

**Proposal to close Forest of Teesdale Primary  
School on 31 August 2022**

**Consultation period:  
28 February 2022 - 10 April 2022**

## **1. Introduction**

Durham County Council keeps under review the number of pupils attending each school and updates information each year about how many pupils are likely to be attending schools in the future. This is an important aspect of the County Council's function in planning school places across the county to ensure there are schools of a suitable size to meet local requirements and to provide the best possible education for the pupils they serve.

The council realises that school reorganisation can be an area of concern as local communities often see a school as being at the heart of the community and sometimes cannot immediately agree with the need for change. Taking this into account, the council must continue to have a system of education that will bring about the highest possible standards of education for the children of County Durham for the short, medium, and long term and in some cases 'keeping things as they are' may not achieve that in this rapidly changing educational landscape.

In line with that strategic objective, the council is consulting on a proposal to close Forest of Teesdale Primary School on 31 August 2022. There are other primary schools within a reasonable travelling distance that pupils could attend who would be displaced from Forest of Teesdale Primary School if this proposal was agreed.

The consultation will commence on 28 February 2022 and end on 10 April 2022.

You may have some questions to ask. This document attempts to answer some of those questions and explain how you can let the County Council know what you think about the proposal.

## **2. Background**

Forest of Teesdale Primary School, set in the small rural community of Forest in Teesdale, has the lowest pupil numbers of any school in Co. Durham and serves the least populated part of the county. There is currently 1 child on roll in Year 6, though that pupil is being taught at St. John's Chapel Primary School currently; no pupils started in Reception in September 2021, and nobody has expressed a 1<sup>st</sup> preference for their child to start in Reception at Forest of Teesdale Primary School for September 2022. There is no anticipated development in this part of the county that will have the effect of increasing these numbers.

Since 1945, the County Council has held a lease of this building, remaining in occupation pending the implementation of the renewal process by the landlords, Lord Barnard, with the lease managed by the Raby Estates. The most recent lease will lapse on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2022 and has been extended on an annual basis.

The most recent Ofsted inspection (date 08/10/2018) judged the school to be 'Good (minus)'. This should have involved a follow up inspection within 18 months, however, COVID has delayed this. The Ofsted report identified many weaknesses and consequently a decision was made to enrich and widen the curriculum for pupils at the school in collaboration with other small primary schools in the upper dales including Wearhead, St John's Chapel and Rookhope Primary schools.

### 3. Why is the Council proposing to close Forest of Teesdale Primary School?

Officers believe this proposal provides the best future option for the children, the school, and the community it serves based on educational outcomes, pupil numbers, site issues and sustainable finances.

As stated, there is currently 1 pupil registered at Forest of Teesdale Primary School. The current predictions indicate no growth up to at 2026/27. Thereafter no pupils are anticipated to be on roll.

#### Projected rolls:

School	Capacity	NOR 2021/22	NOR 2022/23	NOR 2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Forest of Teesdale Primary	35	1	1	1	1	1	1

The breadth of curriculum (in particular highlighted for development post-Ofsted) and the opportunity for social development of pupils at Forest of Teesdale was the key driver for the Federation with other schools mentioned in section 2 of this document. Governors accept that pupil numbers are unlikely to increase over the next 5 years to any sufficiency in which curriculum and social development needs could be addressed in the school.

When potential financial liability is also a factor, and a school faces a poor future Ofsted outcome due to weaknesses identified that the current teaching staff have not the capacity to correct, it becomes incumbent on a local authority to take steps to improve this situation, and the report outlines these and makes recommendations to secure a better educational outcome for the children.

Children can be more effectively educated in a larger, more viable establishment that can offer a broader curriculum. There are schools within a reasonable travelling distance judged 'Good' by Ofsted that are capable of delivering such a curriculum. Consequently, the preferred option of Council officers and the Federated Governing is to close Forest of Teesdale Primary School on 31 August 2022 with the pupil currently on roll being enrolled and educated at an alternative school.

### 4. Which options have been considered?

There are only two options that could be considered. From these two options, the preferred option, and the proposal on which we are consulting is option 2 – close Forest of Teesdale Primary School on 31 August 2022.

#### Option 1: Do Nothing

Retaining the current education arrangements of the federation in the hope that additional pupils enrol. This decision would pose a number of challenges around appropriate allocation of education resources and an Ofsted inspection will identify that curriculum delivery is not taking place on this site.

## Option 2: Close Forest of Teesdale Primary School

This option will enable children to be more effectively educated in a larger, more viable establishment that can offer a broader curriculum and lead to educational improvement. There are schools within a reasonable travelling distance judged 'Good' by Ofsted that are capable of delivering such a curriculum. Consequently, this is the preferred option of the Council and the one on which we are consulting.

### 5. Will my child be eligible for free home to school transport if Forest of Teesdale Primary School closes?

Wherever your child has a school place, the Council's home to school transport policy will still apply. This means free transport will be given to the nearest suitable school where the distance from home to school is over 2 miles for those children aged under 8 years and 3 miles for children aged 8 years and over. In addition to the Council's policy, for pupils aged 8 but under 11 who are eligible for free school meals or whose parents receive their maximum of Working Tax Credit, under national "extended" transport rights, free transport will be provided to their nearest suitable school, if that school is more than 2 miles from the child/young person's home.

### 6. What happens next?

Any proposal for school reorganisations has to be carried out in accordance with Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance. The council cannot take a decision to close Forest of Teesdale Primary School without having held a consultation on the proposal, which will include seeking the views of members of the public. The first stage of consultation will be informal and opens on 28 February 2022. During this period, Durham County Council will share its proposals with key stakeholders. This will include Governors and staff of Forest of Teesdale Primary School, Middleton in Teesdale and Newbiggin Parish Council, trade unions, local residents, young people, and parents of pupils of Forest of Teesdale Primary School and of those primary schools in Middleton in Teesdale and Upper Weardale. The table below sets out the expected timescales for the process.

Date	Stage
28 February – 10 April 2022 (6 weeks)	<b>Consultation</b> All responses received by the closing date will be considered and included in a report for the council to consider and decide whether to take the proposal forward.
May – June 2022 (4 weeks)	<b>Statutory Public Notice</b> If the council decides to proceed with the proposal, statutory notices would be published in the local newspaper, posted on school gates and on the DCC website. These notices would provide an opportunity for comments or objections to be made.
July 2022	<b>Decision Making</b> Durham County Council's Cabinet would consider responses to the statutory notice and make the final decision on whether to agree the proposal or not.
31 August 2022	Forest of Teesdale Primary School closes

## 7. How do you respond to this consultation?

We would like to hear what you think about this proposal. We will be hosting a live event remotely via Microsoft Teams to explain the proposal in more detail and outline the different stages of the consultation process **on Wednesday, 9 March at 6.00pm**. If you would like to attend this live event, please type the address below into your internet browser from 5.55 p.m. on 9 March.

<https://bit.ly/FoTConsultation>

Although you will be unable to speak at the live Teams event, it will provide an opportunity for any questions you have to be submitted via the chat function and where possible, these will be answered by the officers present during the event. We will aim to answer as many questions as possible that you may have about the proposal.

In addition to, or alternatively to, attending the live Teams event, you can also respond in one of the following ways **by no later than 10 April 2022**:

- complete the online form at [www.durham.gov.uk/consultation](http://www.durham.gov.uk/consultation)
- email your views to [schoolorganisation@durham.gov.uk](mailto:schoolorganisation@durham.gov.uk)
- write to: Adam Williams, School Places and Admissions Team, Children and Young People's Services, Business Reply Service, Licence No DU63 (Freepost), Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5BR