

## St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Cockermouth – FAQs

Why are we having a consultation on the potential closure of the school?

Despite their best efforts, the school governors have been unable to appoint a new Headteacher, pupil numbers have fallen to an historically low level, the school budget is expected to fall into deficit and the last Ofsted inspection placed the school into the 'Requires Improvement' category. The consultation runs from 20 September until 29 October 2021.

What happens with the results of the consultation?

All the comments gathered from the consultation will be passed on to Cumbria County Council's Cabinet, who will consider what has been said before deciding whether to publish notices for the closure of the school. This, in turn, would allow another opportunity for those interested to raise any further points before the Cabinet would make a final decision on the future of the school in April 2022. Should a decision for closure be made, the school would remain open until the end of the academic year 2021/22.

Many parents have already taken their children to other schools in the area following the announcement of the potential closure consultation last term.

Both the school governors and CCC agreed that it was fairest to notify parents ahead of the summer holidays to give them time to make alternative arrangements should they wish to do so.

Won't the new housing development in town produce lots of additional children looking for school places?

We know that there is an average of slightly more than 1 primary aged child for every five households in Cumbria. The remaining 200 houses from the Strawberry How development could be expected to produce around 45 additional children over the lifetime of the build, which could be spread out over a number of years. There are currently around twice that number of spare places vacant in All Saints CE Primary and Fairfield Primary schools. Births rates for the town (in common with much of the rest of Cumbria) have fallen too and even the additional children from the estate will not be enough to offset this decline.

If St Joseph's closed, would the building be kept as a school?

That would be a decision for the Diocese of Lancaster as they own the land. It could be that the land comes with an educational covenant that means it can only be used for educational purposes.

Could St Joseph's become part of an academy chain?

As a catholic school, St Joseph could only join a catholic Multi Academy trust (MAT) and the governors have already been informed by the Diocese that they can't join as the school is considered to be financially unviable.

Won't birth rates rise as a result of lockdown?

Indications so far are that there hasn't been a spike in births, as families consider their own financial stability and job security. This, of course, may change in the future.

St Joseph's nursery caters for 2 year olds and offers wrap around care, what alternatives are there if the school closes?

The table below shows a selection of other Early Years childcare providers in the area – further information can be found by contacting Cumbria County Council's childcare Brokerage Service on 03457 125737 or by email at [childrens.information@cumbria.gov.uk](mailto:childrens.information@cumbria.gov.uk)

Name	Address	Age when children can attend
<b>School providers</b>		
All Saints CE School	Slatefell Drive, Cockermouth CA13 9BH	3 years+
Fairfield Primary	Gallowbarrow CA13 0DX	3 years+
Broughton Academy	Moor Road, Great Broughton CA13 0YT	3 years+
St Bridget's CE Primary	Brigham CA13 0TU	3 years+
Eaglesfield Paddle CE School	Eaglesfield CA13 0QY	3 years+
<b>Private and voluntary providers</b>		
Cirrus Dobinson	20 Pinfold Close, Cockermouth CA13 9JW	0+
Rachel Mossop	Mains Farm, Blindcrake, Cockermouth CA13 0QP	0+
Maria Sims	East Barn, Cockermouth CA13 9TS	0+
Anne McKim Stevens	39 Brigham Road, Cockermouth CA13 0BT	0+
Jacequeline Summers	33a Kirkgate, Cockermouth CA13 9PJ	6 mths+
Mayo Kindergarden	28 Mayo Street, Cocerkmouth CA13 0BY	18 mths+
Strawberry How Nursery	Strawberry How, Cockermouth CA13 9XR	3 mths+
Mary Platt Methodist Pre-school	Lorton Street Methodist CA13 9RH	2 years+
St Bridget's Kids Club	St Bridget's School	2 years+
Cockermouth After School Scheme	The Scout Hut, St Helen's Street, Cockermouth CA13 9HX	4 years+

What support is there for teachers and staff during this process?

Both Capita and CCC HR, and trade union representatives will be available for questions and support, but no measures would be taken until after a decision on the future of the school is decided by CCC Cabinet next April.

Has an Executive Headteacher, shared across a number of schools, been considered?

Even if an Executive Head, who must be catholic, could be found the school would also need to have a head of school, which would place more strain on dwindling finances. The position has been

advertised twice, but potentially the risk of being associated with a school in one of the lower Ofsted categories as a career move was putting off applicants and the extra demands of the continuing pandemic could have been a factor too.

What are numbers like at the school now?

3 years ago, the school's numbers were around mid-70s, this has rapidly declined, and in July there were only 27 children on roll. The return to school this September has seen numbers drastically reduced again to 6 in the main school and 2 nursery pupils.

How low do school numbers have to be before closure of a school is considered?

There is not a single minimum figure, there are some schools that have traditionally been small, and have been used to operating within a small budget. Difficulties arise when there has been a significant change in numbers. Where there is a steep decline, or dramatically changing figures year to year, it leads to problems with finances and staffing levels.

If there were another Ofsted inspection now would the school be marked down due to its low numbers?

No, not if the children in school were getting all they needed from the school, there are lots of very successful small schools. However, if the Ofsted inspection was a poor one the school would be forced to academise. The only academy trust they would be able to join is that of the Diocese of Lancaster and they have already refused on the grounds that they feel the school is not financially viable.

What is the LA's view on sharing the building with other children's services facilities, e.g., Children's Hospice Day Centre?

This type of arrangement is possible if it was efficient, and so didn't draw a negative budget. There is significant pressure on special schools across the county so extra services would be welcome, but it would be difficult to set up given the timescales of the current process. Even if the building were to house another children's service, St Joseph's budget would still be regarded as totally separate and there would still be a need to find a headteacher.

If the school closed would the council's home to school transport cover taking children to another catholic school?

Paid transport is to the catchment school or the next nearest if that catchment school is full, so this would be Fairfield or All Saints rather than the next nearest catholic school. The transport to school policy has changed over the years and is not as generous as it used to be.

If St Joseph's building was sold by the diocese could that money generated from that be used to transport the pupils to another Catholic school?

We cannot speak for the diocese but if they did this here, they could potentially open the floodgates and then need to provide this option everywhere.

Where can I read the school's Ofsted report?

<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50093759>