



**Proposal for the Closure of
St Gregory's Catholic Primary School,
Macclesfield**

**Consultation
25 October 2023 – 26 November 2023**

PUBLIC CONSULTATION DOCUMENT

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ABOUT THIS CONSULTATION

Cheshire East Council and the Diocese of Shrewsbury are consulting on the closure of St Gregory's Catholic Primary School, Macclesfield.

St Gregory's is a Voluntary Aided School which is funded by the Government and maintained by the Local Authority but also receives financial contributions from the Diocese. The site is owned by both the Diocese and Cheshire East Council.

St Gregory's Catholic Primary School is a small primary school based in the village of Bollington on the outskirts of the town of Macclesfield. The school caters for ages 4 -11 with an admission number of 15 pupils per year group and an overall capacity for 105. There has been a decline in pupil numbers over the past five years (2019-2023) with only 1 child being admitted to Reception 2023. Based on the most recent pupil census, October 2023, there are 6 pupils currently on roll which means the school has 94% surplus places.

Schools are primarily funded as a result of the number of pupils on roll. This funding pays for the Headteacher, class teachers, teaching assistants, other things that support a pupil with their learning, as well as the things that keep the school running. Fewer pupils means less funding. With falling numbers on roll, the funding dips below the level needed, and a school may become unviable meaning it cannot financially support itself.

St Gregory's Catholic Primary School received an Ofsted 'Inadequate' judgement following a S5 Inspection in February 2022 this resulted in the school being subject to an Academy Order. A sponsored academy solution from suitable Diocesan Academy Trusts was sought. This solution has not been secured as consulted Trusts have assessed the school as unviable in the longer term.

WHO IS THIS CONSULTATION FOR

This is for anyone with a role or interest in schools in the area surrounding St Gregory's Catholic Primary School or their local community. It may include:

- Parent/Carers
- Staff and Governing Body
- Ward Members and Parish Councils
- Local MP
- Diocesan's
- Other local schools including Academies.
- Neighbouring Local Authorities
- Other interested parties

TIMETABLE

| | Event | Dates |
|---------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Stage 1 | Pre – Publication Consultation- already taken place | 2 to 22 October 2023 |
| Stage 2 | Publication of Proposal - Public Notice local press | 25 October 2023 |
| Stage 3 | Representation Period | 25 October 2023 to 26 November 2023 |
| Stage 4 | Decision Making - Children and Families Committee meeting | 11 December 2023 |
| Stage 5 | Implementation | This will follow Committee Decision |

HOW TO FEEDBACK YOUR VIEWS

Before any decisions can be taken, the Local Authority would like to hear your views.

You can:-

- Complete our electronic survey on the Council's website at www.cheshireeast.gov.uk.
- Complete the feedback form and email it to SOCS@cheshireeast.gov.uk

Your personal details will be withheld but any feedback provided will be collated to inform decision-making and will become a public record and published on the Council's website.

At the end of the representation period, a report will be prepared and presented to the Children and Families Committee on 11 December 2023.

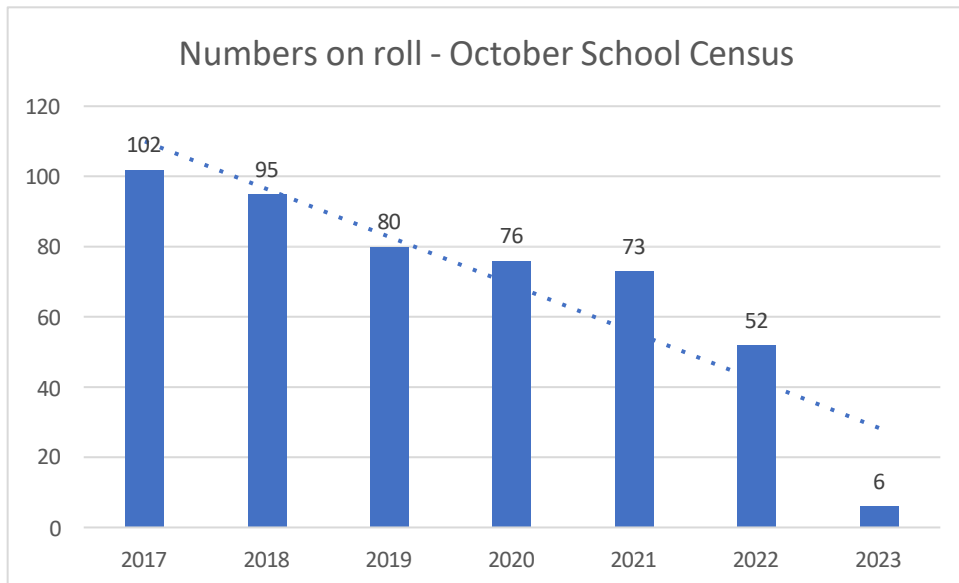
BACKGROUND

The decision to propose closure of the school is not one taken lightly. Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act (EIA) 2006 states that only the Council can propose the closure of a voluntary aided school in this situation.

As previously mentioned the school has been subject to declining numbers on roll since 2019. In October 2023 the school had 6 pupils on roll as illustrated in the table below.

| OCTOBER 2023 CENSUS | PAN SEP 2023 | Number of pupils on roll | | | | | | | | NET CAP @ May 2023 | Surplus places % |
|---|--------------------|--------------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|-------|--------------------------------|---------------------|
| | | R | Y1 | Y2 | Y3 | Y4 | Y5 | Y6 | Total | | |
| St Gregory's Catholic Primary School | 15 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 6 | 105 | 94.3% |

Pupil numbers have been falling steadily for a number of years, however pupil numbers in October 2023 mark their lowest point in 7 years as illustrated in the table below.



In February 2022, the School received an Ofsted Inadequate. An inadequate Ofsted judgement requires the local authority to produce a 'Statement of Action' which was approved by Ofsted. The solution for an inadequate Ofsted judgement is a sponsored academy route and as a Diocesan school, would require alignment to Diocesan policies in seeking an appropriate trust for the school to join. This solution has not been secured as consulted trusts have assessed the school as unviable in the longer term.

As of March 22, the school had 72 pupils in school showing that it had vacancies of 32% across all age ranges.

There were also places in other local schools across the Bollington planning area as well as in Macclesfield primary schools.

A parents' forum was established and meetings stated that the focus of the local authority support was to address those areas identified as inadequate by Ofsted – this focussed on developing a stronger curriculum offer.

The local authority approached a successful local trust who agreed to provide interim leadership and packages of support to accelerate progress across the school.

Ongoing meetings took place between the Diocese, local authority and the Northwest Regional Commissioner's team to seek an appropriate trust for the school to join.

During this academic year as from September 2022, pupil numbers continued to decrease. The school operated in three classes but as numbers fell further, the structure as from September 2023 was two classes with an estimated school population of around 22.

Parental feedback has been that whilst there has been significant support for the current interim leader and the curriculum work which has been undertaken, due to the falling numbers and the ability to maintain friendship groups and pastoral/peer support, parents have sourced alternative school places in other local schools.

REASONS FOR CLOSING A SCHOOL

The consideration and methodology for closing a school is based upon DfE guidance. Identified reasons for closing a school include:

- a. There are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium to long term.
- b. It has been judged inadequate by Ofsted and the Secretary of State has revoked the academy order.
- c. It is no longer considered viable.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

The information below sets out a series of options: -

1. Do nothing

- The numbers in the school are too small to allow the school to be financially sustainable and therefore the deficit budget position for the school would continue grow.
- The local authority could not sustain a school which had a three-year deficit budget without a viable solution and therefore financial risk would continue to increase.
- Small numbers in the school impacts significantly on the risk to provide a good quality education for attending pupils.

2. To seek a sponsored academy solution for the school

- A due diligence process has been followed with two Diocesan trusts which has not seen this school as sustainable in the longer term due primarily to a fall in pupil numbers.
- Increasing risks due to the preferred national solution for the school not being available.

3. To consider alternative uses for the site or alternative educational provisions such as a SEND school.

- Such options will be considered as part of a separate formal consultation process and will follow the DfE's guidance.

WHEN WOULD THE SCHOOL CLOSE

Should a decision be made to close the school, implementation of the closure should start as soon as possible. School closures are usually carried out over 1,2, or 3 academic years but the current low number on roll means that this could be facilitated earlier.

Consideration is given to a number of factors including:

- Assuring a good transition for pupils to move to a nearby school.
- The welfare of pupils some of which may have additional needs.
- The welfare of staff at the school,
- The continued ability to provide good education to the pupils during transition.
- The use of public funds.

The council has considered options available and is intending that closure of the school will take place on 31 December 2023.

DISPLACED PUPILS

All parents of existing pupils have been contacted with details of local schools with vacancies and offered support with applications taking into consideration parental preferences. Where children have an Education and Health Care Plan the Admissions team is working alongside the Special Educational Needs Team to find an alternative school that can meet the child's needs. We will meet with local schools to ensure that all children have an alternative school place.