

Appendix 1: Proposed Closure of Gt Gidding Church of England (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School

SECTION 15 OF THE EDUCATION & INSPECTIONS ACT 2006 (AS AMENDED BY THE EDUCATION ACT 2011) AND THE SCHOOL ORGANISATION (ESTABLISHMENT AND DISCONTINUANCE OF SCHOOLS) REGULATIONS 2013

PROPOSED CLOSURE OF GT GIDDING CHURCH OF ENGLAND (VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED) PRIMARY SCHOOL

Introduction

In accordance with regulation 12 of the Discontinuance Regulations 2013 copies of this proposal may be obtained from the website of Cambridgeshire County Council (full postal address below) at:

[School changes and consultations - Cambridgeshire County Council](#)

Within four weeks of the date of publication of these proposals (13 March 2023) any person may object to, or make comments on the proposals by sending them to Cambridgeshire County Council at:

School.consultations@cambridgeshire.gov.uk and put **Gt Gidding Closure Proposal** in the subject line.

Any objections or comments must be received by midnight on 9 April 2023 when the formal representation period closes

1. Contact Details

Name and address of the local authority making the proposal

Cambridgeshire County Council

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Name, address and category of school

Gt Gidding CE Primary School

Main Street, Gt Gidding, Huntingdon, PE28 5NX

The school is a Church of England, Voluntary Controlled, school

2. Implementation

The proposal is to discontinue Gt Gidding CE VC Primary School ("the school") with effect from 31 August 2023

3. Reason for closure

Cambridgeshire County Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient school places for every child living in their area of responsibility who is of statutory school age and whose parents want their child educated in the state-funded sector. The School Organisation Plan 2022-23 (

[Strategies for schools and learning - Cambridgeshire County Council](#)) sets out the LA's approach to the organisation arrangements of schools to maintain the efficiency and effectiveness of provision to ensure that all schools are well placed to deliver high quality education that meets the needs of their communities and makes best use of public funding.

The decision to consult on the closure of the school was taken for a number of reasons which include:

- (a) the continuing steady downward trend of numbers on roll and pupil forecasts and
- (b) associated impact on funding which in turn has
- (c) increased concern that due to the size and capacity of the school there are limitations to the educational provision which can be offered to pupils
- (d) the challenge of recruiting a headteacher

(a) The school is a small, rural voluntary controlled primary school with a published admissions number (PAN) of 14 and capacity for 98 pupils (14 x 7 year groups).

It is staffed as follows:

- Teachers - 3 full time equivalents (fte) (2 Full-time (f/t) and 2 Part-time (p/t))
- Teaching Assistants – 2 f/t
- 1 Office Administrator
- 1 p/t Midday Supervisor
- 1 Cleaner
- 1 Interim Headteacher

The school has been undersubscribed for several years. In the last 10 years pupil numbers at the school have dropped from 75 to 47. 35 pupils, 74.5% of those on roll (at time of October 2022 Pupil Lead Annual School Census (PLASC)), live outside the catchment area of the school. In September 2021 there were 8 offers for Reception, 4 were in catchment and 4 were out of catchment. In September 2022 there were 4 offers for Reception, all out of catchment and 3 children took up a place.

The school will lose its largest cohort of 10 children when the current Yr 6 pupils move to secondary school at the end of the summer term 2023.

Pupil forecasts for the number of primary age children living in the school's catchment continue to be low. In September 2023 we would expect 2 in-catchment children going into Reception and after that the numbers drop to 1 per year. See Table 2 below. In addition, there are no planned housing developments identified in the Huntingdonshire Local Plan within Great Gidding's catchment area.

The Council's Business Intelligence Service produces two sets of forecasts. The first set focuses on children resident in the catchment area only and does not take into account patterns of parental preference. This has dropped from 60 in 2018/19 to 39 for 2023/24.

The second set focuses on forecasting the number of pupils if previous patterns of parental preference were to continue. This has dropped from 24 to 14 over the same period.

The October 2022 School Census also showed that of the 18 children living in the area served by Gt Gidding Primary School attending state funded schools in Cambridgeshire, 5 of them (28%) attended other schools in the surrounding area.

(b) The falling pupil numbers has had a corresponding impact on the school's budget. When the proposal to consult was first brought to committee, the five-year budget forecast showed a deficit of - £150,500. However, now based on just 22 pupils maximum on roll in 2023/24, this is further exacerbated, and revised forecasts suggest a deficit of -£252,000 by 2026/27.

Sparsity funding is a compulsory funding factor within the National Funding Formula, designed to provide additional funding to schools that are both small and remote. Gt Gidding is currently in receipt of the maximum sparsity funding value as defined by the ESFA (£56,300 for the 23/24 financial year).

Despite receiving the highest level of per-pupil funding in Cambridgeshire at more than £8,000 per child, compared to the median of £4,400 per child, the current budget is not sustainable and would require organisational change to balance.

The school ran a two-class structure just for the 2011-12 academic year when numbers on roll were 47 at January 2012 census (down from 59 in 2011) and it could afford then to provide some non-teaching support in both classes.

Pupil numbers then increased to allow the school to revert back to a three-class structure in September 2012. Numbers on roll at the time of the October 2012 census were 64.

Up until the end of the academic year 2012/13, Infant Class Size Funding operated which supported schools with low numbers in Reception and KS1 and the school benefited from this, e.g. in 2012/13, it received an additional £8030 in its budget.

Such are the financial challenges with the further reduction in pupil numbers (35 pupils on roll as at 20 February 2023 and 10 Yr 6 children leaving in July 2023) that a move to a 2-class structure would be inevitable in 2023/24 but by 204/25 it would not be financially viable to employ any Teaching Assistants and all the KS2 children would be taught by a single teacher. Likewise, Cherry Class (Yrs R, 1 and 2) would have a single teacher and no support staff.

(c) The LA has provided a high level of engagement with, and range of support to, the school in recent years for teaching and learning and leadership and management. This has ranged from between 10 to 19 visits per year between 2015 and 2018 from the School Improvement Service (SIS) and 8 visits annually since 2018/19, all well in excess of the usual entitlement of 5 visits annually from the SIS and does not include visits from other services such as the Early Years Service and the SEND Service.

In September 2015 the school was rated by Ofsted as Requires Improvement (RI). In October 2017, the school received an overall rating of Good, although the Outcomes for Pupils remained as Requiring Improvement (RI). The school was inspected again in November 2022. This was a section 8 ungraded inspection by Ofsted. The outcome of the inspection was that:

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of good as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection. The school can expect to receive its next section 5 graded inspection within 12 to 24 months of November 2022.

The key findings of the November 2022 inspection were that:

- *Leaders and teachers have worked together to bring about improvements to the curriculum. They have made sure that it is better suited to the mixed-aged classes in the school. The curriculum is designed to complement leaders' vision of 'growing great learners'.*
- *In too many subjects, teachers do not ensure that pupils practise key knowledge until they are fluent. This means that those pupils who most need to be secure in crucial component knowledge struggle unnecessarily to complete complex tasks. Leaders should ensure that teachers thoroughly teach the most important knowledge and concepts that pupils need before they move on to new content*

- *Leaders do not consistently provide teachers with up-to-date information about pupils with SEND to inform their teaching choices. This means that teaching to support these pupils is not as precise as it should be. Leaders should ensure that teachers have, and use, detailed information about pupils with SEND to adapt their teaching appropriately.*

The challenges posed by a 2-class structure are enormous in terms of the responsibilities which would fall to just two teachers with regard to leadership (including curriculum leadership), safeguarding, training and development, health and safety, finance/budgeting, the role of SENDCo in addition to full time teaching responsibility. It would risk jeopardising the pupils' entitlement to a broad curriculum offer and risk poor educational outcomes particularly for pupils at KS2:

- a class across all four KS2 year groups would require a bespoke curriculum for the school and potentially for the individual children
- the teacher (who may be the headteacher) would have to have extensive knowledge of the KS1, KS2 and year 7 curriculum.
- planning would need to take account of the sequence and progression of learning across three curriculum frameworks.
- the developmental needs, physical and emotional maturity and level of independence of the pupils across this age range vastly differ.
- the 2014 curriculum and the expectations around progressive sequence of key knowledge make four year groups in a single class much more challenging than in 2011

In summary, a two-class structure is not viable on any level.

(d) Strong and permanent leadership is essential to the ongoing educational outcomes for any school. The recruitment and retention of both a Headteacher and governing body have been of concern to the Council and the Diocese over the past 9 months following the resignation of the previous Headteacher. The governing body, working the Diocese and Council were unable to source any appropriate candidates for interview in early Spring 2022. Equally, there were great challenges in securing an interim Headteacher, with the school having had 2 interim Headteachers in the Autumn Term 2022.

The recruitment challenge would be even greater now given the role a headteacher would be expected to fulfill, teaching full time in the context outlined in the bullet points at the end of section c) above whilst also undertaking all the leadership responsibilities as head of the school.

Summary

The majority of respondents to the consultation, which ran from 23 January to 21 February 2023, object to closure; there is a clear strength of feeling that the impact on current pupils and the local community would be significant. However, the challenges of delivering a full educational offer to those remaining on roll remains and will worsen with the reduction in pupil numbers at the school since the consultation was launched. As of 28 February 2023, the number of pupils on roll at the school was 35 and a further 16 pupils had applied to move school now. No solutions or actions have been identified in the consultation process to address these critical issues.

While recognising the level and nature of objection to the proposal, the case for the closure of Gt Gidding continues to be strong and in the best interests of local educational provision.

4. Pupil Numbers and admissions

The school is a small rural co-educational school with an age range of 4-11 years.

The school has a published admissions number (PAN) of 14 and capacity for 98 pupils (14 x 7 year groups)

As of 20 February 2023 there were 35 pupils on roll, as illustrated in the table below.

Gt Gidding Primary								
	YEAR	2022-23						
CLASS	Rec	1	2	3	4	5	6	Totals
1	2	5	7					14
2				5	1			6
3						5	10	15
Total Roll	2	5	7	5	1	5	10	35
PAN:	14	14	14	14	14	14	14	98
Spaces	12	9	7	9	13	9	4	63

17 pupils are male and 18 female.

34 of the pupils are of compulsory school age and 1 of them is below compulsory school age.

Gt Gidding currently has no children with an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP). There are 7 children in receipt of SEN Support, whose needs can be met through ordinarily available provision at any mainstream school.

5. Displaced pupils

Should the school close, it is proposed that, for admissions and transport purposes, the catchment area for primary schools in Sawtry would be extended to incorporate the area currently served by Gt Gidding Primary school namely the villages of Great, Little and Steeple Gidding, Winwick and Hamerton.

If, at the end of the statutory process, the Committee decides to close the school, in the week following that decision, a separate admissions round would open for parents/carers of children attending Gt Gidding Primary School in the current Yrs R to 5 to apply for new school places for September 2023. Parents and carers would be asked to complete an admissions application form and to name up to three schools they would prefer their child/ren to attend and the LA would work collaboratively with the schools concerned to meet preferences, where possible, but cannot guarantee to do so. If it is not possible to offer a place at one of their preferred schools, a place would be offered at the nearest school to their child's home where a place is available. The allocation of places would be made in line with the *School Admissions Code 2021*. Parents would be notified, on 12 May, of the new school places allocated to their child/ren for September 2023.

The LA has assessed the current capacity at the school and other schools in the surrounding area. Pupil numbers across the nine schools are forecast to decrease by 27 to 1,706 in October 2023, with surplus places increasing from 6.3% to 7.7%.

Provisional pupil numbers within 7.5 miles of Gt Gidding (October 2022)

Name of school	PAN	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total (R-Y6)	Capacity	Deficit (-) / Surplus
Sawtry Infant School	60	82	57	60					199	180	-19
Sawtry Junior Academy	65				59	60	56	83	258	260	2

Folksworth CE Primary	15	9	15	8	13	16	15	11	87	105	18
Stilton CE Primary Academy	30	11	29	14	13	13	26	23	129	210	81
Brington CE Primary	17	13	17	18	16	21	19	20	124	119	-5
Holme CE Primary	17	13	17	17	16	16	16	17	112	119	7
Yaxley Infants School	60	52	53	45					150	180	30
William de Yaxley CE Junior School	64				43	50	53	60	206	256	50
Fourfields Primary	60	55	61	60	59	89	58	59	441	420	-21
Combined total on roll		235	249	222	219	265	243	273	1706		
Capacity (if operating to PAN)	388	259	259	259	268	268	268	268		1849	
Deficit (-) / Surplus		24	10	37	49	3	25	-5			143

Data source: Pupil forecasts October 2022

If Gt Gidding's forecast of 39 pupils on roll for 2023/24 were to be absorbed by the nine schools, there would be 1,745 pupils and a remaining surplus of 104 places, or 5.6%.

It is acknowledged that William de Yaxley CE Junior School is currently graded by Ofsted as Requiring Improvement which may influence parental choice. Even without this school, there are sufficient places amongst the remaining 8 schools to accommodate displaced pupils, with a remaining surplus of 54 or 3.4%.

Schools operate most efficiently and effectively when full or nearly full. To this end the local authority seeks to keep the number of surplus places (the number of places in schools that are unfilled) to a minimum. However, it is generally accepted that not all unfilled places in a school are surplus places, but that a small margin of surplus capacity is often allowed to facilitate parental preference, to take account of the fact that schools with available places may not always be in the part of a planning area where the demand is, and to allow for a degree of error in the forecasts. A school is generally considered to be full when it has less than 5% of its places unfilled. This is in line with the National Audit Office report on Capital Funding for new school places published in 2013, where it states:

"It is considered that on average 5 per cent was the bare minimum needed for authorities to meet their statutory duty with operational flexibility, while enabling parents to have some choice of schools".

In this case, an overall capacity of 5.6% leaves surplus at the bare minimum and the capacity is not evenly spread across all year groups.

In the longer term, a new school is planned for Sawtry, with a proposed opening date of September 2024. This will serve children arising from new developments in Sawtry and will also mitigate the impact of displaced pupils wanting to take up a place in a Sawtry school. The new school will open with 1 form of entry (1FE) and will increase to 2FE in line with demand. This will, therefore, increase the overall level of surplus capacity available within local schools.

Until the new school opens, there are classrooms in both Sawtry and Infant Junior Schools which could be brought into use in 2023/24. Both schools have given in principle agreement for this if required.

6. Impact on the community

The Community Impact Assessment , undertaken as part of the Stage 1 consultation, identified a number of possible areas where the proposal could have some negative impact on a small number of local families and the local community, but also some mitigating factors which limit the impacts.

In any small community, the loss of one institution or business will be felt proportionately more than in a larger community and the closure of a school in a village community will undoubtedly impact. Good schools engage parents in their children's education and reach out to the wider community for support, as well as providing community facilities. However, these must be considered beneficial side-effects to the main duty of a school which is to provide a quality education to its pupils. Numbers on roll, budget deficits and quality of education must be the considerations in any decision on the future of a school and, while a community may be impacted by a decision to close this cannot be the overriding factor.

[The LA's Community Impact Assessment is available here.](#)

7. Rural primary schools

The school is designated as a rural school under the Designation of Rural Primary Schools (England) Order 2022.

The LA has carefully considered the factors set out in section 15(4) of the Education & Inspections Act 2006 as detailed in its report on the presumption against the closure of rural schools. The Presumption report is available as an Appendix to the Committee report of 8 March 2023 and can be read [here](#).

8. Balance of denominational provision

Gt Gidding CE Primary is a Church of England (Voluntary Controlled) school. The school has strong links with St Michael's church, into the grounds of which it has direct access from the school site. Huntingdonshire, the district of Cambridgeshire in which Gt Gidding Primary school is located is well provided for in terms Church of England primary schools. Currently there are 19 church of England primary schools providing a total of 3747 denominational places in the Huntingdonshire. Were the school to close the number of denominational primary schools would reduce to 18 and the total number of places to 3649.

The chart below lists the other Church of England primary schools closest to Gt Gidding. 4 of them are within 6 miles of Gt Gidding

Denominational Primary Schools in the area	Distance from Gt Gidding CE VC Primary School in miles (as the crow flies rounded)	Published Admission Number (PAN)
Folksworth CE VC P	4.5	15
Stilton CE Primary Academy	4.7	30

Brington CE VC Primary	5.1	17
Holme CE Primary Academy	5.5	17
The Elton CE VA Primary William de	6.8	20
Yaxley CE Junior Academy	7.2	64

If the school were to close, primary provision in Sawtry, 3.1 miles away (as the crow flies) from Gt Gidding would become the catchment for admissions and transport purposes. None of the schools in Sawtry have denominational status.

The October 2022 Pupil Led Annual School Census (PLASC) recorded 47 pupils on roll. Only 12 (25%) of them reside in the Gt Gidding catchment while 35 (75%) lived in areas served by other schools. The 2022 School Census also showed that of the 18 children living in the area served by Gt Gidding attending state funded schools in Cambridgeshire, 5 of them (28%) attended other state funded schools in the surrounding area.

In summary, there are a number of alternative denominational schools which families will be able to apply to and for many pupils currently attending the school other denominational schools might be nearer to their home address than Gt Gidding Primary School. The availability of places at these other schools is set out in the table in section 5 above

In short, closure of Gt Gidding Primary School would not have a negative impact on parental choice.

9. Maintained nursery schools

Not applicable

10. Sixth form provision

Not applicable

11. Special educational needs provision

Gt Gidding Primary School does not have any provision recognised by the Local Authority as being reserved for children with special educational needs.

As such no response is required to this point.

Issue	Potential Impact	Mitigating Factors	Conclusions
Impact on pupils	Coping with change to a new school environment. This impact may be greater for children with SEND.	The local authority and schools would work to minimise disruption of transition. Additional transition support will be available for children with SEND.	Initially negative; later potentially positive in terms of widening peer groups and accessing different facilities. Overall: Neutral
Impact on parents and families	Loss of clubs and events.	All the alternative schools provide a range of clubs and events.	Neutral

Impact on wider community	Reduced bookings in community venue.	Gt Gidding village hall hosts events not linked to the school and is likely to continue to do so. The impact of bookings for children is unlikely to be significant as the number of children residing in Gt Gidding is unlikely to significantly change.	Potentially negative.
	Local shop losing trade Reduced access to, and use of, the church for children, families. Reduction in the church community and the resulting impact on sustainability.	None Community support will aid the Parochial Church Council in continuing to make the church available to the community, whether that be for festival times, regular worship for those who seek it, a spiritual safe-space, or general use for social benefit purposes.	Potentially negative Potentially negative
Access to a school with the same designated religious character	A number of pupils could be offered places at non-denominational schools.	There are other denominational schools in the area with places available (see section 5 above). Parents can express preference for a denominational school.	Neutral
Impact on neighbouring schools	Neighbouring schools would offer places to pupils currently at Gt Gidding.	Work will take place to increase capacity and ensure sufficient places at surrounding schools to take all the pupils from Gt Gidding.	Neutral
Impact on pupil travel arrangements	Some families may experience increased costs and travel time to school; others may experience reduced costs and travel time to school.	For the majority of pupils there are alternative schools nearer to their home address. Some pupils living in the Gt Gidding catchment might face longer journeys to and	Potentially negative for pupils living in the Gt Gidding catchment who might face longer journeys to and from school each day. Approximate minimum travel times each way, to

		from an alternative school each day. However for many their nearest alternative school is within statutory walking distance. Free home to school transport would be available for eligible pupils in line with the Council's statutory duties and its published policy.	and from school in Sawtry are below: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gt Gidding, 10 mins ○ Lt Gidding, 9 mins ○ Steeple Gidding, 9 mins ○ Winwick 12 mins ○ Hamerton 10 mins ○ All villages 21 mins The journey time by minibus or taxi (depending on the number of children) could be approximately 30 minutes if there were pick-up points in all the feeder villages.
Impact on community demographics	Closure of the school may impact the balance of community.	The birth rate in the village is low and projected to remain so. Very few pupils arising are from new housing. The majority of new homes are likely to be in school admissions areas served by other schools. Assessment of settlements similar to Gt Gidding indicates population stability regardless of there being a school.	Neutral

12. Travel

The majority (75%) of pupils attending the school are from outside its catchment, while a number of children living within the catchment (5 out of 18) travel to other schools. See section 3a) above. The majority of children, therefore, already face journeys to and from school each day.

Parents may express a preference for their child to attend any school, but in the event of closure of Gt Gidding Primary School, Sawtry Infant and Junior Schools would become the designated catchment schools for children living in the villages currently served by Gt Gidding Primary School and children living in that area would be entitled to transport assistance to Sawtry as the nearest schools are located there and the distance is over the statutory walking distances. The journey time by minibus or taxi (depending on the number of children) would be approximately 30 minutes, depending on the number of pick-up points.

Analysis in January 2023 showed that of the 37 Reception to Year 5 pupils on roll at the time likely to be affected by the proposal, approximately 73% lived nearer/the same distance to an alternative school, with approximately 27% living further away. However, for many on roll at the school, their nearest alternative school is within statutory walking distance of their home address. Given the large proportion of children who attend Gt Gidding as a parental preference rather than a catchment placement, it is envisaged that displaced pupils would continue to be transported to and from school under arrangements made by their parents and carers and that, given that the majority of pupils would be able to attend a school nearer to their home address, it is unlikely there would be a noticeable increase in car usage. On the contrary, it would be expected that car usage would reduce.