



Chair of Governors
Stillington Community Primary School
Main Street
Stillington
York
YO61 1LA
Tel/Fax: 01347 810347

23rd September 2019

Dear Parents,

With a heavy heart, I have to inform you that following a resolution by the full Governing Board at our meeting on Monday 16th September, a request for a consultation on the closure of Stillington Community Primary School (with effect from 31st August 2020) has been sent to the Director of Children's Services at North Yorkshire County Council.

This is not a decision that the Governing Board have taken lightly or without a great deal of consideration; at this point, governors feel that we have exhausted all options open to us which could secure the future of the school.

A brief timetable of significant events:

The school was placed into Special Measures following an Ofsted inspection in December 2016, and a Directive Academy Order was subsequently issued.

In July 2017, the Regional Schools' Commissioner (RSC) identified HOPE Learning Trust as a sponsor.

In December 2017, the Headteacher left the school.

In January 2018, HOPE took over the executive leadership of the school and provided school-to-school 'improvement support'. During this time, the Governing Board worked closely with HOPE Executives in order to facilitate a smooth transition into academisation.

In May 2018, HOPE began their due diligence process.

In October 2018, the school received an HMI monitoring visit which concluded that since the Special Measures judgement in December 2016, "Leaders and managers are not taking effective action towards the removal of special measures".

In November 2018, following their due diligence process, HOPE withdrew from the sponsorship arrangement, and their school-to-school support ceased in December 2018. The Head of School resigned.

In January 2019, the Local Authority (LA) arranged for the secondment of an interim Headteacher; later in January, we were once again inspected by Ofsted (report published in April) and judged to be requiring Special Measures.

Governors' rationale

From January 2019, given that HOPE Learning Trust completed their due diligence and found that, in their opinion, the school was not viable as a stand-alone establishment, we had to consider it extremely unlikely that the RSC would find another multi-academy trust to be a willing sponsor for our school, although the Directive Academy Order remains in place.

Governors recognised that this, added to the temporary nature of the school's leadership and low pupil numbers, left us in an extremely vulnerable position as a stand-alone school.

In March, as I wrote to you in the Spring Governors' Update, we entered into a formal consultation with local schools to establish whether they would be interested in forming a partnership with us, which could place education in Stillington on a more secure footing. We were supported in this approach by the Strategic Planning Team within the Children and Young People's Service (CYPS) at County Hall. As a result of the consultation, in May we received initial expressions of interest; however, following a period of discussion and information-sharing with the headteachers and governors involved, no school was able to commit to any formal partnership with Stillington School.

Since 2015 (when the school was judged as Requires Improvement), the number of children attending the school has fallen from 39 to 18 (Sept 2019), with increasing numbers of parents in the catchment area choosing other local schools for their child/ren. In September 2019, the school attracted one of the seven potential new starters from catchment. Governors are very conscious of the potential impact of falling/low pupil numbers on the quality of education we can provide:

- Whilst just 18 children in a school may seem idyllic, small cohorts make it increasingly difficult to ensure that pupils have the necessary breadth of curriculum, educational and social experiences, and sufficient peer interaction for them to develop and achieve their full potential.
- School budgets are based on the number of children in school; as a standalone school, the current staffing position is not sustainable within the current budget allocation. However, we consider that any further reduction in staffing would seriously compromise the quality of the educational opportunities that we are able to offer our children. Since HOPE's withdrawal, the Governing Board have been successful in securing some additional funding from the LA towards school improvement. This currently supports the interim Headteacher costs. As you know, an extension to the Headteacher's secondment has been agreed for this academic year; however, to support continued progress for 2020/21 a substantive headteacher would need to be recruited at cost to the school. The school's financial forecasts show significant in-year budget deficits from 2020/21 onwards and the LA have increasingly limited ability to provide on-going financial support to schools in our position.

The latest NYCC strategic planning documents regarding the provision of primary education places in our area show no significant increase in pupil numbers forecast for Stillington School. The current projections suggest that the need for school places in the locality can be met without Stillington School's capacity, having taken account of known future housing developments in the coming years.

Whilst I anticipate that most of the issues mentioned above will not be news to you, there is a lot of information to take in and I appreciate that the Governing Board's decision to request consultation on closure may come as a considerable shock.

With this in mind, parents are invited to drop in to school to speak informally with governors and/or our Local Authority School Improvement Advisor, Amanda Bramley, at any time between 3:30pm and 5:00pm tomorrow (Tuesday 24th September) and between 8:30am and 10:00am on Wednesday (25th September).

Should NYCC agree to commence consultation, this will be during November and December. In this period, there would be a public consultation meeting, as well as a session for parents which NYCC officers would attend to provide advice and guidance around school admissions and home-to-school transport.

Just to forewarn you, I expect that the NYCC website, as part of the required process, will be updated with a 'forward plan entry' giving basic details of the consultation request later tonight. There will probably be a press release on Tuesday.

Once the consultation proposal is in the public domain, it is inevitable that some of the children will become aware of the situation. The school has no plans at this time to 'inform the children' of the Governing Board's decision, in the firm belief that parents know their child best and have a right to handle such sensitive information in whichever way they consider appropriate. We would ask that other parents' wishes regarding the information shared with their child are, whenever possible, respected.

Yours sincerely,

Corinne Cross

Chair of Governors (on behalf of the Governing Board)