



**Complete Proposal**

**to Discontinue**

**Saltfleetby Church of England Primary School**

MATTERS TO BE SPECIFIED IN SECTION 15 OF THE EDUCATION AND  
INSPECTIONS ACT 2006

PROPOSALS TO DISCONTINUE A SCHOOL

**10 February 2016**

## Contact details

This proposal is published by Lincolnshire County Council (LCC), County Offices, Newland, Lincoln LN1 1YQ regarding the potential closure of Saltfleetby Church of England Primary School, Main Road, Saltfleetby, Louth, LN11 7SN. The school is a Voluntary Controlled school maintained by the Local Authority (LA).

## Implementation

The proposal is to discontinue Saltfleetby Church of England Primary School with effect from 31 August 2016.

## Objectives and reason for closure

The proposal detailed in this document is to discontinue Saltfleetby Church of England Primary School with effect from 31 August 2016 and is not related to any other school organisation proposal. LAs are under a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places in their area, promote high educational standards, ensure fair access to educational opportunity and promote the fulfilment of every child's educational potential whilst at the same time meeting the aim of enabling children to take up a school place within their local community. To help the LA meet these duties and restructure local provision they have the power to close all categories of maintained schools. The objective of this proposal is to safeguard and protect the standard of provision of primary education for pupils currently attending Saltfleetby Church of England Primary School and for children in the area. This proposal considers the discontinuance of the school to be in the best interests of local children and educational provision in the area. It reinforces the priorities in the Children and Young People's Plan and supports the Council's aim of ensuring that as many children as possible can reach their full potential.

Following careful consideration of how to secure a viable future for the school, the Interim Executive Board (IEB) of Saltfleetby Church of England Primary School made the difficult decision to request that the LA start the consultation process on the proposal to close the school. The decision of the IEB to request that the LA consult on closure has been taken in the context of concern over the long term sustainability of the school in relation to being able to continue to offer quality education to pupils with the resources available. Low pupil numbers in the local area and the extremely low current and projected numbers on roll do not allow the IEB to set a balanced budget that can continue to provide the breadth and quality of provision that children are entitled to.

The Statutory Notice has been published to propose the discontinuance of Saltfleetby Church of England Primary School for the following reasons:-

- To comply with the wishes of the Interim Executive Board.
- A changing age profile of the rural population in recent years resulting in a trend towards lower numbers of families with primary age pupils choosing to live in small rural communities. There are no longer sufficient pupil numbers in the immediate area for a viable school to remain educationally and financially sustainable.

- To reduce any detrimental effect on educational standards that can potentially occur at schools with very low numbers on roll. To keep the school open would mean children continuing to attend a very small school and consequently place greater demands on a small number of staff to adequately deliver the full curriculum entitlement. The staffing structure would have to reduce further to stand a chance of setting a balanced budget with the current number of children on roll. Continued low pupil numbers will mean that the school would be unlikely to be able to generate the budget to maintain the high standard of education that all pupils are entitled to.
- To enable pupils to receive a broad and balanced education in a larger school offering greater social interaction.
- To reduce the incidence of teaching several year groups in one class and in groups that involve teaching across more than one Key Stage. To keep the school open, the low numbers on roll may require a school organisation based on teaching all 7 year groups within one class in the future, which is not considered to be in the best interests of the children or the staff and increases the risk to pupils' education through teacher absence.
- To reduce surplus capacity in the area but still provide sufficient places to meet local needs and parental preference. This decrease in surplus capacity contributes to ensuring the provision of sustainable schools across the county allowing future investment to be used more effectively to support schools in raising standards. If the school were to remain open there would be an unacceptable level of surplus places which is currently at 66% (19 pupils on roll with the capacity for 56) and may possibly increase in September 2016 with more pupils leaving Year 6 than starting in Reception.
- To enhance the future sustainability of the remaining primary schools in the local area. Ensuring sustainability is vital in that it has an impact on recruiting and retaining staff of a high calibre in the area and also attracting future investment.
- To improve value for money delivered by larger schools. Very small schools require a disproportionate amount of funding. The sparsely populated county of Lincolnshire makes it necessary to sustain smaller schools to meet the needs of local communities across wide rural areas, and the LA's funding formula supports this. However, when numbers fall as low as they are at Saltfleetby Church of England Primary School the situation becomes unsustainable for a stand-alone school of this size. Schools are not legally allowed to set a deficit budget without a realistic medium term plan showing how the deficit will be turned around.
- To enable the process to continue to the next stage and allow a further opportunity for people and organisations to express their views about the proposal and ensure that they will be taken into account by the Executive Councillor prior to the final decision being taken. This continuation of the process will allow more time for all potential alternatives to closure to be fully and robustly explored. This includes the continued exploration of academy and alternative federation options.

- To enable the statutory and legal processes to proceed in accordance with DfE guidelines.

### **Pupil numbers and admissions**

This proposal is written in the context of concern over the long term sustainability of the school. The number of children who live local to the school is not sufficient to support a sustainable stand-alone primary school.

To remain viable the school needs to increase the number on roll by attracting pupils from further away than what would be considered the 'natural catchment' area. There are currently 19 pupils on roll at the School which has a potential capacity for 56 leaving 66% surplus capacity. There is also some surplus capacity at neighbouring schools where there are spaces available to accommodate the children from Saltfleetby were the school to close. The admissions process for the September 2016 Reception intake closed on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2016 with applications being accepted up to 19<sup>th</sup> February. At the date of publishing this report no first preference, one second and two third preference applications had been received for the Reception September 2016 intake. The latest LA projections (June 2015) based on actual numbers on roll from January 2015, estimated that potentially 26 pupils would be on roll for the 2016/17 academic year, and 24 for the 2017/18 academic year. However, this was based on their being 29 on roll for 2015/16, not the 19 that are now on roll. There are now likely to be 15 pupils on roll at the beginning of the 2016/17 year.

Further data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) birth data and LA projections (using birth data, new housing data, GP registrations and historic pupil movement in and out of the area) indicate continued low numbers in future years emphasising the need to attract pupils from outside of the local area to sustain viable pupil numbers for a stand-alone primary school.

### **Displaced pupils**

Neighbouring schools in the area have available spaces so offer the opportunity for parental choice. If the closure goes ahead the LA will offer all displaced pupils a place at the nearest neighbouring school of either North Somercotes Church of England Primary School, Warren Road, North Somercotes, Louth, LN11 7QB or Theddlethorpe Primary School, Mill Road, Theddlethorpe, Mablethorpe, LN12 IPB. There is sufficient capacity at these schools for all displaced pupils and there will be no requirement to increase the number of school places available as a consequence of the proposed discontinuance of Saltfleetby Primary School. Parents may also wish to express a preference for a place at any other local primary school should they not wish to consider one of the two schools named by the LA.

### **Impact on the community**

There would be the inevitable disruption for pupils, parents and staff if this proposal proceeds, but this would be short term. This proposal would address the issues surrounding a declining primary school population in an area where there are other appropriate schools in more densely populated areas with sufficient capacity to accommodate displaced pupils. The County Council believes that this proposal

provides the best solution to addressing and meeting the long term educational and social needs of the children in the area if it is not possible to sustain a viable school in Saltfleetby.

An educational site would no longer provide services for children and young people. The school is regarded by the local community as an important facility. The LA would work with the local community to try to ensure any negative impact on the community from the loss of the school would be mitigated.

Alternative community uses for the school building would be considered prior to any decision being made about the future of the premises.

The small size of the school limits its ability to offer a wide range of extended services which are likely to be more readily and widely available at neighbouring schools with a larger number on roll. Extended services currently provided at Saltfleetby Church of England Primary School are already in existence at other neighbouring schools.

The LA has a good track record of redeployment of staff and will always seek to avoid redundancy not only to mitigate costs but also to reduce the human costs of redundancy.

The LA does not consider that there are any sex, race or disability discrimination issues that will arise if the school closes. The LA continues to be committed to provide access to a range of opportunities which reflect the ethnic and cultural mix of the area and aims to ensure that such opportunities are open to all believing that this will be met by the remaining schools in the area.

### **Balance of denominational provision**

Saltfleetby is a Church of England school and there are sufficient faith places at nearby Church of England schools to accommodate the pupils currently on roll at Saltfleetby should the LA proceed with the proposed closure. Therefore the proposed closure will not have any impact on the balance of denominational provision and associated parental choice in the area.

### **Rural primary schools**

Under current DfE guidance there is a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but that the case should be strong and a proposal clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area. In order to consider the proposal to close the school the LA has paid particular attention to the following points:-

- The likely effect of the closure of the school on the local community:

The school currently provides places for only 10 pupils from the local community (for whom it is the nearest school). This is likely to fall to 8 local pupils from September 2016. The school is located centrally in the Saltfleetby area but due to the rural nature of the area it is not located in a village centre. The LA understands that the school is regarded by the local community as an important facility and members of

the local community believe it would have a negative impact if the school were to close. The LA would work with the local community to try to ensure that any negative impact on the community from the loss of the school would be mitigated through partnership working with other services and schools in the area and reduce any negative impact on community cohesion were the school to close.

- Educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools:

The closure of a school can potentially reduce extended services on offer. However, in this case, the small size of the school limits its ability to offer a wide range of extended services which are likely to be more readily and widely available at neighbouring schools with a larger number on roll. It is also challenging to demonstrate the impact on educational standards with such a small cohort. In their current school pupils are required to mix across multiple year groups.

The LA has carefully considered the impact on educational standards and believes that the closure of the school has the potential to protect and improve educational standards. To keep the school open may have a detrimental effect in that it would mean children continuing to attend a very small school and consequently placing greater demands on a small number of staff to adequately deliver the full curriculum entitlement. To keep the school open, the low numbers on roll may require a school organisation based on teaching all 7 year groups within one class, which is not considered to be in the best interests of the children.

Several schools in the local area are regarded by Ofsted as being of an equal 'Good' standard. Standards at these schools would not be expected to be negatively affected by taking on pupils from Saltfleetby. It should also be noted that in some cases it may have been some time since a school or schools in the area has been inspected so the current Ofsted rating may not be a true reflection of the current situation at some schools. This also applies to Saltfleetby.

- The availability, and likely cost to the LA, of transport to other schools and any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the closure of the school, and the likely effect of any such increase:

The LA has considered the impact on transporting pupils to other schools should Saltfleetby Church of England Primary School close. 47% (9) of the pupils who currently attend Saltfleetby live closer to other local schools and it is not expected that the closure would significantly increase the number of car journeys to transport children to and from school, as currently only one of the nineteen pupils on roll live within a safe walking distance. Were the school to close then transport would be offered according to LCC's school transport policy taking advantage of the established routes already in use in the area. It is not expected that costs would increase significantly even if all parents chose to take up the transport offer.

- Any alternatives to the closure of the school:

The Interim Executive Board, supported by the LA, has pursued potential alternatives to closure but an alternative federation or academy solution has not yet been found and the numbers have remained low. Following the request of the Interim Executive Board to commence the closure process and comments raised during consultation the LA has given further consideration to all potential alternatives to closure. Alternative federation options have been pursued by the school, LA, Diocese and CfBT. To date there has been one expression of federation interest from another primary school. The LA provided additional information to the interested school regarding the position of Saltfleetby CE Primary School and the Governing Body of the interested school has decided not to pursue this further.

### **Special educational needs (SEN) provision**

The proportion of children at the school with special educational needs (SEN) is relatively high at 26.3% compared to the primary county average of 15.7%. The primary county average is calculated using the January 2015 School Census. Should the school close this would be an opportunity for improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of educational provision. Places for all displaced pupils would be available at neighbouring schools where the percentage of SEN is similar or better. This proposal would therefore likely lead to improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of the education provision for children currently at the school through ensuring a more balanced proportion of pupils with SEN integrated in mainstream schools with specialist facilities to help ensure all pupils have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Consideration of pupils with SEN will take place and the LA will continue to look to make improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of the education provision for children with SEN.

### **Travel**

Only one of the current pupils attending Saltfleetby Church of England Primary School lives within walking distance of the school. That child would have to travel further than at present, potentially increasing transport costs, although this effect is expected to be minimal in the long term due to the small number of children. Some local children already choose to travel to alternative schools, and some children not local to the school choose to travel from outside of the village.

For that pupil and those who are currently not within walking distance, most journeys to alternative schools would not be lengthy and well within the County Council's guidelines for maximum journey times for primary age pupils of 45 minutes. In many cases there are alternative schools with places available that would result in shorter distances travelled than at present.

The County Council home-to-school transport policy will continue to apply - this provides free home-to-school transport for pupils to their nearest or designated school (if it is more than 2 miles away for primary age pupils). In addition, arrangements will be made to allow displaced children whose parents select a receiving school named above, and who live within the current designated transport area for Saltfleetby Church of England Primary School, to have free transport to

North Somercotes Church of England Primary School or Theddlethorpe Primary School if the school is more than 2 miles from the family's home.

Pupils travelling over 2 miles and meeting the free transport criteria would be provided with transport by means of local bus services or contracted vehicles, which is considered to be the safest and most environmentally cost-effective method of transportation over medium distances. This will make use of the established routes already in use in the area and it is not expected that costs would increase significantly even if all parents choose to take up the transport offer. 47% of the pupils who currently attend Saltfleetby Church of England Primary School live closer to other local schools and it is not expected that the closure would significantly increase the number of car journeys to transport children to and from school.

### **Consultation**

In order for the school to close the LA must follow the necessary statutory legal processes as required by the Secretary of State in accordance with the EIA 2006, the Education Act 2011 and the guidance of the DfE regarding school closure.

Under these guidelines the LA must ensure that sufficient time and information are provided for people to understand and form a view on the proposal and make a response. Under the DfE guidelines which came into effect in January 2014 it is no longer prescribed how statutory consultation is carried out. There is no longer a prescribed consultation period for proposed school closures although a minimum of 6 weeks is recommended which should also avoid school holidays. To comply with this the LA has conducted a six week period of consultation. Any documentation issued must set out the problem that is being addressed and invite comment on one or more solutions. The LA must explain the decision making process and take all reasonable steps to draw the proposal to the attention of all those who might be interested and take into account their views. All applicable statutory requirements to consult in relation to the proposal have been complied with.

The guidance issued by the DfE in January 2014 states that in the case of the closure of a rural primary school the parents of current pupils and the local district and parish councils where the school is situated **must** be consulted. The guidance also lists who should be consulted in connection with all proposed school closures. The list of interested parties was therefore compiled according to these principles comprising as wide a range of consultees as practicable to ensure that all interested parties were included and incorporated parents of current pupils and the Chief Executive of the District Council as well as individual County, District and Parish Councillors as appropriate.

Guidance also requires current pupils to be consulted and all of the children on roll were given the opportunity to discuss the potential closure of their school. The children were encouraged to consider the things they love about their school, and the things they would miss if the school closed. The overall view expressed by the children was that their school was special and they hoped it would not close despite the proposals. The pupils particularly highlighted the facilities available at the school and the number and variety of school trips.

A letter incorporating relevant information and reasons for the proposal was sent out to interested parties on 28 September 2015 to commence a six week period of

consultation. A public meeting was held at Marshlands Village Hall, Saltfleetby on 5 October 2015 to provide more detail about the proposal and enable parents and all interested parties to ask questions and raise concerns. Notes were taken at this meeting and are attached as Appendix A. There was the opportunity to provide a response to the consultation by letter, email or by returning the response form attached to the consultation document by 13 November 2015. Copies of the letter commencing consultation and the response form were also published on the County Council website under the webpage "Current Consultations" on [www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/schoolorganisation](http://www.lincolnshire.gov.uk/schoolorganisation)

All written responses received during consultation have been provided to the Executive Councillor for consideration and further details are confirmed in Appendix B.

To briefly summarise; there were 39 valid responses in total, with 1 in favour, 37 against the proposal and a further 1 response which was neither for nor against the proposal. Responses were received from 10 parents of current pupils all of which were against the proposal; this group formed the largest number of individual responses received.

Many of the responses against the proposal believed the consultation for potential closure was short-sighted as it is their understanding that pupil numbers had previously dropped as low and they believe given time the pupils on roll could increase. Several believe that the Headteacher and IEB have been unsupportive and ineffective in trying to attract new pupils to the school. Many responses also prefer the small mixed classes at Saltfleetby and state the education provision is excellent as the school focuses on the individual needs of each child.

In addition to these responses two petitions have been submitted against the proposed closure of Saltfleetby CE Primary School, with a total of 535 signatures. Original copies of the petitions can be viewed by Members by contacting Democratic Services. Petitions must be considered in the light of DfE guidance that the greatest weight should be given to representations from those stakeholders most likely to be directly affected by the proposals rather than simply taking account of the numbers of people expressing a particular view. The petitions do not confirm the area of interest that each signature represents and therefore it is difficult to assess whether the opinions are those of stakeholders that should be given the greatest consideration.

The letter giving details of the consultation process incorporated the following original details of the anticipated timeline:-

<b>STAGE 1</b>	<b>STAGE 2*</b>	<b>STAGE 3*</b>	<b>STAGE 4*</b>	<b>STAGE 5*</b>
Consultation 6 Weeks	Publication of Statutory Notice	Representation Period 4 Weeks	Final LA Decision	Implementation
28 September – 13 November 2015	December 2015	December – January 2016	March 2016	31 August 2016

However, following the written responses received in the consultation period the LA delayed stages 2 and 3 as above by approximately 6 weeks to allow more time to further explore options that might secure the future of the school prior to

progressing to the next stage. If the process continues through stages 2 and 3, the Statutory Notice (Stage 2) is likely to be published in February 2016 and the final decision (Stage 4) is now likely to be taken in April 2016.

This extension of the process has:-

1. Given the IEB opportunity to develop a working relationship with the newly founded Parent Group to enable them to work together in the best interests of the school.
2. Allowed extra time for the Parent Group to market the school to prospective pupils and parents and for the IEB to continue to explore options other than closure.
3. Allowed the closing date for Reception 2016 applications to pass before the decision is made on whether to progress to the next stage.
4. Enabled LA officers to contact East Lindsey schools and academies in the local area, seeking a federation opportunity. To date there has been one expression of interest from a primary school in developing a federation with Saltfleetby Primary School. The LA provided additional information to the interested school regarding the position of Saltfleetby CE Primary School and provided contact details so they could get in touch with the IEB if they wished to discuss the idea further. The IEB have not yet received any communication from the Governing Body of the interested school who have confirmed that they do not wish to take the idea any further forward at this time. Consideration will continue to be given to alternative federations, de-federation, alternative staffing structures and seeking a potential academy sponsor. Options will continue to be explored through to a final decision on the future of the school.
5. The Executive Councillor has taken the decision to proceed to Statutory Notice therefore initiating a 4 week Representation Period. This will give more time for the above 3 options to continue to be explored and also be a further opportunity for people and organisations to express their views and ensure that they are taken into account when the final decision is taken by the Executive Councillor later this academic year. It is essential however that the statutory process continues in parallel with the pursuit of these options. In the event that none of the above three options result in a viable alternative to closure there should be no undue delay in the closure process in order to avoid as far as possible further negative impact on the pupils, their families and the local community.

Under current legislation the LA is the decision maker for the proposal and is co-ordinating the statutory process before making the final decision. The LA, as decision maker, must be able to show that all relevant issues raised are taken into consideration in the decision making process. Points raised can be considered unpersuasive but must not be ignored altogether.

### **Objections and Comments**

Any person or organisation may object to or make comments on the proposal by sending them to the School Organisation Planning Team, Children's Services, Lincolnshire County Council, County Offices, 51 Newland, Lincoln LN1 1YQ or by emailing [schoolorganisation@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:schoolorganisation@lincolnshire.gov.uk) to be received by the deadline of 9 March 2016.

At the close of the 4 week representation period (statutory formal consultation) on 9 March 2016 responses will be collated and analysed and a further report will be presented to the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee for comment, before going to the Executive Councillor for a final decision on the discontinuance of the school. This decision is likely to be taken in April 2016 but must be no later than 2 months after the end of the representation period. The representation period is the final opportunity for people and organisations to express their views about the proposal and ensure that they will be taken into account by the decision maker.

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