

Statutory Consultation on the Future of Smannell and Enham Church of England Primary School

As a former pupil and governor of Smannell & Enham Primary School, the Borough Councillor for the area for the past 18-years, and someone who helped fundraise for their new building in the late 2000s, I'm deeply saddened that the current governing body decided to initiate the closure process and that the County Council is now considering closure.

I oppose the permanent closure of the school but also recognise the reality of the situation - and I don't want the remaining children's education to continue to be damaged by prolonging the existing arrangement.

In May 2024, the school was rated as Inadequate, with Ofsted making the following remarks: 'Pupils' learning is disrupted by poor behaviour; staff do not implement the schools' behaviour policy consistently or effectively; the staff expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough; staff do not have secure subject knowledge; staff do not check what pupils have learned well enough; pupils have gaps in their knowledge and understanding; some pupils fall behind in their reading and do not catch up quickly enough' and 'that the school, including the governing body, has not acted with sufficient urgency to improve pupils' learning.' The report lays out a litany of inadequacies from the then teaching staff and a failure of the governing body to grip the situation.

The Ofsted rating subsequently caused a rapid decline in pupil numbers, making it less attractive to prospective pupils and teaching staff, whilst exacerbating the budget deficit. And, of course, meant that an academy order was placed on the school. Despite support from the Local Education Authority, parents have voted with their feet. Meaning there were only 24 pupils left on roll and 2 members of permanent teaching staff including the Head Teacher in October 2025.

Other than Year 1 phonics, the situation at Smannell and Enham School is a continuing picture of concern (albeit on very small cohorts). The statutory test results for all areas for 24/25 are as follows:

- Year 1 – (4 pupils) phonics – 100%
- Year 6 - (5 pupils) - SATS outcomes – Reading Writing Maths: combined 40% (below national average of 62%)
- Y6 - English Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling - (5 pupils) – 60% (below national average of 73%)
- Y4 - Multiplication Times Table Check – (4 pupils) – average score 16.5 (below national average of 21.1)

In October, Hampshire County Council received a regretful email from the Chairman of Governors asking them to undertake a consultation on closing the school. According to the Chairman, the governing body voted unanimously for this course of action as they recognised that the quality of education the pupils receive (or in this case lack of) is vital to their future life chances. That's something, I believe we all need to be conscious of and obviously this has not been an easy decision for the governors.

Following that request, I was made aware that around half of the remaining pupils understandably applied for a place elsewhere. Further bringing into question the schools sustainability. Since then, numbers have continued to decline.

For the school to survive and be successful in the future then it needs the removal of the academy order or to have found an academy sponsor; a significant improvement in its budgetary position; and it can no longer be rated as Inadequate - with parents wanting to send their children there. Many of those points are linked but based on the current situation, I see little to no chance of them being obtainable in the short term. And frankly, I wouldn't want the remaining cohort of children to continue to receive a poor standard of education.

That view has been underlined by various conversations I have had with current and former parents of the school in recent weeks as well as other feedback I have received. And I have no confidence in the ability of the current headteacher or the governing body to turn things around. There should have been a wholesale change in governors following the poor Ofsted inspection in May 2024. Therefore, with a heavy heart, I believe that for the good of the remaining children, they should be offered places elsewhere.

It is important, however, that considering this is a Church of England School that an option is given for pupils to go to another CofE school if the parents wish.

Having said all of that, I still think there could and should be a future for Smannell and Enham Primary School with additional teaching staff, new leadership and potentially an academy sponsor. Essentially relaunching the school and starting afresh. Like any new school.

Considering the huge uplift in housing numbers imposed on Test Valley Borough Council by central government, new development sites east of Augusta Park at Finkley and north of Saxon Way at Knights Enham have been allocated as part of the draft local plan. This future increase in population close to the villages of Smannell and Enham Alamein albeit with the retention of a local gap, means that it would be wise to retain a school in its current location. That especially makes sense considering the front of the school is grade two listed (meaning it needs to be preserved and retained) and the other buildings are relatively new. I, therefore, think it is incumbent on the County Council and the Diocese to explore this option in much more detail before deciding on a permanent closure.

If for any reason that is not possible, then it is essential that the site and its grade two listed building remain an educational establishment. Be that a new mainstream academy school, a special (SEND) school or similar.

Cllr Phil North

Leader of Test Valley Borough Council & Ward Councillor for Bourne Valley

17th December 2025