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**My ref:** Hexton JMI School  
**Your ref:**  
**Date:** 30 September 2021

Dear Consultee

**Consultation on the proposal to close Hexton JMI School, Hexton, Hitchin, SG5 3JL on 31 August 2022.**

We are consulting you on the proposal to close Hexton JMI School. If the decision is taken to close the school, it is proposed that this will take effect on 31 August 2022, at the end of the 2021/22 academic year.

**Why is this being proposed?**

Hexton JMI School is a small village school which offers 10 places in each year group: a total of 70 places across Reception to Year 6. The school had 31 children on roll at the start of the autumn term in September 2021.

Schools are mainly funded by an amount of money for each child attending the school. Low pupil numbers make it challenging for schools to operate within budget. Managing the school and maintaining high-quality provision with quality teaching and learning can be difficult on a low budget.

Hexton JMI School can only afford to run two classes because of low pupil numbers. All Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 pupils are taught in one class and all Year 3, Year 4, Year 5 and Year 6 pupils in another class. Achieving good educational outcomes from teaching such a wide range of age groups in one class presents significant challenges. Even though the staff at Hexton JMI School are doing their utmost for the pupils, the breadth of need in each class creates difficulties for leaders and teachers to plan the school's curriculum so that it is coherent and appropriately sequenced to meet the pupils' needs.

In addition, the options for leadership to consistently improve and maintain the quality of education are reduced and opportunities for staff professional development are limited. This further impacts on the educational standards and quality of education for the pupils at the school.

## Forecast demand

Local demand for school places is low and is unlikely to increase in future years. Hexton JMI School sits within the Hitchin West Primary Education Planning Area which covers a cluster of rural village schools. The summer 2021 pupil forecast indicates a surplus of places of between 0.6 and 0.9 forms of entry<sup>1</sup> in the Reception intake across this area in the coming years.

4.1 Hitchin West											
School Code	School Name	Places Available	Actuals				Forecast				
			2021-22	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
2053	Hexton Junior Mixed and Infant School	10	7	5	7						
2077	Pirton School	25	15	20	22						
3357	Offley Endowed Primary School and Nursery	20	20	15	19						
3358	Cockernhoe Endowed CofE Primary School	15	9	15	12						
	<b>Total Year R Pupil Demand</b>		<b>51</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>47</b>	
	<b>Total Year R Places Available</b>	<b>70</b>				<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>70</b>	
	<b>Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (No.)</b>					<b>21</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>23</b>	
	<b>Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (%)</b>					<b>30.0%</b>	<b>30.0%</b>	<b>24.3%</b>	<b>38.6%</b>	<b>32.9%</b>	
	<b>Surplus or Shortage of Year R Places (FE)</b>					<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>0.8</b>	

Summer 2021 pupil forecast

Pupil numbers at Hexton JMI School have been consistently low for a number of years. The spring 2021 school census data identifies that only 7 pupils (17%) attending the school live within the village of Hexton and a total of 19 pupils (46%) attending the school live in Hertfordshire.

There are currently very few families with young children living in Hexton. Information on the number of young children from GP registration data identifies only three children below school age currently living in the village. Furthermore, no new housing is proposed in Hexton that would significantly increase local demand for school places.

With very little demand for primary school places from within the village, the school is reliant on recruiting pupils from further afield who live closer to other schools and these pupils are transported to and from school mainly by car. Due to the school's close proximity to the county boundary, the majority of pupils at the school live outside Hertfordshire.

## What has happened so far?

The county council has worked to support Hexton JMI School over a number of years, to ensure that the quality of education on offer is the best it can be. This has included intervention funding to support Early Years, including supporting phonics and teaching

<sup>1</sup> A form of entry (fe) equates to 30 pupils per year group.

and learning advice for English. However, in light of the low number of children at the school and the school only being able to operate two classes due to financial pressures, a number of options for the future of the school have been explored.

The options the county council have considered include:

- leaving the school as it is
- Hexton JMI School joining a multi-academy trust
- Hexton JMI School federating with other schools
- the closure of Hexton JMI School

Each of these options has been assessed against the following criteria:

- to reduce surplus places and provide places where they are needed to meet demand
- to enhance capacity to raise educational standards, reduce the risk of under-performance or serious weakness
- have acceptable implications for building design, environmental impact and cost
- have acceptable transitional arrangements for affected pupils

Details of all the options considered and discounted can be viewed online at:

[www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/HextonOptions](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/HextonOptions)

The county council's Cabinet considered all the available information and took a decision, when it met on 20 September 2021, to launch a public consultation on the closure of Hexton JMI School.

The decision to consult on this proposal has not been made lightly but is being brought forward in light of the low demand for school places and the challenges the school faces in terms of delivering good-quality education to its pupils.

We are therefore consulting you on the proposal to close Hexton JMI School on 31 August 2022.

In bringing forward this proposal, the county council has taken account of the Government's guidance on the presumption against the closure of rural schools. The guidance does not preclude closure but does require proposers to demonstrate that they have considered all available alternatives to closure and the impact it will have on the local community and other schools.

We have considered this carefully and a summary of the conclusions can be found at:

[www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/HextonGuidance](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/HextonGuidance)

### **What would this mean for pupils at the school?**

Should the county council decide to close Hexton JMI School, all pupils on roll at the time of closure will be able to apply for a place at an alternative school with a vacancy.

We are working with Offley Endowed and Pirton primary schools, the next nearest Hertfordshire schools to Hexton, to ensure that those pupils on roll living in the Hexton parish will be able to gain a place at one of these alternative schools or apply for a place at another school with a vacancy through an in-year application process.

Parents/carers of pupils who live outside the Hexton parish will be supported to apply for places in other schools through a managed in-year application process with officers from both Hertfordshire County Council and Central Bedfordshire County Council. Surgeries will be held at the school in April 2022 and officers will support parents/carers in completing in-year applications for each child.

### **What about transport?**

Free transport will be provided to any child with a statutory entitlement.

Statutory entitlement to free transport is provided if a child:

- attends their nearest school with a vacancy (inside or outside Hertfordshire) if that school is more than statutory walking distance from their home address (2 miles for a child under 8 years, 3 miles for a child aged 8 or over)
- attends their nearest school under statutory walking distance, but there is no available safe walking route to that school and no other school within walking distance

Those pupils securing a place at an alternative school will be assessed against the criteria above to establish if they are entitled to free transport.

Those pupils living in the parish of Hexton and on roll at Hexton JMI School at the time of closure, will (in addition to consideration under statutory entitlement) be provided with transport to either Pirton School or Offley Endowed Primary School and Nursery from September 2022 (as long as the child remains resident in the parish).

### **What would happen to the staff at the school?**

If, following this consultation, the decision is taken to close Hexton JMI School, then all staff at the school will be at risk. The county council will work closely with all staff to attempt to redeploy them into other schools, should they wish.

### **School Uniform**

If, following this consultation, the decision is taken to close Hexton JMI School, children will require a new uniform for their new school. The county council is able to offer financial assistance to families on low incomes to help with uniform costs.

### **Have your say**

No decision to close the school has yet been made. We would like to hear your views on the proposal to close Hexton JMI School on 31 August 2022. You have until **3 November 2021** to let us know your views.

The easiest way for you to let us know your views is to complete the online response form on our website at [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/consultations). You can tell us if you agree or disagree with the proposal and leave your comments.

If you do not have access to the internet you can visit your local library where free access is available to all Hertfordshire residents.

Should you wish to have a paper response form, the school has hard copies available for collection. Please contact the Hexton JMI School office on 01582 881248 or alternatively, you can request a hard copy and get help understanding this information by emailing [education.planning@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:education.planning@hertfordshire.gov.uk) or by calling us on 0300 123 4043. An interpreting service is available for those who need it.

Your response must be received by **3 November 2021**. We will not be able to acknowledge or respond individually to your comments, but they will be taken into account as explained below.

There will be an information meeting held at **St Faith's Church, Hexton** to explain the proposal, so that all views can be heard and considered. This meeting will be held on Tuesday 12 October 2021, 6.00pm – 8.00pm.

In order not to exceed the venue capacity, anyone wishing to attend the event will need to book a place by emailing [education.planning@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:education.planning@hertfordshire.gov.uk) with your name, contact telephone number and number of places required or by telephoning Richard Harris on 01992 555811. Places will be reserved on a first come, first served basis.

### **How the decision will be taken and when?**

This is a consultation, and no decision has been made yet. All comments received will be made available to elected members who make the final decision. All responses may be made available in public reports, although personal details will be removed to respect individual privacy.

The following timetable outlines the decision-making process. Please note that meetings marked with \* will be open to the public. Although it will not be possible to inform everyone individually of the decisions made, you will be able to access this information throughout the process at: [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/committees](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/committees).

<b>Process</b>	<b>Date</b>
Public consultation (5 weeks)	30 September – 3 November 2021
Public meeting*	12 October 2021
Education, Libraries and Lifelong Learning Cabinet Panel*	7 December 2021

Cabinet*	13 December 2021
Statutory notice period (4 weeks)	5 January – 1 February 2022
Cabinet* (for final decision if objections received)	21 March 2022
Implementation of decision	31 August 2022

\* Denotes meetings that are open to the public.

Yours faithfully



**Jo Fisher**  
**Director of Children's Services**