

# Statutory Proposal to close Chittlehampton Church of England Primary School

## 1.0 Contact details

Devon Moors Federation  
Chittlehampton Church of England Primary School: Voluntary Aided  
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## 2.0 Implementation

Chittlehampton C of E Primary School is proposed to close from 31 August 2022.

## 3.0 Reason for Closure

Chittlehampton C of E Primary school is a small, rural primary school for children aged 3-11 and historically operates as a two class school due to the number on roll. The school has a published admission number of 8 with a capacity for 56 pupils. The school has been under-subscribed for a number of years and pupil numbers fall significantly short of the school's published admission number. The school currently has only 15 pupils on roll. Five of the fifteen pupils are in Year 6 and will be leaving the school in July. There is only one first preference for admission to the school in September 2022.

The school is recognised by Ofsted as being a Good school and the Federation is strong with the federated schools working in close partnership to provide the best possible education for all children. However, delivery of a full and balanced curriculum at Chittlehampton C of E Primary School is difficult with such a small and decreasing number of children. A single class school will be very difficult educationally for the children with such a wide age group being taught together. Social and emotional development will also be very challenging.

A review of area health authority data which provides the number of 0-4 year olds living in the school's catchment area shows very low numbers of pre-school aged children. There is a small increase in the number of pre-school aged children living in the catchment area who would be due to start school in 2025, however, parental preference for admission to the school has been low in recent years.

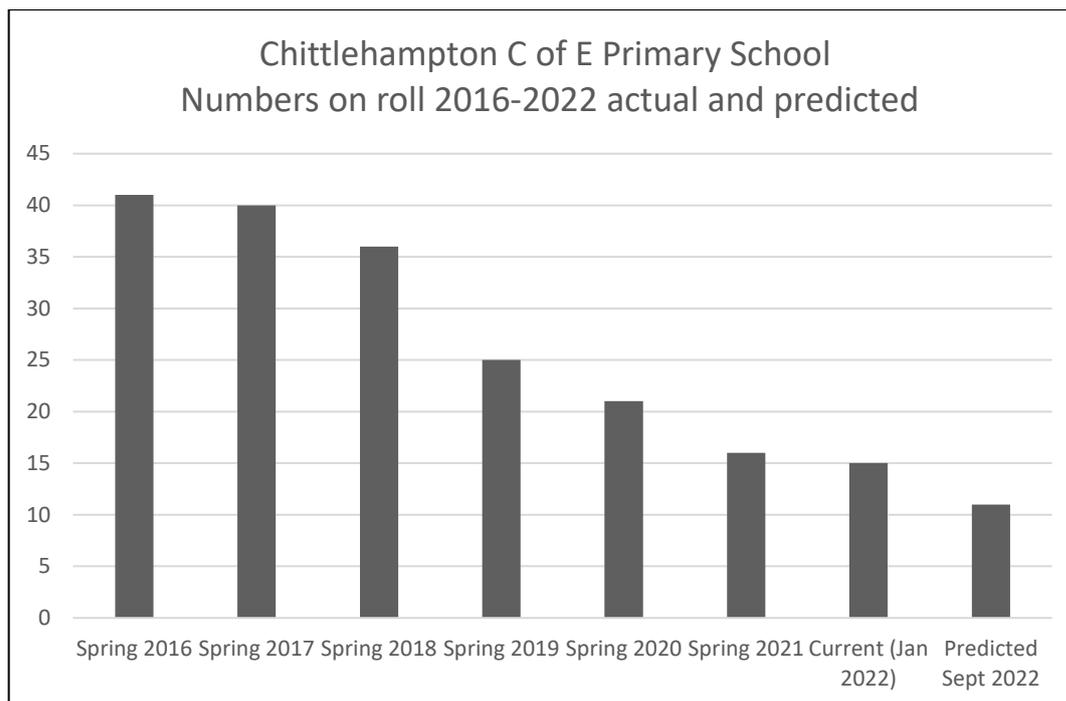
In the District Council's Local Housing Plan, there is an allocated site for development at Chittlehampton but this is only for 20 dwellings. A development of 20 family dwellings would be expected to generate approximately 5 primary aged pupils.

## 4.0 Pupil numbers and admissions

The school provides education for boys and girls aged 3-11. There is currently one child in the Nursery class and 15 children in Reception to Year 6. Please see table below.

School	Published Admission Number (PAN)	Net Capacity	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total Number on roll
Chittlehampton C of E Primary	8	56	3	2	1	0	3	1	5	15

In September 2022, it is not anticipated there will be any children on roll with special educational needs, should the school remain open.



## 5.0 Displaced pupils

Should Chittlehampton C of E Primary School close on 31 August 2022, parents and carers would be able to express a preference for a place at an alternative school. Devon County Council will manage this process and ensure there are local places for all families. Parents and carers would be asked to complete an in-year admissions application form and to name up to three schools they would prefer their child/ren to attend. Devon County Council will try to meet parent and carers' preferences wherever possible but cannot guarantee to do so as it would depend upon vacancies at that time.

A consultation will take place with the Local Learning Community on the new designated school/s for the area and also taking into account parental views expressed at the initial consultation stage.

There is sufficient capacity in local schools to accommodate the children from Chittlehampton C of E Primary School. The nearest school to Chittlehampton C of E Primary School is Umberleigh Primary School (1.8 miles, as the crow flies). The next nearest school is Filleigh Primary School (2.4 miles, as the crow flies). Filleigh Primary School is in the same Federation as Chittlehampton C of E Primary School and is proposing to move to a four class school and can accommodate all of the children from Chittlehampton C of E Primary School. Filleigh Primary and Umberleigh Primary are Ofsted rated 'Good' schools. Both Filleigh and Umberleigh Primary Schools offer Nursery provision.

## 5.1 The table below shows the capacity in nearby schools, April 2022.

School	Type	PAN	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	TOTAL
Filleigh Primary	Foundation	15	7	5	8	10	14	13	16	73
Umberleigh Primary	Academy	8	11	11	7	10	6	7	1	53
High Bickington C of E	Academy	10	12	7	11	11	17	12	11	81
Kings Nympton Primary	Foundation	10	4	1	6	6	6	6	3	32
South Molton C of E United	VA	30	30	26	46	27	31	28	17	205
South Molton Primary	Community	30	31	24	37	35	32	40	53	252
Swimbridge C of E Primary	VA	15	12	14	13	13	17	13	13	95

## 6.0 Impact on the Community

Chittlehampton C of E Primary School plays an important role in the community, especially as it is in a rural setting. The impact on the community of a school closure cannot be underestimated but this has to be balanced against the educational and financial sustainability of the school.

In the wider community, there will be some impact of any closure on the village public house, The Bell, as school meals are provided by the public house. The school is not used by the community for any activities. At the time of writing, the local village shop and post office, Chittlechatter Stores, is up for sale.

Although the proposal will lead to the loss of the school, the Governing Body, the Local Authority and the Diocesan Board of Education believe that the proposal is in the best educational interests of the children in the future.

## 7.0 Rural Primary School

There is a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but the case for closure should be strong and a proposal must clearly be in the best interests of educational provision in the area. The likely effect of the closure of the school on the local community is discussed above at 6.0.

The Diocesan Board of Education and the School considered alternatives to closure and discussions were held with a representative of the Regional Schools Commissioner and some local Multi Academy Trusts. However, it was felt that the school was unsustainable with such a low number on roll which was not forecast to improve.

In Autumn 2021, of the 45 children (Reception to Yr 6) living in the designated area of Chittlehampton C of E Primary School and attending a Devon School, 15 children attended Chittlehampton Primary School.

For the reasons set out at 3.0, the Governing Body and the Local Authority believe the case for closure is strong and in the best educational interests of the children. The nearest school to Chittlehampton C of E Primary School is Umberleigh Academy Primary (1.8 miles) which is a 'Good' school. The next nearest school is Filleigh Primary School (2.4 miles) which is a 'Good' school. All the other primary schools listed at Table 5.1 are either Ofsted rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. There are sufficient school places locally across the schools as outlined at Table 5.1 and there is low predicted demand for Chittlehampton C of E Primary as outlined at 3.0.

Where children are entitled to free home to school transport, this will be provided by Devon County Council. Please see 9.0 below. The cost to the LA will depend upon the outcome of the consultation on any new designated school/s for the area.

## 8.0 Balance of denominational provision

Chittlehampton Primary School is a Church of England School. The nearest Church of England Schools to Chittlehampton village are: High Bickington Church of England Primary School, South Molton Church of England United Primary School and Swimbridge Church of England Primary School. For capacity of these schools, please see Table 5.1 and for travel distances, please see 9.0 below.

## 9.0 Travel

The distances to nearby schools are as follows:

School	Type	Distance (miles as the crow flies) from Chittlehampton C of E Primary
Umberleigh Academy Primary	Academy	1.8
Filleigh Primary	Foundation	2.4
Swimbridge C of E Primary	VA	3
High Bickington C of E	Academy	3.8
South Molton C of E United	VA	4.6
South Molton Primary	Community	4.6
Kings Nympton Primary	Foundation	4.8

All children are entitled to free home to school transport if they attend the nearest school to their home address and they:

- are of statutory school age
- live more than two miles away by the shortest walking route (for primary)
- live under two miles away but all walking routes are considered unavailable

Children in Devon are also be entitled to free school transport to the school designated to serve their home address - provided it is still further than the statutory walking distance (see above).

A consultation will take place with the Local Learning Community on the new designated school/s for the area and also taking into account parental views expressed at the initial consultation stage. This will inform the transport entitlement.

There will be increased vehicular usage as a result of this proposal as some children walk to Chittlehampton C of E Primary School.

## 10 Consultation

The informal consultation period was held between 14 February to 4 April 2022. The consultation document is available at: [Consultation on the future of Chittlehampton C of E Primary School - Have Your Say \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/consultation-on-the-future-of-chittlehampton-c-of-e-primary-school-have-your-say).

A consultation information session was held at the school on 3 March 2022. Five parents attended the consultation session. All parents expressed great sadness over the proposed closure and the impact on the village. There were questions regarding transition, school transport entitlement and what the designated area would be. One parent expressed concern that the town schools are expanded when there is capacity in rural areas and the rural schools suffer.

The parent felt that rural schools should be given extra support by the council to stay open and encourage local families to use their nearest schools. It was felt that it would be beneficial for families if the council could provide extra support for before and after school care to small rural schools which would increase pupil numbers. Some parents felt closure was inevitable with such low pupil numbers and felt sad that other parents were not using their local school and sending their children to other schools.

A full report of the consultation event and response is available at: [Consultation on the future of Chittlehampton C of E Primary School - Have Your Say \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/consultation-on-the-future-of-chittlehampton-c-of-e-primary-school).

The children have also been talking about the possible closure with the Head of School. The children have been discussing their worries and thoughts and some of these are shared in the report of the consultation event above. Their feelings range from some positive thoughts, for example "I can make lots of new friends" and "Already have friends at Filleigh" to understandably some anxious and sad thoughts, for example: "Will we be with our friends again?", "So many memories will be left behind – we love this school" and "I'm worried I won't make new friends".

15 responses were received to the consultation from 13 respondents, mainly from parents and local residents. A summary of these responses will be shared at DCC's Cabinet meeting on 8 June 2022 (but will be made anonymous for data protection reasons). Consultation responses in full will be available for Members to view on request. In brief summary, the main points and recurring opinions were:

There is great sadness over the closure of the school and the loss to the community. There is concern and sadness for the children who are faced with the loss of their school, following two years of disruption and upheaval due to the Covid pandemic.

Some respondents felt that more could have been done to promote the school, including better provision for after school care for working families and less restricted pre-school hours which could have attracted more young families.

Some respondents felt that the new housing being proposed would result in more children attending the school and that houses up for sale in the village could attract families. However, the closing of the school would be a deterrent to families moving to the village in the future.

A few parents responded that the whole school admission system of giving parents three preferences for a school place should be reviewed and that parents should attend their catchment school.

Parents wanted to know what would be the designated school for Chittlehampton village and therefore the school transport entitlement. Parents also raised queries regarding free school transport being provided to access breakfast clubs.

A couple of respondents raised concerns that the South Molton town schools have been expanded when children could have been transported to Chittlehampton Primary School from the town.

Some parents felt sadness for the proposed closure but recognised that such low numbers going forward would have a negative impact on children's education. They were also sad that families in Chittlehampton were not choosing to send their children to the school.

One resident felt more could have been done by the Federation to save the school and questioned whether all alternatives to closure were explored.

In response, we are continuing to see preference for other schools from the Chittlehampton catchment area. This may be because the catchment area is large and families are nearer to other schools. Local authorities must provide a common application form (CAF) that enables parents to express their preference for a place at any state funded school, with a minimum of 3 preferences in rank order.

Devon County Council's (DCC) approach is 'local schools for local children' for community and environmental reasons. There is sometimes pressure in urban areas in contrast with some rural areas seeing a drop-off in pupil numbers and this can sometimes occur in the same locality. It has been suggested that children could be transported from schools under pressure to those smaller schools where numbers are low or falling. This would significantly increase the cost of home to school transport and conflict with the principle of local schools for local pupils and would be unacceptable to a large number of parents.

DCC's Early Years team support schools in setting up early years provision as well as before and after school care but there needs to be a sustainable financial plan and enough demand for the provision to be a viable option, otherwise any shortfall has to be met by the Governing Body. Viability is difficult if there are insufficient pupil numbers due to demographics and there is not sufficient demand.

In the case of South Molton, additional accommodation was to meet the need from the development arising in the town and ensured local provision for families in the town. In the District Council's Local Housing Plan, there is an allocated site for development at Chittlehampton but this is only for 20 dwellings. A development of 20 family dwellings would be expected to generate approximately 5 primary aged pupils. An occupancy level of 0.25 primary aged children per family (2+bed) dwelling is based on empirical research by Devon County Council.

The Diocesan Board of Education and the School considered alternatives to closure and discussions were held with a representative of the Regional Schools Commissioner and some local Multi Academy Trusts. However, it was felt that the school was unsustainable with such a low number on roll which was not forecast to improve.

In respect of school transport, all children are entitled to free home to school transport if they attend the nearest school to their home address and they:

- are of statutory school age
- live more than two miles away by the shortest walking route (for primary)
- live under two miles away but all walking routes are considered unavailable

Children in Devon are also be entitled to free school transport to the school designated to serve their home address - provided it is still further than the statutory walking distance (see above).

If a decision is made to close Chittlehampton C of E Primary School, consideration will be given to new designated school/s for the area and will be consulted on with the Local Learning Community.

## **11 Responding to formal representation period**

The formal representation period runs from 25 April to 23 May 2022. You can object to or comment on the proposal and all responses to this stage should be sent to:

Shona Meek, Planning Team, Devon County Council, Room 120, County Hall, Exeter, EX2 4QG by the closing date of 23 May 2022.

All responses will be shared with the school unless you request otherwise. All comments will be properly considered by the decision-makers but we will not send individual responses to any specific points raised.