

Weaverthorpe School - Closure Proposal

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) (last update 31 January 2022)

1. Current Situation FAQs

1.1 What is the purpose of the proposed consultation on Weaverthorpe CE VC School?

The consultation is to seek the views of parents and other stakeholders on the proposal that Weaverthorpe CE VC School be closed from 31 August 2021.

1.2 Why are the Local Authority consulting on a proposal to close the school?

The Ofsted inspection in January 2020 found Weaverthorpe Church of England VC Primary School to have serious weaknesses and to be 'inadequate' overall. Following publication of the inspection report the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) issued a directive academy order (DAO) in July 2020 as the school was eligible for intervention under the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

An acting headteacher (Mrs Ray) took over the leadership of the school in September 2020 and at the same time the previous governing body was replaced by an Interim Executive Board (IEB).

In the period of time since the directive academy order was issued the Department for Education has been unable to identify a Multi Academy Trust (MAT) to sponsor the school due to viability concerns.

Although no potential sponsor academy trust could be secured it was considered important to explore if a formal partnership with another local maintained school could be an option to sustain Weaverthorpe School. The Local Authority and the Diocese of York worked together to discuss the situation with the potential partner schools in the local area. None of those discussions resulted an acceptable partnership proposal for Weaverthorpe.

It is considered highly unlikely that a partnership arrangement with another local school, such as federation or amalgamation, can now be identified. Therefore the school remains vulnerable as a stand-alone school due to the uncertain nature of leadership beyond the current leadership and governance arrangements which end in July 2022.

In the absence of any proposal to sustain the school, it was therefore felt appropriate to seek a consultation on its future.

1.3 What other options were considered before approving this consultation?

In addition to making the improvements set out in the Ofsted report, Weaverthorpe has two other critical problems: it has a growing financial deficit (which reflects the low current and prospective pupil numbers) and an absence of stable and permanent leadership and governance to be able to continue the school's improvement.

In the absence of a MAT sponsor the best possibility of addressing these issues would be by collaborating with another maintained school which would give opportunities to share costs and expertise. Despite the LA and Diocese of York asking a number of nearby schools to consider collaboration, no suitable proposal has emerged.

1.4 What had/has the LA done to address issues at the school?

The school had been judged to be 'Good' by the previous Ofsted inspection in 2010 and by a monitoring inspection in April 2016 which meant the LA had a lighter touch approach to monitoring school improvement. However, LA involvement with the school had highlighted some of the issues Ofsted subsequently raised for attention, but school leaders and governors had not made sufficient progress to address them before the Ofsted inspection in January 2020.

To ensure the improvements were prioritised the LA asked Langton School's governors to agree to Mrs Ray taking the role of acting Headteacher in addition to her Langton responsibilities for a temporary period. The LA applied to the RSC to request an IEB, recommending new and experienced governors, education specialists and local representation to replace the former Governing Body. The role of the IEB is two-fold, in part to address the school improvement issues and at the same time to support the school to be sponsored by a MAT, in line with the academy order. It is normally expected this process is achieved within about a year.

The LA School Improvement Team have worked alongside Mrs Ray and the IEB as they have continued to take effective action to improve the situation in school; this has been reflected in the Ofsted monitoring inspection report.

As a result of the 'Inadequate' judgement the school was, by law, subject to an Academy Order. This requires the Regional Schools' Council (RSC) to identify a MAT willing to take responsibility for the School. The RSC did nominate a MAT to consider sponsoring the school in 2020 but, following a due diligence exercise, the MAT decided that it could not sponsor the school. No other option has been offered by the RSC.

1.5 What is the current financial position of the school?

Based on the start budget submitted in May 2021 the school had a budget surplus of £36.7k at the end of the 2020/21 financial year; the funding for the 2020/21 financial year was based on 39 pupils. However, the school is projecting in-year budget deficits of £48.8k in 2021/22 and £26.9k in 2022/23 and an overall cumulative budget deficit of £39k at the end of 2022/23. The budget projections are based on pupil assumptions of 25 in 2021/22 and 21 in 2022/23, so the position will deteriorate further if pupil numbers fall below that level.

In January 2022 it was confirmed that the school would receive additional sparsity funding from April 2022 of £10k p.a. as the result of a change in the methodology applied by central government.

Based on the revised budget, which takes account of this additional income and other changes, the school had a budget surplus of £36.7k at the end of the 2020/21 financial year; the funding for the 2020/21 financial year was based on 39 pupils. However, the school is projecting in-year budget deficits of £42.8k in 2021/22 and £12.5k in 2022/23 and an overall cumulative budget deficit of £18.6k at the end of 2022/23. The budget projections are based on pupil assumptions of 25 in 2021/22 and 22 in 2022/23, so the position will deteriorate further if pupil numbers fall below that level.

Both of these budget projections already reflect a notional reduction in staffing from 3.2 FTE to 2.5 FTE in September 2022.

1.6 Why was the statement of action from the LA judged as not fit for purpose by Ofsted?

This was referred to during the recent monitoring visit in June 2020. The statement of action (SoA) was written and was in use in the timescales required. It had been shared with the school leaders

and governors and was shared with Ofsted during the visit. However, due to an admin error it was not sent to Ofsted in the required time period and, due to this, the inspector was not able to say it was fit for purpose.

This would have no impact on the original judgement of 'Inadequate' (as the SoA is only required after the inadequate judgement is published) nor does it affect the academy order.

1.7 Which maintained schools have been approached by the LA with regards to partnership with Weaverthorpe?

Several North Yorkshire maintained schools were approached in the summer term 2021 to establish whether they would be interested in a partnership with Weaverthorpe. The Wolds and Vale Federation made up of Sherburn CE and Luttons Community Primary, Hertford Vale and West Heselton schools all confirmed that they were unable to explore such a partnership at this time.

The York Diocese approached the Federation of Sledmere and Wetwang Schools about the potential for collaboration with Weaverthorpe in the summer term 2021. This approach was made by the Diocese as the federation is within the East Riding, but it was supported by NYCC and the IEB. There were further discussions and assessments undertaken in confidence, given the sensitivity of the proposition, which continued into the Autumn term. Ultimately, this work concluded in October 2021 and did not result in an acceptable proposal for the future of the school.

Wold Newton is a Primary School in the East Riding. It was not among the group of schools initially contacted to establish if they had interest in collaborating with Weaverthorpe School. However, the Governing Body of Wold Newton Foundation School considered the position of Weaverthorpe School at their meeting on 2 December and confirmed that it would not be feasible for them to form a collaboration at this time.

Should any options emerge, either before the consultation or during it, that could potentially place the school on a sustainable footing, then they will be explored.

1.8 Why can't pupil numbers be increased, there are a lot in the area that go elsewhere?

Children attending a school other than their local school is common and this is a factor which impacts on the numbers at Weaverthorpe School. Over time it might be possible to build the numbers on roll at Weaverthorpe, although this would mean attracting children from other local school areas. This is considered unlikely to happen until the school has achieved 'Good'. The short-term financial situation and the presence of the academy order does not allow leaders and governors the time to develop the school in this way.

1.9 What is the capacity of other local schools? Have these assessments taken into account plans for new houses in Sherburn?

At present there is a surplus of 70 primary school places across the five most local North Yorkshire schools including Weaverthorpe. If Weaverthorpe School were to close and all the school's pupils were to attend one of those schools this would still leave a surplus of 21 places across the area.

Across the same area there is projected to be an impact of 28 additional pupils as the potential yield from housing developments, but this is uncertain.

All known housing sites with planning permission or identified in the Ryedale Local Plan, such as the application for new dwellings at Manor Farm, Sherburn have been taken into account when projecting the available capacity.

The more specific position for the Luttons and Weaverthorpe areas is set out the NYCC report to Executive Members for the meeting on 7 December 2021, which can be viewed on the School's website. Luttons School has the capacity to take any additional pupils as a result of the proposed closure, and has indicated a willingness to do so. Luttons School has further indicated that it has capacity to increase its admission number and LA officers will review that position with Luttons if necessary.

2. Process and Timescale FAQs

2.1 Who makes the decisions about the future of the school?

The decision on whether to proceed with the consultation will be a decision for the Executive Member for Education and Skills.

Latter stages of the process are determined by the Executive Member or by the Full Executive Committee of the County Council.

2.2 What are the different steps and timescales of the process?

This is a Statutory Process and therefore there are number of prescribed stages that need to be followed.

On 7 December, the Executive Member for Education and Skills took the decision to approve the consultation.

Due to the Christmas break the consultation period will commence on 7 January 2022. During the following six-week period all stakeholders including parents and staff will have access to a consultation document and be able to attend a consultation meeting to get further information on the proposal. Stakeholders will also be able to submit comments on the proposal and they would be taken into consideration by the decision makers.

The consultation period will end on 18 February and then on 22 March the NYCC Executive will consider a report that would include all of the comments submitted during the consultation period. The decision for the Executive would be whether or not to approve the publication of Statutory Proposals, which would set out the proposal in a formal sense and notify the public of the intention to close the school.

If approved the Statutory Proposals would be published on 1 April and a further period of four weeks would be observed where stakeholders would once again have an opportunity to comment on the proposal before a final decision was taken by the Executive in May. If this decision were to approve the proposal, then the School would close on 31 August 2022.

2.3 Is the closure the only possible outcome?

No, although at this stage it is considered the LA, Diocese and IEB have collectively explored all of the realistic possibilities to sustain the school, and it is on that basis that we consider it necessary to now consult on the future of the school.

Should any options emerge, either before the consultation or during it, that could potentially place the school on a sustainable footing then they will be explored, and presented to the Executive who would then have the option not to proceed with the proposal.

2.4 Will the local authority continue to consider other options put forward throughout the consultation process?

Yes. Although the LA has now reached the position where we cannot see any short-term prospect of a sponsoring MAT being put forward by the RSC or a suitable collaborative arrangement with a maintained school. Currently the school is not financially viable on a stand-alone basis and for it to continue the IEB would have to find a permanent leadership team that could continue with the school improvement at the pace required, whilst also working to address the financial situation.

Should any options emerge, either before the consultation or during it, that could potentially place the school on a sustainable footing then they will be explored, and presented to the Executive who would then have the option not to proceed with the proposal.

2.5 Why is the consultation not starting until January but a parents meeting was held in November?

The IEB had invited LA and Diocesan officers to the meeting on Wednesday 10 November because the IEB members (and LA officers) wanted to be transparent and to ensure families understood the process as early as possible. Due to the decision about the approval to consult not being considered until December, and the consultation not taking place until January, the IEB wanted to fill the time void and ensure that parents were as fully informed as possible.

The full timescales are set out above.

2.6 Does the parents meeting in November mean that the decision has already been taken?

No. LA Officers attended the meeting, at the invitation of the IEB, in order to support families to understand the process that may take place in relation to the school. Officers made it clear that the meeting was not part of any consultation process, and that the LA would expect to repeat much of the information again at the formal public meeting that is proposed for January 2022.

2.7 Do rural schools have to be given two years notice of closure?

No. There is however the presumption against the closure of rural schools which states that:

Proposers should be aware that the Department expects all decision-makers to adopt a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This doesn't mean that a rural school will never close, but that the case for closure should be strong and clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area.

3. Admissions FAQs

3.1 How is the LA assisting parents with their consideration of alternative schools?

The LA has communicated via the School with all parents about how the preference exercise for alternative school places will be managed in December and January and what advice and assistance will be available in that period. Information on the size of other local schools has been provided.

3.2 When will the admissions process be decided?

The intention is that provisional school allocations (that would apply for September 2022 subject to closure) will be notified to parents in late January 2022.

3.3 Does the assistance being given with the admissions process mean that the decision has already been taken?

No. From an LA perspective it is not ideal to undertake a preference exercise for alternative schools until much later in the process, where possible this would preferably take place after the end of the consultation period. This would allow for the catchment areas to be confirmed. These have implications for school transport and may be a factor in some parents' choices.

However, the LA always hopes to be responsive and supportive to the reaction and needs of parents in relation to admissions. The purpose of the preference exercise is to ensure fair opportunity for all parents and avoid a first-come first-served scenario.

The LA emphasised during the 10 November meeting at the School that any alternative school allocations would be made provisionally and would be subject to a closure decision, unless otherwise requested by individual families. The LA is expressly not encouraging applications for transfer sooner than September 2022 (the school will be open and operating in line with current arrangements until July 2022 come what may), but parents have the right to request early transfer if they wish.

3.4 What if parents apply to move their children earlier than September 2022?

Parents have the right to request early transfer if they wish and the LA is obliged to respond. All applications to transfer at any point between now and September 2022 will be considered together through a managed and co-ordinated process to ensure fairness for all.

3.5 Can parents with children due to start school in September 2022 still apply for a place at Weaverthorpe School?

Yes they can as no decision about closure has been taken. However, as with all applications in any part of the County, the LA always strongly recommends that at least two school preferences are made.

Applications for reception admissions should be submitted by the deadline on 15 January 2022.

3.6 I have already nominated Weaverthorpe as a preference for my child for Reception entry in September 2022, what do I do?

It is recommended that a second preference (at least) be added as this would be considered if a decision is made to close Weaverthorpe. Parents who have already submitted their application should contact schooladmissions@northyorks.gov.uk if they wish to change their application or add to it.

3.7 Won't school places for Reception entry in September 2022 have been allocated before we know the school is closing?

The indicative timetable shows that the Executive decision to proceed to the final stage of the closure process would be taken in March, which is prior to the national offer day on 19 April 2022. The LA admissions team will monitor this situation closely and during March would be in direct contact with any parents who may have applied for Weaverthorpe as their first preference school to discuss the options for their application.

It is correct that the final stage of the decision making process would be in late May and so after the national offer date in April. The LA admissions team would seek, through their conversations in March, to avoid any implications for parents.

3.8 What is the position for Secondary School transfers?

Children in Year 6 will transfer to secondary schools as normal in September 2022. There will be no change to the catchment area for secondary schools.

3.9 If I want my child to go to another Church of England school can I do this?

Yes. You can apply to another CE school and the LA will do its best to comply with your preference through the co-ordinated preference exercise.

3.10 Can I apply for a school in the East Riding?

Yes. The LA has agreed with East Riding County Council that any applications for schools in their area will be managed through the co-ordinated preference exercise.

3.11 What will be the future catchment area arrangements?

The proposal, subject to consultation, is that should Weaverthorpe School close then the following catchment areas would apply from September 2022:

- The stand-alone part of the existing Weaverthorpe catchment area would transfer to Luttons School
- The shared area (Butterwick) would become solely attached to Hertford Vale CE School

The LA would welcome any feedback during the consultation period on these proposals and any alternatives to them.

3.12 What is the NYCC Policy on School Transport?

Free transport is provided to the catchment school, or nearest school to the home address, subject to qualifying distance:

- two miles for children under eight years of age;
- three miles for children aged over eight; or
- where the route to the catchment or nearest school is not safe to walk accompanied by a responsible adult.

Low income

Additional children from low income families are eligible for free home to school transport including;

Children aged eight, but under the age of 11 who are attending their catchment or nearest school and the distance to that school is more than two miles.

A low income family is where children are entitled to free school meals or whose parent are in receipt of the maximum level of working tax credit.

Transport to Luttons Community Primary School

The following section only applies in the event that Weaverthorpe CE VC Primary School does proceed to closure in August 2022, and that Luttons CP School becomes a catchment School for the Weaverthorpe area from September 2022.

The LA Road Safety team have assessed the route between Weaverthorpe village and Luttons CP School and it is considered to be a safe walking route (child accompanied as necessary) based on the standard criteria applied to all assessments. However, having considered the matter the County Council is minded to apply discretion as allowed under the Home to School Transport policy in the circumstances of a school closure.

It is proposed that all existing Weaverthorpe School pupils who live in the School's existing catchment area and beyond 2 miles from Luttons CP School would be deemed to be eligible for free home to school transport to Luttons CP School on their transfer in September 2022. This proposed approach would also apply to any new starters in the Reception year at Luttons CP School in September 2022 who meet the same distance and residency criteria. This would provide support to the small number of families who are affected by the closure and who would otherwise not be eligible for transport assistance to Luttons CP School based on the criteria set out above. Eligibility would continue for the length of the child's attendance at Luttons CP School, unless there were to be a future change of address for the family that meant the distance and residency criteria were no longer satisfied.

Arrangements for home to school transport will be confirmed at the end of the statutory process following consultation.

4. Other Options FAQs

4.1 Can the current leadership and governance just be made permanent?

Langton School Governing Board were generous in offering support for leadership at Weaverthorpe by offering expertise and capacity through Mrs Ray, other members of school staff and two of their governors to support the IEB; in addition they agreed to extend their stay for a second year. However, these staff and governors now need to return full time to their substantive posts to focus exclusively on Langton School.

4.2 Now improvements have been made can the school be inspected and judged good?

Ofsted will continue to make monitoring visits to Weaverthorpe to assess its progress towards the removal of the inadequate judgement and this could result in a new judgement. However, to be assessed as 'Good', Ofsted would need to see that this performance has been sustained over a reasonable period and be confident that it can continue. At present, the improvements in provision and specifically, the quality of education, are not yet sufficiently well embedded to ensure all children, from their different starting points, achieve success. Additional capacity has been added this year with a remit to improve curriculum planning which remains at the early stages of its development. Leaders have planned and invested in resources to support the curriculum, but the impact of this is yet to be seen in outcomes for pupils. Further improvements remain a challenge due to the uncertain nature of leadership beyond the current temporary arrangements.

4.3 Can the academy order be rescinded?

Ofsted do not usually return to undertake a full inspection for two full years following an inadequate inspection outcome and due to the pandemic routine inspections have not taken place. The RSC has discretion to revoke academy orders in exceptional circumstances but this is not expected unless a school is judged to be 'Good' or 'Outstanding' following a full inspection. At that point, it would be a decision for the RSC whether or not to agree to a revocation of the DAO, and this is never guaranteed.

Although much work is being done to focus on securing the quality of education in school at the moment, this is temporary and may not be sustainable due to the interim leadership and governance.

4.4 Would the Local Authority appoint new permanent leadership and governance?

The LA's role was to secure short-term leadership and governance following the 'Inadequate' judgement. The appointment of a replacement permanent Headteacher is always the responsibility of the governing board (IEB in this case) and not the LA.

An IEB of a school with a DAO in place and a deficit budget position were right to fully consider the future of the school and its viability before considering a permanent leadership arrangement.

If an academy sponsorship had been agreed, many trusts would have brought in their own leadership arrangements alongside the change in governance.

4.5 Can more schools, including those further away, be considered for collaboration?

The same issues are likely to apply to all schools. We also know that successful collaborations typically involve schools that are close to each other so the benefits of the collaborative arrangements can be maximised. All schools within a reasonable distance will receive a copy of the consultation document.

Has the new Luttons Headteacher been asked to reconsider collaboration?

The decision on collaboration is made by the Governing Board. At present the governing board of the school/federation are making an arrangement with Snainton School which will preclude any other commitments.

4.6 Could the LA just ask the other schools again?

The schools will be part of the consultation and can respond how they see fit. However, the fundamental position on which they made their decisions is unlikely to have changed.

4.7 Can the school just recruit a permanent headteacher of their own?

No. Unless the school is a viable proposition, the IEB could not consider trying to employ a permanent Headteacher.

4.8 Could community donations be used to address the financial issues at the school?

Any financial contributions from the community to support the school budget must be voluntary. Therefore, no-one can be under any obligation to pay and any contributions must be unconditional and without undue influence on school management. This requirement places a significant level of uncertainty in respect of reliance on voluntary community funding for the financial sustainability of the school. In this regard, the Local Authority is unlikely to be able to take into account any voluntary contributions in assessing the financial viability of the school and the school finances should be secure without any reliance upon pledges or other voluntary support

5. Academy Options FAQs

5.1 Could Norton Academy be used as a "pyramid" school for other primary schools to join?

It is the responsibility of the RSC to identify any potential academy sponsors for the school. The RSC has advised the LA that Evolution School Learning Trust (Norton Academy) would not be considered

as a match for Weaverthorpe because it is not a faith trust. They would also expect a potential sponsor to be able to demonstrate in-house expertise and a successful track-record in primary phase school improvement, and to have good or outstanding primary schools already within the trust.

5.2 Have all MATs been approached?

Choice of potential MAT sponsors is managed by the RSC and they will have looked at possible options for faith-based trusts given that Weaverthorpe is a Church of England school.

6. Further advice and assistance

How can I get further information about any admissions queries?

Email your query to: schooladmissions@northyorks.gov.uk

How can I get further information about the process?

Email your query to: schoolorganisation@northyorks.gov.uk

7. Additional questions from the public meeting 20 January 2022

7.1 How was the local authority involved in the school before, during and after the Ofsted inspection?

The role of the LA in school improvement is to monitor the performance of schools and to provide, or signpost to, support for school leaders and governors to access. The LA also has a role to broker direct in-school support where schools require this.

Between the Ofsted inspection in 2016 and the inspection in January 2020, the LA school improvement team undertook regular monitoring visits to the school and each time provided feedback and recommendations to leaders and governors in line with their approach for 'good' schools. In 2019, the visits identified that issues were not being addressed at the pace required and as a result the LA wrote to the chair of the governing board, prior to the Ofsted inspection, in January 2020 to set out these concerns, and issue a warning that action must be taken by the school, otherwise formal powers of intervention may be invoked.

The Ofsted inspection took place shortly after this letter was issued and the judgement was that the school was inadequate, resulting in the issuing of a directive academy order. In the period since the inspection, the LA has used its powers to establish an IEB, to broker leadership cover and to provide additional support, working alongside the current leaders and governors.

7.2 Why was there a vacancy for the LA governor prior to the inspection in January 2020?

When boards have a vacancy for a governor, they are responsible for filling this as soon as possible. If the vacancy applies to the LA governor, then the LA supports the recruitment activity. All applications are reviewed by an LA panel, and references obtained as part of a screening check. Ideally the school have identified the skill set they need so the panel can understand the board's requirements in order to identify and nominate suitable candidates. Candidates are identified by three main routes; 1) They are encouraged by the school to apply for the position and stipulate this on their application; 2) The candidate has applied independently and have confirmed the school is within the region from their home or work they are prepared to travel and is suited to their needs (i.e. primary/ secondary); 3) the candidate has been an LA Governor elsewhere. Where a match (or matches) are identified, the LA forward nominations to the school. The board must then decide

whether the LA nominee is accepted or rejected by the board. There were no appropriate speculative applications on the LA database in Autumn 2019, the board were reviewing any contacts and were in the process of seeking a nominee in their networks to recommend to the LA panel. The LA established an IEB during 2020 following the Ofsted inspection of Jan 2020 - as part of this, all board members were nominated by the LA, in conjunction with the Diocese of York.