

**Consultation on the
Potential Closure of
St Joseph's Catholic
Primary School,
Cockermouth**

This consultation is about the future of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Mountain View, Cockermouth, Cumbria CA13 0DG.

The school's governing body, the Diocese of Lancaster and Cumbria County Council have been working very hard to keep the school thriving and successful over recent months. Despite those best efforts, the governors have been unable to appoint a Headteacher, pupil numbers have fallen to an historically low level, the school's budget is expected to fall into deficit and the last Ofsted report identifies a number of areas of weakness in its summary of key findings.

At the end of the summer term 2021, there were only 27 children on roll at the school, (four years ago there were more than 75 children) with 2 applicants for September 2021 Reception entry. School funding is directly linked to the number of children in the school and very low numbers adversely affect its sustainability and ability to offer the best possible education to its pupils. Funding allocations are based on a national formula, so the County Council is unable to provide additional financial support. Given this background, the Governing Body, taking into account advice from the County Council, has taken the difficult decision to ask us to consult on closure.

In order to bring about the permanent closure of a school, the County Council must undertake a process set out in law. Part of that process involves consulting those affected by the potential closure, and taking account of the views expressed prior to making final decisions. We are writing to you at this stage to seek those views, and will also hold meetings with staff, governors and parents to make sure everyone has the chance to have their say, or have any questions answered.

We are considering the following proposal:

That St Joseph's Catholic Primary School would officially close on 31st August 2022.

The legal process which the County Council has to follow takes several months to complete. Closing the school at the end of the academic year would allow those children whose families would like them to remain on roll at St Joseph's to change schools at the beginning of the next academic year, in September 2022.

The County Council will work with those parents who would prefer to move their children to other schools earlier to secure alternative places. The County Council's existing Home to School Transport policy will continue to apply to children moving to a different school.

Who is this consultation for?

This document is aimed at parents, staff and governors of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, and anyone else with an interest, or stake in, education in the area.

Background

Birth rates across Cumbria have declined significantly in the last few years and Cockermouth is no exception. The average number of children eligible for a place in Cockermouth's reception classes for each of the next 3 years is around 55; over the previous 3 years that figure was nearer 70. Currently there are 105 Reception class places available across the 3 schools in Cockermouth town.

Budgets for running costs (staff salaries, heating, lighting, etc.) are devolved to schools largely on the basis of numbers of pupils at the school. Many of these costs are fixed regardless of the number of children on roll and a lower number of children produces a lower budget. It follows that, where the numbers on roll at any school decrease, there is less money available to the school to support teaching and learning.

Following an Ofsted inspection in June 2019, the school received a 'Requires Improvement' rating. The full report can be viewed here <https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50093759>. The school's reduced budget – caused by falling pupil numbers – is not conducive to supporting the school in improving this position.

All of those involved – staff, governors, the Lancaster Diocese and the County Council – have worked hard to find alternatives to closure, including the possibility of the school sharing a Headteacher with another school, various cost-cutting schemes, or becoming an academy supported by others in the area. For a variety of reasons, none of these options has succeeded in resolving the issues the school now faces.

There are 5 other schools within a 3-mile radius of St Joseph's, and both Fairfield Primary and All Saints C of E Primary are located in the town. The nearest alternative catholic school is Our Lady and St Patrick's Catholic Primary School in Maryport.

Have your say

As well as being able to complete the questionnaire (online or using the form below) you can attend a meeting to be held at the school to ask any questions you may have on Monday 4 October. There will be separate meetings for the staff/governors and parents/stakeholders as detailed below.

- Staff and Governors – 4pm to 5pm
- Parents and other stakeholders – 5.30pm to 6.45pm

What happens next

Once the consultation period has closed, the County Council's Cabinet will receive a report summarising the responses received. Taking into account those responses, the Cabinet will decide whether to proceed to the next stage of the process, which involves the publication of a detailed closure proposal. Publication would trigger a statutory 4-week 'representation period', which provides another opportunity for interested parties to make their views known.

At the end of the representation period, the Cabinet will again consider any views submitted, and will make a final decision on whether the school should close. At the moment, we expect that final decision would be taken at the Cabinet's meeting in April 2022, with the school remaining open until the end of the 2021-22 academic year next July.

It is important that we hear your views

This consultation runs until Friday 29 October and you can complete the online questionnaire here <https://cumbria.citizenspace.com/cumbria-county-council/st-josephs-rc-primary-cockermouth>

Please note that it is not possible to enter into individual correspondence.

If you would prefer, you can complete and return a hard copy of the questionnaire which is attached below.

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1 Please indicate your relationship to the school (tick all boxes that apply)

I am a:

- Parent/carer of a child at St Joseph's Catholic Primary
- Member of staff at St Joseph's Catholic Primary
- Governor at St Joseph's Catholic Primary
- Other

If other has been selected please specify

2 Given the information contained in this consultation document do you think that there is any viable alternative to the closure of St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Cockermouth?

- Yes No

If yes has been selected please provide further details below.

Name (please print)

Address (incl.postcode)

The closing date for this consultation is **Friday 29 October 2021**

Please return by email to school.organisation@cumbria.gov.uk
or by post to School Organisation, Cumbria County Council, Parkhouse Building, Kingmoor Business Park,
Carlisle. CA6 4SJ