

**Proposal to close Rookhope Primary School on  
31 August 2024**

**Consultation period:**

**18 September 2023 - 29 October 2023**

## 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 Rookhope Primary School on 31 August 2024. There are other primary schools within a reasonable travelling distance that pupils could attend who would be displaced from Rookhope Primary School if this proposal was agreed.

The consultation will commence on 18 September 2023 and end on 29 October 2023.

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

Rookhope Primary School, set in the rural community of Upper Weardale, has the lowest pupil numbers of any school in Co. Durham and serves the least populated part of the county. On 1 September 2023, there were 5 children on roll and those pupils are being taught at St. John's Chapel Primary School. No preferences were expressed for a place in Reception at Rookhope Primary School in September 2022 or September 2023. There is no anticipated development in this part of the county that will have the effect of increasing these numbers.

The most recent Ofsted inspection (date 18/10/2017) judged the school to be 'Good. That report however did draw attention to the fact that those pupils with lower starting points did not make as much progress as their peers and that improving the quality of learning in early years remains a focus so that children are challenged to reach their full potential in all areas of the early years' curriculum.

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 Forest of Teesdale Primary schools. The most recent Ofsted inspection (date 27 March 2019) judged St. John's Chapel Primary School to be 'Good' and the most recent Ofsted inspection for Wearhead Primary School (date 11 September 2019) judged the school to be 'Good'. Forest of Teesdale Primary School closed on 31 August 2022 as no pupils were on roll there.

### 3. Why is the Council proposing to close Rookhope 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 are currently 5 pupils registered at Rookhope Primary School. The current predictions indicate no growth up to at 2027/28. Thereafter no pupils are anticipated to be on roll.

School	Capacity	Projected NOR 2022/23	Projected NOR 2023/24	Projected NOR 2024/25	Projected NOR 2025/26	Projected NOR 2026/27	Projected NOR 2027/28
Rookhope Primary	52	5	3	3	2	1	0

The breadth of curriculum and the opportunity for social development of pupils at Rookhope Primary School will be enhanced by them being educated at St. John's Chapel Primary School. All of the children involved in this move have spent significant curriculum time with other pupils across the Federation, in St. John's Chapel Primary School. This was necessary to support effective teaching from September 2021.

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 is to close Rookhope Primary School on 31 August 2024 with the 5 pupils currently on roll being enrolled and educated at an alternative school, most likely St. John's Chapel Primary School which is where they will be educated during the 2023/2024 school year.

### 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 Rookhope Primary School on 31 August 2024.

#### 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 effective curriculum delivery.

#### Option 2: Close Rookhope 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 Rookhope Primary School closes?**

The Council has agreed to provide pupils on roll at Rookhope Primary School with free home to school transport to St. John’s Chapel Primary School to facilitate their education at that school in the 2023/2024 school year. This arrangement will continue should the decision be taken to close Rookhope Primary School on 31 August 2024.

**6. What happens next?**

Any proposal for school reorganisation has to be carried out in accordance with Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance. The Council cannot take a decision to close Rookhope 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 18 September 2023. During this period, Durham County Council will share its proposals with key stakeholders. This will include Governors of the Durham Dales Federation, Stanhope Parish Council, trade unions, local residents, young people, and parents of pupils of Rookhope Primary School and of those other primary schools in Upper Weardale. The table below sets out the expected timescales for the process.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Stage</b>
18 September 2023 – 29 October 2023 (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.
November – December 2023 (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.
February 2024	<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 2024	Rookhope 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 Thursday 5 October 2023 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 5<sup>th</sup> October 2023**.  
[bit.ly/3P5ck0E](https://bit.ly/3P5ck0E)

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:

- (i) Send in the attached response form or write to: Leigh Fisher, 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 by **29 October 2023**.
- (ii) Email your views to [schoolorganisation@durham.gov.uk](mailto:schoolorganisation@durham.gov.uk) or complete the response form online via the following link: [www.durham.gov.uk/consultation](http://www.durham.gov.uk/consultation) by **29 October 2023**.