

## Appendix 2 – Future Viability of Gt Gidding Church of England (CE) Voluntary Controlled (VC) Primary School

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for parents and members of the public

### **Why is closure of the school being proposed?**

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient school places for every child living in Cambridgeshire who is of school age and whose parents want them educated in the state funded sector. We are committed to working in close partnership with schools, academy trusts, the dioceses, and key partners to ensure that the supply of school places across Cambridgeshire is in the right location, is of good quality and is of a sufficient size to be viable.

The Council has concerns about the future viability of Gt Gidding CE VC Primary School. These concerns are related to financial viability and falling pupil numbers which, in turn, may affect educational outcomes.

### **What is a Voluntary Controlled School?**

Voluntary schools are those where the land and buildings are typically owned by a Charitable foundation or trust, usually a religious organisation. At a VC school, the Foundation (in this case the Diocese of Ely) appoints about 25% of the governors. The Local Authority employs the school's staff and is the admission authority for the school.

As Gt Gidding is a maintained primary school, the Council is the responsible body in terms of lead on any statutory processes but is working in close collaboration with the Diocese of Ely as it is a CE VC School.

### **Who makes the decision and what is the process?**

The County Councillors who sit on the Children & Young People's (CYP) Committee will make the decision. At the January committee the Cllrs made the decision to authorise a consultation on the future viability of the school including the potential closure.

There will be a 30-day consultation period, after which members of the CYP Committee will decide whether to move to the publication of a statutory notice formally proposing closure of the school. This will mark the beginning of a 4- week statutory representation period during which anyone may submit their comments/response to the formal proposal. After this 4-week period, the members of the committee will meet again to consider all of the responses and the outcome of the consultation before making a decision on whether or not to close the school.

### **When will the decision on the closure take place?**

The final decision will be made at the CYP Committee meeting in April 2023.

**What is the timescale?**

If the CYP Committee decides to close the school, it would close officially on 31 August 2023.

**What will happen to my child if the school closes?**

If the decision is made to close the school, you will be asked (in late April) to complete an application form to apply for a new school place for September 2023. You will know by mid-May at which school your child has been offered a place. If the decision to close is made, the local authority and the school leadership will hold information sessions for parents to outline in greater detail all the options available to them.

**Can I choose which school my child will attend? Can I ask for another church school?**

You can express a preference for up to 3 schools, which can include church schools. We will be offering all parents the opportunity for a 1-1 conversation with a council officer during the consultation period to discuss options available. We will do all we can to meet parental preference.

**Are there plans to measure the impact of closing the school?**

The impact of closure will be assessed prior to any decision being made via an Equality Impact Assessment and a Community Impact Assessment. In addition, there will be a specific response to the 'Presumption Against Closure of Rural Schools'. All of these documents will be published as appendices to the next CYP committee report, which is due to be held on 8 March 2023.

**How will closure impact the denominational balance of schools in the local area?**

Currently there are 19 denominational primary schools with a total of 3747 places in Huntingdonshire. Should Gt Gidding close the number of denomination primary schools would reduce to 18 and the total number of places to 3648. This is a reduction of 2.64%.

There are five denominational schools within 6 miles of Gt Gidding (as the crow flies). These are listed alongside their distance from Gt Gidding, their published admission number (PAN) and the number of cases they currently operate.

- Gt Gidding CofE Primary School (0m; PAN 14; 3 classes)
- Folksworth CofE Primary School (4.5m; PAN 15; 4 classes)
- Stilton CofE Primary Academy (4.7m; PAN 30; 6 classes)
- Brington CofE Primary School (5.1m; PAN 17; 4 classes)
- Holme CofE Primary Academy (5.5m; PAN 17; 5 classes)

The LA will endeavour to meet parental preferences for alternative school places but cannot guarantee to do so.

**Will transport be provided to the new school?**

Transport assistance for pupils would be provided in accordance with the LA's statutory duties and the Council's Home to School Travel Assistance Policy. The

Council's Transport Assistance Policy can be found on the Cambridgeshire County Council website: [Pre-16 transport \(mainstream\) - Cambridgeshire County Council](#)

**If my child is not eligible for free transport, can I purchase a seat on transport provided for eligible children?**

In exceptional cases, spare seats on transport can be purchased for use by children. This can only be agreed where the spare seat is in a taxi or in a Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) compliant vehicle, such as a school bus. Spare seats can only be purchased whilst they are available, for a term at a time. The Council is not able to provide additional spare seat capacity for purchase because the termly charge (currently £265) does not cover the cost of new contracts.

**What will happen to the school building?**

The Council and the Diocese will need to follow various processes if the school closes. For example, it will need to seek the approval of the Department for Education (DfE) to make any changes to the use of the wider school site. The Council currently rents the land on which the main school building stands so that lease would end and the owner would decide what to do with the building.

**Will there be a public consultation event for parents?**

Yes, there will be a public consultation event for parents and the wider community on Tuesday, 31 January at 3.30pm specifically for parents and a wider meeting at 7pm that evening that the whole community will be invited to, and parents can also attend. Unfortunately, despite the best attempts of the headteacher it has not been possible to offer supervision of pupils in school whilst their parents attend the 3.30pm meeting.

**Should I tell my child about the future of the school?**

The local authority will be working closely with the school leadership to ensure that children are appropriately informed and understand the process that will be undertaken as is appropriate to their age by school staff. Of course, you may wish to discuss the proposals with your child also.

**My child was offered a place at this school due to their catchment/closest school having no available places. How will places now be made available?**

Your application for a new school place will be considered in the normal way of any school application and in accordance with the statutory School Admissions Code. We will work with local schools to maximise the number of places available.

**My child has special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). What support will be available to my child if they move to a new school?**

The SEND District Team will work with staff at the current school to carry out child centred planning for children in receipt of SEN support. This will ensure that pupil and parent/carers' voices are heard and used to build a robust and successful transition plan. The local authority SEND District Team will identify provision required to meet

the needs of children receiving SEN support and will ensure that link SEND practitioners are identified within receiving schools so that information is appropriately shared regarding the children they will receive. Support will be available to Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCoS) at receiving schools to incorporate the provision required as part of the school's graduated response.

Should any child be the subject of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), they and their family will be supported to identify, and transition to, a new school through the well-established EHCP processes.

Further information on EHCP processes can be found on the Council's website.  
[Education, Health and Care Plan \(EHCP\) - Cambridgeshire County Council.](#)

**Will my child be able to move to a new school with their peer group (if they choose)?**

Every parent will be able to express a preference for the school they would like their children to move to.

**I have more than one child at the school. Will they be separated and sent to different schools?**

Your application(s) for a new school place will be considered in the normal way of any school application and in accordance with the statutory School Admissions Code. Under the Code admission authorities are not allowed to guarantee a school place at a particular school. However, we would endeavour to place siblings together, if requested, and will work with schools to find solutions that support family arrangements wherever possible.

If there are more applications than places at the school, you apply for the school's oversubscription criteria will be applied to determine how the places are offered. Different schools have different criteria, so it is important that you check the admission arrangements for all the schools you wish to apply for.

**Will my child be offered an interim place in lieu of the new Sawtry Primary School opening?**

No. If your child moves to a new school, they will have the right to remain in that school until they are of an age to transition to the next phase of their education. Should you wish for your child to attend the new Sawtry Primary School, you will be able to make an application to that school when it opens in the normal way of any school application and in accordance with the statutory School Admissions Code.

**Will the new Sawtry Primary School open to all year groups at the same time?**

The current expectation is that the new Sawtry Primary school would fill from Reception upwards. This means that it would open with only a Reception year group in the first year; Reception and Year 1 in the second year; Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 in the third year; and so on. In the event of pressures on places in Years 1-6 in Sawtry, which might necessitate opening classes in other year groups earlier, the

Council would work with the successful sponsor to determine admission arrangements, in consultation with the Infant and Junior Schools.

**Will children living in the Gt Gidding catchment area or attending Gt Gidding CE VC Primary School get priority at alternative CE schools?**

Your application for a new school place will be considered in the normal way of any school application and in accordance with the statutory School Admissions Code. Under the Code admission authorities are not allowed to guarantee a school place at a particular school. If there are more applications than places at the school, you apply for the school's oversubscription criteria will be applied to determine how the places are offered. Different schools have different criteria, so it is important that you check the admission arrangements for all the schools you wish to apply for.

**Why isn't additional funding being made available to the school to support it remaining open?**

The Council is not legally allowed to subsidise school budgets. The school already receives the maximum allowable sparsity allocation and there is no longer any discretion through other funding factors to target monies to small schools. The national funding arrangements already weights additional funding towards small schools but there is no recognition of school organisation requirements in the funding arrangements.

**Have options been explored for partnership with another school to improve future viability?**

Gt Gidding CE VC Primary is defined as a maintained school and as such can only federate with other maintained schools. A maintained school cannot federate with an academy. This means that options for federation are limited and at this stage, no such option has presented itself. Should a federation opportunity be presented, there remains the possibility that the future viability will not improve.

**Has academisation of the school been considered?**

There has been consideration given to the academisation of the school and adoption into a church Multi Academy Trust (MAT). As a voluntary controlled school, it could only academise with a church MAT unless approval to join a non-Diocesan MAT was granted by the Diocese of Ely. The regional Church of England MAT undertook a period of due diligence and discussion with the Governing Body but concluded that Gt Gidding CE VC Primary School was not a suitable candidate to join its MAT given concerns around viability.

**Do alternative schools in the local area have mixed year group classes?**

Some do and some do not. Some schools have mixed year group classes for some year groups and not for others. It should also be noted that class organisation is reviewed yearly depending on pupil numbers. Therefore, schools that have mixed year group classes now, may not have them in subsequent years.

Schools that currently have at least one mixed year group class are Brington CofE Primary School, Folksworth CofE Primary School and Holme CofE Primary School.

**Have the Health and Safety implications of increased pupil numbers in other local schools been assessed?**

Some schools in the surrounding area have physical space which is currently not being used. There is the potential that, with additional staffing, this space could be used to accommodate additional pupils. The Health and Safety implications would therefore be the same as for any other school.

**Is there a limit on the class sizes which affects outcomes?**

Classes in Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 are subject to the Department for Education's (DfE) Infant Class Size Regulations (maximum of 30 pupils per teacher), with limited exceptions. The schools in the county operate within a long-standing protocol agreed with the Council for junior/Key Stage 2 class sizes of up to 34 pupils in a single year group class and 32 in a mixed year group class.

Whilst there is no specified minimum class size, per pupil funding formulas mean that classes which are too small do not attract sufficient funding to be viable. This in turn has the potential to affect educational outcomes.

**What has been done to assess the impact that this will have on the wellbeing of our children?**

An Equalities Impact has been undertaken as part of this process and will be developed if the process proceeds to subsequent stages. A copy of this will be published with the Committee report in March.

**Is the Governing Body Quorate? Who are the Governors?**

Yes. The Governing Body is currently made up of the following members:

Chair of Governors (Interim): George Hayes

Interim Headteacher: Deborah Bowles

Foundation Governor: Rev. Fiona Brampton

Foundation Governor: Jacqueline McCamphill

Co-opted Governor: Seb Gray

Co-opted Governor: Karen Moody

Staff Governor: Alison Turvey

**Have you actively recruited for a new Headteacher?**

Yes. The Governing Body actively recruited for a Headteacher. However, the applications received were not deemed suitable for the post.

**How can we share our views at CYP Committee?**

If you wish to address the meeting, you will need to apply by 12pm at least 3 working days before the meeting takes place. This means that requests will need to be made by 12pm on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2023. To apply, please visit the Council's website.

You'll need to know the name of the meeting (Children & Young People Committee), the date of the meeting (8<sup>th</sup> March 2023) and what you want to present.

[Apply to address a meeting online - Cambridgeshire County Council website \(achieveservice.com\)](https://www.achieveservice.com)

If you are unable to attend the meeting, your contribution will be read by a member of Democratic Services.

### **Has the funding model changed from 2022/22 to 2023/24?**

No, the funding model has not changed. Further information about school funding can be found on the Council website.

[School funding - Cambridgeshire County Council](#)

### **What other schools are of a similar size?**

There are 9 primary schools in Cambridgeshire that had 80 pupils or less on roll at the time of the October 2022 Pupil Led Annual School Census (PLASC).

<b>School</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>Yr1</b>	<b>Yr2</b>	<b>Yr3</b>	<b>Yr4</b>	<b>Yr5</b>	<b>Yr6</b>	<b>Total</b>
Gt Gidding CofE Primary School	3	8	7	8	2	9	10	<b>47.0</b>
Guilden Morden Primary School	9	10	15	5	7	0	6	<b>52.0</b>
Newton Community Primary School	9	6	10	7	5	9	11	<b>57.0</b>
Dry Drayton CofE Primary School	11	6	14	6	7	10	10	<b>64.0</b>
Kimbolton Primary Academy	10	4	15	12	7	10	9	<b>67.0</b>
Guyhirn CofE Primary School	10	9	12	9	10	13	11	<b>74.0</b>
Kinderley Primary School	12	12	12	7	11	9	13	<b>76.0</b>
Great Staughton Primary Academy	15	13	9	10	8	11	14	<b>80.0</b>
Offord Primary School	13	6	8	9	19	15	10	<b>80.0</b>

### **Why can't the catchment area be changed to include other villages, such as Sawtry?**

School catchments have been in place for many years. Whilst broadening the school's catchment could attract more pupils, it would need to be significantly broader to make a significant impact. It would also mean other pupils may have further to travel to their local school, and negatively impact the rolls of other schools. This is therefore not an option.

**Why are there so many children in the Abbots Ripton catchment, compared to Great Gidding?**

Gt Gidding is comparatively isolated whereas Abbots Ripton is close to major roads and market towns.

**How were DEMAT able to take on Guilden Morden Primary School in a similar position?**

Guilden Morden was in a different position. In 2017 the local authority school was put into 'Special Measures' following a failed Ofsted inspection. The DfE asked DEMAT to run and improve the school, also providing an additional improvement grant. Under the MAT the school has re-established its educational credentials, successfully achieving a strong good in all areas at its next inspection. Along with Steeple Morden CE Primary, it has become a school of choice for a locality big enough to support two closely located small schools. Permanent structural support has also been made possible through the cost efficiencies (economies of scale) of services provided through academy membership.

**Did DEMAT carry out full due diligence before rejecting any proposal for Great Gidding CE VC Primary School to join the Trust?**

Yes. In fact the leadership of Great Gidding withdrew from the process prior to DEMAT's communicated judgement, expressing their desire to 'go-it-alone' with alternative plans. Leading up to this point and despite approaching the review with hope and a keenness to help, DEMAT had cause to express concerns with the long-term viability of the school, based on projected pupil numbers. An objective perspective had to be taken by DEMAT, out of responsibility to the other schools in the MAT i.e. substantial and permanent subsidisation was thought a likely requirement, which the MAT would not be able to provide without using money from other schools on a recurring basis.

**How many children and staff were impacted by the closure of Wormegay CE Primary School?**

Around 30. Wormegay Church School and Runcton Holme Church School (both in Ely Diocese but Norfolk LA) recently merged to form a new school 'Holy Cross' on the Runcton Home site. For some time prior to the 'closure' (merger) the governors had first of all converted to an academy, and through this ensured that the school was working in a hard federation supported through the trust, including employing an Executive Head. With both schools already productively working together, the merger was then the next logical step, and is proving a success. The number of children in Wormegay when it closed had dipped to less than 30, and it was agreed by all that it was educationally inappropriate to sustain a two-class scenario for the whole school. Both catchments were very close to each other geographically, and now work well as one combine catchment area.



**What was the feedback from those you have approached about partnership working with the school?**

The schools we have approached have shown a desire to help and have looked at the opportunities and challenges that a partnership with Great Gidding CE VC Primary School could bring. However, the message has been consistent; that the financial viability is too great a risk and would impact upon other schools and the offer to their own pupils.

**If the school had been taken over by DEMAT previously, would a potential closure still be being considered?**

Yes. It is necessary for any Responsible Body to consider the financial viability of all its schools. All diocese of Ely trusts and schools are required to ensure that educational standards are supported by strong financial viability and sustainability. This includes a conventional expectation that learning delivery is grouped on an educationally viable basis, where individual needs are most likely to be met and children can interact and learn with others of a similar developmental age. This manifests as a preference where possible for single year group-based classes, or a maximum of two-year groups per classes where necessary. Three or more age groups per class is deemed undesirable practice due to the demands placed on staff to meet individual pupil needs, and the lack of opportunity for children to socially interact with their peer group. Such an arrangement is only undertaken in very unique circumstances where staffing can be shown to be able to meet individual needs, and social enrichment can be obtained in other ways. This is not the case at Great Gidding, since finances do not permit such staffing arrangements and proximal schools are too distant for day-to-day class-mixing to be feasible.

In 2021, DEMAT went through a similar process which resulted in the amalgamation of Wormegay CE Primary and Runciton Holme CE Primary School (both in Norfolk), which was renamed the Holy Cross Primary Academy. This was also due to low pupil numbers and concerns with their financial viability.

**Have you considered changing from Voluntary-controlled to Voluntary-aided? Would this attract more funding?**

This would not attract more funding. Voluntary-aided (VA) schools are local-authority-maintained schools and often, but not always, have a religious character.

VA schools are paid on a similar basis to other categories of school. Responsibility for work to VA school premises is shared between the school's governing body and the local authority (LA). The LA has responsibility for the playing fields and the governing body are liable for all other capital expenditure.

**Do you see any future for small schools?**

Yes. Each school is unique, and the Council is not advocating larger schools or increased class sizes. However, it is important to recognise the financial challenges

that small schools face, and to review these on a case-by-case basis to determine what, if any, support can be offered.

**How is a new school in Sawtry considered to be sustainable with 10 pupils, but this one isn't?**

The new school in Sawtry is planned to meet the growing number of children within the school's catchment area, in addition to serving the housing developments which are currently under construction. Whilst the new school is expected to open with a published admission number (PAN) of 10 to minimise the impact to local schools, it will increase over time in line with demand as pupil numbers grow. As the school will form part of a larger Trust, there will be opportunities to share resources until it is fully established.

**Why wasn't closure mentioned previously?**

Previously, forecasts have suggested that numbers in-catchment may dip but will again increase. However, forecasts are now showing a continuous decline in the number of in-catchment pupils. This means that we need to consider the financial viability of the school in the longer term.

**Are there any circumstances that will change which would enable the school to stay open?**

We know that the number of pupils has reduced and is now at a critical point. We are concerned that these lower pupil numbers will result in the school needing to adopt a two-class structure and the challenges that this brings for teachers when differentiating to the needs of children, and the support which children would receive.

The LA feel that they have explored all options to enable the school to remain open but would welcome your views regarding this – including your views on a potential two-class structure, and any other suggestions which you feel could be explored further.

**What would happen if Committee voted against the potential closure?**

If Committee voted against the potential closure, it would be necessary to reduce to a two-class structure and to continue further conversations to assess where further savings could be made.

**Have you considered the impact on local businesses, the church and the village hall?**

This forms part of the current community consultation we are running. We would encourage local business owners, and groups, to share their feedback with us via the Smart Survey.

**What are the Ofsted ratings of surrounding schools?**

Sawtry Infant School – Good (2019)

Sawtry Junior Academy – Good (2019)

Holme C of E Primary School – No inspection since joining DEMAT in 2019.

Stilton C of E Primary School – Good (2022)  
Folksworth C of E Primary School – Good (2022)  
Brington C of E Primary School – Good (2017)

**If the decision was taken to close the school, would the existing structure remain until the end of the school year?**

Yes. If the decision were taken by Committee to close the school, the current structure would remain in place until the end of this academic year. Closure would not take effect before 31 August 2023.

**If the decision was taken to close, would transport be available to other faith schools? What happens if academies refuse to take children?**

If the decision were taken to close the school, it would be possible to consider applications for transport on a case-by-case basis as an exceptional circumstance.