



have
your
say...

...on the future of Shelton Lower School

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**Central
Bedfordshire**

Summary

Shelton Lower School is a small rural lower school in the village of Upper Shelton.

The school has an overall pupil capacity of 75 pupils but has not been full for a number of years and unfortunately this decline is forecast to continue. Only five children's parents have requested a place in the September intake out of a total admission number of 15.

Shelton Lower School has, this year, gone into a budget deficit position and this looks set to worsen.

The governors alerted the council to the deteriorating financial situation in February 2018. The council has been providing financial support to the school and exploring possible options. At present there seems to be no prospect of recovery and therefore we must consider the future of the school.

The council has to follow statutory guidance in any circumstance where closure of a school might result. We are consulting on all options, and are inviting parents, local residents and stakeholders to give us their views on the future options for the school. It is only after this stage that any proposal to close the school will be considered.

This consultation document sets out the rationale for considering the future of the school, how you can have your say and the decision-making process.

Introduction

Councils (or local authorities) have a duty to ensure there are enough suitable school places for children aged 5-16. As part of delivering this role councils can open new schools and close existing schools.

Shelton Lower School is a Foundation school. As such it is overseen and funded by the council and follows the national curriculum, but is the employer of its staff. The governing body and head teacher are responsible for running the school, including recruitment, marketing and financial management.

About the school

Shelton Lower School is a small rural lower school in Lower Shelton Road, in village of Upper Shelton in Central Bedfordshire.

The school is a Foundation school, federated with Southill Lower School (this means they share a governing body and head teacher) and the land belongs to The Vale of Marston Schools Trust.

The school has a good reputation, being rated as Good in the latest Ofsted inspection.

The school has a pre-school nursery, a reception year and pupils from year 1 to year 4. No pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

The total capacity of the school is 75 pupils (years 1-4 and Reception year) with an intake capacity of 15 pupils a year.

About 40 per cent of pupils at the school will live outside the school's catchment area in September 2018 with only three living in the village of Upper Shelton.

Rationale for considering the future of the school

The school has not been full for a number of years and only five children are due to start in the September year R intake out of a total admission number of 15.

Taking account of these pupils, and pupils whose parents have taken places in other schools, the number of pupils on roll in September will be 39, which is 52 per cent of Shelton lower school's capacity. In addition, there are currently 11 children attending the pre-school nursery but no new applicants for September 2018, and the head teacher is currently reviewing its viability.

Despite the governing body making a significant effort over the years to increase pupil numbers through publicity, providing a pre-school nursery and federating with another school, and undertaken marketing activity, there has been a steady decline in pupil numbers and this decline is forecast to continue.

At the point of producing this document it is predicted that by September 2018 there will be only 39 pupils on roll. The projected pupil numbers for the school are provided below. These projections take account of the planned housing growth in the local area. The numbers show a continued decline with the school expected to be operating at under a half of capacity (41 per cent) by 2020 and around a third by 2021.

Year group	Oct-18	Oct-19	Oct-20	Oct-21
Reception	5	4	4	4
Year 1	8	5	4	4
Year 2	9	8	5	4
Year 3	5	9	8	5
Year 4	8	5	9	8
Total	35	31	30	25
Percentage of capacity	47%	41%	40%	33%

Schools are allocated funding based on the number of pupils they have. There is a point at which schools cannot continue because they have too few pupils and therefore inadequate funding to keep operating. Shelton Lower School has gone into a budget deficit position and this looks set to worsen.

The table below shows the forecast financial position for the school based on the predicted pupil numbers. This information was accurate at the point of producing this document. Given the projected decline in pupil numbers, the deficit cannot be repaid and is projected to increase.

Forecast school budget, March 2018 to March 2021				
	31.3.2018	31.3.2019	31.3.2020	31.3.2021
Income	£338,712	£285,680	£268,078	£252,702
Expenditure	£348,680	£303,822	£301,939	£292,554
In year revenue deficit	(£9,968)	(£18,142)	(£33,861)	(£39,852)
Deficit brought forward	(£8,786)	(£18,754)	(£36,896)	(£70,757)
Cumulative revenue deficit	(£18,754)	(£36,896)	(£70,757)	(£110,609)

It will be increasingly difficult with reducing budget year on year for the school to sustain the broad and balanced curriculum required by the national curriculum, which is a legal requirement.

The governors alerted the council to the deteriorating financial situation in February 2018. The council has been providing financial support to the school and exploring possible options. At present there seems to be no prospect of recovery and therefore we must consider the future of the school as its financial viability is in question.

Therefore, in the best educational interests of pupils, the council has started the statutory process to consider the future of the school and possible closure.

Impact of closure

Shelton Lower is a rural school and therefore the council must consider;

1. the effect of closure on the local community
2. educational standards at the school and likely effect on neighbouring schools
3. the availability, and cost, of transport to other schools
4. any increase in motor vehicle use as a result of closure and the effects of any increase
5. any alternatives to closure.

Below provides an initial view on the potential impact of closure but this consultation gives you an opportunity to raise any other issues that you feel should be considered.

Impact on community

The local community does not use the school facilities for community activities.

Impact on schools

Parents of pupils currently attending the school may express a preference to send their children to neighbouring schools in the area, or outside it. There are three lower schools in the immediate area: Church End, Cranfield Academy and Thomas Johnson. All three schools currently have vacancies. The other lower school in the area, although further away, is Houghton Conquest Lower School. The three neighbouring schools also have provision for pre-school nursery children and can accommodate the children currently at Shelton.

With regard to standards in alternative schools, they are all rated by Ofsted as good, with all (including Shelton) assessed by the council's School Improvement Service to have the potential to be 'outstanding'. The table below shows the current Ofsted rating, foundation stage profile, key stage one assessment outcomes for 2016 and 2017 and pupil characteristics of all the schools in the area.

Ofsted, attainment and pupil data of lower schools in the area								
		2016		2017				
School	Ofsted	FS	KS 1 RWM	FS	KS 1 RWM	English as additional Language	Free school meals	Special Educational Needs
Church End	Good	66	78	70	76	11%	7%	17%
Cranfield Academy	Good	72	70	79	68	22%	4%	7%
Houghton Conquest	Good	79	78	78	88	0%	5%	8%
Shelton	Good	70	70	80	66	3%	10%	5%
Thomas Johnson	Good	84	70	79	86	8%	7%	13%

Travel

As nearly all pupils attending the school come from outside of the village, the effect of the use of motor vehicles in the area, if the school closes, would be negligible.

In the event of closure, pupils on the school roll at the end of the summer term 2019 may be eligible for assistance with travel costs, in line with Central Bedfordshire Council's home to school transport policy. If the council proposes to close the school (stage 2), there will be a detailed assessment of current travel distances to the nearest other suitable school. Parents would be notified of any school transport eligibility at the time of making an application for an alternative school place.

Process for decision making

The council is required to follow a prescribed process to close a school. The process has five stages and the process for this is set out below.

We are currently at stage 1 – informal consultation. We are inviting parents, local residents and stakeholders to give us their views on the future of the school before we propose closure.

Statutory process	Action	Date/time
Stage 1 – Informal	Six-week consultation starts	23 April 2018
	Staff meeting	30 April 2018, 3.30pm
	Public meeting	30 April 2018, 6.00pm
	Consultation closes	8 June 2018
Stage 2 – Proposal to close	Director of Children’s Services decision	22 June 2018
Stage 3 – Representations	Four-week representation period starts	25 June 2018
	Representation period closes	23 July 2018
	Overview and scrutiny committee	30 July 2018, 10.00am
Stage 4 - Decision	Executive make a decision	7 August 2018, 9.30am
Stage 5 – Implementation	School to close if this is the decision	31 August 2019

It should be noted that time process and timetable is illustrative after stage 1. No decision has been made about closure, and no decision will be made until careful consideration and due process following this informal consultation.

We understand that the possibility of closure is very unsettling for parents and they want to know more about what would happen if the school does close. We have therefore prepared a separate factsheet to explain the process for allocating new school places for Shelton Lower School pupils.

Have your say

You can have your say online at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/consultations or you can pick up a paper response form from the school.

All responses should be received by **5pm Friday 8 June 2018**.

We will also hold a public meeting at the school on 30 April at 6pm to answer your questions. You do not need to register to attend the meeting.

Central Bedfordshire in contact

Contact us...

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on the web: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/consultations

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