

Proposed closure of Fletching CE Primary School Community Impact Assessment

Introduction

Fletching Church of England Primary School is located in the village of Fletching, East Sussex.



Fletching is a village and civil parish in the Wealden District of East Sussex, England.



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.

Wealden District Council has designated a large part of Fletching village as a Conservation Area. The north-west half of the parish, including most of Fletching village, is in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The entire parish lies within the 7km zone of influence

around the Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation. This is relevant when considering what development is permissible in the parish.

Impact on pupils

Should the proposals be implemented and Fletching Church of England Primary School (Fletching) be closed, the pupils in Reception to Year 5 would need to move to alternative primary schools in the 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 Fletching are:

Bonnars CE Primary School
Buxted CE Primary School
Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School
Danehill CE Primary School
Framfield CE Primary School
Harlands Primary School
High Hurstwood CE Primary School
Holy Cross CE Primary School
Little Horsted CE Primary School
Manor Primary School
Newick CE Primary School
Nutley CE Primary School
Rocks Park Primary School
St Philip's Catholic 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 Fletching 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 be asked to identify buddies for the incoming pupils to help further ease the transition by ensuring there is a familiar face and an introduction to new friendship groups.

Impact on parents and families

The Fletching PTA organises a number of events for parents and pupils in order to fund raise for the school. These include, but are not limited to:

- Cake sales on the first Friday of each month
- The annual 'Garden Trail' when residents open their gardens to visitors
- Annual disco
- Polo Festival

Fletching runs a breakfast club (Honeybees), Monday to Friday and a number of lunchtime and after school clubs for pupils including an after school forest school club, gymnastics, athletics, mini tennis, kit car building and football.

Potential Impact:

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

Mitigating Factors:

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

- Bonnors CE Primary School
The Friends of Bonnors hold regular events including cake sales, film nights, a summer party and a Christmas fayre. The school has breakfast and after school clubs and also runs a number of after school clubs for pupils including chess, drama, sports and musical theatre.
- Buxted CE Primary School
The school provides wrap around care (breakfast and after school). They run a number of after school clubs for pupils including fitness, tag rugby, craft club, arty time. The PTA run events and fundraisers including Christmas fair, Christmas party, Easter egg hunt, bingo night, quiz night, school disco, scholastic book fair, movie nights.
- Chailey St Peters CE Primary School
The Friends of Chailey St Peters school hold a number of different events during the year, including film nights, discos, and fairs.
- Danehill CE Primary School
The school has a breakfast club and an after school club, as well as a number of extra-curricular clubs and activities including netball, dance, football, tennis and Lego / construction.

- Framfield CE Primary School
The PFTA hold a number of events, including a spring fair, Elvis night, dragon boat racing, a Christmas fair, film nights, discos and ladies netball. The school runs a number of after school clubs for pupils including netball, tennis, homework, newspaper editors, ukulele, guitar, football and table tennis
- Harlands Primary School
The PTA hold a number of events including discos, summer fairs, Christmas fairs, gardening days, quiz nights, film nights and pancake races.
- High Hurstwood CE Primary School
The Friends of High Hurstwood School organise a range of events including sponsored walks, bake sales, a Christmas bazaar, wreath making, drinks evenings, discos a summer fete.
- Holy Cross CE Primary School
The school offers a breakfast club and a number of after school clubs including a gardening club, arts and crafts, football, drama, science, chess and board games.
- Little Horsted CE Primary School
The PTA holds a number of events and fundraisers including school discos, 49 club (a monthly draw), film nights, and barbecue at the Isfield bonfire night. The school offers a breakfast club and a number of after school clubs that can include, subject to demand, drama, dance, book worms, chess, computers, fun fit, rugby, craft, bike ability cycle training, short tennis, art, football, netball, cricket, rounders, stoolball, yoga and hockey.
- Manor Primary School
The school offers a breakfast club and a large number of after school clubs including stamps, tennis, karate, football, cooking, netball, gardening, science, rounders, arts, film, maths, running, drama, tag rugby, hockey, table tennis, choir and cricket. The Friends of Manor School organise a number of events such as a Christmas bazaar, family games evenings, quiz nights and school discos.
- Newick CE Primary School
The school offers a breakfast club and a number of after school clubs including football, young engineers and music lessons. The Friends of Newick School organise a number of events such as bingo.
- Nutley CE Primary School
The school offers a range of after school clubs including sewing, art, cheerleading and sport.
- Rocks Park Primary School
The school offers a number of after school clubs including origami, mini tennis, drama, art, Great Out Tours, Tag Rugby, gymnastics and netball. The FSA organise a number of events such as jumble and cake sales, forest trails, quiz nights and a Christmas fayre.
- St Philips Catholic Primary School
The school offers a breakfast club and a number of after school clubs including netball, drama, ballroom dancing, yoga, karate, football, French and tennis.

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 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 events such as the annual garden trail would cease.

Concerns were also raised about the impact on the village shop which is about to reopen and might benefit from the passing trade brought by the school.

Potential Impact:

If the school were to close the local community would no longer be able to attend events to raise money for the school such as the garden trail.

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 Fletching so the school would have 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 (Fletching Village Hall). The village hall is approximately 200 metres from the school.

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 (if it reopens) would be unable to rely on passing trade from the school community. If the school remained open this might still be 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

Impact on neighbouring schools

If the proposals go ahead every pupil in Reception to Year 5 at Fletching would be offered a place at an alternative school, many of which are likely to be nearer to their home address:

Potential Impact:

Reflecting that Fletching takes pupils from a wider area than just North Chailey (including Uckfield and the surrounding area), an analysis of pupil numbers in the wider area has concluded that there would be sufficient places in the surrounding schools for the pupils of Fletching. This is illustrated in the table below.

Provisional pupil numbers in North Chailey, Uckfield and the surrounding area

Capacity	PAN	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total	Capacity	Surplus	% surplus
		365	365	365	365	365	365	365				
Fletching	15	5	9	10	10	13	8	14	69	105	36	34%
Chailey St Peter's	20	17	15	17	20	22	23	25	139	140	1	1%
Danehill*	15	13	16	11	11	17	10	18	96	105	9	9%
Newick	30	30	27	33	34	32	30	30	216	210	0	0%
Bonnors	15	17	20	19	18	14	13	10	111	105	0	0%
Buxted**	30	30	27	23	26	25	30	24	185	210	25	12%
Framfield	15	15	15	9	14	17	12	13	95	105	10	10%
Harlands	30	28	30	24	30	29	26	28	195	210	15	7%
High Hurstwood	15	16	15	15	15	16	15	13	105	105	0	0%
Holy Cross	30	9	15	11	10	19	9	12	85	210	125	60%
Little Horsted	15	17	14	18	17	13	16	13	108	105	0	0%
Manor	60	60	55	61	60	60	59	60	415	420	5	1%
Nutley	15	16	12	17	12	12	16	14	99	105	6	6%
Rocks Park	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	210	210	0	0%
St Philips	30	29	30	15	32	27	30	30	193	210	17	8%
Totals	365	332	330	313	339	346	327	334	2321	2555	249	10%

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

* Danehill's capacity takes account of the decision to increase its PAN to 15 with effect from 2020/21 and that the school is already organised to its new PAN.

** Buxted's capacity takes account of the decision to increase its PAN to 30 with effect from 2020/21 and that the school is already organised to its new PAN.

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, travel arrangements for pupils were raised as a significant concern.

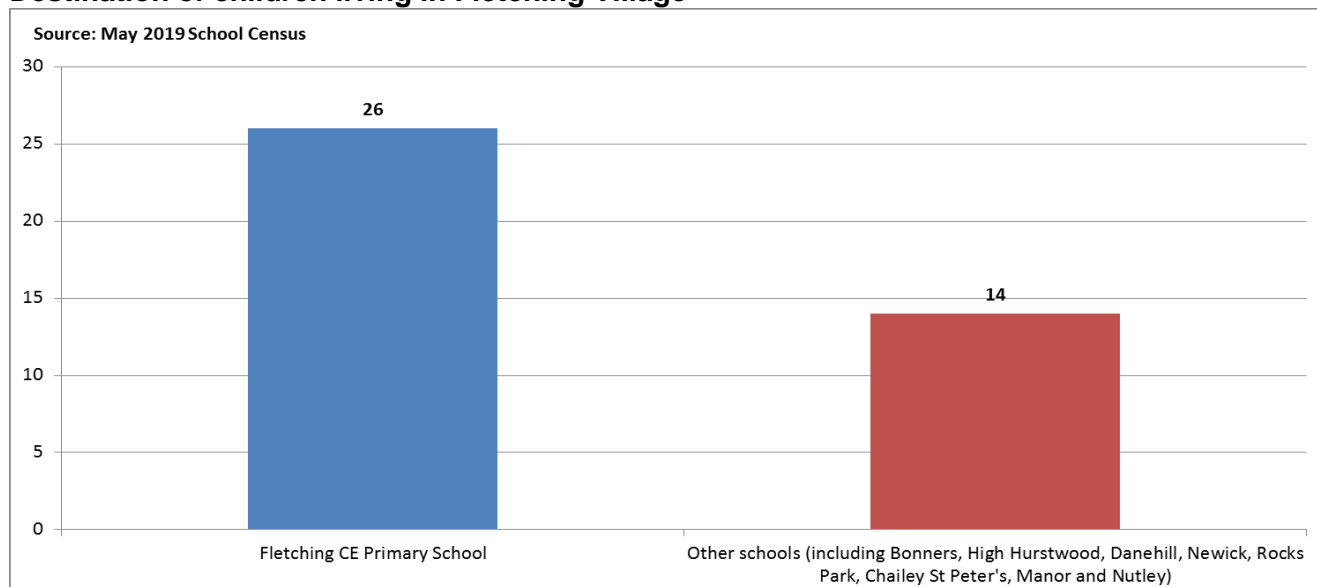
Potential Impact:

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:

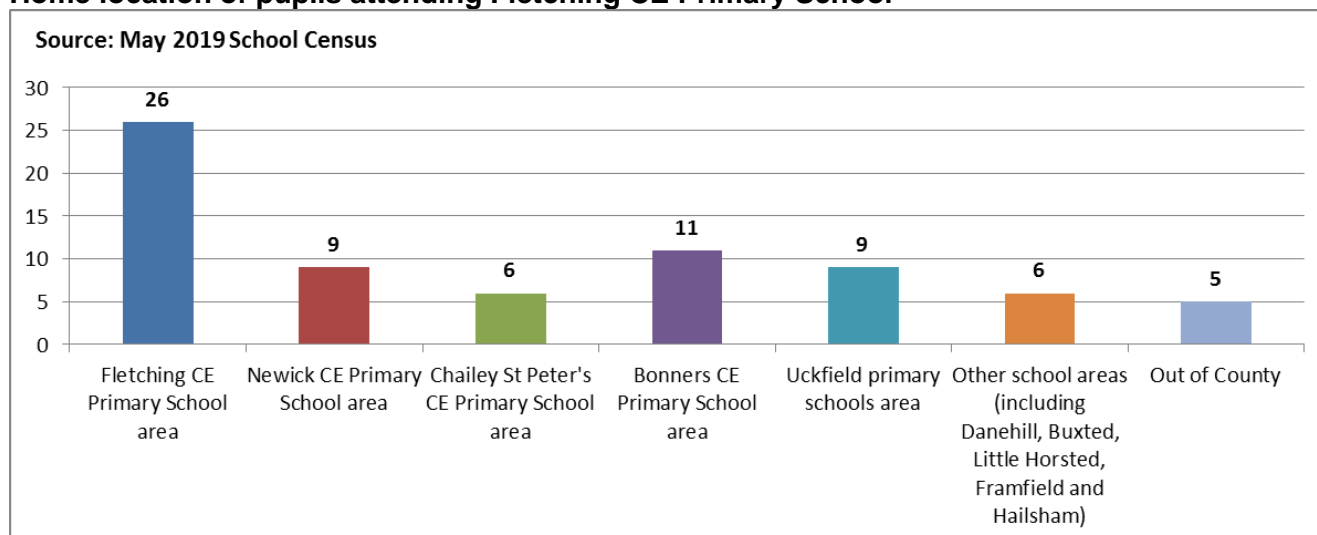
The May 2019 School Census showed 40 children living in the Fletching community area attending state funded schools in East Sussex. Of these, 26 (65%) attended Fletching while 14 (35%) attended other schools in the surrounding area.

Destination of children living in Fletching Village



The 26 pupils from Fletching who attended the school in May 2019 made up 36% of the total number of pupils on roll, whereas 46 pupils (64%) live in areas served by other schools.

Home location of pupils attending Fletching CE Primary School



The majority of pupils currently attending Fletching are from out of the area, while a number of children living in the village travel to other schools. The majority of pupils therefore already face journeys to and from school each day. Latest analysis shows that of the 55 Reception to Year 5 pupils likely to be affected by the proposal, approximately 68% live nearer to an alternative school, with approximately 32% living further away. Should the school close the likely impact on traffic and the environment might potentially be reduced if displaced pupils attend schools nearer to their home address. The local authority acknowledges that some pupils living in Fletching and attending the school might face longer journeys to and from an alternative school each day and that this might increase car usage for these families. For families that live outside of the Fletching community area it is envisaged that displaced pupils would continue to be transported to and from school under arrangements made by their parents and carers. It is hoped that for these families car usage might reduce.

Alternative schools are between 2.6 and 5.9 miles away from Fletching as shown in the table below. For the majority of pupils and families these schools might be nearer to their home address.

School	Distance from Fletching CE Primary School in miles (rounded)
Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School	4.0
Danehill CE Primary School	4.0
Newick CE Primary School	2.6
Bonnars CE Primary School	3.1
Buxted CE Primary School	4.5
Framfield CE Primary School	5.9
Harlands Primary School	4.7
High Hurstwood CE Primary School	5.9
Holy Cross CE Primary School	3.7
Little Horsted CE Primary School	5.7
Manor Primary School	4.2
Nutley CE Primary School	3.5
Rocks Park Primary School	3.7
St Philip's Catholic Primary School	4.2

Free home to school transport would be provided for eligible pupils who meet the criteria set out in the link below. The local authority currently estimates five pupils would be eligible for free home to school transport to their nearest alternative school although this figure might change if pupils are unable to access a place at their nearest alternative school.

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

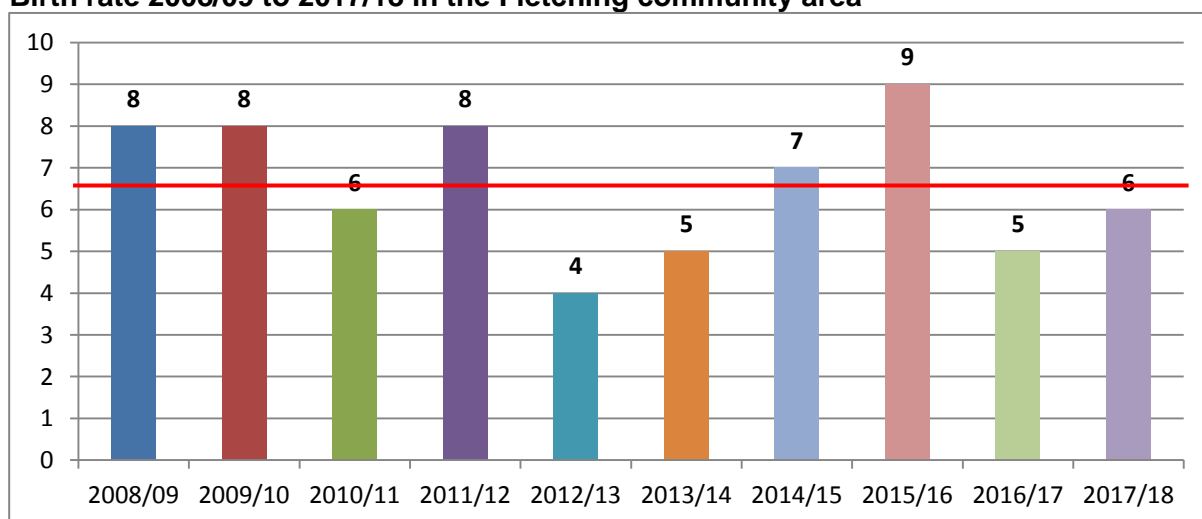
Recommendations:

None

Impact on community demographics

The 10-year average birth rate in the Fletching community area is less than 7 per annum (the school's published admission number is 15), with a high of 9 and a low of 4, as illustrated below.

Birth rate 2008/09 to 2017/18 in the Fletching community area



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 only eight new homes are planned in Fletching Parish over the remaining Wealden Local Plan period to 2027/28.

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 in the Fletching community area are houses with two bedrooms or more, this would generate an estimated 2 additional pupils in total across all year groups during the Local Plan period to 2027/28.

Potential Impact:

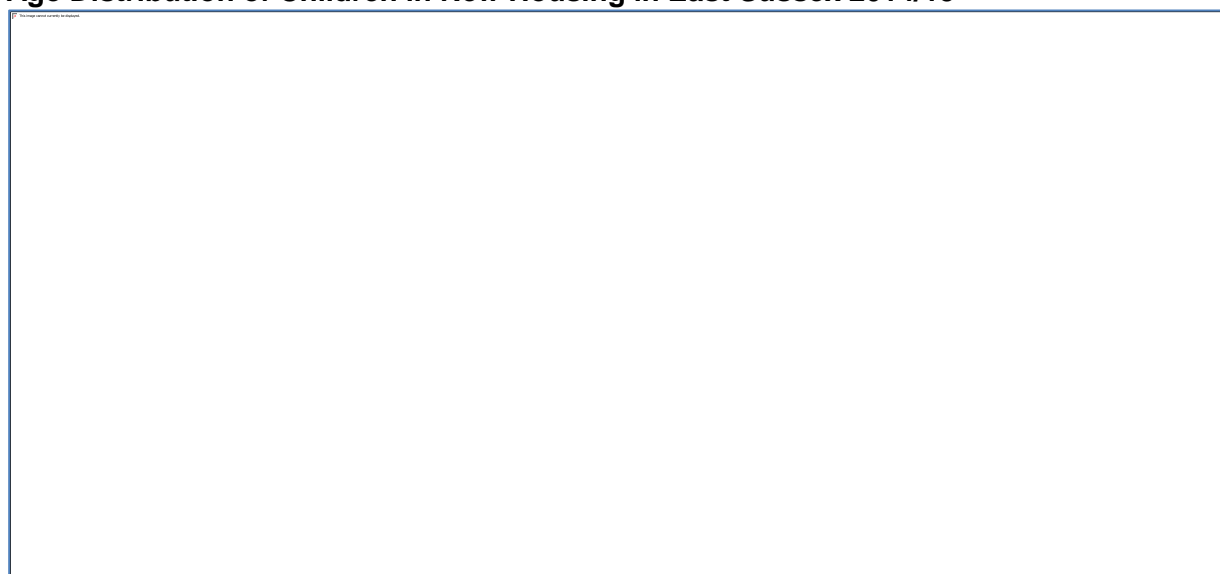
The closure of the school could have the effect of making the village less attractive to families with school age children and so attracting an older population.

Mitigating Factors:

Fletching'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 Fletching in the future could be limited. Virtually none of the pupils arising from new housing will be in houses built in Fletching Parish. The majority of new homes will be in school admissions areas served by other schools, most notably Uckfield.

Housing trajectory data from Wealden District Council suggests that development in Uckfield will take another eight years to build out. It will therefore be some time before all of the demand from the new homes materialises. This is evidenced in the chart below which shows the results of a recent countywide survey of children in new housing developments. Households surveyed had been resident in new housing development for up to six years. When this is taken into account it is clear that many of the children living in new housing development are born after households move in. This indicates that there is a time lag between new homes being occupied, children being born and the subsequent demand for primary school places. Many of the children arising from new housing built in the wider area are unlikely to actually impact on primary school pupil numbers until the middle of the next decade.

Age Distribution of Children in New Housing in East Sussex 2014/15



Source: Cognisant Pupil Yield Survey for East Sussex County Council 2014/15; ONS, Age by Single Year, Census 2011

Should primary school places be required to accommodate children arising from new housing in the wider area, it is more appropriate to provide those places closer to where the new homes are being built. The proposed closure of Fletching would be unlikely to have a major impact on this.

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.	Fletching has a village hall and is close to other villages and towns which host events in community venues.	Potentially negative but could be mitigated by use of village hall
	Local shop losing trade (if reopened).	None	Potentially negative
Impact on neighbouring schools	Neighbouring schools would offer places to pupils currently at Fletching.	There are sufficient places at surrounding schools to take all the pupils from Fletching.	Positive
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 Fletching might face longer journeys to and from an alternative school each day and that this might increase car usage for these families. Free home to school transport would be available for eligible pupils.	Potentially negative for pupils living in Fletching who might face longer journeys to and from school each day.
Issue	Potential impact	Mitigating factors	Conclusions

Impact on community demographics	Closure of the school may impact the balance of the community.	The birth rate in the village is low and projected to remain so. Virtually none of the pupils arising from new housing in the area will be in houses built in Fletching Parish. The majority of new homes will be in school admissions areas served by other schools.	Neutral
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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

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