

NAVIGATE ILLUMINATE SHELTER



Governing Body
of
James Calvert Spence College Federation

Consultation on the possible closure
of Acklington C of E First School

Reasons for the Governing Body's consultation on closing Acklington C of E First School

The primary responsibility of a Governing Body is to ensure that the school offers high-quality education, delivered through a broad and balanced curriculum in line with the National Curriculum. The Governing Body of James Calvert Spence College is committed to ensuring that all children attending schools in the Federation receive the same high standard of educational provision and the same educational opportunities as any other pupil in Northumberland.

In the light of falling numbers at the school, it is becoming increasingly difficult to provide the best educational experience for children at Acklington C of E First School. The Governing Body has therefore reluctantly concluded that it must consider the option of closing the school at the end of December 2017 and re-directing the pupils to other local schools.

From September 2015, Acklington Church of England First School became part of the James Calvert Spence College hard federation, creating one governing body to oversee the three schools, with each school retaining its own budget. Ultimately, the purpose of the hard federation was to give more stability and prevent the first school from closure which would have otherwise been imminent.

At this time, Acklington C of E First School had 10 students on roll, 2 children in Nursery and 4 members of staff. The number of students on roll was falling, making the school unsustainable. Due to limited staffing, the school was having difficulty meeting curriculum needs for all year groups.

Support for the First School has now been in place for 21 months. During this time, the following arrangements have been in place:

- Senior leadership has been provided by the Executive Headteacher, a Head of School until the end of the last academic year and an Assistant Headteacher.
- All support functions such as HR, finance and ICT have been taken in-house and provided centrally from within the Acklington Road site. Salaries attributing to these

staff have been paid by the Middle and High School budgets, therefore offering a nil-cost service to the First School to allow for the limited funds to be used to improve the students' education.

- Teaching staff capacity has increased with specific teachers delivering different aspects of the curriculum. This has resulted in a positive church inspection who rated the school as good in October 2015.
- The school has also benefited from an extensive marketing campaign in a bid to attract new students to join the school
- A free breakfast club has been offered since September 2016. This has been very popular with existing parents, but has failed to increase student numbers.
- After school provision has been provided at a reasonable cost to aid working parents. Again, this has been well received by existing parents, but has not attracted any additional students to the school.
- The school kitchen has been closed and all meals are now made and delivered from South Avenue to reduce costs.

Despite all of the above, there are currently only 13 children on roll and there is no anticipated intake into nursery or Reception in September 2017. There are 5 other first schools within a 7 miles radius, the closest of which is only 1.3 miles away, who have pupil places available and the facilities and buildings are all significantly better equipped and in better condition.

With such small numbers, it is increasingly difficult to provide a broad and balanced curriculum at the school, and to offer the children sufficient educational, social, emotional and cultural experiences to ensure they achieve their full academic potential.

At the same time, the Governing Body must ensure that the premises are maintained, whilst managing a balanced budget. Schools receive funding based on the number of pupils they have on roll, rather than the size of the school building. As the number of pupils decreases, so does the funding – but the running costs of the premises (such as heating, lighting, cleaning and maintenance of the building) does not reduce.

The buildings are dilapidated and a recent survey suggested that the mobile classrooms are beyond repair and would need replacing. Given the financial drain of the school already, this is not financially feasible without funding from NCC or another source. Within the last month, the boiler is leaking, there was no hot water and the heating in the mobile containing the toilets has broken. Potential Health and Safety issues are becoming prevalent.

Despite the low student numbers, two full-time equivalent teachers are employed to deliver the curriculum. With the funding so low as a consequence of few pupils, it becomes increasingly difficult to meet all these responsibilities. Since joining the federation, the other schools have heavily subsidised the First school and without this, the school would have been financially unviable. There comes a point when the Governing Body can no longer fund the staff and provide the educational resources needed to offer the pupils a broad and balanced curriculum, while still funding the maintenance of the school building. The Governing Body also has to consider its duty to students at South Avenue and Acklington Road who require staffing and resources that offer them a full curriculum. Currently some of their funding is being absorbed by Acklington C of E First School and this cannot continue long –term otherwise it may become detrimental on their education.

At Acklington C of E First School, the number of pupils has not increased. Unless the pupil numbers drastically increase in the very near future, it is unlikely that the school will be sustainable in the foreseeable future.

How would this proposal affect the pupils in Acklington C of E First School?

The final decision on whether or not the school would close would be made by the Northumberland County Council Cabinet. If approval for closure of Acklington C of E First School is given by the Council's Cabinet following the necessary statutory processes, places for pupils would be found in other local schools. Places would be guaranteed for current pupils at one of the other six schools in the Coquet Partnership. Parents who wish to continue to educate their child within a Church school ethos, transport on the basis of faith would be provided to the nearest Church school with available places to the home address.

If Acklington C of E First School closed, parents who choose to send their child to another First School would still be able to apply for a place for their child at James Calvert Spence College for Year 5.

If the proposal to close Acklington C of E First School is approved by the Council's Cabinet, the proposed official closure date is 30 December 2017. However, as this date falls within the academic year, it is acknowledged that some parents may prefer to move their children at the beginning of the academic year for transition, rather than wait for a final decision to be made in December 2017. In order to make the transition process for pupils as easy as possible, the Governing Body would work with the local authority to explore whether pupils could join another school at the beginning of the academic year in the coming September. The questionnaire at the end of this document invites parents to comment on this proposition.

What would happen to staff at Acklington C of E First School?

If the proposal to close Acklington C of E First School is approved, staff would be considered for employment at the other sites within the federation, if there are vacant posts and they have the relevant skills and experience. Where there is no additional staff required, staff at the school would be 'at risk' of redundancy. While the Governing Body is the employer, Council officers would support the Governing Body working with the staff to identify redeployment opportunities elsewhere in the County and to avoid redundancies where possible.

What impact would the proposal have on the local community?

The Governing Body recognises that the closure of Acklington C of E First School would have an impact on the village community served by the school. However, the decision to consult on the closure of the school has been made after much deliberation and with great reluctance. The Acklington C of E First School building and site are owned by the Duke of Northumberland, who may want to consider alternative uses of the site if the decision to close the school is made. Any feasible suggestions on alternative use arising from this consultation would be passed on to the Duke's estate.

As Acklington C of E First School is a rural school, the impact of the school's closure would also need to be considered carefully by the Councillors who sit on Northumberland County Council's Cabinet, should the process continue to that stage. The Council's Cabinet would need to consider alternatives to closure, transport implications and the impact on the local community of the loss of the school.

How can I make my views about this proposal known?

In order to make an informed decision about the next steps, the Governing Body needs to hear the views of the staff, governors, parents, pupils and local community who would be most affected by closure of the school. You can ensure that your views are considered by:

- 1) Completing the questionnaire at the back of this consultation document and sending it to the address provided no later than Monday 26 June 2017.
- 2) Attending a consultation meeting: the following timetable provides details of separate meetings for staff and parents and the wider community where you will be able to discuss the proposal with the Governing Body, council officers and school representatives:

Venue	Meeting type	Date	Time
Acklington C of E First School	Staff only	21 June	3.30pm
James Calvert Spence College, Acklington Road	Parents and public	22 June	4.00pm

What happens at the end of the consultation?

All the feedback received during consultation will be analysed and presented in a report to the Governing Body in late June 2017, when it will decide whether or not to proceed to the next stage of the process. If the Governing Body decides to proceed, there will be a further four week statutory period when you can make written representations about the proposals. The Council's Cabinet would then meet in November 2017 to make a final decision on whether or not to approve the implementation of the proposal.

Consultation on the proposal to close Acklington C of E First School

Your name *(Optional)*:

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Are you responding **mainly** as a *(tick one box only)*?

- Parent/carer of children at Acklington C of E First School
- Governor in Acklington C of E First School
- Staff Member in Acklington C of E First School
- *Parent/carer of child(ren) in another school
- *Governor in another school
- *Staff member in another school
- *Pupil in another school

If you ticked any of the starred () options, with which school do you most associate with?*

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- Parish Councillor Parish/town council
- Resident in Coquet Partnership area Town/village
- Resident outside of Partnership area Town/village
- Other Please clarify

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Your views: (continue on separate sheet where necessary)

1) What do you think about the proposal to close Acklington C of E First School?

For Against Don't know

Please provide the main reasons for your answer

- 2) Do you have an alternative proposals or suggestions for tackling the issues facing the school, or any further comments?

- 3) If this proposal is approved, would you wish the Governing Body to explore whether pupils could transfer to their new schools at the beginning of the academic year in September 2017, rather than January 2018 (the start of the Spring Term)?

Yes No Don't know

Comment:

- 4) If this proposal is approved, do you have a suggestion for alternative use of the Acklington C of E First School site?

Please return this form to arrive no later than **Monday 26 June 2017**

By post to FAO Mr Adrian Doherty, Chair of Governors, James Calvert Spence College,
Acklington Road, Amble, Northumberland, NE65 0NG

By email to chutchinson01@jcsc.co.uk

or drop your form off at any of the school offices.

Thank you for taking part in this consultation