

Executive

21 April 2022

Report of the Director of Prevention and Commissioning
Portfolio of the Executive Member for Children and Education

The Future of Primary School Places in Naburn

Summary

1. This report provides members of the council's Executive with a briefing on the complex and challenging context impacting on the future of primary school places in the village of Naburn. It provides members with a briefing on the outcomes of the recent Ofsted inspection of Naburn school and presents the options for consideration about the future of primary school provision in Naburn.

Recommendations

2. Executive are asked to consider and support:

Option 3: To follow a twin track approach of working to identify an academy sponsor within the next 6 to 8 months, whilst at the same time consulting on the future of primary school places in the village of Naburn.

Reason: To ensure that the local authority is fulfilling its statutory duty to manage the sufficiency and quality of school places in an efficient and cost effective way. The school has received a directive academy order as a result of being placed in special measures. The school is vulnerable due to falling rolls and the impact this is having on its future financial sustainability. The publication of the statutory notice proposing the closure of Naburn Primary School, followed by a six-week representation period, will allow the LA to fully consider all further observations and comments received and decide whether to proceed with the proposals. At the same time work will continue to take place to

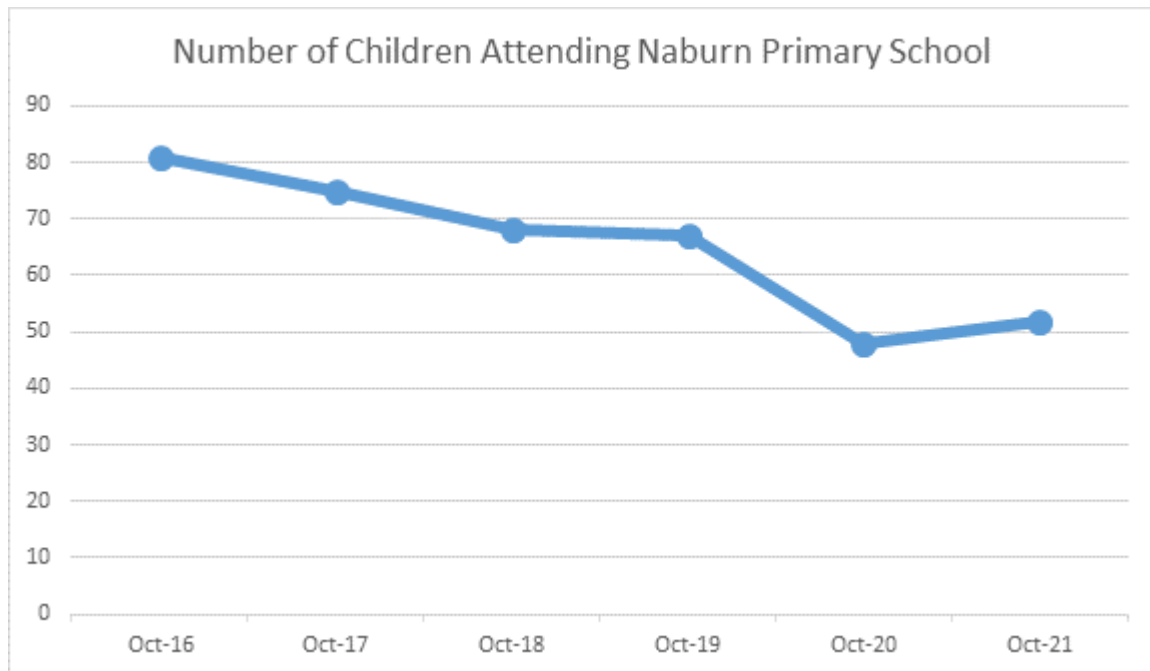
support the school's improvement and to continue the search for an academy sponsor.

Background

3. Naburn Primary School is a smaller than average 1 form entry voluntary controlled Church of England primary school serving Naburn Village, in the south of York. The school has been experiencing falling rolls for the last 5 years and has seen in-year movements of children over the last 3 years which has adversely impacted on the financial viability of the school. A number of children from the village opt to attend Escrick Primary School. The school has a published admissions number of 84 and currently has 38 children on roll. There are 14 total preferences and 3 first preferences (2 from catchment children and 1 sibling) for reception in September 2022. The school will see 6, Year 6 pupils leave for secondary school in July 2022.
4. The table below shows the number of children born in Naburn catchment and the number still living in catchment to start Reception 4 years later. This table not only shows the small number of children born in this catchment area, but also highlights the fluctuation from year to year.

Birth Year	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
Reception Year	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Number born in Naburn catchment	4	2	5	0	1	3	5	4
Resident in for Reception in Naburn catchment	6	3	3	5	8	4		

5. The graph below shows the number of children attending Naburn Primary School at the time of the October census from 2016 to 2021 and shows a clear pattern of falling rolls at the school.



6. The school has faced increasing budget deficits as a result of the falling rolls and this has constrained leadership and support staff capacity in the school. In 2019/20, the school had a negative in-year balance (£-44,564). The local authority has worked with the governing body during 2020-21 to consider the future of the school and this work included exploring academy conversion and federation with another maintained primary school. Both of these options proved to be unviable and led to the restructuring of provision in 2021 and to the resignation of the headteacher. Since September 2021 the school has been supported by an acting headteacher for 2 days a week and has operated two mixed age classes.
7. The school was judged outstanding by Ofsted in 2007 and following re-inspection in December 2021 serious weaknesses were identified which placed the school in special measures. The areas for improvement identified by Ofsted are as follows:
- Procedures and processes for ensuring pupils are safeguarded are not effective.
 - The curriculum is not structured or coherent.
 - Some children in Key Stage 2 cannot read or write sufficiently well for their age
 - There is not enough challenge and ambition for pupils in mixed age classes
 - Pupils have not had any PSHE or RSE teaching

- A third of pupils are persistently absent from school and this is showing little or no sign of improvement
8. As a result of being placed in special measures the school is subject an academy order and an academy sponsor will be looked for by the Regional Schools Commissioner. Discussions with sponsors in York have indicated that none of the York multi-academy trusts are interested in sponsoring due to its financial viability. The local authority has submitted a statement of action to Ofsted outlining what it intends to do to support the school and as part of preparing this statement consideration needs to be given to whether an option to close the school should be considered. This has been discussed with the Diocese of York and they will support the decision arrived at by the local authority.
 9. The decline in pupil numbers means that the quality of education provided by the school has been severely impacted as it has lacked the capacity to develop whole school and curriculum leadership. The small mixed age teaching groups have meant that children have lacked a peer group and this has an adverse impact on their social development. The mixed age classes present challenges in delivering an appropriate curriculum to meet the needs of the broad age range within the two class structure that the school has had to implement. In practice this means that the KS2 and KS1 curriculum cannot fully be developed within the confines of small mixed age group classes. The school has also struggled to fully develop its curriculum and broader learning opportunities. Despite the good work done by the acting headteacher the school lacks the capacity in the longer term to address the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted without significant financial investment and this would still not guarantee that a sustainable future for the school could be assured.

Consultation

10. The statutory period of consultation following the publication of a closure notice will involve full consideration of all options for the future of the school. These options include:
 - Keeping Naburn Primary open and increasing the funding provided to address the areas for improvement until an academy sponsor can be found.

- The impact of the closure of Naburn Primary School on the current pupils and actions to mitigate this impact.

Options

Option 1

Continue to support the school until an academy sponsor can be found. The local authority will work with the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Diocese of York to look for suitable sponsors over the next 6 to 8 months.

Option 2

The local authority (LA) should now publish a statutory notice proposing the closure of Naburn Primary School, followed by a six-week representation period, after which the LA will consider all further observations and comments received and decide whether to proceed with the proposals. The statutory notice will outline the case for closure, the sufficiency of school places for children displaced from the school and evidence of the impact on the community of the closure of the school with any measures proposed to mitigate any adverse impact. The consultation will also outline the options for alternative school places for the children currently at the school and will provide details about potential impact on home to school transport.

Option 3

To follow a twin track approach of working to identify an academy sponsor within the next 6 to 8 months, whilst beginning a consultation to consider the future of primary school places in Naburn. It is important to have clarity on the future of the school within 8 months as further delay will impact on the school's long term sustainability and the capacity to address the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted. During this time the school will be supported to address the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted through the local authority statement of action.

Analysis

11. Keeping Naburn Primary School open while an academy sponsor can be found carries financial risk and would require significant investment. Currently the school's budget cannot support a full time headteacher or additional teaching or leadership time. Following the publication of the Ofsted report there is a risk that families will want to move their children from the school which will add to financial pressures and impact of the likelihood of a sponsor being found.

Finding a sponsor could take a considerable amount of time during which the school remains vulnerable as it lacks the capacity to fully address the areas for improvement identified by Ofsted. If a sponsor is not found at the end of the 8 month period then a statutory closure notice would have to be published and this would result in a period of greater uncertainty for children and families and the school community. Option 3 which adopts a twin track approach would allow the search for a sponsor to be conducted in parallel with the consultation on the future of school places. This would provide a stronger contingency plan for children, families and the community during which all options for the future of the school can be fully explored.

12. The school fell into deficit in 2021-22 which was anticipated pupil numbers had fallen to 48 pupils on the October 2020 census (leading to a significant reduction in funding for 21-22). Naburn set in place a restructure, which came into operation in September 2021. This means that during the current financial year Naburn operated with high staff numbers and in a deficit position, during the summer term of 2021, Since September 2021 it has been operating with reduced staff numbers and a break even staffing complement; the in -year revenue deficit projected for 2021-22 of £61,888 was mainly generated in summer term 2021. This was generated by the additional staffing costs during the summer term prior to the implementation of the restructure. The increase in costs of £5,894 between the start budget and revised budget, is primarily linked to the new headteacher's concern for staff wellbeing and setting in place additional teaching assistant hours.
13. While Naburn will receive some additional funding due to changes in the dedicated schools grant, all schools will need to cover the additional costs associated with pay reviews, and other budgets such as energy will also need to be increased. This means that with the opening deficit position of £65k caused by increased staffing costs, the pressure of inflation, and investment needed in teaching and learning, it will be very difficult for the school to achieve financial sustainability in the long term. The fall in pupil numbers means that the increase in funding is only guaranteed for the financial year 22/23. The fall in pupil numbers will cause a reduction in funding for 2023/24 as this will be triggered by the numbers of pupils on roll at the October census point. Based on current projections the maximum number of pupils would be 46 for the

academic year 2022/23, however, this could fall to 35 based on first preferences for admissions.

14. Due to the school's longer term financial sustainability issues it is right to consider closure as an option as the resources needed to remove the school from special measures will be considerable and the educational experience of the remaining pupils will be further impacted if the number of pupils continues to fall. If the school is able to find a suitable academy sponsor then it may be possible to secure the future of the school through implementing Executive or shared headship arrangements. It would also be possible to draw on the central support services of a multi-academy trust which may help to make the school more sustainable in the future. However, there would need to be greater security in future pupil numbers to ensure that the school is able to remain viable. Currently some children living in the catchment do not take up places at the school and this has added to the problem of a falling roll.

Council Plan

15. The proposed closure supports the council plan priority to deliver a better start for children and young people. The proposed closure of the school will ensure that children receive a good quality of education through being transferred to schools which can provide a more sustainable curriculum offer.

Implications

- **Financial** – the school's financial sustainability is not secure due to the fluctuation in pupil numbers. The school is currently operating well below its published admissions number and despite staffing reductions is carrying a deficit. The changes to the school funding formula will see the school receive some additional funding in 2022/23 (approximately £76K) however, this will not offset the pressures caused by the decline in pupil numbers and the school will struggle to afford to recruit a full time head which it needs to increase leadership capacity.
- **Human Resources (HR)** – a consultation to close the school will have implications for staff with possible redundancy costs.
- **Equalities** – an equalities impact assessment will be completed as part of the consultation and final decision making process.

Risk Management

16. There is a risk of children not being able to access suitable school places. This will be mitigated by having a planned phased closure of Naburn Primary School.
17. Closing the school will incur potential redundancy costs and costs associated with the closure of the building. Potential redundancy costs will be mitigated by the number of temporary contracts currently held by staff at the school and seeking to ensure that staff have a sufficient notice period and to provide staff with information about available employment in York schools.

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**Report
Approved**



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Specialist Implications Officer(s)

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Wards Affected: Naburn and Fulford

For further information please contact the author of the report