

I write in my capacity as local county councillor, as Smannell and Enham Church of England Primary School is within Andover North Division, which I have represented for the past 8 years. I write in support of maintaining a school at Smannell for the benefit of the wider community.

Smannell and Enham CoE Primary School is a small, rural school on the outskirts of Andover in the village of Smannell. It has a grade II listed frontage and forms the heart of the village alongside the Oak at Smannell pub.

The school had thrived but in recent years a particularly damaging ofsted 'inadequate' rating and a sharp decline in pupils left the governing body with a difficult decision to request a consultation on its future. I understand this consultation is informal and submit my views in the hope they can form part of the wider discussion around the school going forward.

Following its Ofsted inspection in May 2024, the school was given an academy order. It is a difficult set of circumstances to entice an academy sponsor to commit to taking on the school, even more so when that sponsor must be of Christian denomination. I would ask the Executive Member for Children's Services to ensure she receives a detailed brief from the Diocese outlining the attempts they have made to secure sponsorship. I recognise that requiring the sponsor to be of Christian faith does further limit the ability to academise and question whether this needs greater attention from Government. I appreciate that the County Council do not have the ability to force a sponsor upon the school and cannot pursue other options such as federation with an academy order hanging over its head, though that may have been an easier task with nearby Church of England primaries than full academisation.

There are financial implications as the school is currently operating a deficit, and the eligible catchment pupil numbers are low. This is not uncommon in a village, and the school has historically maintained higher pupil numbers through parental choice from out of catchment addresses, something it may be able to do once more if the current issues identified by Ofsted were fully rectified.

I would like consideration to be given to pausing the current school offer. I recognise that the declining pupil numbers and low staff ratio is not sustainable nor is it providing good quality education for the current small cohort of pupils. Their educational attainment is paramount and if that is best served at another school, that should be facilitated. I do, however, feel the site still has a lot to offer and with further development earmarked as part of Test Valley Borough Council's draft local plan on the East of Andover there is likely to be higher demand for primary education in this location in the future. I would also give consideration to the creation of a special school on this site, recognising the growth of EHCPs within our County and the demand on places for specialist education, which I am sure the location would lend itself to.

I have encouraged all residents, parents and former pupils who have contacted me to respond to this informal consultation and share their views. I trust that the views of the community will be taken into consideration when a decision is made and I thank you for keeping me informed throughout this process.

Cllr Kirsty North
Andover North Division