

**TITLE OF REPORT:**           **Proposal to Consult on an Options Review of Colegate Community Primary School**

**REPORT OF:**                 **Helen Fergusson, Strategic Director, Children’s Social Care and Lifelong Learning**

**Purpose of the report**

1. To propose that the Council consults on an Options Review of Colegate Community Primary School.

**Background**

2. Colegate Community Primary School carries a large financial deficit which is forecasted to increase.
3. Other factors compound the school’s financial difficulties. The birth rate is falling, and no new housing is planned for the area. The school is currently judged requires improvement by Ofsted, making it a less attractive option for parents. Consequently, the school roll is falling. The school Pupil Admissions Numbers per year group is 30. In the last 3 years admission to Reception, despite the efforts of staff and governors to attract families, has been half of that.

Numbers for September 2023 are as follows:

Year group	Reception	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Number of pupils	15	13	13	20	23	20	21	125

4. Leaders have implemented staffing savings where they can but there is limited capacity to cover unexpected staffing costs (such as illness). Such financial pressures add to the deficit even with a carefully managed budget.
5. Despite low numbers, 30% of pupils have special educational needs with above average proportions who have significant needs and who require additional adult support.
6. Outcomes at the end of the academic year (2023) were low for Reception and significantly below average at the end of KS1. There are significant gaps in knowledge that will be difficult to close as these cohorts move through key stages 1 and 2.
7. The school occupies more than one building. This increases the number of staff needed to ensure pupils’ safety. Considerable capital investment (a minimum of £250,000) is required to move all classrooms and facilities into one building.

8. Limited staff and leadership capacity, as well as a significant budget deficit, means that the school is struggling to implement the changes needed to secure a good judgement at its next inspection. The school does not have a full-time substantive headteacher and relies on secondments to add to leadership capacity.
9. The above factors mean that there is no prospect of the structural deficit being eliminated.
10. While the birth rate is declining, the school is also struggling to attract children from its catchment area. The projected numbers (below) show a decrease in this planning area's population based on birth data and current numbers in primary schools. These projections include the new housing on the Freight Depot site which is part of this planning area but will not impact on Leam Lane, Heworth and Wardley. The Leam Lane, Heworth and Wardley areas are not currently under pressure from in year transfer requests.

#### Heworth Grange Planning Area Pupil Forecasts

Academic year	Primary								
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The table above shows a forecast decline in primary pupil numbers of 209 pupils between 2023/24 to 2027/28.

#### Proposal and/or Issues for consideration

11. Colegate is our most vulnerable school with a deficit budget and multiple other challenges which make ensuring a good education for the schools pupils more challenging. The school relies on additional funding for SEND children to operate and function. Further staffing reductions will be likely in the financial year 24-25 making the school even more vulnerable. A SWOT analysis has been completed to consider the possible options.

**Option 1: Status quo, continue to work to improve to become a good school offering a good quality education, but further staff reduction in academic year 24-25 through more mixed age classes in order to reduce the deficit.**

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school reduces the rate of increase in structural deficit.</li> <li>• The community is still served by a local school.</li> <li>• No redundancies take place.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is limited leadership capacity within the school which jeopardises the school becoming good.</li> <li>• The curriculum will need to be redrawn to ensure it is fit for further mixed age classes.</li> <li>• The challenge of improving</li> </ul>

	outcomes and closing gaps in knowledge becomes greater.
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some secondment opportunities for staff in other maintained schools who want more experience in another school and leadership experience.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numbers decrease further because parents are unhappy with mixed age classes.</li> <li>The deficit remains – it just grows less quickly.</li> <li>Structural deficit remains (deficit balance brought forward)</li> <li>The school gets another Requires Improvement judgement, or an inadequate judgement, resulting in an academy order. If this occurs the deficit of the closed school remains with the LA and would impact negatively on wider council budgets.</li> <li>It may be difficult to find seconded staff willing to teach in the school.</li> </ul>

**Option 2: The school remains open as above but moves into one building and increase the numbers of mixed age classes.**

<p><b>Strengths</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school reduces the rate of increase in the structural deficit.</li> <li>The community is still served by a local school.</li> <li>No redundancies likely to take place.</li> <li>Some reduction in running costs.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Weaknesses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is limited leadership capacity within the school which jeopardises the school becoming good.</li> <li>The curriculum will need to be redrawn to ensure it is fit for differently organised mixed age classes.</li> <li>The challenge of improving outcomes and closing gaps in knowledge becomes greater.</li> <li>There is an additional cost of a minimum of £250,000 to the council to make one building fit for purpose.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>The remaining buildings could be repurposed by the local authority, potentially this could be for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alternative provision site for time measured input linked to SEMH/ASD needs.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numbers may decrease further because parents are unhappy with mixed age classes.</li> <li>The deficit remains – it just grows less quickly.</li> <li>Structural deficit remains (deficit</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key stage 3 alternative provision – assessment hub to support the Y7/8 SEN.</li> <li>• Relocation of a special school setting.</li> <li>• Development of a Cognition and Learning ARMs.</li> </ul>	<p>balance brought forward)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school gets another Requires Improvement judgement, or an inadequate judgement, resulting in an academy order. If this occurs the deficit of the closed school remains with the LA and would impact negatively on wider council budgets.</li> <li>• There are limited opportunities for the buildings to be repurposed because of their proximity to the school.</li> <li>• The remaining buildings may fall into disrepair</li> <li>• If the remaining buildings are demolished, they would only create extra car parking space. This would result in additional cost.</li> </ul>
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**Option 3: Colegate closes and children are accommodated in other local schools.**

<b>Strengths</b>	<b>Weaknesses</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The deficit budget does not grow.</li> <li>• There is one less school with a deficit budget and other schools become more financially robust.</li> <li>• Neighbouring schools will fill places, therefore are less vulnerable to financial pressures.</li> <li>• The closure would be planned for July 2025. This allows for careful planning and management of future potential admissions and allocation of places for current students.</li> <li>• Pupils can be accommodated in schools that have an OFSTED rating of at least good and who have capacity to further improve and well-embedded curriculums.</li> <li>• There will be greater capacity in other schools to support the number of children with additional need.</li> <li>• The continued reduction in the birth rate as outlined above in the short to medium term should</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The community would need to travel further to access education.</li> <li>• Closure of a school is unlikely to be a popular option for some local families.</li> <li>• All Colegate school staff will be at risk of redundancy.</li> <li>• Closure would potentially reduce the number of places available for new families moving into the area, however, there is decreased projected demand in the area for the short to medium term.</li> <li>• In the longer term, Windy Nook may need additional accommodation to support additional pupils. There is a cost implication to this.</li> <li>• The deficit budget of the closed school will remain with the LA and will impact negatively on wider council budgets.</li> </ul>

<p>ensure that there will be places available for future reception intake in the area.</p>	
<p><b>Opportunities</b></p> <p>The buildings could be repurposed by the local authority, potentially this could be for (but not limited to):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alternative provision site for time measured input linked to SEMH/ASD needs.</li> <li>• Key stage 3 alternative provision – assessment hub to support the Y7/8 SEN.</li> <li>• Relocation of a special school setting.</li> <li>• Development of a Cognition and Learning ARMs.</li> <li>• Considering current and projected numbers from September 2023 all pupils in Colegate Community Primary School, apart from one year group, year 4 (see below), can be accommodated in neighbouring primary schools which are within a reasonable walking distance as outlined in Department for Education guidance. (2 miles walking distance for children under 8 years of age and 3 miles for children 8 years and over) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ These are Windy Nook (expanding to a 2-form entry to create extra places in the longer term if required),</li> <li>○ The Drive, Wardley,</li> <li>○ St Augustine’s, Roman Road,</li> <li>○ Lingey House</li> <li>○ White Mere primary schools.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Information regarding the limited capacity of neighbouring schools to accommodate Year 4: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ some pupils live a distance away from the school eg Springwell Estate, so places at a school nearer to their</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>Threats</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The distance to travel may affect attendance of some families.</li> <li>• Elected members may face challenge and opposition to the proposal</li> <li>• There would be a reduction of choice for parents which may increase school place appeals.</li> <li>• If this option is agreed there is the potential that parents will look to move their children out of Colegate before the official closing date.</li> <li>• Colegate’s catchment would need to be re distributed. Parents within the local area may view this negatively.</li> <li>• An expansion of Windy Nook may cause instability to the school.</li> <li>• There may be an increase in parking/ traffic issues around the Windy Nook site.</li> </ul>

home address could be explored.	
○ We could also ask schools to exceed their Pupil Admission Numbers to accommodate these students if necessary, as there is no class size limit, unlike at KS1.	

## Recommendations

12. Cabinet is recommended to agree to a consultation on the Options Review of Colegate Community Primary School.

For the following reasons:

- Colegate Community Primary School carries a large financial deficit which is forecasted to increase.
- Over the last 3 years, the school roll has fallen to less than a 50% intake despite every effort by the Leadership of the school to increase.
- The school's financial difficulties are compounded by a falling birth rate leading to a reduced intake in future years.
- There are no new housing developments planned for the area which may have increased the intake.
- The school is currently judged requires improvement by Ofsted, making it a less attractive option for parents.

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## Policy Context

1. The Options Review reflects the Council’s objectives as set out in “Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives”: Corporate Plan 2023 – 2028, in particular the ‘Putting people and families at the heart of everything we do’, agenda. It also recognises the local authorities responsibility to ‘...secure efficient primary education is available to meet he needs of the population areas, as stated in The Education Act, 1996 (Section 13: General Education Responsibilities). It is supported by the work undertaken in the planning of school places to ensure that there are an appropriate number of school places to accommodate all children in Gateshead (School Capacity Document).

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#### Consultation

11. Employee engagement commenced on 12 February 2024 to ensure that they were aware of this report coming to Cabinet on 20 February 2024 and the options contained within it.
12. Community engagement commenced on 13 February to inform all parents and stakeholders of the intention to present the report to Cabinet and directing them to the published report on the council website.
13. The employees have been advised that no formal collective consultation will be required unless Cabinet approve the recommendation in this report.
14. Should Cabinet approve to consult on the Options Paper with one of the outcomes being the potential closure of Colegate Community Primary School then this would result in the affected employees being placed at risk of redundancy, at this time we will ensure the relevant trade union representatives are involved.
15. As this Cabinet paper is being considered during the week of the scheduled school closure for half term, the collective consultation with both employees and trade union representatives would commence on 28 February 2024 and end on 28 June 2024.



16. The Cabinet Members for Children and Young People and Ward Councillors have been consulted on the report.

### **Alternative Options**

17. This report will look at the options available to the Council regarding the future of Colegate Community Primary School.

### **Implications of Recommended Option**

18. **Resources:**

- a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms that there are financial implications for all options for Colegate Community Primary School. If the outcome of the review is to close Colegate Community Primary School this will enable a time limited budget process to be put in place to mitigate as far as possible the increase in Colegate Community Primary School’s deficit budget and therefore the impact on Council resources.
- b) **Human Resources Implications** – If the outcome of the review determines that the only viable option to take forward is to close Colgate Community Primary School then the council will strive to avoid any compulsory redundancies, by working with all maintained schools and services across the Council to find suitable alternative redeployment for the employees. However, the full detail of this cannot be determined until the outcome of the consultation period.
- c) **Property Implications** – If the outcome of the review determines that the only viable option to take forward is that the school remains open but moves into one building the council would have to consider that there are limited opportunities for the buildings to be repurposed because of their proximity to the school. If the outcome of the review determines that Colegate closes and children are accommodated in other local schools, the existing buildings could be repurposed by the local authority.
19. **Risk Management Implication** - There are no direct implications and all statutory procedures are being followed.
20. **Equality and Diversity Implications** - If there is an impact on staff the local authority as employer will provide support through the agreed HR policies and procedures available to all employees. These include; training, redeployment opportunities, counselling and support for employee well-being. If there is an impact on pupils the local authority will mitigate this through the school admissions process in identifying alternative school places to meet the needs of individuals with protected characteristics.
21. **Crime and Disorder Implications** – There are no direct implications.
22. **Health Implications** - Should option 2 be agreed the alternative schools for the children are within the recommended two mile walking distance for children under 8 outlined in the travel to school guidance from the Department for Education. The consultation process and proposed options is likely to cause stress and anxiety for staff, pupils and their parents / carers due to uncertainty.

This could have a negative impact on health and wellbeing for employees and pupils and their families. The council will listen to all concerns as part of the consultation process and communicate effectively with all stakeholders to reduce any negative impact on health and wellbeing as far as possible. An Impact Assessment report is available.

23. **Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications** – There are no direct implications.
24. **Human Rights Implications** - If there is an impact on staff the local authority as employer will provide support through the agreed HR policies and procedures available to all employees. These include; training, redeployment opportunities, counselling and support for employee well-being. If there is an impact on pupils the local authority will mitigate this through the school admissions process in identifying alternative school places to meet the needs of individuals with protected characteristics.
25. **Ward Implications** - The Wards for which there may be implications are as follows:
  - Windy Nook
  - and Whitehills
  - Wardley and Leam Lane
  - Pelaw and Heworth
  - Felling
  - High Fell
  - Deckham
  - Chowdene (1 child)

## **Background Material**

**The following documents have been used in order to prepare this document:**

- “Making Gateshead a Place Where Everyone Thrives”: Corporate Plan 2023 – 2028
- The Education Act, 1996
- DfE: [Opening, closing and making changes to schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/opening-closing-and-making-changes-to-schools)
- Cabinet Report: Primary Community Controlled School Admissions Arrangements and Co-ordinated admission schemes for Primary and Secondary Schools for 2025/26
- ‘School Capacity Audit to ensure Sufficiency of School Places’ Report produced by Education Support Services.
- Schools Financial Budget documents