

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**LEADER DECISIONS****DATE: 9 JULY 2018****LEAD OFFICER: DAVE HILL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LEARNING****SUBJECT: PROPOSED CLOSURE OF RIPLEY COFE PRIMARY SCHOOL****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

Quality of education at Ripley CofE Primary School has been a concern since 2010. 96% of schools in Surrey (April 2018) are judged as Good or Outstanding by Ofsted, whilst inspections by Ofsted at Ripley have resulted in Requires Improvement (or equivalent) judgements in 2010, 2013 and 2015 followed by Inadequate in 2017. Although the school has met national averages in attainment, progress of pupils is significantly below average and particularly concerning for disadvantaged pupil groups. Despite the Council providing around £180,000 of additional support to the school with Babcock 4S, the school has not improved.

Following the inadequate Ofsted judgement in May 2017, the school received a Directive Academy Order from the Department for Education's Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), in accordance with the legislation set out in the Education and Adoption Act 2016. The effect of the Order is that the school should be placed within a multi-academy trust (MAT) to secure its future. No appropriate MAT has been identified by the RSC and the Diocese of Guildford to take the school forward.

Disappointingly, due to there being no viable sponsored academy solution and no other options, in line with the Department for Education's statutory guidance 'Opening and closing maintained schools' April 2016, the Council therefore proposed closure of the school in consultation with the Diocese of Guildford.

The informal consultation on the proposal was conducted between 5 March and 16 April 2018, following which the Cabinet Member determined to proceed with the publication of statutory notices. The notices were published on 25 May 2018, which also initiated a four week statutory representation period, closing on 22 June 2018.

The Council has remained open to considering further options that may have arisen during the process. To date no further options have come forward that would be considered appropriate to be progressed by the Council or the Regional Schools Commissioner.

The Leader of the Council is asked to review the rationale for the proposal and the summary of the representations provided within this report to determine whether to approve the proposed closure of Ripley CofE Primary School with effect from 31 August 2018.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the Leader of the Council approves the proposal to close Ripley CofE Primary School.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recognised that the majority of representations made objected to the proposal, and that the school is valued highly by the local community. However, this particularly difficult and sensitive recommendation is put forward due to the following reasons which cannot be overcome despite the overwhelming community support for the school:

- No appropriate realistic options for the future of the school have arisen during the informal consultation and the statutory representation period.
- Progress of children is significantly below average, despite meeting average attainment. Ofsted raised concerns regarding outcomes for pupils lower down the school, pupils from deprived backgrounds and pupils with special educational needs.
- The number of children on roll now is untenable and it is not viable to continue the school. Children that have moved during the period of uncertainty have been able to find places in other schools due to the number of vacant places in the surrounding areas. Schools in surrounding areas have sufficient places to accommodate displaced pupils.
- Three year groups only have 1 child in each year, and a further year group only has 2 children. This limits the opportunities for children to learn and play with children of their own age.
- Projections for future need for school places indicate that future cohorts can be accommodated in adjacent areas.

DETAILS:**Background**

1. Ripley CofE Primary School is a voluntary controlled school with a Published Admissions Number (PAN) of 28. The school is maintained by the Council in partnership with the Diocese of Guildford. There are two independent nurseries located on the site: Ripley Pre-School and Toad Hall Nursery. The school, which has existed since 1840 and was formerly an infant school, took the decision to expand in 2009 to include the junior age range and become a primary school. The school expanded incrementally with all years from reception to year 6 being in place from 2012.
2. The school is situated in the village of Ripley with a population of 1,620 (2011 Census). Pupils at the school reside in Ripley and in the surrounding areas of around a 3 mile radius. The area is served by a number of primary phase schools as set out in paragraphs 63 and 86.

The proposal

3. It is proposed that Ripley CofE Primary School should close with effect from 31 August 2018.

Reasons for the proposal

4. The school received an Inadequate (4) Ofsted grading following an inspection on 3 May 2017. This follows a number of low graded Ofsted inspections in previous years. The school was rated 1 (Outstanding) by Ofsted in 2008, but since 2010 has been graded 3 (Satisfactory/Requires Improvement) until the inspection in 2017 where it was graded as Inadequate, with outcomes for pupils graded as Requires Improvement.
5. Subsequently the school received a Directive Academy Order on 31 July 2017. This was issued by the Department of Education's Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), on behalf of the Secretary of State. The order is in line with the process set out in the Education and Adoption Act 2016 for schools graded as Inadequate by Ofsted. This is further set out in statutory guidance published by the Department of Education on 'Schools Causing Concern'. The effect of this order is that the school should be enabled to be converted to an academy within a multi-academy trust (MAT) to secure its future.
6. As Ripley CofE Primary School is a Church of England voluntary controlled (VC) school in the Diocese of Guildford, under the terms of the 'National Memorandum of Understanding' April 2016, between the National Society (Church of England) and the Department of Education, the Diocese and the RSC would need to consider and agree any potential MAT looking to sponsor the school.
7. In order for a MAT to be considered by the Diocese and the RSC, the following minimum criteria would need to be met:
 - Approved as a multi-academy trust by the Department for Education.
 - Established track record of turning around underperforming schools.
 - A strong plan and immediate capacity to effect a turnaround in the school.
 - Able to safeguard the religious character of the school, with appropriate church representation on the board of the MAT and on the local governing body of the school.
8. Prior to the informal consultation, the Diocese and the RSC advised the Council that there was no appropriate MAT to sponsor the school. Therefore, as no further options were viable to progress, in line with the Department for Education's statutory guidance 'Opening and closing maintained schools' April 2016, the Council put forward the proposal on closure and commenced consultation.
9. The process for decision making regarding school closures is set out in the Department for Education's statutory guidance 'Opening and Closing Maintained Schools' April 2016. It consists of the following key stages:
 - Informal consultation for a recommended period of 6 weeks.
 - Cabinet Member for Education considers the responses to the consultation and determines whether to proceed with publishing statutory notices together with a further period of statutory consultation.
 - Statutory notices published regarding the nature of the proposal and commencement of a statutory consultation period of 4 weeks.
 - Leader of the Council considers the consultation responses and determines whether or not the school should be closed.

Reasons why the proposal is recommended

Options for continuing the school

11. Ripley CofE Primary School is a designated rural primary school, as determined by the Department for Education's Designation of Rural Primary Schools (England) Order. There are two primary phase schools within 2 miles straight line distance of Ripley CofE Primary, and a further 10 within a 3 mile radius of the school. Send CofE Primary School is the nearest school being 2.1 miles away by road route.
12. Mindful of the designation, the Council must ensure that any possible options for retaining the school have been fully explored and exhausted as it has set out in the statutory proposal. Unfortunately to date, no one MAT has been identified that meets all four criteria and is willing to take on the school. Other options have been explored but not been considered viable to progress for the reasons set out from paragraph 20 below.
13. In putting forward this proposal, the Council has considered Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 in regard to rural schools. The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 contain a presumption against closure of rural schools, and it is a requirement that proposers must consider the effect of the discontinuance of any rural primary school on the local community. The statutory guidance specifically states that 'This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but the case for closure should be strong and a proposal must be clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area.' The guidance states that when producing a proposal, the proposer must carefully consider:
 - The likely effect of the discontinuance of the school on the local community;
 - Educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools;
 - The availability and likely cost to the LA of transport to other schools;
 - Any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result in the discontinuance of the school and the likely effects of any such increase;
 - Any alternatives to the discontinuance of the school.

Each of these points is addressed below.

Likely effect of closure of the school on the local community

14. Through the informal consultation and the representations made to the statutory notice, the Council recognises that the majority of the local community disagrees with the proposal to close the school. The school is seen as an important part of the village and is valued highly by the local community. Closure of school may impact on:
 - The demographics of the village, with families less likely to reside in the village due to lack of state maintained primary education.
 - Community spirit in the village. The school participates in community events and has done so for many years. Examples include the annual pantomime and the annual bonfire event.

- Participation levels in other activities for children in the village such as scout, guides and brownies, toddler group and the junior section of Ripley Cricket Club.
 - Opportunities for elderly people to interact with younger age groups, who currently help children with reading in the school.
 - Local businesses with possibly a reduction in passing trade.
 - Housing market with families less likely to consider moving to the village.
15. The closure of the school would also result in the loss of the building as a community facility. There is a village hall within half a mile of the school, around a 10 minute walk away, which is available for hire.
16. It is anticipated that the private nursery on the school site could continue in its current location. With regard to the pre-school, which is a separate organisation but within the school buildings, the Diocese have confirmed that a pre-school alone would not meet the conditions of the Trust Deed for the site. However, it recognises that the pre-school would need time to find alternative premises so would not serve immediate notice on the pre-school, allowing time for it to re-locate to a new site. It is envisaged that this period would be no longer than 12 months from the date of the school's closure.

Educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools

17. The school was judged to be Outstanding by Ofsted in 2008, however since the subsequent inspection in 2010 the quality of education at the school has been judged as Requires Improvement or equivalent. At its most recent Ofsted Inspection in May 2017, the school was judged as Inadequate and had 139 pupils on roll. Pupil numbers fell to 73 in October 2017 and currently there are 28 pupils on roll with fewer anticipated to be on roll in September. Some year groups consist of only 1 pupil and as such children have limited access to learning and playing with children of their own age. It is not considered that the proposed closure of Ripley CofE Primary School would have any detrimental effect on standards at neighbouring schools as no further permanent changes are required in the foreseeable future as a result of Ripley closing.

Availability and likely cost to the LA of transport to other schools

18. Support with transport to alternative schools would be provided for eligible pupils provided they meet the criteria. Individual circumstances would also be considered. The criteria can be found on the Surrey County Council website at: <https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools/school-transport/under-16-transport-to-school> . Of the 15 pupils on roll that would require a primary school in September, around half reside outside the village and closer to other schools. Therefore the number of children likely to require support with transport is anticipated to be low. Costs related to transport support would be met from the Local Authority's Home to School Transport budget.

Any increase in the use of motor vehicles

19. With around half of the pupils who would be on roll in September residing outside of the village and closer to other schools, it is anticipated that any impact on traffic would be minimal. Some families may have to travel further, whereas other families would have reduced journeys to school. With the small numbers on roll and there not being a need to expand other school/s if Ripley were to

close, it is anticipated that any impact on traffic and parking around other schools would be minimal.

Any alternatives to closing the school

20. Extended school

Statutory guidance regarding school closures references consideration to 'scope for an extended school to provide local community services and facilities e.g. childcare facilities, family and adult learning, healthcare, community internet access etc.' The Council rejected this as an option as it would not resolve the inadequacies at the school on which basis the Directive Academy Order was issued.

21. Multi-academy trust (MAT)

The RSC approached the Good Shepherd Trust (GST) to sponsor Ripley in the summer of 2017. After careful consideration of the position of the school and the current pupil numbers, GST declined to sponsor the school. The RSC then worked with the Diocese of Guildford to identify other suitable sponsors using the following criteria:

- An approved academy sponsor by the Department for Education;
- Established track record of turning around underperforming schools;
- A strong plan and immediate capacity to effect a turnaround in the school;
- The ability to safeguard the religious character of the school, with appropriate church representation on the board of the MAT and the local governing body of the school.

22. Under the terms of the National Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the National Society (Church of England) and the Department for Education, it is for the Diocese to agree on a suitable multi-academy trust (MAT) to sponsor the school with the Regional Schools Commissioner. Any MAT seeking to sponsor a Church school must be able to safeguard the religious character of the school. In line with the advice from the Church of England, the view of the Diocesan Board of Education (DBE) is that the 'as is' principle applies to the governance arrangements for the Church representatives of a MAT sponsoring a Church of England school. Ripley is a Voluntary-Controlled (VC) Church of England school so the Diocesan Board of Education would expect at least 25 per cent of the Trustees or Members to be Church appointed on the sponsoring MAT. The RSC can only consider possible sponsorship arrangements for Ripley if they meet the terms of the MOU.

23. Prior to the Council's consultation on proposed closure, the Diocese were approached by the South Farnham Educational Trust (SFET) who expressed an informal interest in the school. The Diocese met with SFET in the autumn of 2017, however the Diocese rejected this proposal as it had no confidence that SFET understood how to maintain or develop the Christian character and ethos of the school. SFET offered a side-agreement to legally safeguard the Christian character and ethos of the school. However, in the view of the DBE, this was not sufficient to ensure that the Christian character of the school would be protected following academy conversion and the proposal was declined on that basis.

24. Once the public consultation on the proposed closure was underway, two further verbal expressions of interest were received. Both of these expressions of interest were investigated and explored by the RSC and the DBE and were not

taken forward for further consideration by the RSC and DBE on the conditions set out by the RSC including the criteria above.

25. Federation

The Council asked the Diocese to consider the options for the possible federation of Ripley CofE Primary School with other neighbouring Church of England primary schools. All local Church primary schools were invited to meet informally with the Diocese to explore whether they would be prepared to federate with Ripley CofE Primary as part of forming a multi-academy trust. After careful consideration and exploring all the options, no Church school was in the position to put themselves forward to establish a federation and create a MAT within the timescales required. There were no offers to amalgamate (merge) schools at this point, only an offer to take some of the Ripley children into classes where there were existing vacancies. The Diocese shared this information with both the RSC and the Local Authority at the end of the autumn term 2017.

26. Amalgamation

At the commencement of the public consultation on the proposed closure of the school, there were no offers or proposals to merge or amalgamate the school with another local school. During the public consultation process, Clandon CofE Primary School came forward with a proposal to merge the two schools. Although this was considered by both the Diocese and the Council, concerns were expressed about this option on the basis of a lack of school improvement capacity to tackle the significant school improvement challenges faced at Ripley and the significant amount of investment and resources required to make the school financially viable. This proposal was rejected therefore, as it was felt that the proposal to amalgamate the two schools could have a detrimental effect on the quality of education offered to pupils of both schools.

27. The Council has remained open to considering any further options that may have arisen during the process with the Diocese and the RSC.

Leadership issues and local authority involvement

28. The historically low numbers at the school (set out in paragraphs 58 & 59) have been a concern of school governors over recent years due to the difficulties this causes with balancing the school budget. The Council were fully supportive of the school, recognising the important part it plays in the local community and articulated its position to the leadership through school improvement meetings, of wanting to retain the school for it to continue to serve the local community.

29. Two interim heads of school were in post from January 2015 until February 2017 under executive leadership from Pyrford CofE Primary School. The Headteacher of Pyrford is a National Leader of Education (NLE) and the school is a National Support School (NSS) providing support to other schools with school improvement.

30. Responsibility of recruiting a head teacher lies with the governing body. As such, following concerns regarding the ongoing interim leadership, and discussions in school improvement meetings with Babcock 4S and the Chair of Governors, in May 2016 the Council wrote to Babcock 4S requesting that they provide support to the school in moving forward the recruitment of a substantive head and/or a partnership with another school. In November 2016 the governing body wrote to the Council to advise of their concerns regarding recruitment of a permanent head teacher on the grounds of viability and low forecasted numbers. The IEB

application further set out that governors refused to recruit on the basis that the school was not in a position to attract or afford a head teacher of appropriate calibre to secure the improvement in standards and quality of provision needed by the school. Therefore the interim leadership arrangements continued.

31. Between 2014 and 2016 the Council provided significant support to the school of over £150,000 including School to School Support, School Effectiveness Support, Finance, Governance and HR support. In addition, council officers identified and secured over £100,000 of Section 106 funding from historical local residential development which was ring-fenced to education provision in Ripley. This enabled a number of building condition issues to be addressed including resurfacing of the playground and improvements to the toilet facilities. Additionally to the sum above, the Council has allocated further funds to replace a demountable classroom at the school site. The Council has also been working with the school to address ongoing issues in a classroom block provided by the community which has experienced sinking floors.
32. With the governing body continuing to maintain single-age classes despite numbers below capacity, the school was experiencing financial difficulties, with 94.6% of income in 2016-17 being spent on staffing (median for similar sized primary schools in Surrey was 83.3%) and expenditure being higher than income. This resulted in the leadership of the school having difficulties in delivering an effective curriculum, despite the school receiving additional income from lettings and the local authority providing intervention funding to the cover the costs of Executive Headship.
33. The governing body believed the school to be unviable and sought options for change in terms of closure or a MAT/federation/amalgamation to secure the sustainability of the school. These concerns were expressed through school improvement meetings between 2015 and 2017. The Council was committed to retaining the school and options for federation or amalgamation were explored by the school and the Diocese but no viable solutions were found.
34. The Executive Head Teacher resigned in February 2017. With immediate action necessary, a further interim arrangement had to be put in place with support from both Pyrford and Send CofE Primary Schools, with the executive head teacher of Send bringing expertise as a Local Leader of Education (LLE) and former Ofsted inspector.
35. Following its continued concerns for the school, in March 2017 the Council issued the governing body with a Formal Warning Notice, in line with its powers under section 60 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (as amended by the Education and Adoption Act 2016). The specific concerns of the local authority were set out as:
 - Unacceptably low standards.
 - Failure to take steps to address the budget deficit.
 - Lack of a strategic plan for the future of the school, and associated securing of permanent leadership and governance arrangements.
36. The warning notice asked the governing body what action it was taking to address the concerns, in particular to provide reassurance that the governing body and the senior leadership team of the school can demonstrate that they:

- Have a very clear grasp of the weaknesses that need to be addressed.
 - Understand the interventions necessary to tackle these weaknesses.
 - Can explain what steps have already been put in place to secure rapid improvement and what impact such steps have had, in particular what impact such steps will have on the performance of the school.
 - Can set out what further steps are proposed, when and what impact they expect the proposed steps to have.
37. If the information provided from the school in response is not sufficiently reassuring or convincing, the local authority can consider whether to use the intervention powers set out in Part 4 of the 2006 Act within two months from the end of the compliance period which consist of:
- The power to require governing body to enter into arrangements.
 - The power to appoint additional governors.
 - The power to direct closure of a school.
 - The power to appoint an interim executive board (IEB).
38. Following pre-notification to the Chair of Governors that the Council was to issue the warning notice above, the entire governing body made the decision to resign. With the warning notice in place, and no reassurance from the governing body on how it was intending to address the Council's concerns due to its absence, the Council initiated its power to appoint an Interim Executive Board (IEB) with the immediate appointment of a 'shadow IEB'.
39. With agreement from the Diocese of Guildford, the Council made the application to the Department of Education to create the formal IEB. The application was approved with the board consisting of three named experienced Advanced Skilled Governors (ASGs). The appointed chair was the Chair of two other schools including the nearby Send CofE Primary School, experienced in overseeing school improvement, taking schools through change, leading governing bodies and with local knowledge and understanding. The two further ASGs have significant experience in school governance, driving improvement and leading transformation in governance and leadership.
40. In the application to the DfE for the IEB, the Council expressed its concern that the school was expecting an Ofsted inspection and it would be vulnerable to being judged inadequate as permanent senior leadership was not in place and the governing body had resigned.
41. The Council provided a further £29,740 to the school in the form of intervention funding, in addition to the school's standard budget.
42. In May 2017 interim co-head teachers wrote to parents to advise them that the school needed to restructure to ensure its ongoing financial viability and this would involve vertical grouping from September 2017 (where a class may consist of children from more than one year group). This letter, of which the council had no involvement in, also directed parents to Surrey Admissions if they had any questions about school places. A number of families decided to move their children to other schools following receipt of the letter. It should be noted that 32 state maintained schools in Surrey teach some classes in mixed-age groups with 91% of those schools being Good or Outstanding.

43. Soon after the appointment of the IEB, the school was inspected by Ofsted in May 2017 and graded as 'Inadequate'. Out of the 5 areas of inspection, 3 were graded as Inadequate or Requires Improvement (Leadership, Quality of Teaching, and Outcomes for Pupils).
44. The Council acknowledges the criticisms of the Ofsted report of the local authority. However, it believes it has taken all the action it can within its powers together with the significant support it has provided to the school as described above.
45. The Ofsted report highlighted the impact of the historic unstable leadership and governance:

'Uncertainty and shifting interim leadership arrangements have hampered efforts to improve the school. Whilst strengths exist as they did at previous inspections, the overall quality of education and outcomes for pupils is still not good enough.'

'Due to the transient and unstable nature of strategic leadership arrangements, school improvement planning has been too short-term. Current plans do not provide a clear roadmap to get the school to good. Too many timeframes are 'ongoing' with insufficient prioritisation of intended actions.'

'Monitoring by leaders at different levels is not rigorous enough to achieve and sustain sufficient improvement. Although generally clear-sighted about the school's strengths and weaknesses, leaders' view of the overall quality of teaching before the inspection was too optimistic.'

'Teachers' access to high-quality training opportunities has been restricted due to budgetary constraints at school level.'

'Over time, governance has been ineffective. The former governing body failed to find a sustainable solution that allowed the school to operate successfully. Successive governing bodies have overseen a sub-standard quality of education for pupils over a number of years.'

'Governors did not ensure the financial viability of the school as the number on roll decreased. The use of additional funding to diminish differences in the achievement of disadvantaged pupils compared with others nationally has not been tracked tightly enough and is not effective.'

46. However, the report also made the following positive statements in relation to leadership:

'The interim head teachers, other leaders and staff have worked hard to maintain the school operationally and to prevent existing strengths from slipping. Good care is taken to ensure pupils' well-being.'

'Leaders gather information regularly about pupils' attainment and progress. They have taken sensible steps to check its accuracy. They consider the achievement of both individuals and groups to identify and target where outcomes should be better.'

'Leaders of different subjects convey a strong sense of teamwork. Leaders and teachers work together, supporting, coaching and modelling ideas.'

'A new interim executive board consisting of experienced governors had been formally in place for three weeks at the time of the inspection. In anticipation of their role being formalised, board members wasted no time gaining a strong understanding of the school's predicament and its effectiveness. They have a firm handle on their statutory duties and have already used their experience to prioritise their actions appropriately. For example, board members have overseen a thorough safeguarding audit. They have taken steps to balance the budget for the current year.'

'The interim executive board members convey a strong determination that they will not preside indefinitely over continuing uncertainty. They know that this board is not the long-term answer required. They have set out ambitious timescales to formulate proposals for a sustainable resolution to the current situation. However, given the exceptionally short life of the interim executive board, this work is at an early stage.'

47. Numbers on roll decreased significantly following the communication from the school regarding vertical grouping and the outcome of the Ofsted report.
48. On the publication of the Ofsted report, the IEB wrote to parents to inform them of the forthcoming Directive Academy Order and what this would mean for the school. A subsequent meeting was held for parents with the school and the local authority.
49. Ongoing leadership of the school was secured by the IEB with the appointment of a full-time head teacher.

Outcomes for children at the school

50. Although national outcomes are higher than average at Ripley, the progress of pupils is significantly below average. Progress of pupils is crucial in evidencing the individual step changes of each pupil taking into account their starting points when they joined school and from Ofsted perspective is as important in assessing the performance of a school as attainment. The following table shows the percentage of pupils meeting the expected standard who completed key stage 2 in summer 2017. This shows positive improvement on the previous outcomes in 2016. However, the 2017 outcomes mask concerns regarding the progress for pupils, outcomes for other cohorts and outcomes for disadvantaged children as described in the following paragraphs:

	School	England average	Local authority average
Pupils meeting expected standard in reading, writing and maths	67% (2016: 42%) 102.2 average scaled score	61% 104.1 average scaled score	67%

51. Overall progress at key stage 2 is a concern and significantly below average. Pupils at Ripley should be making more progress and achieving higher based on their starting points. In 2016 progress was in the bottom 10% for all pupils and disadvantaged pupils in reading and writing, with progress for all pupils in mathematics significantly below average. This table summarises the progress outcomes for children who completed key stage 2 in the summer of 2017, which shows that progress for writing and maths continues to be 'well below average' compared to all state schools in England:

	School progress score in reading, writing and maths	Compared to all state schools in England	Local authority average
Reading	-2.0 (2016 -4.0)	average	0.5
Writing	-6.1 (2016: -6.1)	well below average	-0.3
Maths	-4.5 (2016: -2.6)	well below average	-0.3

52. With regard to disadvantaged groups, in 2017 50% of pupil premium pupils and 25% of SEN supported pupils achieved the expected standard.
53. The Ofsted Inspection in May 2017 made some positive comments, however the Quality of Teaching, Learning and Assessment was graded as 'Requires Improvement' with concerns including:

'There is still too much variability in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment between classes and subjects. Consequently, pupils do not make good progress over time. Although teaching is not inadequate, the standard of education received by pupils has been less than good for a number of years. This is unacceptable.'

'Some teachers do not use their knowledge of pupils consistently well to promote good learning and progress. Differing levels of challenge and support for most-able pupils or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are not tight enough. In some classes, teaching and tasks are sometimes pitched too low when pupils are capable of tackling more demanding work.'

'Results at the end of key stage 1 mask inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and learning for current pupils.'

54. Similarly in the same inspection Outcomes for Pupils were also graded as 'Requires Improvement' with the following concerns:

'Pupils do not make consistently strong progress, including in English and mathematics. Although these areas are stronger overall compared with other subjects, the picture between classes varies too much.'

'Different groups of pupils make inconsistent progress, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Differences between the outcomes of disadvantaged pupils compared with other pupils nationally are not closing consistently. Not enough most-able pupils reach the higher standards or achieve the depth of learning that their starting points indicate they could.'

'Standards in science are lower than those seen nationally at the end of both years 2 and 6.'

55. The school has not received an Ofsted Monitoring Inspection since the last Section 8 Inspection in May 2017.
56. Senior leaders of the school and the IEB are monitoring the progress of each pupil. Mixed age classes were introduced and pupil groupings are regularly reviewed and revised to ensure the needs of pupils are most effectively met. The quality of teaching remains variable within the school. The head teacher put strong support in place through team-teaching arrangements to ensure that the highest number of pupils access good quality teaching.

Future viability of the school

57. Ripley CofE Primary School currently provides 196 places for years R to 6, with 28 places available in each year. The school has been consistently below 196 places in each year of its existence as a primary school.

58. Numbers of pupils on roll at the school have been declining since 2014. Numbers decreased further following a letter sent from the school to parents regarding the school's decision to teach in mixed-aged classes from summer 2017 in order to manage the school's budget. 32 state maintained schools in Surrey currently teach some year groups in mixed aged classes, 91% of which are good or outstanding schools. At Ripley however, some families reacted to this proposal by taking their children out of the school.

59. Numbers have decreased further whilst the school's future is uncertain. The following table shows the numbers on roll at the school over recent years from the January census, the number of surplus places (unfilled) and their financial impact, together with the corresponding Ofsted outcomes:

Year	Number of pupils on roll (from January census in each academic year)	Number of surplus places (based on PAN of 28)	Estimated impact of surplus places on school revenue funding (based on average of £3,000 per vacant place per year)	Ofsted Grading
2007/08	71 Up to age 6	13 (based on 3 year groups)	£39,000	1/outstanding, June 2008 Under permanent HT
2008/09	97 Up to age 7	15 (based on 4 year groups)	£45,000	
2009/10	121 Up to age 8	19 (based on 5 year groups)	£57,000	3/satisfactory, May 2010 Under same permanent HT as 2008
2010/11	130 Up to age 9	38 (based on 6 year groups)	£114,000	
2011/12	151	45 (first year as full primary)	£135,000	
2012/13	171	25	£75,000	3/requires improvement, April 2013. Under subsequent permanent HT
2013/14	177	19	£57,000	
2014/15	162	34	£102,000	3/requires improvement, April 2015 Under executive HT
2015/16	148	48	£144,000	
2016/17	139	57	£171,000	4/inadequate, May 2017 Under interim HT
2017/18	67	129	£387,000	

60. Data from the past four school census data collections further demonstrates how numbers have fallen in each year group:

		Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total
Academic year 2016/17	October 16	26	18	18	18	22	23	20	145
	May 17	27	17	17	17	23	17	21	139
Academic year 2017/18	October 17	15	16	7	7	8	9	11	73
	January 18	14	14	6	8	7	9	9	67
Difference between October 2016 and January 2018		-12	-4	-12	-10	-15	-14	-11	-78

61. The current numbers of pupils on roll are shown in the table below (as of 12/06/2018). There has been an ongoing decrease since the consultation on the future of the school commenced:

Year group	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total
Number on roll	9	5	1	1	2	1	9	28

62. Of those above, some have decided to attend alternative schools from July. 15 children currently in years Reception to Year 5 would require a primary school place in September if the school were to close.
63. The table below shows the vacant school places in the areas surrounding Ripley by year group as of 19/06/2018. The areas shown reflect where children on roll at Ripley typically reside. There are 110 vacancies in the surrounding areas:

School	Vacant places						
	<i>This gives an indication of the vacant places in areas close by to Ripley, exact numbers do fluctuate.</i>						
	Reception	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Total
Send							25
Send CofE Primary*	12	0*	0*	11	2	0*	25
	<i>*additional places would be made available at Send for children on roll at Ripley if required as the nearest school to Ripley</i>						
Clandon							6
Clandon CofE Primary	0	0	0	1	5	N/A	6
Byfleet and West Byfleet							29
Byfleet Primary	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
Pyrford CofE Primary	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
St Mary's CofE Primary	0	8	0	2**	8	4	20
West Byfleet Infant	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	0
West Byfleet Junior	N/A	N/A	N/A	5	0	0	5
South Woking							36
Barnsbury Primary	0	0	0	0	7	0	7
Kingfield Primary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Westfield Primary	0	11	11	0	7	0	29
Sheerwater and Maybury							14
Maybury Primary	1	1	0	0	2	1	5
New Monument Primary	0	0	2	0	4	3	9
Total by year group	13	21	13	17	36	10	110
<i>** places available from September 2018</i>							

64. Applications for reception school places indicating preferences for the school have decreased over recent years, impacted upon in part by Ofsted judgement and the uncertainty of the school's future. The following table shows the numbers of preferences for the school received by the application closing date for each of the past three years:

	For September 2016	For September 2017	For September 2018
1st preference	18	16	4
2nd preference	15	14	6
3rd preference	24	11	7
4th preference	18	7	7
Total	75	48	24

Future pupil place planning

65. Projections for future school place demand in the local area have been variable for some time. Projections indicate that there is not a need to re-provide places that would be lost if Ripley were to close. Areas adjacent to Ripley have capacity to accommodate children from the area both now and in future years.
66. For the purposes of planning school places, Ripley is considered within the 'Ripley and Send' primary planning area. The table below shows the projected demand for school places in the area of Send and Ripley, which has 88 places per year group in the primary phase (28 at Ripley and 60 at Send). This incorporates information on housing development (paragraph 69) as well as demographic data:

Year	Projected reception year intake			2018 Difference between projected need and available places (88)
	2016 projections	2017 projections	2018 projections <i>(includes updated housing data, new demographic data to be released later in the year)</i>	
2018	64	70	71	-17
2019	65	73	74	-14
2020	63	70	73	-15
2021	62	73	76	-12
2022	62	73	78	-10
2023	62	73	76	-12
2024	62	73	73	-15
2025	62	73	73	-15
2026	-	72	72	-16

The main change from year to year is contributed to additional housing in the area, both current and projected. The table above shows that based on 2018 projections the area is anticipated to have a high number of surplus places year on year in proportion to the number of places available.

67. If Ripley were to close, the number of reception places in the area would be reduced to the 60 places at Send CofE Primary School. This would result in a projected deficit of places. However, with consideration to the projected number of vacant places in surrounding areas it is anticipated that there would be sufficient spaces moving forward as shown in the following table:

Year	South Woking Area Reception places/PAN: 180		Byfleet and West Byfleet Area Reception places/PAN: 330		Total vacancies	Deficit in Ripley & Send	Projected overall vacancies across all three areas
	Projected number of places needed	Difference between projections and available places	Projected number of places needed	Difference between projections and available places			
2018	149	31	279	51	82	-17	65
2019	157	23	286	44	67	-14	53
2020	158	22	282	48	70	-15	55
2021	160	20	287	43	63	-12	51
2022	160	20	288	42	62	-10	52
2023	161	19	289	41	60	-12	48
2024	161	19	290	40	59	-15	44
2025	162	18	290	40	58	-15	43

68. For children living in the Send & Ripley planning area, if they do not attend school in the locality they are most likely to attend schools in the areas above. Additional vacancies are projected in the Clandon and Horsley planning area in some years.
69. The projections showing future need for school places incorporate forthcoming residential developments through data from Guildford Borough Council (GBC). This is updated every year. The previous cabinet report in May incorporated housing data from GBC from the 2017 update. The Council have since received the 2018 update on housing trajectories from GBC. A summary of both sets of data is shown in the table below over 5 year periods for comparison purposes. This data is included in the projected numbers of school places in paragraph 66:

Ward	Housing trajectories over next 5 years		Housing trajectories over the subsequent 5 years	
	2017 update	2018 update	2017 update	2018 update
Lovelace (including Ripley)	52	205	0	94
Send	236*	286	300	101
Clandon & Horsley	222*	366	197	102

*the number from 2017 data differs from the cabinet report of 08/05/18 due to the period being over 7 years.

70. The numbers of housing above have a limited impact on future demand for school places. The average primary pupil yield for 50 homes, for example, would be seven children. This is based on established formula which is applied across Surrey for calculating likely pupil yields from new developments. Spread across school year groups, this would result in an estimate of 1.79 additional children per year group.
71. Consideration has also been given to the possibility of a strategic housing site coming forward at Wisley Airfield, which is within 2 miles of Ripley village. This is a large site of around 2,000 homes and would include a primary school. The introduction of the primary school would be phased, opening with one class/form of entry around 5 years into the construction of homes, and a further form of entry around 5 years later.
72. Officers considered the impact of the homes being constructed and occupied at Wisley on school place demand prior to the opening of the potential new primary

school on the development. The table below shows that the likely impact on demand for places in the Send and Ripley planning area would be minimal:

Year	Homes anticipated to be constructed	Estimated primary pupil yield, per year group
2018-19	-	-
2019-20	-	-
2020-21	-	-
2021-22	-	-
2022-23	50	2
2023-24	100	3
2024-25	150	4
2025-26	150	4
2026-27	150	5

73. The planning application for Wisley was refused by Guildford Borough Council, with the decision being appealed by the developer. The outcome of the appeal was announced on 13 June 2018. The Secretary of State has decided to dismiss the appeal and refuse planning permission.
74. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure a sufficiency of school places and whether or not the school is closed, would continue to monitor the projected need for future places including impact of Guildford Borough Council's Local Plan, and propose changes if required.

Impact of potential closure of the school

Displaced pupils

75. If the school closes, primary consideration needs to be given to protecting the learning of existing pupils and securing appropriate ongoing education in another setting.
76. There are currently 28 children on roll, 17 would require an alternative primary school place in September 2018. Around half live in the village of Ripley, whilst others live closer to other schools in surrounding areas. There is sufficient capacity in the local area for the majority of displaced children as shown in paragraph 63.
77. If the Leader determines to close the school, the Council would offer an alternative school place to every pupil on roll at Ripley CofE Primary School, at the time the decision is effective. As this is close to the end of term, officers wrote to parents at half term to ask them to indicate their preferences and any other considerations to help with planning places in the event of the school closing.
78. Offers would be sent out to all pupils on roll at the school following the decision. Offers would be mindful of families with siblings and would endeavour to offer places in the same school where possible, although this cannot be guaranteed. There are two families who currently have more than one child on roll at the school, who would require an alternative place in September.
79. As the nearest school to Ripley, provision would be made at Send CofE Primary School for displaced pupils. Send have vacant places in some year groups (paragraph 63) and in other year groups additional capacity would be provided where needed. With the small numbers on roll at Ripley the number of extra

places needed is anticipated to be minimal with a few additional places for year 2 in September (current year 1). The Council would provide funding to the school to enable them to provide additional teaching staff for that year group and some space adaptations. There may also be the need for one additional place in year 3 and one in year 5.

80. In the Cabinet Report dated 8 May it was stated that Clandon could be an alternative option for additional spaces. With the small numbers on roll at Ripley, the additional provision needed would be minimal; and geographically Send is closer for the majority of families, with others residing around south Woking.
81. During the informal consultation it was indicated that some families may have preferences for other local schools and live closer to other schools. Some schools in the surrounding areas have vacancies in some year groups and the local authority will endeavour to meet parental preferences for school places where that is possible.
82. Parents and carers additionally have the right to express a preference for any school at any time, as may any parent at any school. The declining numbers on roll show that a significant number of parents are deciding to move prior to the decision on closure being made and spaces are available in order for them to be able to do so.

School Transport

83. There are a number of alternative schools within 2-3 miles straight-line distance of Ripley which are within reasonable travel distance. For the purposes of assessing nearest schools for home to school transport support, the shortest road route from the child's main place of residence would apply. Send CofE Primary is 2.1 miles away by road route and is the nearest primary school to Ripley, although the Council recognises that some families live in other locations and may prefer other schools closer to them.
84. As set out in Surrey County Council's Home to School transport policy, a journey to school will be considered as suitable if it allows the child to reach the school without undue stress, strain or difficulty that would prevent them from benefiting from the education. In line with statutory guidance, the following journey times are considered to be reasonable for a journey to school:
- 45 minutes for primary aged pupils
 - 75 minutes for secondary aged pupils
85. Eligibility for support with home to school transport would be determined in line with the Council's home to school transport policy:
<https://www.surreycc.gov.uk/schools-and-learning/schools/school-transport/under-16-transport-to-school>
 Consideration would also be given to individual circumstances.
86. The table following illustrates the distance by road route from Ripley CofE Primary School to the closest alternative schools together with approximate travel times. It should be noted, as above, that around half of the children who would require an alternative primary school place in September, live outside of Ripley and closer to other schools:

Distances measured from Ripley CofE Primary School by <u>road route</u> to the following schools			Approximate travel time	
Name of school	Kilometres	Miles	Driving	Walking
Send CofE Primary School	3.397	2.111	6 minutes	42 minutes
Pyrford CofE Primary School	3.828	2.379	5 minutes	46 minutes
St Mary's CofE Primary School, Byfleet	5.654	3.513	14 minutes	1 hour 27 minutes
West Byfleet Junior School	5.792	3.599	10 minutes	1 hour 11 minutes
West Byfleet Infant School	5.874	3.650	10 minutes	1 hour 11 minutes
New Monument Primary Academy	5.989	3.721	10 minutes	1 hour 5 minutes
Kingfield Primary School	6.065	3.769	10 minutes	1 hour 13 minutes
The Raleigh School	6.194	3.849	10 minutes	1 hour 9 minutes
Clandon CofE Primary School	6.500	4.039	10 minutes	1 hour 16 minutes
Maybury Primary School	6.539	4.063	11 minutes	1 hour 19 minutes
Westfield Primary School	7.106	4.415	12 minutes	1 hour 26 minutes
Byfleet Primary School	7.168	4.454	14 minutes	1 hour 34 minutes

Distances are measured from the address point of Ripley CofE Primary School to the nearest school gate for pupils to use at each of the schools. Travel times are approximate.

Applications for Reception entry in September 2018

87. For families who have expressed a preference for Ripley CofE Primary School for September 2018 Reception entry, the Council has written to each applicant to advise them of the consultation and any further developments which may affect their application. Four applicants in receipt of an offer of a place at Ripley, also received a parallel offer for another school in order not to place them at a disadvantage should the school close.

Early years provision

88. There are two early years settings on the school site which are not managed by the school. Ripley Pre-School is a voluntary organisation with charitable status and Toad Hall Nursery is part of privately owned chain.

89. The Council's Early Years Commissioning Team have carried out a review of sufficiency of places in the area and the potential impact of closure of Ripley CofE Primary School. That has concluded that the early years places currently operating on the school site would need to continue on site or elsewhere in the local area to ensure sufficient provision.

90. Toad Hall is situated on land owned by Surrey County Council with a separate pedestrian entrance to the main school gate and shared parking with the school. Therefore, it is anticipated that in the event of closure of the school Toad Hall would be able to continue on the site, although parking arrangements would need to be looked at.

91. Ripley Pre-School operates within the school building on Diocese owned land. In the event of the school closing, the trust deeds of the site indicate that the pre-school would not be able to continue on the site. However, the Diocese have indicated that the pre-school could stay on site for up to a year whilst alternative accommodation is identified.

92. The charity, Surrey Nurturing Links also operate from the site, offering services for families with children under 5. Early Years are exploring options for provision in the event of the school closing.

School buildings

93. The ownership of the building and land is split between the Council and the Diocese of Guildford. There is a covenant on the land restricting its usage to Church of England school education. There are no current proposals for the future use of the school site if the school were to close.

Costs of implementation

94. The Council would provide assistance with travel costs to alternative schools for children on roll at the school at the time of determination subject to eligibility. With the small numbers on roll who would be displaced by the closure (15) and some living closer to other schools, the cost of this are anticipated to be minimal. This would be funded from the School Transport Budget which includes allowances for situations such as this.
95. Some children may need assistance with the additional costs of new uniforms for alternative schools, subject to eligibility. This is normally supported through school level discretionary funds for those families on low incomes.
96. Provision of additional key stage 1 staff and space adaptations at Send CofE Primary School for displaced children in September 2018. As these spaces would be temporary whilst the children transition through the school, with Send retaining its PAN of 60, this would be funded through the Council's budget for the provision of temporary classes, at an estimated capital cost of £300,000.
97. The Council has a statutory duty to ensure sufficiency in school places. Current projections indicate that future cohorts will be able to be accommodated in nearby schools (reference paragraphs 66 and 67). However, if demand significantly increases, provision of additional places may need to be considered together with the associated costs. Given the number of projected surplus places in surrounding areas this is unlikely for the foreseeable future.
98. If the school were to close, it is anticipated that early years places at Ripley Pre School would need to be reprovided which would be at a capital cost to the Council, estimated around £250,000 (reference paragraph 89).
99. Options would need to be looked into for the relocation of Surrey Nurturing Links (paragraph 92). Assumed to be cost neutral for the Council.
100. The site would need to be secured whilst not in use.
101. If the school were to remain open, there would be revenue costs to consider with the RSC and the Diocese to enable its ongoing sustainability.

Consultation

102. The statutory consultation was undertaken by Surrey County Council on the proposed closure of Ripley CofE Primary School from 25 May 2018 to 22 June 2018. The associated documentation was published on the Surrey County Council 'Surrey Says' website and circulated to local stakeholders. Interested parties were invited to return responses to the consultation via a formal consultation response form, email or online via Surrey Says.

Responses

103. In total, 256 formal written responses were received via the Surrey Says website, post and email. The breakdown of category of respondents is provided below (some respondents indicated more than one category):

Respondent Category	Number	% of responses received
Parent of child attending Ripley	9	3.3%
Parent of a child that may attend the school in future	16	5.9%
Parent of a child attending another school	20	7.4%
Member of staff at the school	1	0.4%
Local resident	109	40.5%
Pupil on roll at the school	30	11.2%
Other	113	42.0%

104. Of the responses received, 251 responses disagreed with the proposal (approximately 98%), 3 responses agreed (approximately 1%), and 1 response classified themselves as 'don't know' in this respect (approximately 0.5%). 1 respondent did not offer a response (approximately 0.5%).

105. There were no discernible patterns in terms of the category of respondents that typically agreed/disagreed with the proposal, with agreement and disagreement being broadly divided amongst the categories of respondents.

106. Comments about the proposal (243 received in total, some did not provide comments) can be broadly themed into different areas; these are summarised and responded to in the following sections.

Historic management

107. Approximately 62% of respondents raised concerns around the historic management of the school, whether that be through leadership at the school, Babcock 4S, the Regional Schools Commissioner, the Diocese of Guildford or Surrey County Council.

108. Comments were made regarding Surrey County Council '*not putting in place a permanent head teacher*' for the 'past 11 terms' and the '*mis-management*' from both the Diocese and Surrey County Council. Many respondents advised that they felt '*the school has been neglected*' and that this has been '*for at least 18 months or more*'. A number of comments quoted the previous Ofsted report for the school, advising that "*sticking plaster solutions*" had been enacted. One respondent advised that they felt the consultation process is '*just a paper exercise*' and that the decision on the proposed closure had already been made

by the Council. A number of respondents stated that *'with the right support and investment, this decline can be reversed'*.

109. The responsibility for the appointment of a head teacher lies with the governing body of the school and therefore it is not the responsibility of the County Council or the Diocese. The Council and the Diocese have supported the school and provided a significant amount of additional school improvement support as set out in the report.
110. From another perspective, a respondent who agrees with the proposed closure of the school stated that *'the leadership team have failed'* the school. They go on to say that they feel *'closure is the best route'*.

Impact on the community

111. Approximately 60% of the responses referenced impact on the local community as a concern. A number of respondents felt that the school is a *'cornerstone'* and *'at the heart'* of their local community. Many advised that they were concerned about the *'severe impact on the village'* if the school closure was to go ahead and feel that it would *'permanently damage the village and its economy'*.
112. Beyond education, the local children take part in local events such as the Ripley Bonfire, Ripley Pantomime, Ripley 1st Scout Group. One respondent was raised concerns regarding how enterprises such as Ripley Cricket Club will survive without the membership of local families from Ripley CofE Primary School.
113. Ripley Court School, a local independent school, responded to the consultation with their objection to the closure. They feel it is *'vital for a close-knit, happy and supportive village like Ripley to have a school for its children'* as not all families can or want to pay fees for education.
114. Some respondents commented that *'businesses and shops will suffer'* due to *'less demand for their services'*. Another concern raised by approximately 33% of respondents is that *'house prices will be affected'* by the proposed closure of the school. Many expressed that they were worried Ripley would become a *'soulless commuter village'* or that the *'village will simply become a dormitory location with an ageing and/or retired population'*. A pupil at Ripley CofE Primary School stated that if the proposed school closure is approved *'it will decrease the population of Ripley'* due to families moving to other areas for school places.
115. One respondent advised that they were worried about the nurseries on the site of the school. They felt that the onsite nurseries provided *'a smooth transition'* onto Ripley CofE Primary School. One nursery would remain on site and the other will remain initially and given time to find alternative local accommodation.

Transport issues

116. Around 50% of respondents were concerned about the transport implications for families having to travel further afield to another school.
117. Comments raised included concerns about the affordability of transport for families who are unable to drive. Many stated that there is a *'lack of reliable*

public transport in the village and that a longer journey in these circumstances *'is not practical in today's society'*. Other comments raised felt that children would need to *'walk unacceptably long distances'* to travel to other local schools and advised that some routes have *'no pathways'*. Some respondents who are parents of local children advised that travelling to another school would place *'extra pressure'* on home life and their work arrangements.

118. Transport assistance would be provided to those who are eligible under the Council's transport policy. Consideration would also be given to individual circumstances.

Potential/future housing developments

119. Approximately 41% of responses raised concerns relating to new housing being built in the local area and the developments likely to come forward in the future. In light of this, many respondents felt that the proposed closure is *'short-sighted'* and that *'Ripley has a steadily growing population'*. Some respondents made reference to Guildford Borough Council's Local Plan, which outlines the future development planned for the area. Many were concerned that *'no allowance has been made for development of more housing in and around the village'*. A number of respondents commented that more housing in the area would place *'obvious strain'* on school places, and that a school is needed to accommodate the increased pupil yield.
120. One respondent advised that the proposed development at Garlick's Arch has *'further facilities'* for the *'growing community of Travellers / Gypsies'* in Ripley. They go on to question whether the *'educational needs of gypsy children'* can be met locally if Ripley CofE Primary School is closed.
121. Around 33% of respondents also felt that the proposed school closure would *'inhibit families coming into the village and deters others from staying'* impacting on the diversity of the community and house prices.
122. Irrespective of future housing development, the Academy Order issued to the school by the Secretary of State would still be effective. The Council works closely with the boroughs and districts to establish housing permissions being granted and the number of houses likely to come forward over the next 10 years. This forms part of the Council's forecasts for school place demand and is monitored closely to ensure sufficiency of places across the county. If demand increases in the future, the Council would take action to provide additional places as necessary, in line with its statutory duties.

Religious character of Multi-Academy Trusts (MAT)

123. Approximately 40% of respondents stated that they preferred any MAT to sponsor the school regardless of the religious character, rather than none. One comment stated that they feel a suitable MAT had been *'turned down for no solid reason'* and another respondent advised that they would prefer *'a non-religious body'* to support the school *'to enable its continued existence'*.
124. One respondent commented that they feel it is *'unjustifiable that a Christian Organisation can fail its most vulnerable dependents'* and that the Diocese of Guildford and another stated that the County Council have *'essentially blocked anything from moving forward'* with alternative proposals.

125. The Diocese of Guildford and the Regional Schools Commissioner are limited by the national Memorandum of Understanding between the Department for Education and the National Society (Church of England) in relation to finding an appropriate MAT to sponsor Ripley CofE Primary School.

Traffic issues

126. Nearly 39% of respondents were concerned about *'creating further congestion to the already busy roads'*. One respondent advised that they were anxious about the *'carbon and environmental impact associated'* with parents travelling to alternative schools if Ripley CofE Primary were to close. Another respondent expressed that the *'thought of possible heavy plant traffic going up and down for months if developers move in is terrifying'*.
127. One respondent said that they have concerns about *'parking in the vicinity of other schools is very limited'* and another advised that there are *'issues with parking and traffic management'* mainly relating to Send CofE Primary School. The Council anticipates that any impact on traffic would be minimal as Send would remain at the same capacity as it is currently, with a very small number of additional places being provided on a temporary basis.

Other options to be explored

128. Approximately 27% of responses mentioned other options which could have been explored, before closure was considered. Many residents of the village want both the Council and the Diocese to *'give the school time to find a permanent solution to remaining open'*. Suggestions included: combining the current provision with another school, increasing the support at the school to enable progress, finding an alternative Multi-Academy Trust sponsor (regardless of religious character) and reducing the Published Admissions Number (PAN) to 15, in order to make it *'viable for the immediate future'*.
129. A number of respondents advised that they feel the school has had *'insufficient time'* to find an alternative solution and that with *'competent leadership the school could succeed'*.
130. Ripley CofE Primary School has received significant support and funding over recent years and a period of time has already passed during which options for the future of the school have been reviewed and a suitable MAT has not been identified. Reducing the PAN would not address the concerns on which the Academy Order was issued by the Secretary of State.

Emotional health and detriment to education

131. An estimated 21% of respondents cited that another area of concern was the impact the closure would have on the pupils' emotional health and education. Some stated that it would be *'almost impossible to reverse'* the *'negative impact on so many lives'*, whilst others made reference to the impact it could have on the parents. Some made reference to the *'economically disadvantaged'* families in the community and advised that they *'will be hit the hardest'*. A pupil on roll at Ripley CofE Primary School responded and advised that their parents are *'worried'* about the outcome of the proposal.
132. One respondent stated that *'uncertainty has been hanging over the school and this invariably affects the children'*. Other comments referred to the

transition period required in a new school and the effect the proposed closure may have on friendships. Some people raised concerns about the impact of children's health and wellbeing if they were unable to walk to school and that longer journeys will impact *'on their ability to learn'*.

133. Ripley CofE Primary School pupils have responded and state that they are *'feeling sad'* about the proposed school closure. Another pupil has commented that *'friendships will be split up'* should the school be closed.
134. The Council would endeavour to meet parental preferences for alternative school places wherever possible and local schools would help to support the transition of children to their new schools.

Other school places in the local area

135. Approximately 19% of respondents identified the availability of other school places in the local area as a concern. Other comments were of the view that *'surrounding schools are bulging with no space for additional pupils'*. Many also felt that closing the school would add *'extra pressure'* on other local schools.
136. Respondents advised that parents could lose the *'element of choice'* should Ripley CofE Primary School close as other local schools *'are already at capacity'*. One respondent stated that they were concerned about the provision of *'teachers and resources'* at other local schools should there be an *'influx'* of children moving from Ripley CofE Primary School.
137. One comment considered that other local schools are *'big'* and that pupils *'are merely products on an efficient conveyor belt'*.
138. The Council is aware of impact of this proposal on school places and recognises that a small number of additional temporary places would be needed for September 2018 if the school were to close. All other pupils can be accommodated by the available capacity in the local area.

School's progress

139. Approximately 12% of respondents remarked on how much progress the school has made. It was stated that the school is *'improving all the time'*. Some responses cited that the school should have a *'second chance to have a better OFSTED report'* before a decision is made regarding the proposed closure.
140. There were also several comments praising the current staff, and the impact they have had on the school in recent months including the *'teacher and staff even through this difficult time have been amazing'*.
141. Other comments included *'after a bad patch the standard of teaching and achievement has improved no end'* and *'our kids are safe, happy and learning well'*. A pupil on roll at Ripley CofE Primary School stated that they feel Ripley is *'a nice school to have a nice time in'*.
142. Giving another perspective, a respondent who agrees with the proposal to close the school stated that *'there is no life left in this school'*. They continued to state that there has been *'tampering with sats results to try and show progress that is not happening'* and that the closure of the school will allow the pupils to receive the *'education they deserve'*.

Other responses

143. With the support of school staff, pupils on roll at Ripley CofE Primary School have submitted their views on the closure, details of which have been included in the above sections. Largely, the pupils have advised that they feel *'sad'* regarding the proposed closure and that they will *'miss'* the friends they have made at Ripley CofE Primary should they have to move schools.
144. Some respondents felt that Surrey County Council and/or the Diocese has a *'manipulative plan'* in relation to the land on which the school is located and that there is other motives relating to the proposed closure of Ripley CofE Primary School. Another respondent advised that they are worried that *'the school will be vandalised left empty'*. There is an education covenant on the land which restricts its use. No plans have been made for future use of the site.
145. Another issue raised by at least 4 local parents is related to the admissions for the school. New applicants for September 2018 felt they had *'no other option'* than to indicate preferences for other schools due to the uncertainty of Ripley CofE Primary School's future. No applicants were disadvantaged by the consultation and all parents who named Ripley CofE Primary School as a first preference were given the opportunity to name an additional preference in case of closure.
146. Friends of Ripley CofE Primary School expressed a number of concerns regarding closure of the school including *'misunderstanding of statutory obligations'*, *'failure properly to consider alternatives to closure'*, *'projected need for school places'*, *'failure to consider statutory criteria'* and *'transport implications'*. The Council confirms that it has complied with the necessary procedural requirements and has demonstrated full understanding of its statutory obligations. This report sets out the considerations made to future school places (from paragraph 65) and transport implications (paragraphs 18, 19, and from paragraph 83).
147. One respondent advised that *'the issues raised by the potential closure of this school go to the heart of our Conservative Government's Education Policy (Academies, child wellbeing, improving standards, etc) and the issue of Faith Schools only complicates matters further'*. They continued to say that they feel the *'decision to close this School will play into the hands of the Government's critics'*.
148. Responses from Guildford Borough Council referenced future housing development in the local area and advised that a *'significant quantum of new housing'* is planned for the area. They advised of the impact this would have on school place demand and the transport difficulties some families would face advising that the Council ensure that *'appropriate infrastructure is in place'*. If demand increases in the future, the Council would take action to provide additional places as necessary, in line with its statutory duties.
149. Parish councillors from Ripley Parish Council indicated that they object to the proposed closure of the school. A Ripley Parish Councillor stated that the school *'is hugely supported by the village'* and that the school and local events allow *'children to develop within their local community'*. Parish Councillors also commented on the proposed additional housing and that educationally *'Ripley pupils are better than the national average'*.

150. Send Parish Council objects to the proposal whilst acknowledging that *'changes are necessary'* at Ripley CofE Primary School following the OFSTED report but that they have *'huge sympathy'* for Ripley as they may *'lose this community asset'*. They raise concerns regarding the potential relocation of pupils to Send CofE Primary School and the *'highway issues'* associated with the area. They state that *'mitigating measure need to be put in place to negate the problem getting worse'*. Only a small amount of additional temporary provision may need to be provided for year 2 in September 2018 so any impact on traffic and parking issues is likely to be minimal.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

151. The informal consultation and the publishing of statutory notices have been completed in compliance with the relevant legislation governing such decisions. Therefore there is no outstanding risk associated with this.
152. There are associated financial risks whether the decision is taken to proceed with the proposal or halt. Work is being undertaken to mitigate any risks to the Council and ensure resultant costs are within budget.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

153. If the school is discontinued, there would be associated costs as set out from paragraph 94.
154. If the school remained open, revenue costs of sustaining the school would need to be agreed with the Diocese, the RSC and other stakeholders who may be involved in supporting the school.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

155. The Section 151 Officer acknowledges that the majority of children currently on roll at Ripley School can be accommodated in adjacent schools. The additional costs associated with this process are minimal and it is recognised that the viability of the school is no longer tenable. However, should provision for additional temporary places at Send CofE Primary School be required and re-provision of the pre-school, then the County Council could incur over £0.5m additional costs. This is at a time when the County Council's budgets are under significant financial pressure.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

156. There is a clear expectation in public law that the Council should carry out a consultation process whenever it is considering making significant changes to service provision, or has made a commitment to, or has a practice of consulting on the matters under consideration. Such consultation will need to involve those directly affected by such changes together with relevant representative groups. It will be important that the material presented to consultees provides sufficient information to allow for intelligent consideration and response in relation to the proposals. This information will need to be presented in a way that consultees will understand. The responses to the consultation will need to be conscientiously taken into account when the Leader makes the decision.
157. In considering this Report, the Leader must give due regard to the results of the consultation as set out in the report and the response of the Service to the

consultation comments and conscientiously take these matters into account when making its final decision.

158. In coming to a decision on this issue the Leader needs to take account of all relevant matters. The weight to be given to each of the relevant matters is for the Leader to decide.
159. Relevant matters in this context will include the statutory requirements under the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013, policy considerations including Schools Causing Concern Guidance for Local Authorities and RSCs February 2018 and the Memorandum of Understanding between the National Society and the Department for Education April 2016, the impacts of the options on provision of school places, the medium term financial plan, the Council's fiduciary duty, any relevant risks, and the public sector equality duty.
160. As Ripley is a designated rural school there is a presumption against closure. A proposal to close must be in the best interests of educational provision in the area, take into account a range of issues and carefully consider alternatives to closure including joining a MAT.
161. The Council owes a fiduciary duty to its Council tax payers, analogous to that owed by trustees responsible for looking after property belonging to other people. Accordingly in deciding to spend money a local authority must take account of the interests of Council taxpayers who have contributed to the Council's income and balance those interests against those who benefit from the expenditure. It will also need to act in a prudent way having regard to the short and long term consequences of the decision.
162. The best value duty is contained in section 3 of the Local Government Act 1999 as a result of which the Council is under a duty to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The relevant guidance states that Councils should consider overall value, including economic, environmental and social value when reviewing service provision.

Equalities and Diversity

163. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken and accompanies this report as Annex 1.

Other Implications:

164. The potential implications for the following council priorities and policy areas have been considered. Where the impact is potentially significant, a summary of the issues is set out in detail below.

Area assessed:	Direct Implications:
Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children	Set out below
Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults	Set out below
Environmental sustainability	Set out below

Public Health	Set out below
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Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children implications

165. The needs of Looked After Children affected by the proposal would be prioritised through school admission arrangements whereby Looked After Children are the highest criterion.

Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults implications

166. Safeguarding vulnerable children is a high priority in Surrey schools. Schools have considerable expertise in safeguarding vulnerable children and adhere to robust procedures. The school would continue to apply good practice in the area of safeguarding as would any schools involved in providing places for displaced children if the school were to close. Safeguarding is monitored when Ofsted carries out inspections of schools.

Environmental sustainability implications

167. If the school were to close, there could be implications for families residing close to the school travelling further to alternative settings and in turn on carbon emissions. This is anticipated to be minimal due to the low numbers on roll and due to some families living in other localities closer to other schools, whereby journeys may be reduced.

Public Health implications

168. The wellbeing of children and their families could be affected if the school were to close through the additional pressures of needing to change school, transition to a new setting, additional costs associated and the impact of additional travel times on daily routines.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

169. Subject to the Leader's approval to proceed with this proposal, the next steps are:

- To offer alternative places to children on roll in reception through to year 5 for September 2018.
- To put in place staffing and capital arrangements for additional places in year 1 at Send CofE Primary School (year 2 in September).
- To put in place appropriate arrangements for staff.
- To put in place practical arrangements to ensure continuance of early years provision.
- To implement the logistical requirements of discontinuing the school.

Contact Officer:

Melanie Harding
 School Commissioning Officer (South West)
 schoolorg@surreycc.gov.uk

Consulted:

Ripley CofE Primary School (governing body, staff, pupils)
 Parents/carers of pupils attending the school
 Ripley Pre-School
 Toad Hall Nurserv School
 Site Trustees
 Local residents
 Diocese of Guildford
 Diocese of Arundel & Brighton
 Local schools within 3 miles (governing body, staff, parents/carers)
 Local County Councillors Julie Illes and Keith Taylor
 Borough Councillor Colin Cross
 Ripley Parish Council
 Guildford Borough Council
 Woking Borough Council
 Sir Paul Beresford, MP
 Mary Lewis, Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning
 David Hodge, Leader
 Dave Hill, Executive Director Children Families and Learning
 Liz Mills, Assistant Director for Schools and Learning
 Julie Stockdale, SEND and School Organisation Strategic Lead
 Paula Evans, Strategic Lead, Education and Partnerships (Interim)
 Unions

Sources/background papers:

- The Education Act 1996; the Education Act 2002; the Education Act 2005; the Education and Inspections Act 2006.
- Consultation document regarding the proposal to close Ripley CofE Primary School.
- Statutory proposal for the closure of Ripley CofE Primary School.