

BRIGHTON AND HOVE CITY COUNCIL

Statutory Notice for school closure – St Bartholomew’s CE Primary School, Brighton

In accordance with section 15(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, Brighton and Hove City Council proposes to close St Bartholomew’s CE Primary School with effect from 31 August 2024.

Contact details

The name and contact address of the local authority or governing body publishing the proposals:.

Head of School Organisation
Brighton & Hove City Council
Hove Town Hall
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Hove
BN3 3BG
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The name, address and category of the school it is proposed that should be discontinued

St Bartholomew's CE Primary School

Ann St,
Brighton
BN1 4GP

Implementation

It is proposed that the school will be closed on 31 August 2024. It is not intended to implement this proposal in stages.

Reason for closure

The city is seeing a significant decline in the number of children seeking a school place.

School funding is primarily determined by the number of children on roll, and falling rolls equate to reduced funding to deliver education. While primary schools’ rolls are falling but the number of schools remains unchanged, there is effectively less financial resource across all schools. This is because many costs are driven by the number of classes in a school, whereas funding levels are driven by the number of pupils.

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are a sufficient number of school places for pupils and that places are planned effectively. The Council monitors surplus reception places, a key measure of demand, and aims to maintain a 5-10% surplus across all city primary phase schools to allow for parental preference and for movers across or into the city.

Since 2017 the Council has been seeking to reduce the number of surplus places in its primary phase schools, through proposed reductions in published admissions numbers. Not all of these proposals have been able to be implemented, leaving the city with a significant

number of surplus places and, with the impact of parental preference, meaning some schools remain full and viable and others not.

In the Census 2021 it was revealed that Brighton & Hove’s population profile had fewer children & young people aged 0 to 19 (20.5%) compared to the South East (23.1%) and England (23.1%). There was a 22% drop in children aged 0-4 living in the city in the 2021 census compared to the 2011 census.

The Council’s own projection of pupil numbers starting Reception in the coming years forecasts that there will be 640 surplus places in 2025 and 657 surplus places in 2026. The earliest indication for 2027 suggests that number will rise to 824 unfilled places.

Therefore, with 2610 starting school places the city will have over 25% surplus capacity from September 2025.

School Year	Pupil Forecast	Unfilled places	Surplus Capacity
September 2024	2132	478	18%
September 2025	1970	640	25%
September 2026	1953	657	25%
September 2027	1787	823	32%

In the October 2023 census the school had recorded the following number of pupils on roll compared to October 2022. The school has the capacity to admit 210 pupils.

Census Date	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total
October 2023	19	17	23	23	20	16	23	141
October 2022	13	20	24	17	12	18	20	124

This was the second lowest total number of pupils of any of the city’s primary schools in October 2023 and the lowest total number of pupils in any of the city’s primary schools in October 2022. The only schools with a lower pupil population in October 2023 was Hertford Infant School (80 pupils) but this school only has three age groups compared to 7 in a primary school. The other school is St Peter’s Community Primary and Nursery School, which is the other school where closure is proposed.

For the financial year 2023-24, the school has set a deficit budget. The Council can facilitate schools to set a deficit budget by using the surplus balances of other schools to offset this position. Should the amount of school deficits exceed the amount of surplus balances there will be a need for the Council to underwrite these deficits from its own General Fund.

In 2023/24 the total amount of school balances forecast is £4.5m and the total amount of school deficits forecast is £4.4m. However, based on previous trends, it is expected that the school balance figure will be adjusted upwards by the end of the financial year as schools have historically set cautious budget plans that have ended up being more positive at the end of the financial year, compared to what had been forecast.

The use of a license deficit permits schools to plan their budget to balance or move into surplus within a 3-5 year period. The current economic conditions faced by schools,

including the funding levels set by central government are making it more difficult for schools to maintain a positive budget position.

St Bartholomew's CE Primary School budget forecast for 2023/24 is a deficit of £205,000. Based on budget plans submitted in summer term 2023, the school is unable to forecast reaching a balanced budget position in the longer term.

During the consultation period the school submitted a high level budget plan intending to indicate an alternative option to closure however they were unable to demonstrate an ability to move out of deficit position.

The revised proposals put forward to assist the school to remain open were about mitigating the low pupil numbers, through reducing the PAN, introducing a nursery and funded SEN support provision being made available. Proposals did not consider how the school would seek to improve levels of parental preference and fill to the school's capacity of 210 pupils. The council's view is that a medium to long term strategy to maintain the school though a reduced number of pupils onsite is not a viable approach with pupil numbers still expected to fall in future years and parental preference being a mainstay of government policy.

Pupil numbers and admissions

At 8 January 2024 the school had the number of pupils on roll detailed in the table below:

School	Yr R	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6	Total
St Bartholomew's CE Primary School	19	16	22	24	17	14	23	135
Numbers of surplus places	11	14	8	6	13	16	7	
Percentage of surplus places	37%	47%	27%	20%	43%	53%	23%	

The school is a coeducational school that admits girls and boys. In January 2024 they had 73 boys and 62 girls on roll. It is a primary school catering for pupils between the age of 4 and 11. Pupils are able to start school before they reach compulsory school age if their parents choose to send them to school at the start of the academic year rather than at the start of the term they would become 5. All pupils are day pupils.

The school is in the Central City planning area. Nominally the postcode BN1 4 is assigned to the school, but it is recognised that the school will admit pupils from outside that area. The planning area is expected to have 116 surplus places in 2025, 164 surplus places 2026 and this is expected to rise to 179 in 2027. The school admits the lowest number of pupils of schools in the planning area despite there being more than 30 pupils living in the postcode area in proximity to the school.

As of 9 October 2023, there were 11 pupils with EHCPs at St Bartholomew's. According to the October School census, there were 33 pupils recorded as being SEN Support.

In the January 2023 census, 39.3% of the school population had English as an additional language and 55.6% of pupils where the parent/carer/self-identified ethnic group is other than White British, Refused or Not Known.

Displaced pupils

It is expected that pupils in Year 6 will continue to attend the school until its proposed closure at the end of the academic year 2023-24.

The table below shows the number of pupils likely to be displaced.

School	Yr R	Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5
St Bartholomew's Community Primary School	19	16	22	24	17	14

There are 8 schools within 1.0 mile of the school. Spaces in other schools at 8 January 2024 are shown in the table below.

School (distance from St Bartholomew's in metres)	Current Year group						
	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
St Bartholomew's – Current pupil numbers	19	16	22	24	17	14	
St Paul's (1082.21m)	4	13	10	3	5	2	
St Martin's (1704.73m)	15	11	2	5	9	8	
Stanford schools (1096.91m)	25	10	16*	29	11	0	
Carlton Hill (1310.95m)	0	0	3	2	0	0	
Downs Schools (1294.66m)	4	5	13*	2	2	1	
St Mary Magdalen's (1506.08m)	10	4	14	10	13	11	
Fairlight (1588.25m)	10	19	13	15	33	23	
Middle Street (1390.54)	1	5	2	11	6	3	
St Joseph's (2102.31m)	11	13	5	10	6	9	

*assuming only pupils from the Infant school move up to the Junior school.

It would technically be possible to move entire classes onto some other school sites and this could be explored if the school were to close.

The Council maintains that there is sufficient capacity to accommodate displaced pupils at a reasonable distance if the school is to close, even when taking into account sibling links of children in primary school classes.

It is recognised that parent/carers may choose to send their child to another Church Aided school in the city. There are sufficient places at Church Aided schools within 1.3 miles of the school to accommodate the number of pupils currently at St Bartholomew's. There are places in all year groups at the two closest Church of England schools which are within 1.06 miles of St Bartholomew's, but these are not sufficient places if all pupils wanted to move to these schools.

Where possible we will place a child at the school preferred by the parents/carers and support will be provided to find and apply for new schools.

No interim arrangements are required for pupils.

Impact on the community

The Council does not underestimate the potential impact of this proposed change on the pupils at the school, whose circumstances may already make them vulnerable. We recognise the school serves some disadvantaged families and therefore professional support, from the support services such as Inclusion Support Service, Schools Mental Health Service and Ethnic Minority Achievement Service, will be put in place to facilitate the movement of those students to local schools and minimise the impact of change upon them.

The Council recognises that the school's community stretches beyond the area the school sits within and consideration has been made to how pupils and families can be supported in that transition so that the sense of community can be given the chance to be maintained. It is expected that this will happen through the scheduling of opportunities for pupils and families to come together through and beyond the transition phase with the support of the council's mental health in schools' team.

Through the consultation process concerns have been expressed about the potential harm a school closure would have on families and children who have special educational needs, have life experiences that have caused trauma and created disadvantage. It is reported that these are families who have experienced multiple intersectional vulnerabilities but who have found a welcome and supportive environment in the school that has led to a build-up of community support and resilience that would be lost if the school was to close. Whilst it is clear that any change of school will have an impact on a family and child, the council is committed to minimising the harmful impact of that in conjunction with both St Bartholomew's CE Primary School and the receiving school.

The closure of St Bartholomew's CE Primary School would reduce the number of surplus primary school places in the city.

The Council considers that allowing surplus places to remain at current through inaction would directly and negatively impact the financial viability of many local schools, which in turn will have an impact on the quality and breadth of the education offered at those schools.

Balance of denominational provision

The proposal is about closing a Church of England Voluntarily Aided school and this will reduce the amount of Church of England places in each chronological cohort by 10%, as we are proposing to reduce 30 offered places out of 300 Church of England places across the city. However, some of the Church of England schools are running with surplus school places therefore the reduction in real terms is less.

The proposal would reduce the number of Church of England school places in the planning area by 30 which is a 50% reduction. The Council notes in the consultation response from

the Chichester Diocesan Board of Education that highlights the decrease in the number of Church of England school places available to children in the city.

The Central City planning area is estimated to have over 100 unfilled places in the coming years. As a church school it is accepted that the school will not simply draw pupils from the BN1 4 postcode but the localised picture in the planning area, of there being surplus places is replicated in other adjoining planning areas.

The Council will request that church schools who are their own admission authority give due consideration to any applications they receive, in line with their own admission arrangements, including where there is provision to prioritise children with additional needs and vulnerabilities. The submission from the Chichester Diocesan Board of Education outlines the commitment of the Diocese to work as partners in exploring places in alternative schools for children with identified, documented, additional needs within an EHCP and children with high level needs but without an EHCP are determined.

The Council considers that should the proposed closure be implemented the impact on the balance of denominational provision in the area and the impact on parental choice will not be significantly impacted. The next closest Church of England school is St Paul's CE Primary School under 1100 metres from St Bartholomew's CE Primary school followed by St Martin's CE Primary and Nursery School at 1705 metres distance from St Bartholomew's CE Primary School. According to the October 2023 census return both schools are currently operating at approximately 84% occupancy and neither school full in the Reception year on allocation day.

It is expected that some families, whilst currently at a church school, will not specifically be seeking a church school alternative.

Maintained nursery schools

Not applicable.

St Bartholomew's CE Primary School is not a maintained nursery school nor does it have nursery provision.

Special educational needs provision

At St Bartholomew's School no specialist places are specifically reserved for pupils with special educational needs.

The numbers of children with EHCPs and on SEN Support are provided above.

During the consultation we heard a lot of concern raised about the intersectionality of needs at the school e.g. having SEN and being from a Black or Racially Minoritised community.

The Council understands that a change of setting for pupils with SEN (or for those with a range of additional needs or vulnerabilities) can often be challenging and require additional support to ensure a successful transition. Officers from the Council are making arrangements for all children including those with EHCPs and on SEN support, to ensure that they are appropriately placed. If the decision is taken to proceed as proposed, parents will be supported in the Spring term to help them understand their options and find out their preferences for alternative schools for their children. Families with children who have an EHCP impacted by this proposal will be directly supported by the SEN team to explain the process of how their children will transfer to other schools.

The Council has secured one-off additional funding to support children and families in their transition to new schools. This process will be overseen by the Assistant Director for Education and Skills and oversight and scrutiny will be provided by the co-chairs of Children, Families & Schools Committee.

The Council acknowledges the support provided by the school to children with a range and intersectionality of additional needs and vulnerabilities. Unfortunately, the high level of support currently provided has become increasingly difficult to sustain for schools like St Bartholomew's which have falling rolls. The financial impact of low pupil numbers is cumulative and therefore this support cannot continue to be provided and will lead to increased school deficits.

As a result of these proposals, outcomes for pupils with SEND may improve as they would move to a more financially viable and therefore long-term sustainable school. This means that the new school would be able to provide the additional necessary support and resources required to support children with EHCPs and those on the SEN register.

The Council's Social Communication Resource base is currently located within St Bartholomew's. This resource supports children with social communication difficulties to attend school (any school – not specific to St Bartholomew's) and will need to move to another setting should the school close.

Travel

Information is provided above to demonstrate that alternative school places can be provided within a reasonable distance. The Council therefore considers it will be possible to re-allocate pupils to alternative school places within a reasonable distance of St Bartholomew's should the school close.

It is recognised that longer journeys to school may occur for some families if they take a place at a school further from their home address. This applies to children where their family may wish for them to attend a Church of England School which is further away from their home address than St Bartholomew's.

Assessment for home to school transport assistance needs to consider if the child is eligible under distance or the above SEN criteria including, are the child's learning difficulties or disabilities such that it could not be reasonably expected that the child could walk to school.

The Council will work with schools who receive pupils from St Bartholomew's CE Primary School to develop their school travel plans to seek to mitigate against increased car use.

Sixth form provision

Not applicable to this proposal

Rural primary schools

Not applicable this school is not a designated rural primary school.

Ownership of the site

The freehold of the site is owned by The Chichester Diocesan Fund and Board of Finance (Incorporated) Charity Number 243134

Consultation

All applicable consultation was carried out prior to publishing this full proposal. Initially meetings were held between the Council, the Headteacher and the governing board.

A consultation document was prepared and issued on 7 November 2023. It was published online on the council's website and was circulated to the parents, staff and governors of St Bartholomew's CE Primary School and to Headteachers of all schools in the city via the Council's weekly Schools Bulletin. It was also circulated to local Councillors and members of the Children Families and Schools Committee, local Members of Parliament, neighbouring Local Authorities and the two diocese responsible for schools in the city. A copy of the questions posed and the text used in that consultation are attached as **Appendix 1** to this document (to be provided upon publication).

The document contained details of how comments on the proposal could be made and the closing date of the consultation, 22 December 2023. The duration of this period of consultation was 6 weeks 4 days.

During this consultation stage six meetings were held – 4 in person at the school and one via Teams. A copy of the notes taken at the three open public meetings is attached as **Appendix 2** to this document (to be provided upon publication). A presentation was given at this meeting by the Head of School Organisation. A copy of the presentation is attached as **Appendix 3** to this document (to be provided upon publication).

The results of this consultation were reported to the Children, Families and Schools Committee on 22 January 2024. At that meeting the decision was to proceed to the publication of the statutory notice and full proposal. A copy of the Committee report and Appendices is available at XXX (weblink to be provided upon publication).

Where and when the Statutory Notice and Full Proposal Information will be available

Brighton and Hove City Council will publish the statutory notice for this proposal on Tuesday 23 January 2024. Within four weeks of the date of publication any person may object to or make comments on the proposal i.e. until 5 pm on Tuesday 20 February 2024. Copies of the notice will be published in the Argus newspaper on 25 January 2024. A copy of the statutory notice is attached as **Appendix 4** to this document (to be provided upon publication).

On 23 January 2024 the full proposal information (this document plus appendices) will be sent to the following recipients:

The Governing Board of the school
The Diocese of Chichester
The Diocese of Arundel & Brighton
Members of the Children, Families and Schools Committee
Local Ward Councillors
The Member of Parliament for Brighton Pavilion
The Secretary of State (schoolorganisation.notifications@education.gov.uk)

It will also be published on the council's website at the following address XXX (to be provided upon publication)

Any person may request a copy of the full proposal information either by writing to Head of School Organisation, Brighton & Hove City Council, Brighton & Hove City Council, Hove Town Hall, Norton Road, Hove, BN3 3BQ or emailing schoolorganisation@brighton-hove.gov.uk.

How to make representation or comment on the proposal

Any person may object or make a representation or comment on the proposal either by responding to the consultation at XXX (to be provided upon publication) or by writing to Head of School Organisation, Brighton & Hove City Council, Hove Town Hall, Norton Road, Hove, BN3 3BQ before the closing date of 20 February 2024 (by 5pm) or via email to schoolorganisation@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Following the closing date for representations, comments and objections, a report will be prepared for the Children, Families and Schools Committee to consider the proposal. In the event that closure is recommended, a final decision will be made by Full Council to determine the proposal within 2 months i.e. no later than 9 April 2024. At the present time it is anticipated that the report will be considered at the Children, Families and Schools Committee on 29 February 2024 and Full Council on 4 March 2024.

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