

Consultation Analysis

Consultation on the proposed closure
of St Mary's C of E Infant School and
transfer of its pupils to Puttenham C of
E Infant School

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Introduction

This report is an analysis of responses gathered on the proposal to close St Mary's CofE Infant School and transfer its pupils to Puttenham CofE Infant School.

Surrey County Council published a consultation from 25 April 2025 to 23 May 2025.

This paper is an analysis of the responses received during the consultation period.

Consultation Summary

The aim of the consultation was to seek views on the proposal from all interested parties, particularly from pupils and their families who attend St Mary's Church of England Voluntary Controlled Infant School, pupils and their families who may attend the school in the future, staff members at either school, pupils and their families who attend Puttenham Church of England Infant School, local schools and the local community.

The consultation was open from 25 April 2025 to 23 May 2025. The associated documentation was published on the Surrey County Council 'Surrey Says' website, circulated by both schools and circulated to stakeholders, including dioceses, councillors and MPs. Interested parties were invited to return responses to the consultation via an online form or by email or post.

Two public meetings were held at Shackleford Village Hall on 1 May 2025 at 2pm and 7pm.

Key points from the consultation responses:

- There were **115 responses** to the consultation.
- In response to the question "Do you support the proposal to close St Mary's C of E Infant School for the reasons explained in the consultation?" **66% do not support the proposal.**
- In response to the question "Do you support the proposal to offer a place for St Mary's pupils at Puttenham C of E Infant School?" **49% do not support the proposal.**

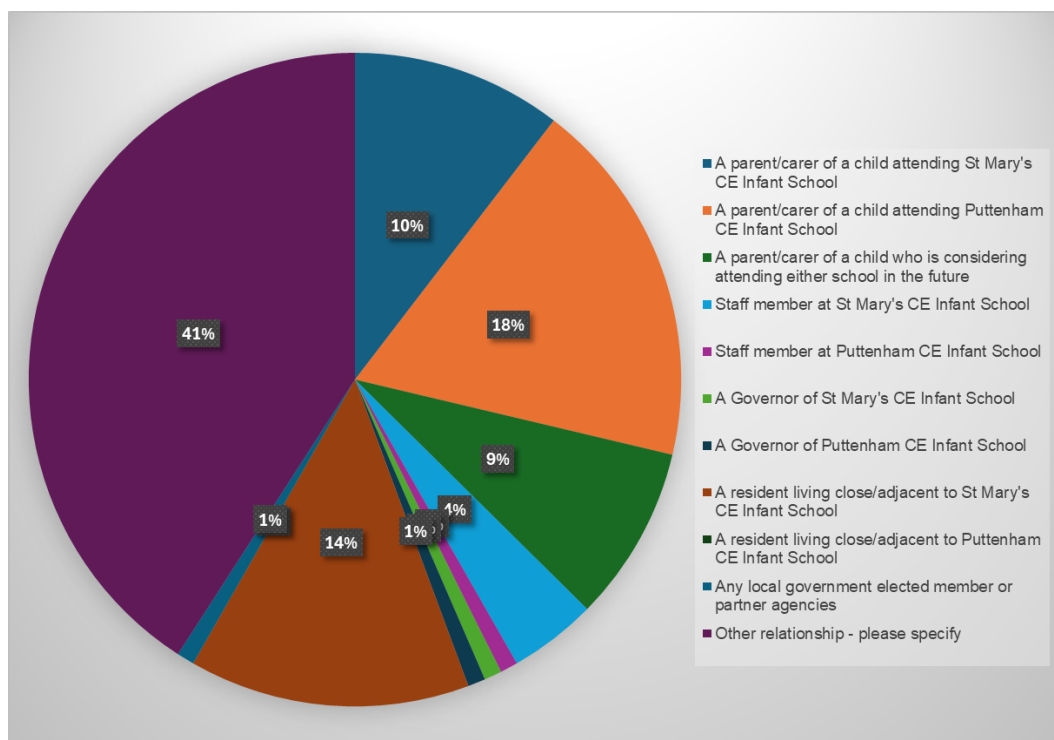
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Quantitative Analysis

In total, there were **115** responses to the consultation. The responses to the consultation regarding the proposal to close St Mary's CofE Infant School had **20 (17%)** respondents support the proposal, **76 (66%)** respondents not support the proposal, and **19 (17%)** respondents stated they were unsure. Meanwhile,

concerning the proposal to offer a place for St Mary's CofE Infant School pupils at Puttenham CofE Infant School, **27 (23%)** respondents support the proposal, **56 (49%)** do not support the proposal and **32 (28%)** stated they were unsure.

All **115** respondents indicated their relationship with the school. The chart below shows the distribution of respondents to the consultation.



Percentage who supported/did not support/were unsure by individual groups – Closure of St Mary's C of E Infant School

Responses from a parent/carer of a child attending St Mary's CE Infant School – 10%

0 support the proposal, 10 do not support the proposal and 2 are unsure

Responses from a parent/carer of a child attending Puttenham CE Infant School – 18%

5 support the proposal, 4 do not support the proposal and 12 are unsure

Responses from a parent/carer who is considering attending either school in the future – 9%

0 support the proposal, 9 do not support the proposal and 1 is unsure

Responses from a staff member at St Mary's CE Infant School – 4%

1 supports the proposal, 4 do not support the proposal and 0 are unsure

Responses from a staff member at Puttenham CE Infant School – 1%

1 is unsure

Responses from a Governor of St Mary's CE Infant School – 1%

1 supports the proposal

Responses from a Governor of Puttenham CE Infant School – 1%

1 supports the proposal

Responses from a resident living close/adjacent to St Mary's CE Infant School – 14%

2 support the proposal, 14 do not support the proposal and 0 are unsure

Responses from any local government elected member or partner agencies – 1%

1 does not support the proposal

Responses from Other – 41%

10 support the proposal, 34 do not support the proposal and 3 are unsure

Percentage who supported/did not support/were unsure by individual groups – transfer of St Mary's pupils to Puttenham C of E Infant School

Responses from a parent/carer of a child attending St Mary's CE Infant School – 10%

3 support the proposal, 3 do not support the proposal and 6 are unsure

Responses from a parent/carer of a child attending Puttenham CE Infant School – 18%

4 support the proposal, 9 do not support the proposal and 8 are unsure

Responses from a parent/carer who is considering attending either school in the future – 9%

2 support the proposal, 5 do not support the proposal and 3 are unsure

Responses from a staff member at St Mary's CE Infant School – 4%

1 supports the proposal, 1 does not support the proposal and 3 are unsure

Responses from a staff member at Puttenham CE Infant School – 1%

1 is unsure

Responses from a Governor of St Mary's CE Infant School – 1%

1 supports the proposal

Responses from a Governor of Puttenham CE Infant School – 1%

1 supports the proposal

Responses from a resident living close/adjacent to St Mary's CE Infant School – 14%

4 support the proposal, 9 do not support the proposal and 3 are unsure

Responses from any local government elected member or partner agencies – 1%

1 does not support the proposal

Responses from Other – 41%

11 support the proposal, 28 do not support the proposal and 8 are unsure

Qualitative Analysis

Respondents had the opportunity to add comments at the end of the survey. Out of the **115** responses received, **95** comments were made on the proposal. These comments were broadly themed and separated into **14** possible tags. Each response could have more than one tag attached. The overall frequency of each of the tags provides an indicator of respondent's main concerns regarding the proposal.

Sub theme	Tag	Number of responses	Prevalence (% out of total responses)
Positive impacts	St Mary's not sustainable	6	6%
	Impact on pupils	3	3%
	Future of other schools	2	2%
Negative Impacts	Organisation at Puttenham	14	15%
	Vertical streaming	9	10%
	Impact on Puttenham CofE Infant School	12	13%

	Impact on the community & village	37	39%
	Increased travel times	9	10%
	Impact on pupils	6	6%
	Impact on staff	5	5%
	Loss of a good school	30	32%
	New housing planned	12	13%
	Leadership issues at St Mary's	20	21%
Ideas and Innovations	Ideas	27	28%

Key themes from the consultation

Positive impacts

Respondents identified some positive impacts for both the closure of St Mary's CofE Infant School and the transfer of its pupils to Puttenham CofE Infant School.

St Mary's not sustainable

6% of the comments identified that St Mary's CofE Infant School is not sustainable, with the school being described as *"very vulnerable"* and the closure *"now unavoidable"*. One respondent felt that *"in the light of falling birth rates within Waverley, which is unlikely to improve over the next few years, it is unfortunately not economically viable for St Mary's Infant School to remain open."* Another respondent stated that *"school resources are so stretched now that while this will be difficult for some, it's not sustainable to keep such a low attended school open."*

"The fall in the UK birth rate leading to reduced pupils and the way schools are funded by numbers on roll, has made St Marys very vulnerable."

"It is not a good use of resource to continue to house schooling at St Mary's with such low numbers and thus low financial settlement for the school."

"Without enough children from the local community attending the school and the falling birth rate, this school has been at risk for a number of years. It is very sad for the school and village communities, but the closure of the school is now unavoidable."

Impact on pupils

3% of the comments felt that the proposal will have a positive impact on the pupils. One respondent felt that the proposal *"is a win win for all pupils"* whilst another mentioned that pupils *"would be better off in a thriving school."* Additionally, one respondent stated that *"Puttenham Infant school is an excellent school providing a wonderful nurturing, inclusive education. It has the physical resources to*

accommodate the children, and the staff and community would welcome them with open arms."

Future of other schools

Another positive theme was the proposals impact on the future of other schools. 2% of respondents mentioned this. One respondent commented that *"if St Mary's is to close then I fully support the pupils being transferred to Puttenham as this would ensure another small village school keeps going."*

Negative impacts

Respondents also identified several potentially negative impacts of the proposals, some expressed *"concern"* and that *"more clarity is needed"*. Others advised that *"it would be a loss"* and that the proposal is *"shortsighted"*.

Organisation at Puttenham C of E Infant School

15% of the comments were around the organisation at Puttenham CofE Infant School if St Mary's CofE Infant School were to close and its pupil's transfer. It was felt that *"more clarity is needed on how the children will be dispersed in the classes"* and *"the proposal is unclear as to how it would affect class numbers at Puttenham and how the new students would be distributed."* One respondent advised that they *"would like some more information on how it would work with classes and class sizes if pupils were to be transferred to Puttenham."* Whilst another respondent felt that *"the numbers do not add up."* It was also stated that *"given the low numbers that will now potentially be moving across, a class of anything under 10 children in a spare classroom will not work."*

Some of the comments were made in relation to St Marys CofE Infant School pupils being separated into a single mixed class at Puttenham CofE Infant School. One respondent felt that *"the immediate option feels like isolation and segregation for the St Marys cohort"* whilst another felt *"alarmed to hear that Puttenham School has refused to integrate the pupils into their classes."*

"We would want our children to be fully integrated into the school, not marginalised..."

"The original proposal for the current mixed Reception/YR 1 class to be rehomed at Puttenham School is now not viable due to current student numbers at St Mary's...it would be unfair to single them out in their own small class..."

Vertical streaming at Puttenham C of E Infant School

10% were concerned about vertical streaming being offered at Puttenham CofE Infant School due to the impact this will have on the pupils. One respondent advised that their *"son is one of the youngest in the reception class, with split classes which will probably be based on age, he'll now be put in a class with children just starting school"*. Another stated that mixed age classes are *"statistically proven not to advantage the children put in this situation..."*. Another respondent also mentioned that *"I firmly believe my child should not be placed in a mixed age group under any"*

circumstances. I selected Puttenham C of E Infant School for my child based on its current offerings.”

“I would not be in support of mixed age group classes at Puttenham School. The impact to both the children and their education would be great...”

“Having mixed-age classes in an infant school isn’t always the best idea because it can make teaching and learning more complicated.”

Impact on Puttenham C of E Infant School

13% of comments identified potential negative repercussions on Puttenham CofE Infant School and the current pupils attending. One respondent stated that whilst *“it is a very sad situation for St Mary’s, we have concerns for our child starting Reception when we chose Puttenham for certain reasons e.g. small village school.”* Whilst another commented *“I like the fact that Puttenham School is small and less pupils as it makes for more one on one.”* Comments were also made around *“unsettling the education of the children who are currently at Puttenham”* and that *“there will be a likely impact on the children thriving at Puttenham.”*

Others also mentioned the current uses of the spare classroom and the challenges the school may face if this classroom is populated. One respondent stated that *“the current spare classroom is used extensively by the well populated after school provision and other activities and it may be challenging for this provision to start at 3pm and a class teacher to co-exist.”* Another advised *“considering events like assemblies where parents are invited, Mother’s Day, Christmas etc. We are sometimes limited to one parent per family due to the space.”*

“This additional room is essential for various purposes, including parent meetings, support for students with additional needs, small group learning, one-on-one instruction outside the classroom, library reading sessions, afterschool clubs, wrap around care and future plans for a cooking area for the children.”

Impact on the community & village

39% of comments indicated that the proposal would have a negative impact on the local community and village of Shackleford. The proposal to close St Mary’s CofE Infant School was described as a *“loss to the community”, “a real shame”* and *“devastating”*. Respondents mentioned how closing the school would affect village life and events as well as the future of the village. Respondents advised that *“the school has always been at the centre of the village community”* and *“it helps to keep our communities alive...it’s such an important part in the epicentre of a small community.”* One respondent also stated that *“The school provides the mechanism for village social cohesion and if closure becomes a reality this will be gone!”*

“To let St Mary’s close would be a devastating loss to the village, there are huge implications for the church and fundraising in the village, notably the Shackleford fete.”

“We cannot solely consider the needs of today but must look to the future needs of the village demographic. With the threatened closure of the church as well it gives little hope for the current younger residents of Shackleford...”

“The school plays a central role in the life of Shackleford, including events such as the village fete, which relies on the school’s participation and presence. Its loss would erode the community fabric and weaken the identity of the village.”

Increased travel times

10% of comments related to concerns surrounding increased travel times, lack of parking and increased traffic in Puttenham. Respondents mentioned that *“if there isn’t a local school families will have to travel further”* and *“St Mary’s is in walking distance whereas Puttenham isn’t, so that will add traffic to an already busy area.”* Some respondents expressed frustration at the current situation and therefore feel this would only be exacerbated by the proposal. One respondent commented on the fact that *“the traffic levels to and from the school at 8.30am and 3pm are at capacity”* whilst another stated that *“Traffic at peak times is dreadful with Puttenham hill being grossly congested. Getting in and out of that junction is a nightmare prospect! If St. Mary’s stays open, there would be none of this trauma.”*

“Replacing with spots at Puttenham school would not be a satisfactory alternative location for the vast majority of families attending, not least with the already horrendous traffic that affects Puttenham Heath Road every morning.”

“I’d take into account parking and despite the new tarmacked village car park behind the school it is often still very congested at pick up and drop off times.”

Impact on pupils

6% of respondents commented on negative impacts for the pupils. Respondents mentioned the emotional impact on pupils and the loss of the experiences that St Mary’s CofE Infant School provides them. One respondent mentioned that *“this proposal is deeply upsetting...for the whole community, current parents and most importantly, to the children.”* Another stated that for both the school and church to close *“would be absolutely catastrophic to all local members of the community, staff, and the young innocent children.”* Furthermore, a respondent stated that they *“don’t believe Puttenham offers the same experience...I think it will have a detrimental effect on those children, who may potentially at this young age have undiagnosed SEN conditions, they will not thrive in the way they could at St Mary’s.”*

Impact on staff

5% of respondents commented on the negative impacts for staff members. The comments were largely based around *“staff members facing job insecurity”*. One respondent stated that *“if the school closes it will never reopen. Staff will lose their jobs.”* Another commented that they are *“devastated at the thought of it closing not least for the long serving members of the teaching staff and local community who are most affected by this decision.”*

“The staff members (some of which have been at the school for twenty years), now have to find new jobs, adding additional financial pressures to those that already exist in today’s World.”

Loss of a good school

32% of the comments were in relation to the loss of St Mary’s CofE Infant School, which is a good school, describing the school as *“nurturing, caring and supportive”* and *“unique in its offering”*. One respondent advised that *“it would be a terrible shame to lose such a special school.”* Others stated that the school *“gives the best possible start to children embarking on their school life”* and that *“St Mary’s School has given so many children an amazing start in life.”*

The surroundings of the school were also mentioned as a factor as to why St Mary’s CofE Infant School should not close. One respondent stated that the school is *“in a traditional, scenic setting that cannot be compared with other schools”* whilst another stated that *“it’s a really lovely little school in a beautiful village location”*.

“The unique learning and nurturing environment has enabled my daughter to thrive.”

“It has such a holistic approach to education, offering art and forest school as well as a positive, nurturing environment.”

“The setting of the school and the education possible due to the setting of the school is next to no other state offering in the area.”

New housing planned

13% of the comments were in relation to the new housing planned for the local areas, with the feeling that closing a local school now would be *“nonsense”*, *“ill-planned”* and it was stated that the Local Authority are *“failing to anticipate demand that is clearly on the horizon.”* One respondent felt that *“This is a very short-sighted proposal in view of the large number of new developments proposed for the Godalming, Milford, Witley areas.”*

“There are so many new homes and developments being built in and around Godalming surely more school places will be needed?”

“Our local communities are growing; new housing is planned for Milford and Elstead alongside that already built on Eashing Lane; families moving into the area from London and other areas continues, I do wonder where they will send their children without local schools.”

Leadership issues at St Mary’s C of E Infant School

21% of the comments were around the connection between the current leadership and management at St Mary’s CofE Infant School and the schools’ low numbers. Respondents felt that an inadequate response to bullying, a shared Head Teacher across two schools and a lack of marketing have led to the schools’ low numbers.

One respondent felt that *“the school has the potential to be a thriving village school again, it just needs proper leadership and vision.”* Whilst others stated that *“it must be tricky for the head to be in charge of two schools”* and *“I’d question priorities with having a shared Head Teacher.”*

Respondents also commented that *“there have been numerous reports of serious bullying and mistreatment of pupils. In a small and close-knit community, such a negative reputation can make or break a school.”* and *“there was little marketing, awareness of who St Mary’s are and why parents should opt for this school over others in the area.”*

Ideas and innovations

28% of the comments offered ideas and suggestions on the organisation at Puttenham CofE Infant School, other alternatives to the proposals, new leadership at St Mary’s CofE Infant School and the usage of the site.

Some respondents considered the use of the St Mary’s CofE Infant School buildings and site if the school was to close. They suggested *“a unit for SEND”*, one respondent commented *“Given the lack of SEN establishments required in Surrey you could change its direction and offering”* whilst another stated *“why not reposition the school as a specialist setting, for example, as a dedicated provision for children with special educational needs.”*

Comments were also made regarding alternative suggestions for the organisation of pupils at Puttenham CofE Infant School. One respondent made the following suggestion, *“if the 10 incoming year 2s remained together and were in the same class as the year 1s and the current Puttenham children all remained together going into year 2. This I feel would cause the least amount of disruption for the children who would all remain with their current friends.”* Another respondent suggested that *“Surrey County Council needs to take advice on whether segregation is an appropriate way for Puttenham to treat these 5-year-olds”*.

Several respondents felt that there are other alternatives instead of transferring the St Mary’s CofE Infant School pupils to Puttenham CofE Infant School. One respondent suggested a *“more equitable proposal would be to fill the spaces across all local schools”* and another commented *“surely it would be better to find spaces for the remaining pupils at Shackleford in all the local schools that are not full.”* One respondent also suggested St James Primary School as an option, *“with the partnership with St James School Elstead, a larger Primary, would it not make more sense to take in the pupils, where the head should already know the current children.”* Other alternatives suggested were *“the children affected at St Mary’s should have been found places at existing schools first to determine the true need for children to go to Puttenham.”* and *“classes have already been reduced from 2 class intake to 1 (Puttenham school and Farncombe Infants to name a few) and it would be beneficial to see the effects of this before a drastic change.”*

Multiple other comments suggested to *“prioritise leadership reform over closure”*. One respondent commented *“I ask that the council explore more constructive options around leadership support, advertising and marketing”* and another suggested *“I urge the council to consider more constructive alternatives - such as leadership review, improved marketing (inc. social media) and engagement”*

with local organisations". One respondent proposed that "a new management team should be put in place and the school should be supported to re-open and to market itself".

Public Meetings

Two public consultation meetings took place at Shackleford Village Hall on 1 May 2025. Roughly 70-80 people were in attendance across both meetings. Themes arising from the public meetings reflected the themes from the responses to the consultation. The notes from the public meetings were uploaded to Surrey Says alongside the consultation which includes a "questions and answers" section to answer questions which have arisen during the consultation process.

What happens next?

The Council will consider all the views put forward during this consultation period before making a decision on whether to publish proposals required by law. These formal proposals may be altered, amended or different from this consultation. If proposals are published, there will be a further period for comments, called the representation period or 'Statutory Notices'. This would last for 28 days, and a final decision would then be taken by Surrey County Council's Leader as to whether to close St Mary's C of E Infant School.