

# Proposed closure of Broad Oak Community Primary School Community Impact Assessment

## Introduction

Broad Oak Community Primary School is located in the village of Broad Oak, Heathfield, East Sussex.



The village of Broad Oak is in the Parish of Heathfield and Waldron, which is in Wealden District.



Covering 322 square miles, Wealden is the largest district in East Sussex and is classified as one of the most rural districts in England. Half the population lives in the five main towns of Crowborough, Hailsham, Heathfield, Polegate and Uckfield. The rest live in rural villages and hamlets.

The parish includes the market town of Heathfield and the villages of Waldron, Cross-in-Hand, Broad Oak, Old Heathfield and part of Punnetts Town. Heathfield is surrounded by the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

## Impact on pupils

Should the proposal be implemented and Broad Oak Community Primary School (Broad Oak) be closed, the pupils in Reception to Year 5 would need to move to alternative primary schools in the surrounding area. Year 6 pupils would be leaving primary school to take up places in secondary schools and so would not be affected by the closure in terms of their school place.

### ***Potential Impact:***

The main changes for pupils in Reception to Year 5 would be:

- A new school
- A new route to school
- A new uniform
- New teachers and support staff
- A new learning environment
- Changed friendship groups

Responses to the consultation indicated that parents were concerned about the impact on the mental health and wellbeing of pupils.

### ***Mitigating Factors:***

Every pupil would be guaranteed the offer of a place at an alternative primary school in their local area. The schools identified as being within a reasonable distance of Broad Oak are:

- All Saints and St Richards CE Primary School
- Cross in Hand CE Primary School
- Parkside Community Primary School
- Parkside Community Primary School
- Dallington CE Primary School
- Maynards Green Community Primary School
- Mayfield CE Primary School
- Five Ashes CE Primary School
- Burwash CE Primary School

The local authority would be responsible for overseeing the process of closing the school and would work closely with the school to implement closure, including supporting pupils during their final months at Broad Oak and in their transition to a new school. Parents and carers of children at the school would be able to express a preference for a place at an alternative school. 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. Parents and carers would be offered a school place either at one of their preferred schools named on the application form or, if this is not possible, at the nearest school to the child's home where a place is available. The local authority would try to meet parents and carers preferences wherever possible but cannot guarantee to do so. The allocation of places would be made in line with the admissions policy as set out in the school admissions booklet which is available on the East Sussex website at:

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/educationandlearning/schools/admissions/>

The local authority would take all practicable steps to ease the transition for all pupils, including vulnerable groups. It would work with the receiving schools to arrange transition days for pupils to meet their new teachers and to familiarise themselves with their new environments.

Local authority support is available to schools, children and families for mental health and emotional wellbeing as set out in Appendix 4 of the Lead Member report.

Some of the schools identified mention on their websites that second hand uniforms are available at a very low cost.

**Recommendation:**

That, in addition to the mitigations outlined above, the receiving schools would be asked to identify buddies for the incoming pupils to help further ease transition by ensuring there is a familiar face and an introduction to new friendship groups.

**Impact on parents and families**

The Friends of Broad Oak School organise a number of events for parents of pupils in order to fund raise for the school. These include but are not limited to:

- Summer, Easter and Christmas Fayres
- Harvest Festival and supper
- Film nights
- Quizzes
- Book week events
- Christmas coffee morning
- Discos

Broad Oak also provides a breakfast club and a holiday club which has run for inset days so far, although the school has been looking to offer more dates throughout all holidays going forward.

**Potential Impact:**

If the proposals go ahead, it is likely that these events would cease.

**Mitigating Factors:**

Schools in the local area also provide events, clubs and wrap around care for pupils:

- All Saints and St Richards CE Primary School  
The PTA holds regular events including cake sales and film nights. The school also runs a number of before and after school clubs for pupils including archery, gymnastics, netball and fencing.
- Cross in Hand CE Primary School  
The school offers an extensive range of after school clubs, which include drawing, choir, drama, diamond dance, gymnastics, football, mandarin, tag rugby, karate, tennis and swimming.  
  
The Friends of Cross in hand school hold a number of different events during the year, including film nights, discos, a Christmas and a Summer Fair, quizzes and cake sales.
- Parkside Community Primary School  
The PTA holds events such as fireworks, quiz nights, ladies bingo, cake sales and a summer fete. The school has a breakfast club and an after school club, as well as a number of extra-curricular clubs and activities including helping out on the school farm.
- Punnetts Town Community Primary School  
The Friends of Punnetts Town School hold a fundraising event at Easter, summer and Christmas. Maypole dancing is an annual tradition and other recent activities have included a Christmas shopping evening, a quiz night, film nights for the children and an annual theatre or pantomime trip.
- Dallington CE Primary School  
After school clubs include Irish dancing, tag rugby, football, African drumming, choir, piano, great out tours and karate.

- Maynards Green Community Primary School  
The Friends of Maynards Green School organise a range of social occasions as well as organising a variety of fund raising activities such as a summer fair, cake sales and a Christmas market. The school offers a breakfast club and after-school childcare.
- Mayfield CE Primary School  
The Friends of Mayfield School organise events - recently a circus, an Easter parade, a pamper evening, a fashion show and a Christmas fair. The school offers a breakfast club and a range of after school clubs including drama, multi-skills, violin, guitar, bible explorers & craft, hockey, football and netball.
- Five Ashes CE Primary School  
The school has a range of after school clubs including dance, tag rugby, pottery and a cookery club.
- Burwash CE Primary School  
The school offers a number of after-school activities including football/cricket, netball, judo, gardening, mud kitchen club, film and newspaper club.

***Recommendation:***

That the local authority and/or the receiving schools be asked to let prospective parents know of any arrangements in the area for holiday clubs.

### Impact of the proposal on the local pre-school

Broad Oak Pre-school offers early years provision for children aged 2-5. It operates from Broad Oak Village Hall. It works with all of the local primary schools to ensure that children have a managed transition to school.

***Potential impact:***

The proposed closure of the school would not directly impact Broad Oak Pre-school as it is not located on the school site. Its current cohort of 28 comes from a number of towns and villages:

#### Home location of children attending Broad Oak Pre-school

Child's home location	Funded and non-funded 2, 3 and 4 year olds	% of cohort
Broad Oak	7	25%
Heathfield	11	39%
Burwash, Hailsham, Hawkhurst, Herstmonceux, Horam, Punnetts Town, Robertsbridge	10	36%

Source: September 2019 early years data from the pre-school

***Mitigating Factors:***

Children leaving the pre-school in September 2019 fed into nine different primary schools; fewer than five went to Broad Oak. In recent years very few children from Broad Oak attended their local pre-school.

***Recommendation:***

None

### Impact of proposal on the wider community

Concerns were expressed through the consultation that, should the proposed closure be implemented, the school premises would be lost as a community venue and local residents would lose access to a community defibrillator which is located on the school site.

Concerns were also expressed about the impact on the village shop which benefits from the passing trade brought by parents and pupils attending the school.

**Potential Impact:**

If the school were to close the local community would no longer be able to attend events at the school and would no longer have access to the defibrillator located there.

Schools act as employers and consumers in the local area. Parents of pupils attending the school may be more likely to spend locally. Sell et al (1996) studied the socio-economic impacts of school closures on North Dakota communities. They found a perceived decline in retail sales and the number of businesses in both communities where schools had closed and communities where schools had gained students due to the consolidation of schools. Those from communities where schools had closed were more likely to think this decline was due to the school closure. However, there was a lack of data to support their belief [1] [2]. A high proportion of pupils at the school do not live in Broad Oak so the school has had the effect of bringing in potential customers from outside the village.

**Mitigating Factors:**

If local volunteers wish to organise events for the village, there is at least one alternative venue in the village (Broad Oak Village Hall). The village hall is approximately 0.4 miles from the school, around a 10 minute walk.

In addition, Heathfield and Waldron Parish Council provide information on its website about a range of groups and events in the wider parish area that could be accessed by the local community. These include:

- Sports and fitness, such as bowls, table tennis, cricket, rugby, ramblers, folk dance and Tai Chi.
- Interests, such as History Society, Horticultural Society, Philatelic Society, choral society, Drama Club, Quilters and a Brass Band.
- Clubs and Groups, such as Rotary Club, Linked Hands Club, British Legion and the Women's Institute.

The Heathfield.net website indicates that Public Access Defibrillators (PADs) have also been installed at Broad Oak Village Hall and on the outside front wall of GO:VER Gym in Broad Oak. Therefore the community has access to alternative defibrillators in close proximity to the school. The defibrillator currently situated at Broad Oak could be relocated to an alternative community venue.

The economic benefits that a school brings to a community 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 academic standards must be the major considerations in any decision on the future of a school and, while a community may be impacted by a decision to close a school; this cannot be an overriding factor. If the school closed, the local shop would be unable to rely on passing trade from the school community. This is already the case for 13 weeks of the year during school holidays. It would be for the local community to consider how to support local retail facilities.

**Recommendation:**

None

**Access to provision of same school designation**

Broad Oak is a non-denominational school. Currently 58% of school places in the Heathfield area are faith based and 42% are non-denominational. If Broad Oak closes this would change to 64% faith

based and 36% non-denominational. The three non-denominational schools in the Heathfield area other than Broad Oak (Parkside, Punnetts Town and Maynards Green) have 10 spare community school places between them. Other community schools are available in the wider area surrounding Heathfield, for example in Hailsham where a number of pupils on roll at Broad Oak live.

#### **Potential Impact:**

Pupils currently in Reception to Year 5 at Broad Oak would be likely to be offered places at faith schools.

#### **Mitigating Factors:**

It is not unusual for rural parts of the county to have only faith schools and no community provision at all. Examples include the North Chailey, Battle, Robertsbridge and Wadhurst review areas. All non-denominational state funded schools in England have to provide collective worship of a 'broadly Christian character'. Faith schools will provide worship in accordance with the trust deeds related to the school. The Diocese of Chichester Board of Education recognises "that Church schools serve the whole community and are not exclusive to worshipping families". Parental preference would be considered where possible when allocating alternative school places to pupils at Broad Oak but parents do have the right to have their children excused from worship in any state funded school, whether non-denominational or faith based.

The three non-denominational schools in the Heathfield area other than Broad Oak (Parkside, Punnetts Town and Maynards Green) currently have 10 spare community school places between them. Other community schools are available in the wider area surrounding Heathfield, for example in Hailsham where a number of pupils on roll at Broad Oak live.

#### **Recommendation:**

None

### **Impact on neighbouring schools**

If the proposals go ahead and the school is closed, every pupil in Reception to Year 5 at Broad Oak would be offered a place at an alternative school, many of which are likely to be nearer to their home address.

#### **Potential Impact:**

An analysis of current pupil numbers in the Heathfield area has concluded that there would be sufficient places for the pupils of Broad Oak. This is illustrated in the table below:

#### **Provisional pupil numbers in the Heathfield area**

Capacity	PAN	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total	Capacity	Surplus	% surplus
		230	230	230	230	230	230	230				
Broad Oak	20	5	1	6	9	8	6	17	52	140	88	63%
All Saints' and St Richard's	20	15	13	13	10	17	6	13	87	140	53	38%
Cross-in-Hand	60	57	37	43	42	56	44	30	309	420	111	26%
Dallington	15	16	13	17	17	18	14	11	106	105	0	0%
Five Ashes	10	10	10	8	7	14	7	7	63	56	0	0%
Mayfield	30	21	21	28	25	21	24	21	161	210	49	23%
Maynards Green	30	30	30	30	30	33	32	30	215	210	0	0%
Parkside	30	30	30	29	31	29	30	30	209	210	1	0%
Punnetts Town	15	15	12	16	12	14	17	10	96	105	9	9%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>230</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>190</b>	<b>183</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>169</b>	<b>1298</b>	<b>1596</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>19%</b>

Data source: Pupil number returns from schools between September and November 2019.

The impact on local schools would be positive in terms of increasing their rolls and sustainability.

#### **Mitigating Factors:**

N/A



### **Recommendations:**

None

### **Impact on pupil travel arrangements**

Through the consultation, traffic congestion in Heathfield was raised as a significant concern.

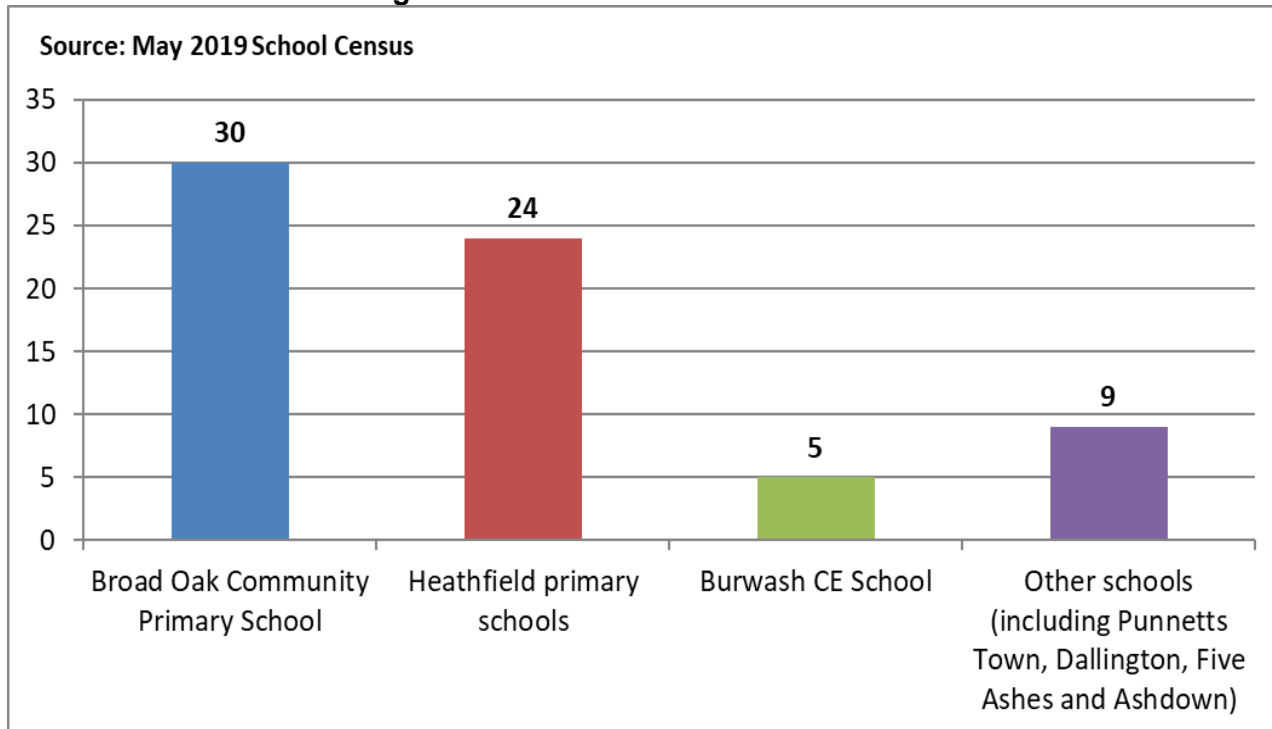
#### **Potential Impact:**

Some families may be impacted by additional travel costs and travel time. The closure of the school may impact members of the community who will have to go beyond the local village to engage with teachers and use community facilities. Respondents to the consultation cited the impact on traffic and the environment of children having to travel by car to their nearest alternative school.

#### **Mitigating Factors:**

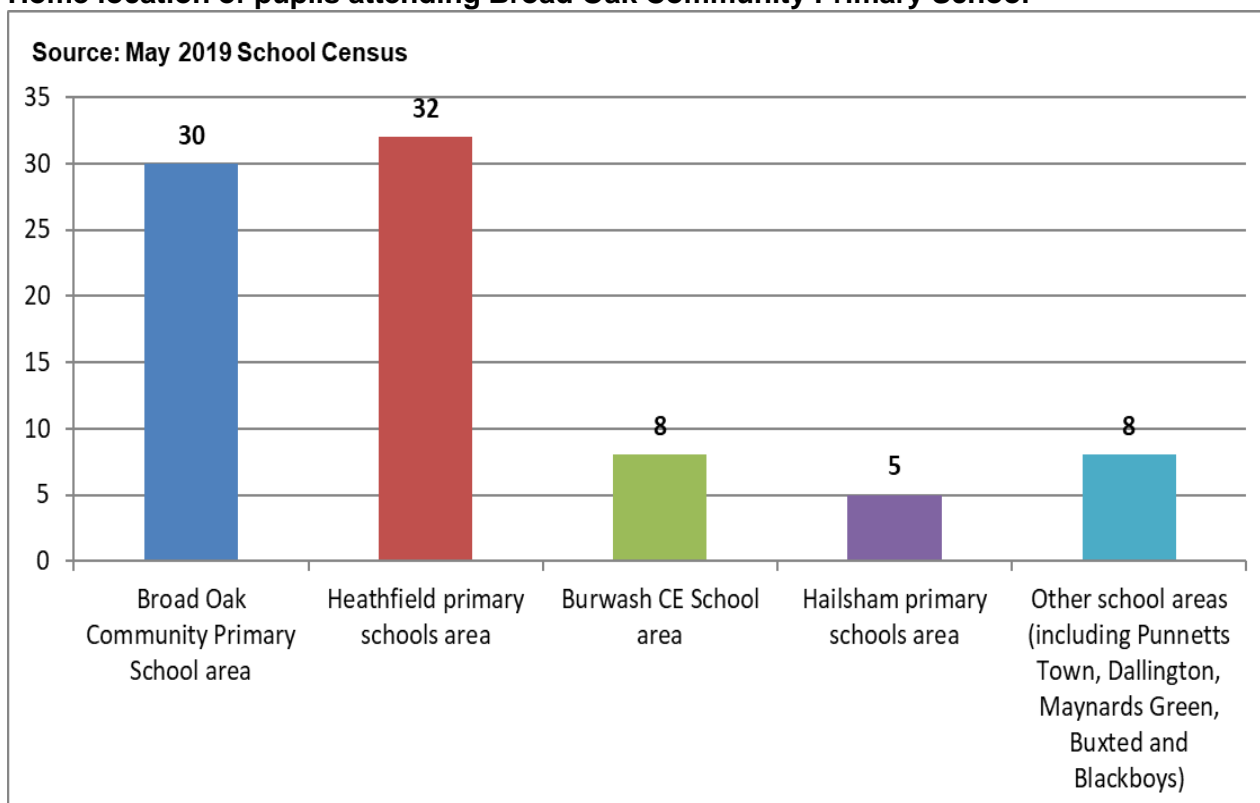
The May 2019 School Census showed 68 children living in the Broad Oak community area attending state funded school in East Sussex. Of these, 30 (44%) attended Broad Oak while 38 (56%) attended other schools in the surrounding area.

#### **Destination of children living in Broad Oak**



The 30 pupils who attended the school in May 2019 made up 36% of the total number of pupils on roll, whereas 53 pupils (64%) live in areas served by other schools.

## Home location of pupils attending Broad Oak Community Primary School



Alternative schools are not far from the village and would be in travelling distance for community activities - between 1.5 and 5.4 miles away from Broad Oak as shown in the table below. For the majority of pupils and families these schools could be nearer to their home address.

School	Distance from Broad Oak Community Primary School in miles (rounded)
All Saints' and St Richard's CE Primary School	1.5
Cross-in-Hand CE Primary School	2.3
Parkside Community Primary School	2.5
Punnetts Town Community Primary School	2.3
Dallington CE Primary School	3.8
Maynards Green Community Primary School	3.5
Mayfield CE Primary School	3.7
Five Ashes CE Primary School	5.4
Burwash CE Primary School	5.1

The majority of pupils currently attending Broad Oak are from out of the area while a number of children living in the village travel to other schools. The majority of children therefore already face journeys to and from school each day. Should the school close the likely impact on traffic and the environment could potentially be reduced if displaced pupils attend schools nearer to their home address.

Latest analysis shows that of the 35 Reception to Year 5 pupils likely to be affected by the proposal, approximately 57% live nearer/same distance to an alternative school, with approximately 43% living further away. Free home to school transport would be provided for eligible pupils who meet the criteria set out the link below. The local authority currently estimates five pupils would be eligible for free home to school transport to their nearest alternative school. The cost to the local authority would be negligible as either pupils are already in receipt of free



home to school transport or arrangements are already in place to the alternative schools. The local authority acknowledges that some pupils living in Broad Oak and attending the school might face longer journeys to and from an alternative school each day. However, for many their nearest alternative school is within statutory walking distance.

<https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/educationandlearning/schools/transport/>

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 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. To the contrary, it would be hoped that car usage would reduce.

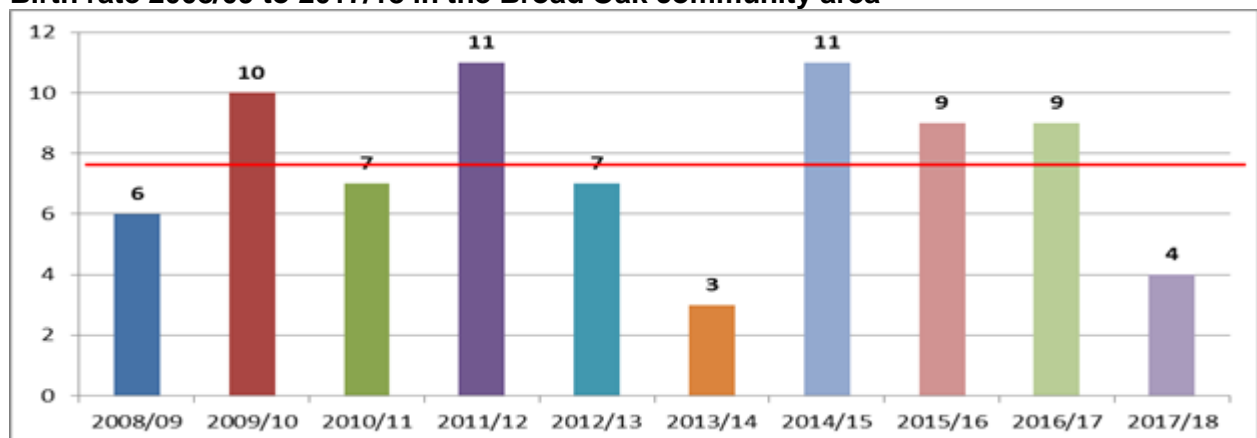
### **Recommendations**

None

### **Impact on community demographics**

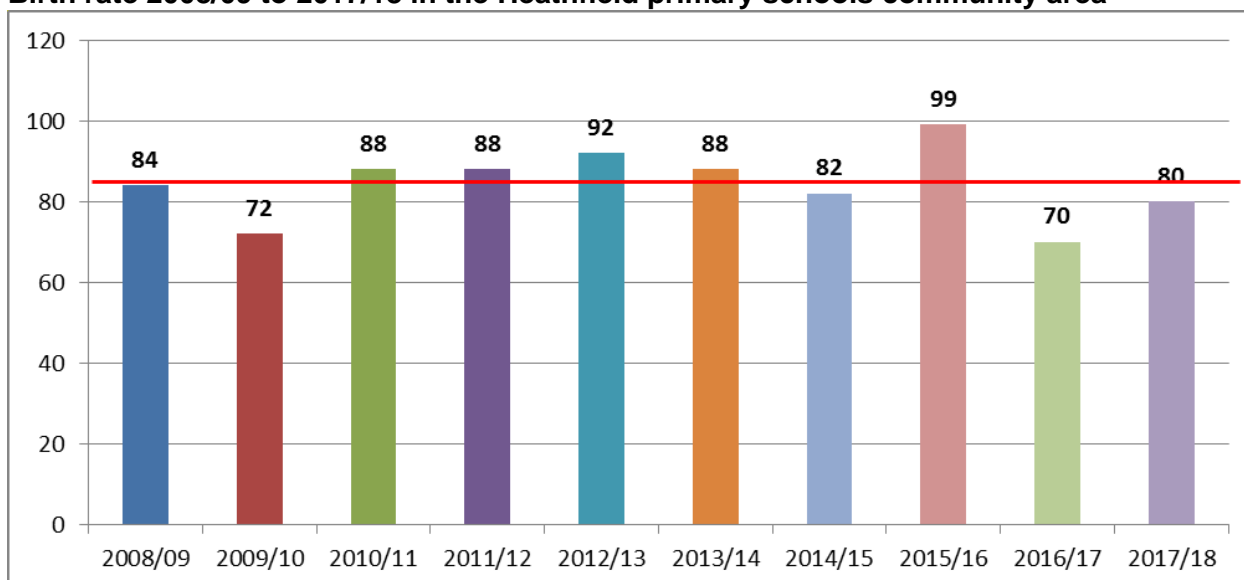
The 10-year average birth rate in the Broad Oak community area is less than 8 per annum (the school's published admission number is 20), with a high of 11 and a low of 3, as illustrated below.

**Birth rate 2008/09 to 2017/18 in the Broad Oak community area**



In the same period, births in the Heathfield community area have averaged fewer than 85 a year, with a high of 99 and a low of 70 as demonstrated below.

### Birth rate 2008/09 to 2017/18 in the Heathfield primary schools community area



Based on births alone the combined published admission number (110) of the three Heathfield schools (All Saints' and St Richard's CE Primary School, Cross-in-Hand CE Primary School and Parkside Community Primary School) would have been sufficient in each year of the ten years to accommodate all of the children born in the Heathfield and Broad Oak community areas.

Wealden District Council provides regular updates on housing numbers and trajectories to inform the local authority's pupil forecasts. The most recent update was provided in spring 2019 and showed that just short of 600 homes are planned in Heathfield and Waldron Parish during the Wealden Local Plan period between 2018/19 and 2027/28. Within this total the Wealden Local Plan sets a windfall allowance of 50 dwellings for the village of Broad Oak over the same period.

The local authority's published pupil yields from new housing are:

#### Pupil yields from new homes

Pupil yield per new dwelling by property type and size	Houses 2 bed+	Flats 2 bed+	Houses / flats 1 bed
Primary schools	0.25	0.0375	0.00

Taking these pupil yields into account and assuming that all new homes are houses with two bedrooms or more, in Heathfield and Waldron Parish as a whole the local authority estimates 150 additional primary age pupils would be generated across all year groups from new homes over a ten year period (approximately 21 additional pupils per year group). The housing specifically in the Broad Oak community area would, over the same period, generate an estimated 12 to 13 additional pupils (approximately 2 additional pupils per year group over the period). The demand for places is therefore likely to be in Heathfield rather than in Broad Oak. The local authority's pupil forecasts take account of these housing figures and the likely demand for school places they will generate.

#### Potential Impact:

The closure of the school could have the effect of making the village less attractive to families with school age children and so attracting an older population.

#### Mitigating Factors:

Broad Oak's birth rate indicates that population growth, even with the limited house building planned in the village, would be low and in-area demand for places at Broad Oak in the future could be limited. Very few of the pupils arriving from new housing will be in houses built in Broad Oak. The majority of new homes will be in school admissions areas served by other

schools, most notably Heathfield and Horam. It is not the school's or the local authority's role to seek to encourage families with young children to move to the village and indeed the resources required to attempt to do so would be prohibitive and likely to be of little effect.

**Recommendations:**

None

**Summary and conclusions of the potential impact on the community**

The community impact assessment has 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.

Issue	Potential Impact	Mitigating Factors	Conclusions
Impact on pupils	Coping with change to a new school environment.	The local authority and schools would work to minimise disruption of transition.	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	Losing a community venue.	Broad Oak has a village hall and the village is very close to Heathfield and other villages which host events in community venues.	Potentially negative but could be mitigated by use of village hall.
	Local shop losing trade	None	Potentially negative
	Losing access to Community Defibrillator	There are two further community defibrillators located in Broad Oak. The defibrillator at Broad Oak could be relocated to an alternative community venue.	Neutral
Access to same school designation	A number of pupils could be offered places at faith schools.	Parents can opt their children out of collective worship in any school.	Neutral
Impact on neighbouring schools	Neighbouring schools would offer places to pupils currently at Broad Oak.	There are sufficient places at surrounding schools to take all the pupils from Broad Oak.	Positive
Impact on pupil travel arrangements	Some families may experience increased costs and travel time to school,	For the majority of pupils there are alternative schools nearer to their home	Potentially negative for pupils living in Broad Oak who might face longer journeys to and from

Issue	Potential Impact	Mitigating Factors	Conclusions
	others may experience reduced costs and travel time to school.	address. Some pupils living in Broad Oak might face longer journeys to and 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.	school each day.
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. The majority of children in the village do not attend the local school. Very few of the pupils arising from new housing will be in houses built in Broad Oak. The majority of new homes will be in school admissions areas served by other schools.	Neutral

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.

### **References**

- [1] Sell, R., Leistritz, L. and Thompson, J. (1996) "Socio-economic impacts of schools consolidation on host and vacated communities". *Agriculture Economic Report* No. 347
- [2] Sustainable Education Review, The Impacts of School Closures Analysis Report, The Moray Council November 2014

November 2019