

## PROPOSAL TO CLOSE GRAFTON CHURCH OF ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

### 1. Purpose of this Consultation Document

1.1 Before any major decision can be made about the future of a maintained school, there has to be consultation with those people likely to be affected by the change. The purpose of this document is to consult with the Grafton School community, and all others with an interest in the future provision of education for children from the Grafton area. This document gives background information and asks for your views.

1.2 The document has been circulated to:

- Parents of current pupils
- Parents of children not yet of school age in the designated area of the school
- Staff
- Governors
- Diocese of Salisbury
- The Local Wiltshire Councillor
- The Local M.P.
- The County Secretaries of the relevant professional associations
- Primary Heads Forum
- Heads and Chairs of Governors of nearby primary schools
- Heads and Chairs of Governors at nearby secondary schools
- Grafton Parish Council.

Further copies have also been made available at the school, on the school website, the nearest library, and on the Council website.

### 2. Why it is proposed to close the school

2.1 Pupil numbers at the school have always been subject to fluctuation. Over the last 10 years the highest number was 35 in 2007 and the previous lowest number was 16 in 2004. In recent years the number of pupils at the school has declined and in January 2011 there are 12 pupils at the school. Numbers for September 2011 will be a maximum of 12. There are no signs of future growth in pupils, with no applications for reception places in September 2011.

2.2 The reducing number of pupils has led to increasing levels of concern from staff and governors, Salisbury Diocese and Wiltshire Council, about the quality of provision at the school. Although the high staff: pupil ratios mean that children receive high levels of individual attention, the key issue is that pupils do not benefit from the stimulus of other children around them. This will affect their educational and social development. The school has worked hard to mitigate this through collaborative projects with other local schools which provide pupils with opportunities to work with larger peer groups on a regular basis, and the children do make good progress from their individual starting points. However the reducing number of pupils is now felt to be adversely affecting the quality of education.

2.3 The Governors, Diocese and Local Authority have worked together to meet these challenges. Results of a research project carried out by Governors with Parish parents in February 2010 gave Governors clear indication of the issues which needed to be addressed in order to become school of choice. Governors, in particular, have

explored a range of possibilities since 2005, including a number of models involving federation with other schools and the development of an Early Years/Infant model in partnership with a local school to which pupils would transfer for KS2. However these efforts have not been successful.

- 2.4 The likely effect of the discontinuance of the school on the local community has been considered very carefully. It has been concluded that it is not possible to develop other services that would enable the continuance of the school around a school with so few pupils. Part of the school is already let to a pre school provider and there no further spaces that could be let. The key issue is the quality of education.
- 2.5 At a number of Governing Body meetings, and meetings with Local Authority and Diocesan staff from September 2010 the realistic prospects of sustaining the school both educationally and financially in the longer term were discussed. On 19th January the Head teacher and Co-Chairs met with Local Authority and Diocesan staff and agreed that it is now in the best interests of pupils and staff to consult on a managed closure of the school. Both the Local Authority and Diocese expressed the view that Governors should consult on closure and the Full Governing Body agreed to do so at their meeting of 19th January.
- 2.6 Parents were advised of this verbally by the Head teacher on 20<sup>th</sup> January and in writing by Governors in a letter dated 21<sup>st</sup> January. Parents have been offered assistance with possible transfer arrangements and the Local Authority is working with them to achieve this.
- 2.7 During the consultation period Governors will continue to actively pursue any opportunities which may offer the possibility of maintaining a school in Grafton.
- 2.8 In the absence of any realistic options it is proposed to formally close the school on 31 August 2011, with current pupils being offered places in schools of choice from September 2011. A new school(s) will be identified as the designated primary school(s) to serve the area currently being served by Grafton Church of England Primary School.

### **3 What is the Council's policy on village schools?**

3.1 The Council's policy on village schools is as follows:

The Local Authority recognises the Government's presumption against the closure of village schools, and will not normally bring forward proposals to close a village school unless it can be demonstrated that one or more of the following criteria apply:

- There is only very limited demand for places at the school for children coming from the designated area.
- Standards are low and there is low confidence in the likelihood of improvement.
- Recruitment of a Head teacher has not proved possible.
- The necessary improvements to the school accommodation are either not possible or cost effective.
- The school has a deficit budget without realistic prospects of recovery.

In the present circumstances Grafton meets the first criterion. Only one pupil joined the Reception Class in September 2010 and there are currently no applications for a Reception place in September 2011.

#### 4 Future demand for school places from the Grafton designated area

4.1 Information provided by the Health Authority suggests that there is an average of 9 pre-school children per age cohort born within the Grafton catchment area in the next few years. This figure does not take into account any children of that age who may move into or out of the area. However given the recent history of admissions to the school it is unlikely that many of these will apply to the school which suggests that the long-term numbers at the school are unlikely to increase. As the table below indicates, there are sufficient places for current pupils, and likely future pupils in other local schools.

#### 4.2 Other nearby primary schools

Details of other nearby primary schools are given in the table below:

School	Capacity of School	September 2011 Forecast Roll	September 2014 Forecast Roll	Distance from Grafton by Road (miles)
Burbage	203	122	116	2
Gt. Bedwyn	210	195	177	3.6
Shalbourne	60	33	32	4.6
Easton Royal	60	44	47	3.6
Colingbourne	119	125	122	6.6

4.3. A survey by Governors identified 57 primary age children in the Grafton Parish catchment area. These pupils attend the following schools:

Great Bedwyn	37%
Grafton	21%
St Katherine's Savernake	11%
St Francis	11%
Burbage	9%
Others	11%

## 5 Options for the future of the school's current catchment area

- 5.1 A decision needs to be made on which Primary School (s) the current catchment area should be designated to in future years and views from all interested parties are welcomed on this particular point.
- 5.2 The nomination of a future school to provide places for children from Grafton does not interfere with the parents rights to express a preference for a different school. However, school transport entitlement is linked to the designated area school, unless an alternative school is closer to the child's home address.
- 5.3 The reallocation of the school's current catchment area may have implications for secondary school catchment areas and local secondary schools will be consulted on this point.

## 6 What happens next

- 6.1 You are invited to make your views known using the attached proforma or by sending a letter to the address shown on the proforma. The closing date for responses is **Monday 7<sup>th</sup> March at 5p.m.**
- 6.2 There will be a public meeting at the school on Thursday **February 17<sup>th</sup> at 7pm** at which you may wish to ask for further information or make your views known. Meetings are also being arranged with staff and governors.
- 6.3 Following the consultation period a report and recommendation will be produced by the Local Authority. The outcome of the consultation will be considered by the Cabinet Member for Children's Services who will decide whether or not to publish a public notice proposing the closure of the school. There will then be a six week period for formal representations to be made. If there are objections to the public notice the matter will be considered and determined by the Cabinet of the Council.

## 7 Other questions you may have

- 7.1 Admissions: the current Grafton catchment area will be linked to an alternative designated school(s). This does not interfere with the parents rights to express a preference for a different school. However, school transport entitlement is linked to the designated area school, unless an alternative school is closer to the child's home address. The current Transport Policy is to provide for all children who live more than 2 miles (if under 8) or 3 miles (if over 8) from the designated school by the shortest walking route, or for whom where is not a safe walking route.
- 7.2 Future of the buildings and playing field: there will be further consultations with the local community before making any decision on these. The future use of the buildings by Sunflowers Pre-school will be a key issue in these consultations.
- 7.3 Financial implications: if the school closes the Council will incur additional transport costs, depending on how parents express their preferences, and some redundancy costs. Pupil funding will follow the pupils to their new schools.

**RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF GRAFTON CHURCH OF  
ENGLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL**

1. Please give your name and your interest in the future of the school (e.g. current parent, parent of pre-school child, village resident).

2. Do you agree with the proposed closure of the school?

YES  NO  Please tick appropriate box

If you wish to give your reasons for supporting the closure please do so below.

If you do not support the closure, and believe that there are other options that should be considered, please give details below.

3. Do you have any views on how the current catchment area should be redesignated?

Please return this form to:

Director, Department for Children and Education (Ref: NH/CD), Wiltshire Council, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, Wiltshire, BA14 8JB by **5 p.m. on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> March**