of the closure of a rural primary school must consult;

- Parents of pupils at Marsham Primary (Foundation) School
- Norfolk County Council
- The local district and parish council, where the school is situated.

In addition, this document will be provided to people and organisations that may have an interest in this proposal including;

- Governing Body of Hevingham and Marsham Primary School Partnership (Federation)
- All staff at Marsham Primary School & Hevingham Primary School
- Pupils at Marsham Primary School
- Parents of pupils at Hevingham Primary School
- The governing bodies and staff of any other school in the Aylsham Cluster
- Parents of any pupils at other schools who may be affected by the proposal
- Trade unions who represent staff at Marsham Primary School
- MP
- Early Years providers.

Who will make the final decision and when could the change happen?

After this consultation ends on 15th December 2023, the governors will review the results of the consultation and decide whether to proceed with the proposal. Norfolk County Council will also consider the responses to the change of catchment proposal.

If we decide to go ahead, by law we have to publish a statutory notice to close Marsham Primary School. People would then have 4 weeks to write to Norfolk County Council either supporting or opposing the proposal. The final decision is made by the Executive Director of Children's Services, Norfolk County Council as the Local Authority Decision-Maker.

If at the end of the consultation process, the proposal does not go forward, then the school would remain as it is.

How can I learn more about this proposal and have my say?

Come and talk to us - There will be a meeting for parents/carers and other interested members of the community:

- 2.15 – 3.15pm, Thursday 9th 2023 at Marsham Primary School.

(This will also include the consultation event for Norfolk County Council's catchment consultation)

Tell us your views by;

- Completing the online survey on <https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/marsham>
- Completing the attached form and handing it into the Marsham Primary School Office

We need all responses by 12 noon, 15th December 2023.

List of stakeholders who were sent the consultation document

Hevingham and Marsham Primary Partnership
Aylsham Cluster Trust
Aylsham Learning Federation
Aylsham High School
Aldborough Primary School
Bure Valley School
Buxton Primary School
Colby Primary School
Erpingham VC Primary School
Hevingham Primary School
Blue Sky Federation
John of Gaunt Infant & Nursery School
St Michaels C of E VA Primary and Nursery
Trinity Federation of Church Schools
Nebula Federation
DNEAT
Broadland District Council
County Councillor
District Councillors
Jerome Mayhew MP
Marsham Parish Council
Aylsham Town Council
Norfolk County Council
John Bear Nursery
Dandelion Education
Hevingham under 5s
Buxton Pre school
Smiles
Cawston Montesorri
Cawston Buzz Club
Swanton Abbott Pre school
Little Brown Hare Pre school
Fair View Kindergarten
Smiles Cawston
Stepping Stones Pre School
Fairview Day Nursery
Hainford Pre School
National Education Union Norfolk
Diocesan Director of Education
Diocese of Ely
Diocese of East Anglia
NAHT
Educate Norfolk – (Secondary)
Educate Norfolk – (Primary)
Unison
NASUWT
NEU (ATL section)
Voice the Union
GMB
ASCL
Consultation Event

A consultation event was held on 9 November 2023, in person at the school, supported by the Chair of Governors (COG), Headteacher, as well as the Admissions Manager and School Organisation Manager, Norfolk County Council. 9 people attended. The key issues raised included;

- Where has proposal come from, why now
- Tried to close in past, same reasons
- Loss of local asset, recruitment drive needed
- Why close this school when building a new school in Aylsham?
- Catchment and parent preference information given by Admissions Manager
- What does school do to promote itself, we don't know enough
- Promotion of school places, people don't know about it
- Decided already
- Concerns about whether there would be transport to new school
- Aylsham schools are RI, this school has a 'good' Ofsted,
- Request to leave it another year to fundraise and keep it going
- Capacity, document says 51 but on website it says 35
- Small school suits my child as school has met his needs and helped with speech issues
- Environmental issues – more cars to get to other schools
- Can't afford transport to school, what happens
- Will there be spaces in other schools
- Parents requested a chance to turn it around and then if not successful then close it i.e. a year
- What happens if it becomes a stand-alone school and left Federation
- Feel governing body is very Hevingham based and not many from Marsham
- How did the school get saved last time it was facing closure
- Would there be space at Hevingham for Marsham pupils, could the school mini bus be used to transport pupils to Hevingham
- Could Marsham run childcare around school hours
- Hurtful that closure proposal came from governors, expected it would be NCC
- Check that families can still apply for September 2024

A meeting was requested by the local MP to discuss the school closure proposal. This took place on 17 November 2023 with the Headteacher.

A further meeting was held with one parent on 28 November, who said she was representing the views from 5 parents following a meeting in the village hall recently. The Headteacher (HT), Chair of Governors (COG), County Councillor, School Organisation Manager, Norfolk County Council and Admissions Manager, Norfolk County Council attended.

Issues raised by parent	Response
Reception; why is there not more done with the Tots in the Village Hall as would help with transition, they used to have visits to school. Reception; why is there not more done with the Tots in the Village Hall as would help with transition, they used to have visits to school.	HT; happy to discuss with Tots, but not happened in last 10 years.
Join another Federation	HT; already in a federation, would not survive as a stand-alone school as would need own HT and governing body.
Numbers, these have dropped in the last year.	HT; many have moved out of the area, also some siblings moved when YR6 sibling moved to high school to make school run easier for parents. Also lack of wrap around childcare is not provided at Marsham, which many working parents would prefer.
Who owns the school land, could this be sold and keep school going for a while	County Councillor; the length of time to buy land takes too long for this to be an option
Fundraising, if the parents raise funds to support the school would this help	HT; the contribution could only used for certain things and not the school running costs
Friends of School, these meetings always held at 9am which is not convenient.	HT; the Friends run these meetings, not the school
Reserves, why does Marsham have larger reserve compared to other schools	HT; this is from budget year 21/22 and was held for the purpose of purchasing the school minibus.
School budget, can parents see what the Marsham budget is	HT; the governors manage the budget, along with the HT and support from the council finance team. There is a set format for schools to use.
Promotion of the school, we are putting up posters promoting the school as many people do not know it is an option.	Admissions Manager; explained the parental preference and admission process.

<p>Federated Governing Body, why is there no one from Marsham on the governing body</p>	<p>COG; there is a governor from Marsham. There are also spaces on the governing body and have promoted these vacancies.</p>
<p>Voluntary work at Marsham school, happy to help with gardening, reading, cleaning</p>	<p>HT; always welcome support from parents, but would need to be a regular arrangement if this is to financially support the school</p>
<p>School transport, if the school closes, concerns about getting to Hevingham, could the minibus be used.</p>	<p>Norfolk County Council will advise on a case by case scenario depending on different criteria.</p>