



Have your say on
a proposal to close
Fletching CE Primary
School



The consultation runs from
5 July to 11 October 2019

PART ONE

Introduction

East Sussex County Council has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient primary and secondary school places and is committed to working in close partnership with schools, academy trusts, the dioceses and key partners to ensure that the supply of school places across East Sussex is in the right location, is of sufficient size, is viable and of good quality.

We know that schools can face challenges in meeting pupils' needs, particularly where pupil numbers are falling, and that in some cases, changes to the pattern of school organisation in an area can help secure the viability of schools, improve opportunities and raise standards.

On 24 June 2019 the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability gave approval for a consultation to take place on a proposal to close Fletching CE Primary School with effect from 31 August 2020.

This consultation document is for pupils, parents and carers, staff, governors, the local community and other interested parties. We welcome your views on the proposal. The local authority will consider all the views put forward during the consultation period before a decision is taken on whether to proceed with the statutory process to close the school.

Background to the proposal

The local authority recently undertook reviews of rural primary school provision in East Sussex. The main focus of the review was the increasing number of rural schools with small and very small pupil numbers. Local demand at those schools was analysed alongside the effect this is having on their viability and capacity to offer a well-balanced, high quality curriculum that meets the needs of their local community and makes best use of public funding.

The review took account of many factors which influence provision in an area. These include:

- The quality of provision and outcomes achieved for pupils
- School leadership
- Federations and collaborations
- Financial viability
- The level of surplus places in an area / school
- The location of schools in relation to local pupil numbers
- Parental choice for schools
- Premises

Fletching CE Primary School is a small, rural Church of England primary school. The school has a published admission number of 15 and capacity for 105 pupils. The information and evidence from the review tells us that the school has been under-subscribed in each of the last five years and pupil numbers fall significantly short of the school's published admission number each year. This means it is difficult for the school to be financially viable and to regularly have good outcomes for pupils. There is little in-area demand for places at the school. The consultation document outlines the data for the school and the reasons for proposing closure.

Data used in the consultation document was taken from the January 2019 School Census. The census, which happens three times each academic year, is a statistical publication. We acknowledge that pupil numbers can fluctuate throughout an academic year but it is important to use data from an official data source taken on the same day for every school. The January 2019 School Census is the most recent, published and verified data available.

PART TWO

Pupil numbers and surplus places

In January 2019 Fletching CE Primary School had 71 pupils on roll against a capacity of 105 places. There were 34 (32%) surplus places. This is shown in Chart 1.

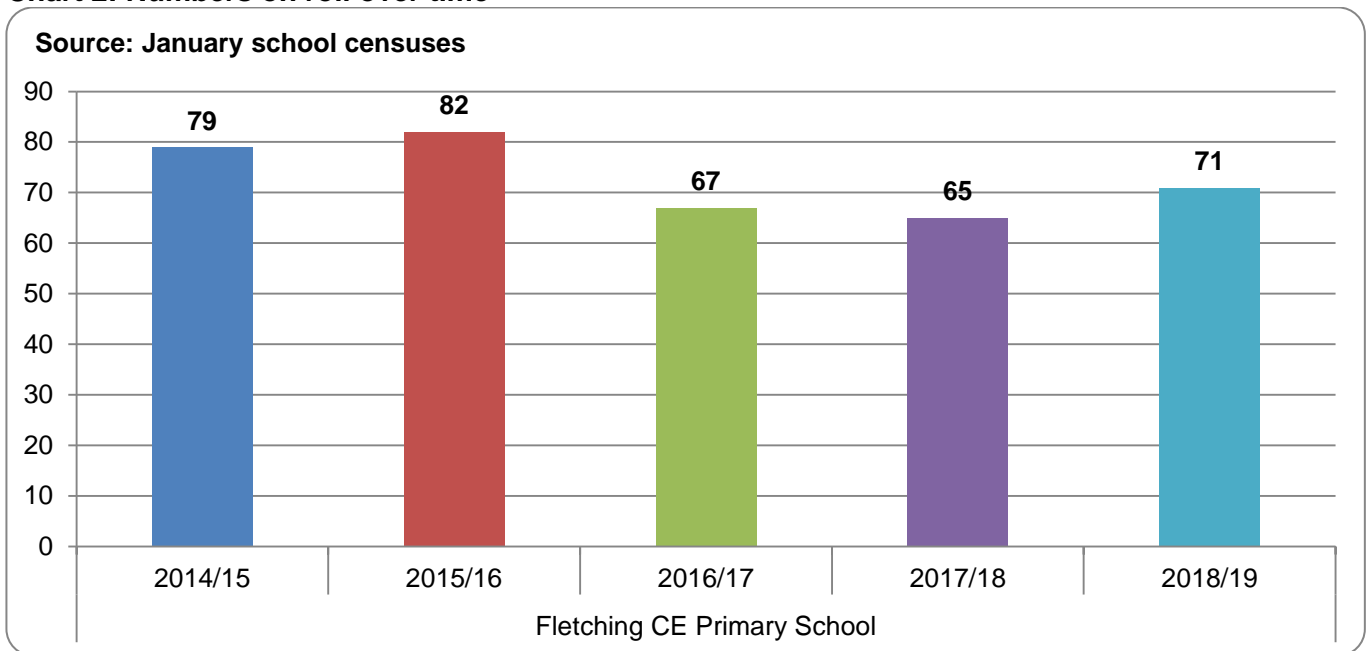
Chart 1: Pupil numbers 2018/19

2018/19 pupil numbers and surplus places	PAN	Capacity	2018/19 NOR								Surplus places	% surplus places
			Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total		
Fletching CE Primary School	15	105	10	8	10	11	8	13	11	71	34	32%

Source: January 2019 School Census

Pupil numbers at the school have been significantly below capacity for a number of years. The situation in each of the last five years is illustrated in Chart 2.

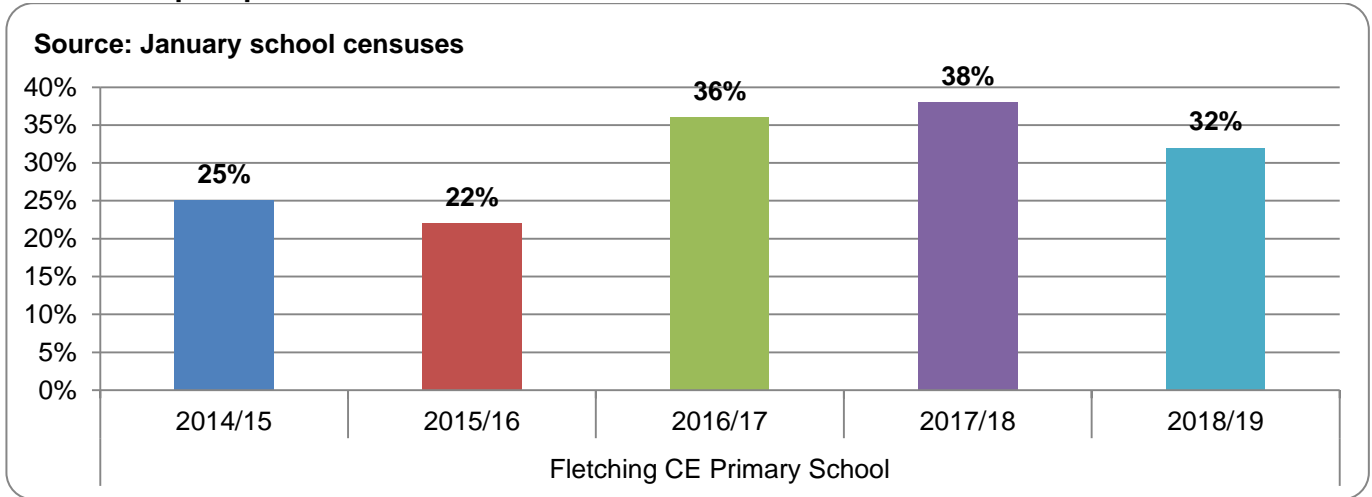
Chart 2: Numbers on roll over time



For September 2019, while 11 Year 6 pupils will have left the school, only six children have accepted a place in Reception year, of which two live in the Fletching community area. On this basis there will be nine (60%) surplus places in the school's Reception year by the start of the 2019/20 academic year and overall pupil numbers are expected to fall to below 70.

Falling pupil numbers lead to increasing surplus places. Chart 3 shows the percentage of surplus places at the school in the last five years.

Chart 3: Surplus places



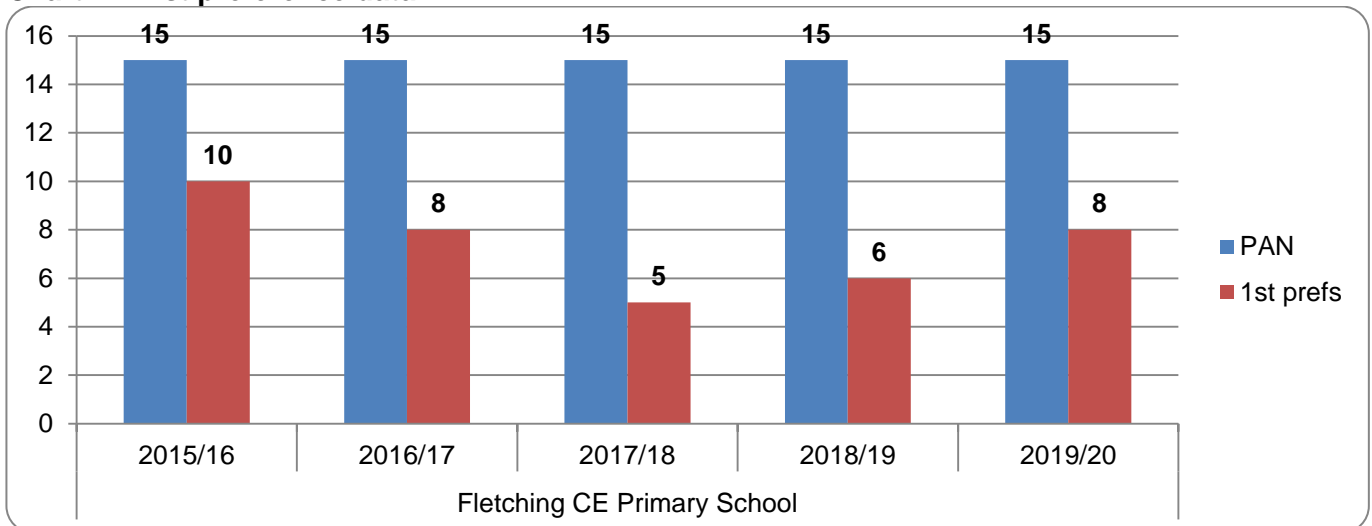
Low pupil numbers are difficult to manage and can lead to irregular class sizes and inefficient staff to pupil ratios. Smaller schools tend to have a higher proportion of fixed costs than larger schools and, as such, have less flexibility to respond to cost pressures, unexpected events, and deficit recovery. With only six children accepting a place in the school’s Reception year for September 2019 we expect the level of surplus places to increase again in 2019/20. Due to its low pupil numbers, Fletching CE Primary School is currently organised in three classes across the school meaning that at least one class has three age groups in it.

The local authority acknowledges that statutory consultation around school closure will cause uncertainty within the school community, which can contribute to a reduction in pupil numbers.

Parental preference

First preference data reveals Fletching CE Primary School has been under-subscribed in each of the last five years and pupil numbers fall significantly short of the school’s published admission number each year. Chart 4 demonstrates the first preferences in each of the last five years.

Chart 4: First preference data



Source: Admissions data

Pupil home location

In January 2019 there were 42 children living in the Fletching community area attending state funded schools in East Sussex. Of these, 16 (38%) attend schools other than Fletching CE Primary School, their local school. Chart 5 demonstrates this.

Chart 5: Destination of children living in the Fletching community area

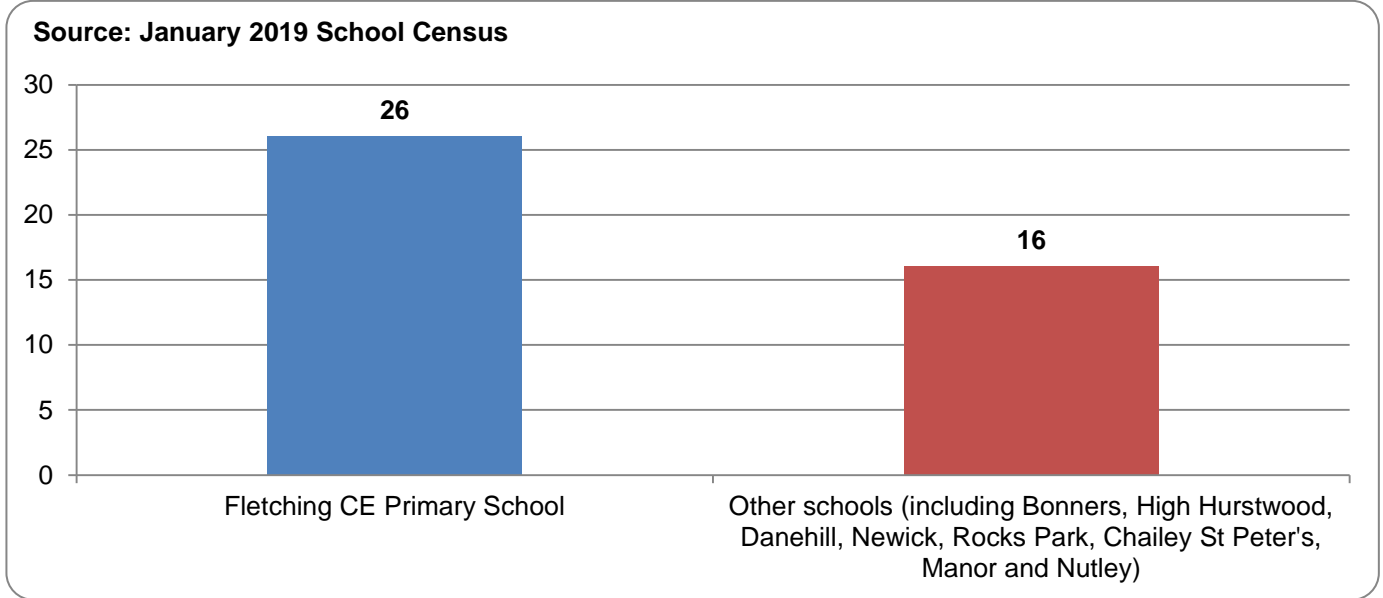
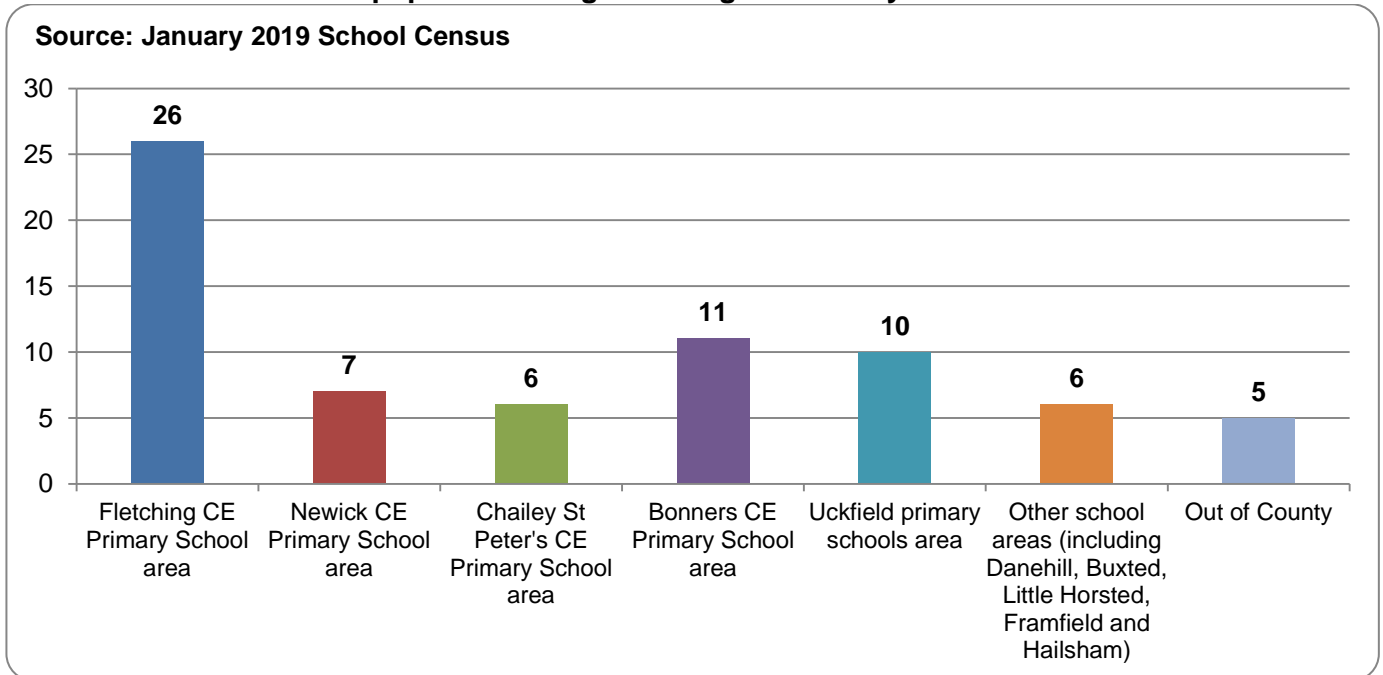


Chart 6 illustrates that Fletching CE Primary School is largely attended by pupils who live outside the school's community area. Only 26 pupils (37% of the number on roll) live in the local area, whereas 45 pupils (63%) live in areas served by other schools, for example: Newick, Chailey, Maresfield and Uckfield.

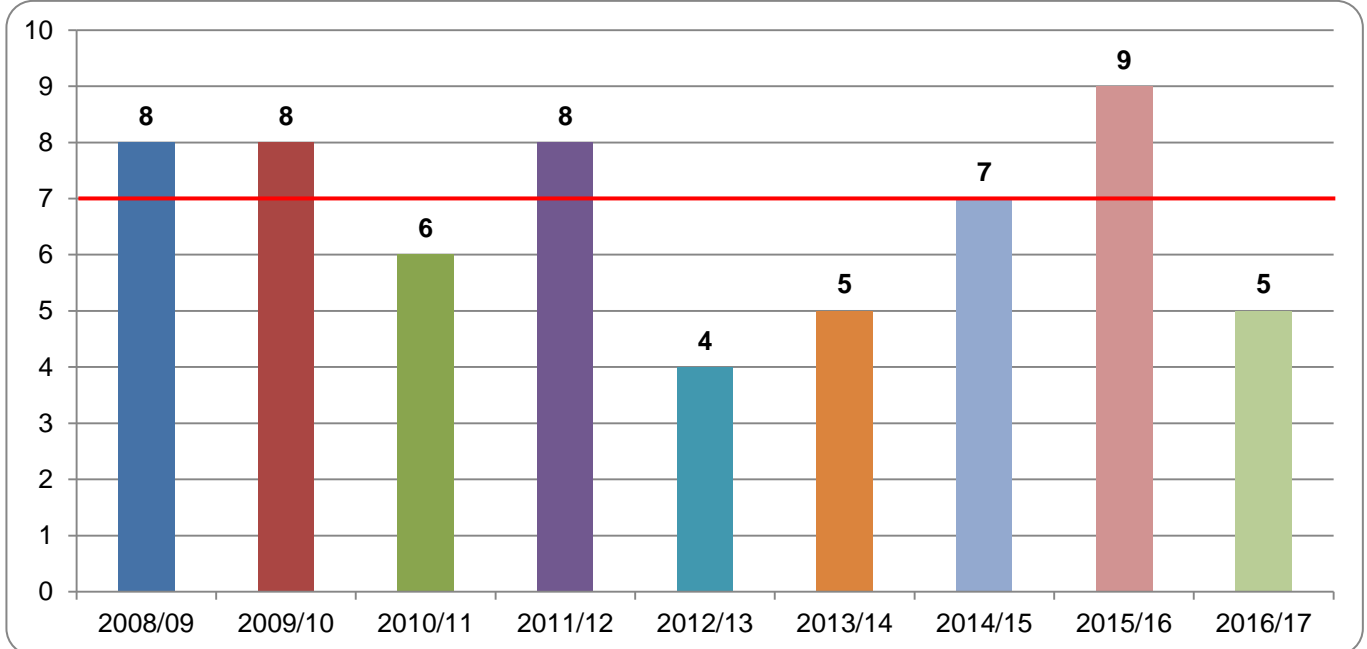
Chart 6: Home location of pupils attending Fletching CE Primary School



Births and housing

Over the last nine years births in the Fletching community area have averaged seven a year, with a high of nine and a low of four. Chart 7 illustrates this. Low birth numbers within the local community mean there is limited local demand for the school.

Chart 7: Birth rate 2008/09 to 2016/17 in the Fletching community area



Source: ONS live birth data

Wealden District Council provides regular updates on housing numbers and trajectories to inform our pupil forecasts. The most recent update was provided in spring 2019 and showed that only 8 new homes are planned in Fletching Parish during the Wealden Local Plan period between 2018/19 and 2027/28.

Our published pupil yields from new housing are provided in Chart 8.

Chart 8: 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 all new homes are houses with two bedrooms or more, we estimate two additional primary age children would be generated from new homes in the Fletching community area over a ten year period. Our pupil forecasts take account of these housing figures and the likely demand for school places they will generate.

Financial viability

Chart 9 provides an overview of Fletching CE Primary School's three year budget plan, with two years actuals for historical comparison, as submitted by governors to the local authority in May 2019.

Chart 9: Budget plan	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022
Budget Share	353,591	342,551	372,507	363,595	349,092
Carry Forward	44,822	59,754	31,012	-5,457	-62,138
Available Budget	398,413	402,305	403,519	358,138	286,954
Other Income	125,748	87,939	63,228	63,497	64,359
TOTAL REVENUE	524,161	490,244	466,747	421,635	351,313
Staffing	309,029	319,227	336,200	355,766	369,170
<i>% of budget share (exc. carry forward)</i>	<i>87%</i>	<i>93%</i>	<i>90%</i>	<i>98%</i>	<i>106%</i>
Premises	54,382	37,135	40,302	40,302	40,302
<i>% of budget share (exc. carry forward)</i>	<i>15%</i>	<i>11%</i>	<i>11%</i>	<i>11%</i>	<i>12%</i>
Supplies & Services	100,995	100,259	88,445	84,350	84,350
<i>% of budget share (exc. carry forward)</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>29%</i>	<i>24%</i>	<i>23%</i>	<i>24%</i>
Capital Contribution	0	2,610	0	0	0
<i>% of budget share (exc. carry forward)</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>1%</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>0%</i>
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	464,407	459,232	464,947	480,418	493,822
Short Term Contingency	0	0	7,258	3,354	3,354
Long Term Contingency	0	0	0	0	0
C/FWD	59,754	31,012	-5,457	-62,138	-145,863
<i>% of budget share</i>	<i>16.9%</i>	<i>9.1%</i>	<i>-1%</i>	<i>-17%</i>	<i>-42%</i>

The historical and forecast pupil numbers on which the figures are based are included in Chart 10.

Chart 10: Historical and forecast pupil numbers

Age at start of school year	Actual Numbers			Estimated Numbers	
	Oct 2016	Oct 2017	Oct 2018	Oct 2019	Oct 2020
4	8	7	10	8	8
5	9	7	7	10	8
6	7	9	10	8	10
7	9	6	11	12	8
8	11	11	9	11	12
9	14	9	12	8	11
10	9	14	11	13	8
	67	63	70	70	65

Fletching CE Primary School is facing significant financial challenges. The three year budget plan submitted by governors shows a small deficit in 2019/20 with increasing deficits for the following years. The local authority has been working closely with governors to try to address the budget position and has provided the school with approximately £45,000 of additional support in recent years. The size of the deficit and the lack of scope to address the issues make this plan of significant concern to the local authority.

The low pupil numbers at Fletching CE Primary School are causing significant financial challenges; the effect in 2019/20 is being substantially supported by a carry forward from 2018/19. The school is currently organised in three classes across the school. A further reconfiguration from three classes to two across the school could be complex and would lead to at least one class having four age groups in it.

Fletching CE Primary School's budget share per pupil for 2019/20 is £5,220.60. In East Sussex, the average cost is £3,879.12 per primary pupil. The average budget share per pupil is the funding received from the Department for Education to educate each child in the county.

Budget deficits are expected to be recouped from future year's school budgets. It is difficult to see how the predicted budget deficit at Fletching CE Primary School would be recouped as there is no scope for the school to operate within its means. The school's deficit budget would need to be balanced as part of the overall resources allocated within the Dedicated Schools Grant from the Department for Education, which could reduce resources available to other schools.

Quality of education

Fletching CE Primary School was rated good at its last Ofsted inspection in 2017.

The local authority has provided a range of support to the school in recent years for teaching and learning, leadership and management, at a cost of approximately £21,000. There are variations in attainment at the school in all key stages; although there is an improving trend, attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 has been consistently below East Sussex and national averages for the last three years.

All primary schools in the area surrounding Fletching CE Primary School are rated good or outstanding by Ofsted.

Balance of denominational provision

Fletching CE Primary School is a Church of England Voluntary Controlled school. The local authority does not believe the proposal would have a negative impact on the balance of denominational provision and associated parental choice in the area should the school close. There are seven Church of England primary schools in the immediate area surrounding Fletching:

Bonnors CE Primary School, Maresfield	(Voluntary Controlled)
Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School	(Voluntary Controlled)
Danehill CE Primary School	(Voluntary Controlled)
Holy Cross CE Primary School	(Voluntary Aided)
Little Horsted CE Primary School	(Voluntary Aided)
Newick CE Primary School	(Voluntary Controlled)
Nutley CE Primary School	(Voluntary Controlled)

Admissions and transport arrangements

Should Fletching CE Primary School close on 31 August 2020 it is proposed that, for admissions purposes, the Fletching community area would be merged with the Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School community area. Parents and carers of children at Fletching CE Primary School would be able to express a preference for a place at Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School or an alternative school if they so wish. 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. We 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 seek to increase the published admission number at Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School from 20 to 30. This would be subject of a separate statutory decision-making process.

Free home to school transport would only be provided for eligible pupils who meet the criteria set out in the link below. From our initial analysis we believe the majority of children on roll at Fletching CE Primary School would have a shorter distance to travel to their nearest alternative school and would therefore not be eligible. At this stage the data tells us that fewer than ten children might qualify for free home to school transport. The impact of any free home to school transport on the local authority's transport budget is expected to be minimal as there is already transport provision in place to a number of alternative schools. The criteria can be found on the East Sussex website at:

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

For information about which schools have spare places and whether your child/ren would qualify for free home to school transport please contact the admissions team on 0300 330 9472.

Alternative options to closure

A number of alternative options were considered before agreeing to consult on the proposed closure of Fletching CE Primary School. These included:

- **Federation.** Fletching CE Primary School is in partnership with Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School and could consider federation. Although federations are recognised as a way of enabling smaller schools to work more formally in partnerships to share costs, we do not believe this would address the significant financial challenges faced at Fletching CE Primary School.
- **Amalgamation.** Consideration was given to amalgamating Fletching CE Primary School with Chailey St Peter's CE Primary School. This option would produce the same outcome as the current proposal to close Fletching CE Primary School and merge the two community areas for admissions purposes.
- **Academisation.** In undertaking their due diligence, academy trusts, both local and national, find some small schools to be financially unviable or too isolated to be included in their trust, unless they convert with other small schools as a local hub. Governors have not expressed a desire to academise and no academy trust has approached the local authority about taking the school into their trust.
- **No change.** As outlined in the consultation document, Fletching CE Primary School has been undersubscribed in each of the last five years and pupil numbers fall significantly short of its published admission number each year. There is very little in-area demand for places at the school. The school faces significant financial challenges, with the governors three year budget plan showing a deficit of over £145,000 by 2021/22. Doing nothing will not address these challenges.

PART 3

Closure of schools and the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013

There is a defined statutory process in the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 which must be followed before making a decision on the closure of a maintained school. This is supplemented by further guidance on the process published by the Department for Education.

There are five stages to the statutory process which must be followed:

Consultation

The publication of this consultation document marks a period of consultation during which the views of interested parties are sought and which will be considered by the local authority.

Publication

Dependent upon the outcome of the consultation, the local authority will decide whether or not to publish statutory notices regarding the proposed closure.

Representation

The representation period starts on the date of publication of the statutory notice and must last for a period of four weeks. During this period, any person or organisation can submit comments on the proposal to the local authority, to be taken into account before a final decision is taken.

Decision

Within two months of the end of the representation period the local authority must make a decision on the proposal.

Implementation

If the proposal is approved, Fletching CE Primary School would close on 31 August 2020.

Rural schools and the presumption against closure

The local authority acknowledges that there is a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but the case for closure should be strong and in the best interests of educational provision in the area. There are a number of factors set out in the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 that must be taken into account when proposing to close a rural primary school; the local authority has had regard to these and will continue to take them into account during the consultation process.

Equality Impact Assessment

The local authority is required to have 'due regard' to the duties set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Public Sector Equality Duty, 'PSED') in determining these proposals. An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the consultation process to identify the equality implications of this proposal and any appropriate mitigation.

PART 4

The consultation and decision making process

Timescale

5 July to 11 October 2019	Stage one – consultation
December 2019	East Sussex County Council’s Cabinet will consider the results of the consultation and decide whether to publish a statutory notice on a proposal to close Fletching CE Primary School
If required:	
January 2020	Stage two – publication of statutory notice
January to February 2020	Stage three – representation period (four weeks)
March 2020	Stage four – final decision by Cabinet
31 August 2020	Stage five – implementation (closure) if approved

Who we will consult

The local authority is consulting with pupils, parents and carers, staff, the governing board, other local schools and trade unions. We are also consulting with a wide range of other groups and organisations including early years providers, the district and parish councils, the local MP, the Church of England and Catholic dioceses and the wider local community.

How to share your views

The consultation runs from 5 July to 11 October 2019. You can share your views by:

- Completing the online questionnaire
- Printing and completing a hard copy of the questionnaire and posting it to: **School Consultations, Standards and Learning Effectiveness Service, Children’s Services Department, East Sussex County Council, East G, County Hall, St Anne’s Crescent, Lewes BN7 1UE**
- Emailing the Council at: school.consultations@eastsussex.gov.uk
- Attending a consultation event at **Fletching Village Hall, High Street, Fletching TN22 3SS on Tuesday 16 July 2019 from 7pm to 8.30pm.**

Please submit only one response per person to this consultation

This consultation forms stage one of the process required when a school closure is proposed. The information provided in this document, and at the consultation event, is intended to be sufficient for people to form a view on the proposal. East Sussex County Council will consider views and concerns raised during the consultation period before making a decision on whether to proceed with the proposal.

Due to the volume of responses we receive when consulting on school proposals, we will not be able to acknowledge written responses or enter into correspondence with interested parties during or after the consultation period. A list of frequently asked questions will be made available to view online and will be updated throughout the consultation period.

Thank you