

Options for the future of Manners Sutton Primary School

Introduction

Nottinghamshire County Council wishes to seek the views of interested parties regarding the future of Manners Sutton Primary School.

Background

Manners Sutton Primary School is a small school with a published admission number of eight serving the village of Averham in the Newark District. The school is maintained by Nottinghamshire County Council. The last Ofsted inspection of the school (January 2018) rated the school as 'good'.

On 21 September 2020, Nottinghamshire County Council's Children and Young People's Committee approved the undertaking of an initial statutory consultation to explore options for Manners Sutton Primary School including possible closure.

In this regard Nottinghamshire County Council is following the prescribed process described in '**Opening and closing maintained schools: Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers**' published by the Department for Education, November 2019. See: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/851585/Opening_and_closing_maintained_schools1012.pdf

According to the above, Stage One of the statutory process makes it a statutory requirement to consult any parties the Local Authority (LA) thinks appropriate before publishing proposals under section 3: Proposing to close (discontinue) a maintained school.

Manners Sutton Primary School is designated as a rural school, Nottinghamshire County Council will therefore follow the guidelines regarding the presumption against the closure of rural schools.

The LA may use the consultation to consider a range of options for the future of a school (e.g. amalgamation, academisation, federation or closure). However, the proposer must then publish specific proposals according to Stage Two of the statutory process outlined at **appendix one**.

Reasons For consultation.

1. Declining Pupil Numbers

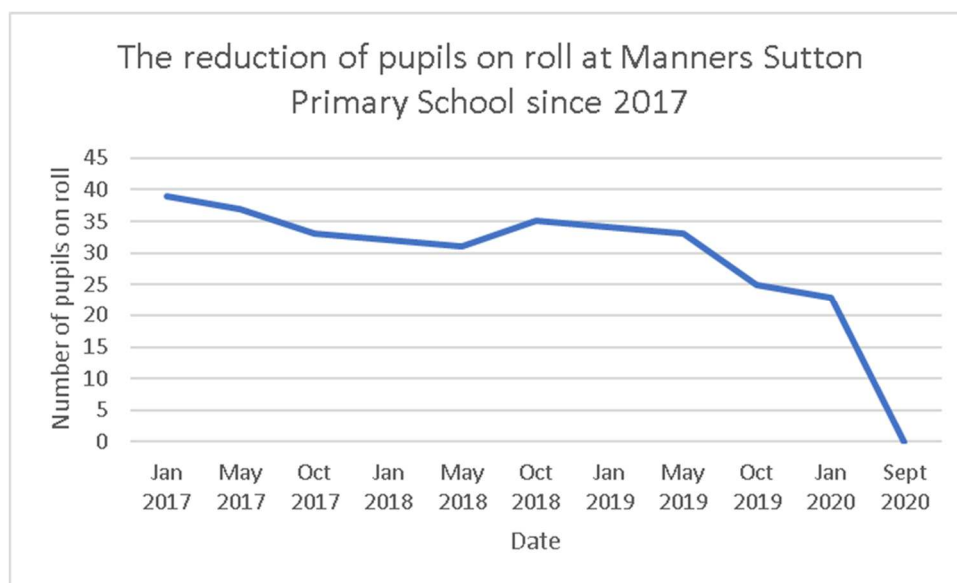
In recent years there have been significant concerns about declining pupil numbers at Manners Sutton Primary School. Over the recent past, this small rural school has experienced a decline in pupil numbers. At the time of the most recent Ofsted inspection in January 2018, 34 pupils were on the school's roll. By the time of the last statutory school census, undertaken by the school in January 2020, there were 23 pupils on roll.

In September 2020 Nottinghamshire County Council were informed by the Headteacher of Manners Sutton Primary School that the school had opened for the 2020/21 academic year with **zero** pupils on roll.

The table and graph below show the number of pupils attending the schools over the last four years on the Department for Education's census dates:

Table 1. Number of pupils on Roll of Manners Sutton Primary School

Date	Jan 2017	May 2017	Oct 2017	Jan 2018	May 2018	Oct 2018	Jan 2019	May 2019	Oct 2019	Jan 2020	May 2020	Sept 2020
Number on Roll	39	37	33	32	31	35	34	33	25	23	N/A	0



As of October 2019, there were 34 primary school aged pupils in the catchment area of Manners Sutton Primary School. All of these pupils are now on roll at other schools in the local area.

There is little housing development planned in the catchment area of Manners Sutton Primary School. It is therefore not expected that the number of pupils in the school catchment area will increase in the short to medium term.

2. School Financial Position

Due to the reduction in the number of pupils on roll, Manners Sutton Primary School has seen a reduction in the funding they receive to run the school in recent years. This has resulted in significant financial challenges.

Measures have already been taken to improve the school’s financial position. These include closing the school’s nursery provision; reducing two primary classes to one; and the employment of an executive Headteacher (shared with another School).

3. Difficulty in Offering A Broad and Balanced Curriculum

Schools are required to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum. The Governing Body of Manners Sutton Primary School is of the view that the projected numbers on roll will render this objective very difficult to achieve in the future.

4. Safeguarding against future risk

Due to the low number of teaching staff employed by the school, it has become very difficult to cover absences that occur due to unforeseen circumstances.

Options available

a) Continue with no change

Should the school continue with no change, it would remain open with no pupils on roll. This is highly cost inefficient and is not sustainable. It is anticipated that the school will receive no pupil led funding for 2021/22 so would find it highly challenging to provide a suitable learning environment. Nottinghamshire County Council has a responsibility to ensure the efficient use of public money.

b) Academisation

The DfE and Local Authority are not able to insist that Manners Sutton Primary School joins a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). To date, the school has not been approached by any interested MATs. Should the school join a MAT, then it is inevitable that the MAT would wish to change the way the school operates in accordance with its own core values.

With no pupils on roll it is highly unlikely that any MAT would deem it viable to admit Manners Sutton Primary School into their Trust.

c) Federation

Federated schools operate in collaboration with each other, sharing senior staff and possibly governing bodies, which allows them to maximise good educational practice, while achieving economies of scale.

For this option to be feasible, Manners Sutton Primary School would be required to work with the Local Authority to identify another school that would see the benefits in federation.

Manners Sutton Primary School is already realising the benefits of having a shared headteacher, so one major benefit of federation has already been gained.

With no pupils on roll and uncertainty regarding Manners Sutton's future, it is highly unlikely that another school would deem it viable to federate with Manners Sutton Primary School.

d) Amalgamation

Should Manners Sutton amalgamate with another school it would close and reform as part of a new and bigger entity, i.e. a new amalgamated school.

For practical reasons, an amalgamation would need to be with another school within reasonable travelling distance.

Table 2. Schools within 5 miles of Manners Sutton Primary School

School	Latest Ofsted Rating	Distance*
Muskham Primary School	Good	3.8
Lovers Lane Primary and Nursery	Requires Improvement	4.2
St Peter's Crosskeys C of E Academy	Good	4.2
Caunton Dean Hole CofE Primary	Good	4.5
Bishop Alexander LEAD Academy	Good	4.9
Lowe's Wong Infant School	Outstanding	5.0
Lowe's Wong Junior School	Good	5.0

*Distance measured by road

A proposed amalgamation would be sponsored and led by the LA. The LA cannot compel another school to amalgamate with Manners Sutton Primary School, consequently this is not seen as a viable option.

With no pupils on roll and uncertainty regarding Manners Sutton's future, it is highly unlikely that another school would deem it viable to amalgamate with Manners Sutton Primary School.

e) Closure

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to ensure the efficient use of resources. Maintaining a school for no or very few pupils could not be considered efficient given that there are surplus places in other local schools.

The Local Authority also has a duty to respond to the concerns raised by the Headteacher and the Governing Body of Manners Sutton Primary School regarding its ongoing viability.

Closure would require all pupils on roll at Manners Sutton Primary School to join the roll of another school. However, as the school currently has no pupils on roll this would not be a current consideration.

It is extremely important to note that at this point in time no definitive decision has been made about the future of the school.

Appendix one – Prescribed Stages and proposed timeline for the consultation process to consider the future of Manners Sutton Primary School.

Stage one: Pre-publication consultation	5th October 2020 - 15 November 2020	This is the start of the process when the Local Authority provides information about what is being proposed and gathers the views of interested parties to help them develop the proposals.
Stage two: Publication	4th January 2021	A legal notice is published in the local paper (usually the Newark Advertiser) and on the Council website which sets out brief details of the proposal and where more information can be found. It also gives details of where objections and comments can be sent and the closing date for these. It marks the start of the representation period or formal consultation.
Stage three: Representation	4th January 2021 - 31 January 2021	This is the formal consultation stage. During this period, any person or organisation can submit comments on the proposal to the LA, to be taken into account by the decision-maker.
Stage four: Decision	Spring 2021	All the objections and comments gathered during the representation period are provided to the decision maker (Local Authority Elected Members) to enable them to make the final decision. A statutory notice outlining the decision will be published.
Stage five: Implementation	Summer 2021	The decision made in stage four is implemented.