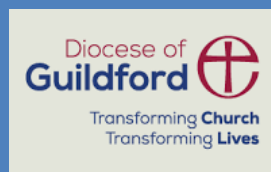




Consultation on the proposed closure of St Mary's C of E Infant School and transfer of its pupils to Puttenham C of E Infant School

April 2025



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

Local authority details

Local Authority	Surrey County Council
Address	Woodhatch Place 11 Cockshot Hill Reigate Surrey RH2 8EF

School details

Name of School	St Mary's C of E Voluntary Controlled Infant School
Category of School	Infant
Type of School	Voluntary Controlled
URN	125149
Address	Shackleford Road, Shackleford, Godalming, Surrey
Postcode	GU8 6AE

Name of School	Puttenham C of E Infant School
Category of School	Infant
Type of School	Academy
URN	125195
Address	School Lane, Puttenham, Guildford, Surrey
Postcode	GU3 1AS

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

We are consulting you about a proposal to close St Mary's C of E Voluntary Controlled Infant School (St Mary's CE Infant) and offer places for its pupils at Puttenham C of E Infant School (Puttenham CE Infant) from September 2025.

If the proposal was agreed it would mean that St Mary's CE Infant would close on 31 August 2025 and its pupils would be offered a place to transfer to Puttenham CE Infant from September 2025. Puttenham CE Infant is an academy school within a multi academy trust called The Good Shepherd Trust. The Good Shepherd Trust would temporarily expand the operating capacity at Puttenham CE Infant from September 2025 to accommodate the children from St Mary's CE Infant.

Background context

In recent years, the majority of local authorities across England, including Surrey, have been experiencing a significant fall in pupil numbers. At the height of Surrey's pupil population in October 2016, there were 13,374 children who had just started in Reception classes at Surrey primary phase schools. By October 2024, this number had fallen to 11,687 children, which is a decrease of 1687 or 12.5% - equivalent to 56 fewer classes. The reasons behind this are thought to include the lower birth rate and families leaving Surrey as a result of the pandemic, Brexit and the cost of living crisis.

Schools receive money from central government based on the number of pupils they have on their roll. This means that schools with a high number of vacant places have less money for staff, resources, equipment, extracurricular activities, to pay bills and to carry out maintenance work.

While Surrey schools are recognised for their high performance and excellent results, the fall in the number of children has meant a higher number of surplus primary school places and the subsequent reduced funding from central government has meant that our schools are facing difficult challenges. For some schools, these challenges have now reached a significant level and are beginning to affect their ability to fully support their pupils, especially those with the greatest needs. The Council has a responsibility to protect the high-quality education that Surrey is known for and to ensure it is financially sustainable.

We know that our schools have close ties to the local area and communities, sometimes over many generations. This makes proposals of this nature very difficult, and not something we would choose if we felt there was a better option.

Why are we consulting you?

In Surrey, our goal is to ensure that no one is left behind and that every child has access to enriched educational opportunities. This is only achievable when schools can admit as many children within their Planned Admission Number (PAN) as possible and maximise the funding they receive. Sadly, for some Surrey schools, the number of children attending remains too low and has led to financial deficits in some schools.

This has happened at St Mary's CE Infant and so we now must consider the school's closure and transferring its pupils to Puttenham CE Infant. We would not be doing this if we thought there could be a better option.

We now want to hear your comments on the proposal to close St Mary's CE Infant and transfer its pupils to Puttenham CE Infant. Your input and feedback are important in helping us to further understand what the school means to the children, parents/carers, staff and local community.

St Mary's C of E Infant School

St Mary's CE Infant is a one form entry infant school, with a PAN of 30 and an overall capacity of 90 places. It is recognised by the Department for Education as a "Rural Primary School". It was judged 'Good' by Ofsted in 2023 but despite this, the school has been affected by falling rolls over recent years.

In October 2021, the school had 81 pupils on roll and by October 2024 that had fallen to 44 - a decrease of 46%. As a result, the number of unfilled places at the school has risen from 9 places in October 2021 to 46 places in October 2024.

	Reception	Year 1	Year 2
October 2021	30 0 unfilled places	24 6 unfilled places	27 3 unfilled places
October 2024	16 14 unfilled places	10 20 unfilled places	18 12 unfilled places

Furthermore, for Reception entry in September 2025, the school is only expecting a maximum of 6 pupils. Pupil projections for the area suggest that, based on current trends, this level of surplus places will remain throughout the next decade, which is unsustainable

Because St Mary's CE Infant is designated by the government as a rural primary school, the council had to take into account specific factors when considering the future of the school. These factors include the likely effect of closure on the local community and any alternatives to the closure of the school.

School leaders, the Council and the Diocese of Guildford have been working collaboratively together to try and secure the school's future as the school is recognised as a good school with dedicated staff and a committed school community. In September 2023, St Mary's CE Infant entered into a federation with St James C of E VA Primary School. This allows the school to operate under one governing body and share leadership and business resources. School leaders have combined age groups and restructured staff, but this has not solved the problem as the number of children on roll, and subsequent funding, continue to fall.

Whilst we recognise that there may be close historical ties to the school in the local community, currently only 2% of children educated at St Mary's CE Infant live in Shackleford itself. It is clear that the number of children living in the immediate vicinity of the school is no longer able to fill or sustain the rolls of the school.

Why are we proposing to close St Mary's CE Infant School?

The Council is proposing to close St Mary's CE Infant because of the low number of children on roll at the school. The Council and the Diocese of Guildford agree that the

number of children on roll will be so low that the school cannot continue without putting the quality of education for the children at risk.

In proposing a closure, Section 16 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 requires that the local authority or governing body must consult certain persons, including parents, dioceses and, where the local authority is a county council, any district and parish councils.

Why was Puttenham C of E Infant School chosen as a destination for pupils to be offered a place?

Working together with school leaders and the Diocese, several local schools were considered as potential options for pupils transferring from St Mary's CE Infant. At the forefront of discussions was trying to ensure continuity and certainty for pupils and their families, allowing them to move together as a cohort of peers and maintain friendship groups.

Puttenham CE Infant is preferred because it:

- shares the same ethos and characteristics, both religious and educational, as St Mary's CE Infant
- shares the same junior pathway as St Mary's CE Infant because it is also a feeder school for Waverley Abbey C of E Junior School. This means the children can continue on the same educational pathway for junior provision as expected when they started at St Mary's
- is a similar sized school and similar environment to that at St Mary's, providing continuity and familiarity for the children
- has a spare classroom so there would be no delay necessary to allow for building works to be completed. The Good Shepherd Trust would temporarily expand the capacity at Puttenham CE Infant to accommodate St Mary's pupils, but the PAN will remain at 30.

What would this proposal mean for the children?

All children on roll at St Mary's CE Infant, or those who have been offered a place at St Mary's CE Infant to start Reception in September 2025, would automatically be given a place at Puttenham CE Infant. This means that children would be removed from the roll at St Mary's CE Infant and transferred to the roll of Puttenham CE Infant for September 2025.

There will be no need for parents to apply for a place at Puttenham CE Infant as this transfer would be automatic. Pupils can then continue to attend Puttenham CE Infant until the end of Year 2 when they will transfer to junior provision in the usual way. It is likely that children would be taught in mixed aged classes across the school, but this would depend on the number of children transferring and the year groups they are in.

However, should any parent wish to apply for a place for their child at another school other than Puttenham CE Infant, they are able submit an in-year application listing that school as a preference. If a place is available, it will be offered or your child can be placed on a waiting list if the year group is currently full.

Submitting an in-year application for another school would not prevent your child from automatically gaining a place at Puttenham, unless you chose to accept the offer of a place elsewhere and remove your child from the St Mary's CE Infant roll before the end of the summer term in July 2025.

What would it mean for the staff?

The closure of St Mary CE Infant would affect all staff who are employed by Surrey County Council at the school.

Our priority would be to ensure that staff at risk of redundancy are supported fully throughout this transition, just as we would be supporting our children and families. Staff will be consulted with separately and offered support in the form of Employee Assistance (if available in this school), and redeployment support with priority access to Surrey County Council vacancies.

Would there be any changes to either of the school buildings?

The St Mary's building and site are not owned by the Council. The Guildford Diocesan Board for Education would work with the Department for Education and the Charity Commission to decide what happens to the building and site in the future.

There are no changes required to the building at Puttenham CE Infant as the school has enough spare capacity to accommodate all of the St Mary's CE Infant pupils. The operating capacity at Puttenham CE Infant would temporarily increase to accommodate St Mary's CE Infant pupils, but this would not require a statutory process as it would be a temporary increase lasting for no longer than three years. Puttenham CE Infant would revert to its intended capacity of 30 per year group for all pupil intakes from September 2026.

It is Surrey County Council's commitment to work together with school leaders and the Diocese to support children, families, staff and communities through the next steps. We will do all we can to protect the education and wellbeing of all those potentially affected.

What happens next?

This paper is part of a four week public consultation on the proposal to close St Mary's C of E Infant School and transfer its pupils to Puttenham C of E Infant School.

The consultation begins on Friday 25th April and will end on Friday 23rd May at midday.

There are a number of ways you can respond to the consultation, and these are set out below. We will also hold two public meeting for families, local communities and any other interested parties to discuss the proposals and get your input and feedback. This is important in helping us to further understand what the school means to the children, parents/carers, staff and local community. Anyone who wishes is welcome to come to either meeting and you do not have to have a child at either school to attend.

These meetings will take place on:

Thursday 1st May 2025 at 2pm and 7pm at Shackleford Village Hall

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

Mary's C of E Infant School. The timeline for this proposal is shown in the table below (dates may be subject to change).

Timeline

Date	Event
25 April – 23 May 2025	Consultation on proposal
1 st May 2025 at 2pm and 7pm	Public meetings held
27 May 2025	Results of the consultation are considered by the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning. A decision is made whether to publish a statutory notice for the closure of St Mary's CE Infant and the transfer of pupils to Puttenham CE Infant School.
2 June - 30 June 2025	A statutory notice is published for a 4 week representation period
Early July 2025	The outcome of the representation period and any objections are considered by the Leader of the Council and a final decision on the proposal is made
31 August 2025	St Mary's C of E Infant School would officially close
September 2025	Pupils would start the autumn term at Puttenham C of E Infant School

How do I respond to this consultation?

You can respond:

- online at www.surreysays.co.uk and by searching for the school's consultation (school name or post code) or using the following link: [St Mary's C of E Infant School proposal](#)

or

- by completing the consultation response form that is available alongside this document. You can either:
 - email the form to schoolorg@surreycc.gov.uk
 - print it, complete it and send it back to:

St Mary's CE Infant proposal
Education Place Planning
Woodhatch Place
11 Cockshot Hill
Reigate
RH2 8EF

All responses must be received by midday on 23 May 2025.

If you have any questions about this proposal, please email schoolorg@surreycc.gov.uk.