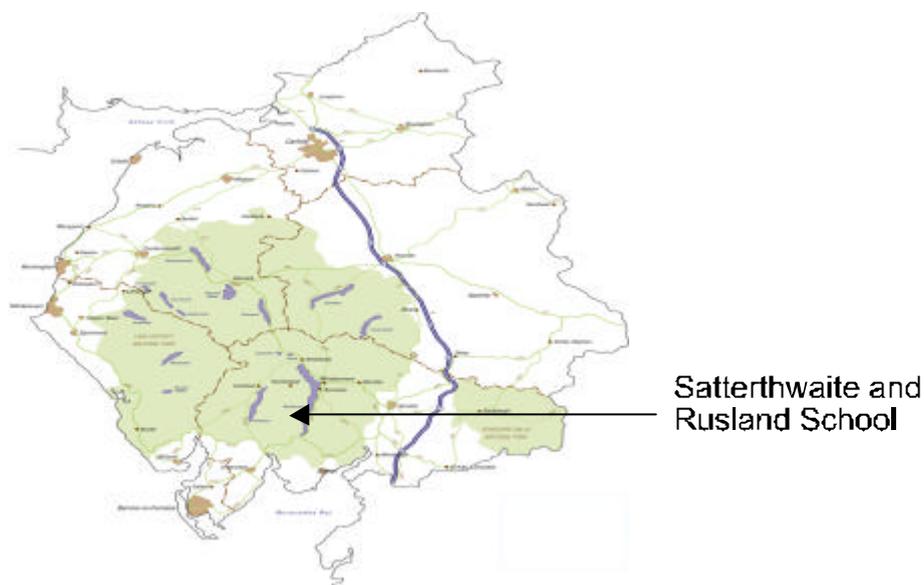




Review of Primary Education for Children Living in the Satterthwaite and Rusland Area



Satterthwaite and Rusland School

A Consultative Paper

June 2005

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1. INTRODUCTION

The County Council is consulting with those most closely associated with Satterthwaite and Rusland C of E School about the future primary education provision for children living in its catchment area.

This paper, which is aimed at parents, staff, governors and everyone else with an interest in primary education in the area, is intended to encourage local opinions to be expressed so that they can inform the decisions which are eventually taken.

2. THE CONTEXT AND THE REASONS FOR THE REVIEW

The intention of Cumbria's School Organisation Plan was to establish a context in which possibilities for change to the network of school provision could be considered.

The Plan recognised the importance to the County's education service of small rural schools. It also emphasised the County Council's support of small schools through enhanced funding and more generally.

The Plan did, however, stress the importance of monitoring the situation at schools with small numbers of pupils. In pursuing this general monitoring role, LEA officers held discussions in October 2004 with representatives of the governors of Satterthwaite and Rusland School. The focus of these discussions was on the future viability of the school given its reduced pupil roll.

Following analysis of the school's situation, the LEA decided in early May 2005 that there was no option but to instigate a formal review concerning the future of the school.

At the school's governing body meeting on 26 May 2005, the following resolution was passed unanimously:-

"The governing body of Satterthwaite and Rusland C of E controlled school agree to abide by any decision the Review Body recommends. However, after much discussion, the governing body have reluctantly come to the conclusion that due to our falling roll, the school is no longer viable, and we will be planning as governors for the closure of the school in July 2006."

The 'Review Body' referred to is the School Organisation Committee whose role in the decision-making process following the review is covered in Appendix C.

3. THE CURRENT PROVISION

Satterthwaite and Rusland is a Voluntary Controlled Church of England School catering for children aged 4-11. The school is located in Satterthwaite and

serves the hamlet and the surrounding rural areas. A catchment area map is provided as Appendix A.

The school's present official capacity is 21. Appendix B provides a plan of the internal accommodation. The school has two classrooms, the larger of which doubles as the hall and a library area.

There are cloakroom and toilet facilities and an office. In addition to some hard play facilities, the school has a grass area and small garden area used as an outside classroom. There is also a quite extensive wooded area that the children use as an outdoor play area.

4. THE MAIN FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Pupil Numbers

The number of pupils attending Satterthwaite and Rusland School has declined over the last 6 or 7 years. The details of the pupil roll over that period are as follows:-

Jan 99	Jan 00	Jan 01	Jan 02	Jan 03	Jan 04	Jan 05
17	16	16	14	12	15	9

There are only 2 pupils enrolled to start in September 2005. This includes one child from Ulverston and the single 3 year old known to live within the catchment area of the school. Of the 9 pupils currently on the register, 7 reside in the catchment area. Given the generally downward trend coupled with the fact that there are only a very small number of pre-school children presently residing in the catchment area, the school's roll is likely, at best, to remain at about its current level for the foreseeable future.

Experience indicates that where rolls reduce to these kind of levels, this can bring about further losses of pupils as parents, for a range of reasons, consider what is best for their children both educationally and socially.

Educational Issues

Small Schools Generally

There is a body of opinion which supports the view that young children thrive in the intimate atmosphere of a small primary school. There is, however, clear evidence that, once numbers fall to a very low level, it is extremely difficult for such schools to offer a broad and balanced curriculum. The situation has become more challenging for the smallest schools over recent years with the implementation of the revised National Curriculum and the National Primary Strategy.

Ofsted inspection reports on very small schools have highlighted the difficulties in teaching the full age range from 4-11 in one class when the emphasis of the National Primary Strategy is clearly to split Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 teaching and the expectations for the Foundation Stage are separate and

distinct. The difficulties of this large age spread being taught together are exacerbated by the very wide ability range that is often found in these situations.

The lack of suitable peer relationships has also been highlighted. It is felt that a child's social development can be hindered when there are few or no children of a similar age and the same gender within the school.

Headteachers in all schools have experienced an increase in both their responsibilities and the pressure of work. This is particularly true in small schools. In larger schools, responsibility for different curriculum areas can be delegated. In small schools, the headteacher has to develop and maintain expertise in all areas of the curriculum. In addition, they have to work with governors to manage their school and its budget whilst undertaking what is often a significant proportion of the day-to-day administrative tasks.

One way in which issues relating to pressure on headteachers and the challenges of working on the curriculum can be addressed is through the federation of two or more rural schools or increased collaboration between them. The Government is promoting these strategies and recently issued guidance and regulations on the subject. The LEA also promotes the idea positively. These possibilities are, however, unlikely to help in situations where pupil numbers have fallen to very low levels.

Satterthwaite and Rusland School

Satterthwaite and Rusland School faces those issues common to all small schools outlined above. These have become particularly acute as the number on roll has fallen to 9 and the school needs to reduce staffing further and reorganise so that children are taught in one group for part of the week. Through informal discussions involving the Head and Chair of Governors, there was an appreciation that federation with other schools would not resolve the issues.

Recent LEA reviews of educational provision in the school have raised concerns about its capacity to address identified issues for improvement without high levels of support. It has received help, for example, to plan for a broad and balanced curriculum given the small numbers and the restructuring exercise. Although the school has many strengths and qualities in its provision, guidance has been required to plan to continue to raise standards of teaching and learning. The school itself has not routinely monitored and evaluated its work, identified areas for development and addressed these.

It is the LEA's view that Ofsted would judge leadership and management in the school as unsatisfactory. There is little documentation in place to guide the school's work and performance management has not systematically driven staff professional development or been linked to school improvement priorities. The school has needed help to plan for sustainability, there is little evidence of strategic planning and development planning is not sufficiently detailed to support improvement. Generally, the school would need continuing support to sustain itself and maintain improvement.

The school does provide a rich learning experience for its children and, clearly, high levels of individual attention. It is well resourced in some areas, such as

computer provision, for example. Its size and capacity for effective leadership and management at all levels, however, cause concern.

Financial Issues

General

For many years now the general and financial management of schools has been the responsibility of governing bodies. The onus placed on governors leads them to consider how best to organise and run the school for which they are responsible so that their pupils can be provided with the best possible education that the available resources allow. This responsibility frequently presents governing bodies with difficult decisions and choices.

How Schools are Funded

Each school's budget is largely determined by a LEA scheme that is closely controlled by DfES guidelines. This allocates funds according to formulae which are based substantially on pupil numbers. Cumbria's scheme also provides a lump sum for each school and additional support for small schools to help them with their overheads.

Whilst the majority of a school's resources is delegated via the LEA's scheme, other elements of funding come directly from the Department for Education and Skills [DfES], some of which are also partly allocated on the basis of pupil numbers.

Current Budgetary Concerns

Generally, 2005/06 delegated budget shares have increased by 7.4% on 2004/05 levels. Of course, not all schools will have received such an increase. Despite that overall percentage increase, the budget actually available to Satterthwaite and Rusland School has reduced by £4,778, primarily because of the fall in pupil numbers.

Due to prudent spending, the school had only a very small deficit at the end of 2004/05. However, the impact of the loss of income in the current financial year coupled with a large increase in employee costs and other inflationary trends will mean that the school will struggle to end the year in credit. To be able to plan to achieve a break even situation for this financial year given the level of the school's budget, the Governors would have needed to reduce the teaching staff to 1.8 from September 2005. However, using part of a 'once only fund' of approximately £7,000 collected through fund raising in the past, the school has been able to limit the reduction in teaching staff from 2.1 full time teachers to 1.9 from September 2005. It would, without any major and unexpected changes in funding levels and costs or further cuts in staffing, be in deficit again before the end of the 2006/07 financial year. The scope to reduce expenditure is very limited.

Employee costs are the major part of any school's expenditure. In the case of Satterthwaite and Rusland School, such costs already exceed its formula budget share. With no real likelihood of an upturn in pupil numbers, it is hard to see how the school could avoid an ongoing and increasing budget deficit

without taking action which reduces staffing resources to levels which are unacceptable. The Governors have indicated that yet another reduction in staffing levels would in their opinion be inconsistent with achieving high education standards.

The costs of maintaining Satterthwaite and Rusland School are extremely high given the pupil roll. In terms of the formula budget share, it costs £7,181 per pupil. This is over two and a half times greater than the county primary school average cost of £2,576 per pupil.

Community Issues

There is a presumption against the closure of rural schools unless the case for closure is strong in educational terms. Furthermore, when considering a school's closure, LEAs are expected to take account of the overall effect that it would have on the local community. The consultation process provides the opportunity for local people to express their views on this issue.

Village life is clearly not enhanced by the loss of a school. Of course, there are many thriving villages of Satterthwaite's size (and much bigger) in the County which do not have schools. In the case of Satterthwaite, there is alternative primary school provision within a reasonable travelling distance.

Satterthwaite and Rusland School is situated in a rural area with no main centre of population. As a consequence, the school is rarely, if ever, used for non-school activities. Satterthwaite does have a church with its hall available for community functions.

With regard to the school building and site, these would revert to the ownership of the Trustees were the school to close.

There is little, if anything, more important to the best interests of children than their education. This reality needs to be seen in the context of the financial and educational issues facing Satterthwaite and Rusland School and the non-educational benefits of the school to the village and wider community.

Alternative Provision

There are three primary schools within a few miles of the catchment area of Satterthwaite and Rusland School. These are Hawkshead Esthwaite, Leven Valley and Penny Bridge Schools. If Satterthwaite and Rusland School closes, parents will be able to express a preference for a place at these and potentially other alternative schools. They will be offered a place at the school they prefer as long as there is one available.

Whilst parents are able to express preferences for a place at any school, catchment areas remain important. This is because they affect priorities concerning admission to schools and entitlement to school transport. If Satterthwaite and Rusland School were to close, there would therefore be a need to incorporate its catchment area into the catchment area of another school or schools.

Any of the three schools could provide sufficient places to accommodate all of the remaining pupils from Satterthwaite and Rusland. Leven Valley and Penny Bridge School, like Satterthwaite and Rusland, are Church of England schools. The location of these schools can be seen on the map provided as Appendix A, as can the catchment area of Satterthwaite and Rusland School. The nearest of these schools to Satterthwaite and Rusland School is Hawkshead School which is 4.5 miles away. Leven Valley School and Penny Bridge School are rather more distant at 5.7 miles and 6.7 miles respectively.

Where schools close, more often than not their catchment areas are absorbed into the catchment area of a single school (in this case it would be Hawkshead School, Leven Valley School or Penny Bridge School). It would, however, be possible to split Satterthwaite and Rusland's catchment area and incorporate parts of it into the catchment area of the alternative schools. It would not be possible to incorporate the catchment area into another school that does not have an adjoining catchment boundary. Parents are encouraged to express their views on these possibilities.

School Transport

The Normal Transport Policy

Under the normal transport policy, free transport is provided to a child's nearest or catchment school if the distance between their home and the school exceeds the statutory walking distance. The statutory walking distance is two miles for children under eight and three miles for older children. The distance is measured by the nearest available walking route. For a route to be available, it must be one which a child, accompanied by an adult, could be expected to walk with reasonable safety. Where the distance is below the statutory walking distance and a parent considers their route to school to be an unsafe walking route, they may ask for it to be assessed.

School Transport Policy in a School Closure Situation

Under the Authority's school transport policy, pupils living in the catchment area who are attending a school at the time of its closure, and who transfer to the new catchment school, receive free transport providing the distance between home and school is more than one mile.

The School Transport Implications if Satterthwaite and Rusland School Closes

Pupils attending Satterthwaite and Rusland School and Living in its Catchment Area

These children, as long as they transfer to the new catchment area school, would be entitled to school transport as they all live more than a mile from the alternative schools.

Pre-School Children Living in Satterthwaite and Rusland's Catchment Area

Normal school transport policy as described above would apply.

Pupils attending Satterthwaite and Rusland School and living outside its Catchment Area

Again, the normal school transport policy would apply.

5. DRAWING CONCLUSIONS

This paper highlights the fact that the number of pupils attending Satterthwaite and Rusland School has fallen over recent years. The prospect of an upturn in numbers in the foreseeable future appears remote.

The paper describes the financial effects of the pupil number situation. Arguably, the restricted budget that has resulted is already impacting negatively on the education provision at the school. To further reduce costs to avoid budget deficits, as would be required, would almost certainly threaten the maintenance and improvement of educational standards.

The LEA feels that it is not appropriate to take the risks to children's education which it feels the retention of the school would inevitably involve. The school and wider community's views on this will be very important.

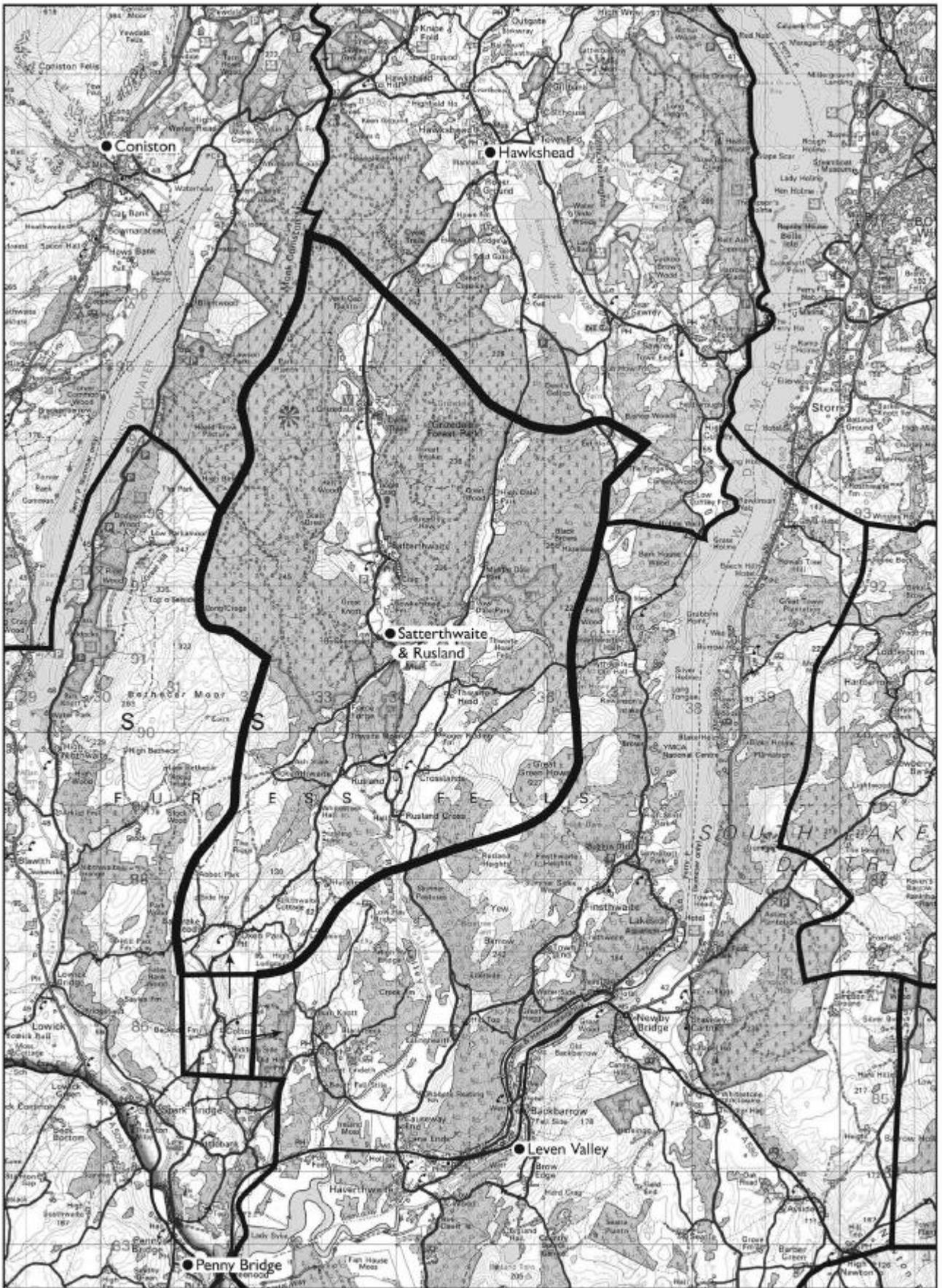
It is also important to know the preferences parents have for alternative provision if the decision is taken that Satterthwaite and Rusland School should close. Closure, if it were to occur, would be very likely to be at the end of the next academic year in July 2006.

6. AND FINALLY

This consultative paper is intended to explain the issues involved and to stimulate discussion. Any requests for additional information or clarification should be directed to the Property and Transport Services Unit, the address and telephone number of which are given on the front cover.

Details of the consultation arrangements and the decision-making process after the consultation period are attached as Appendix C. This is obviously an important issue for everyone involved with the running of the school and for parents of both existing pupils and younger children who are due to enter school in the next few years. It is hoped, therefore, that all those with an interest in primary education in the area will participate in the consultation process.

June 2005

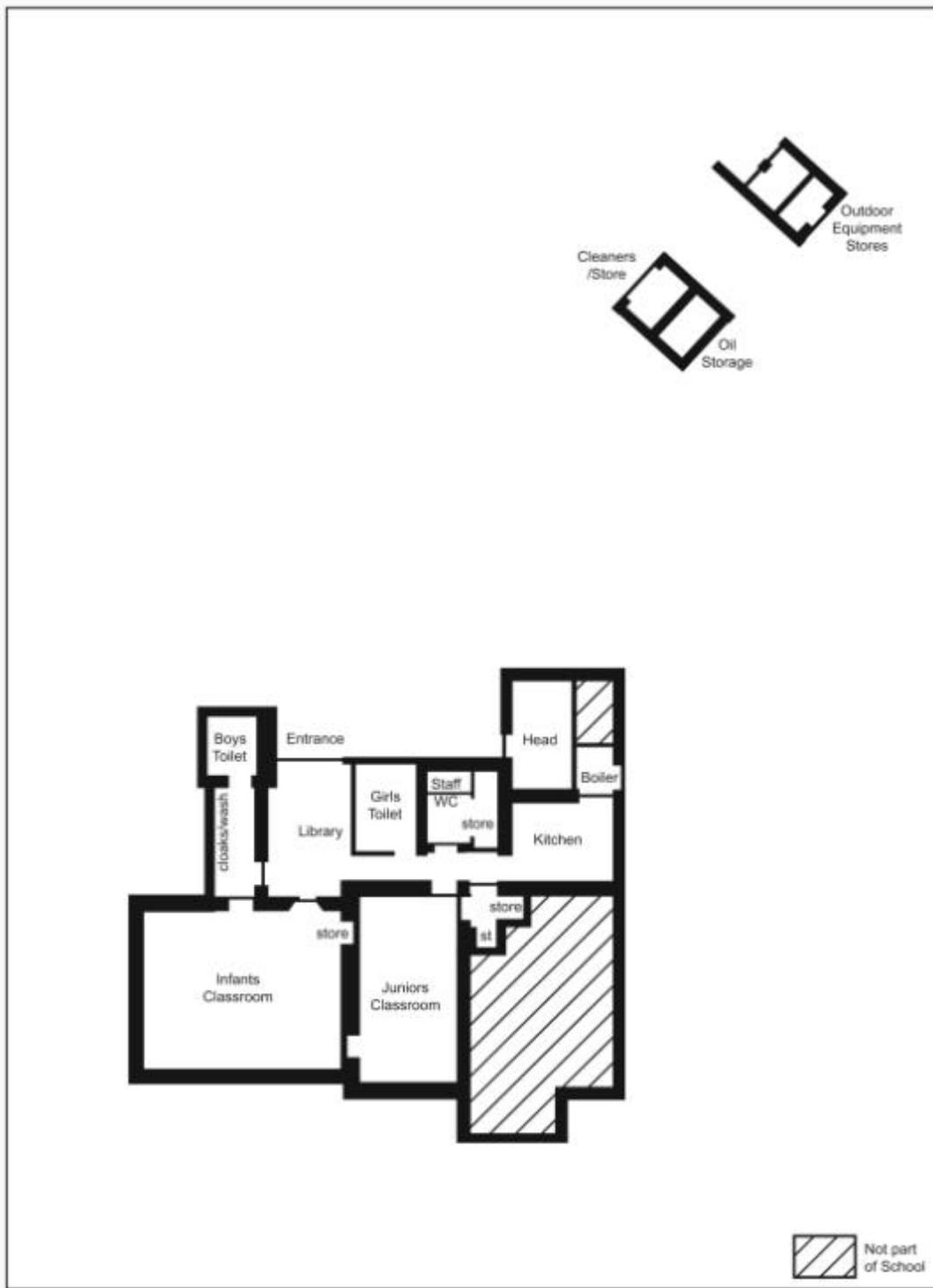


Adjacent Schools and Catchment Area of Satterthwaite and Rusland School

not to scale



Based on the Ordnance Survey Map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office. Licence No LA076546



 Not part of School

not to scale



Floor Plan
Satterthwaite and Rusland School

THE CONSULTATION AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

This Appendix explains the consultation process and the formal decision-making process after the consultation period.

The Consultation Meetings

A series of consultation meetings will be held at the school on **11 July 2005**. They are intended to enable interested parties to express their opinions regarding the issues covered in this paper.

The details of the meetings are as follows:

4.30-5.15	Staff of the school
5.15-6.00	Governors of the school
6.45-8.00	Parents of pupils attending the school and those with pre-school children living in the area

Such meetings are not usually intended primarily as an opportunity for debate; their main purpose is to enable County Councillors to listen to the views expressed and LEA officers to respond to questions. However, given the relatively small number of people involved, it will be possible for them to be conducted informally and interactively.

A note will be prepared of each meeting summarising the points made. These will be made available to members of the Council's Cabinet when they are taking the decision regarding the school's future. It is recognised that a number of those closely connected with the school fulfil a combination of the roles of employees, governors and parents. For those choosing to go to more than one of the three meetings, it is not necessary to contribute particular points or opinions more than once.

LEA officers would be more than happy to talk to anyone from the wider community who did not attend one of the consultation meetings and who would like to discuss any aspects of the situation relating to the school individually prior to responding in writing to this paper. Initial telephone contact should be with Mike Tuer on the number shown on the front cover.

Written Comments

Written comments are also invited and should be sent to the Property and Transport Services Unit, 18 Portland Square, Carlisle CA1 1PE **by 8 August 2005**. Views can either be expressed in a letter or on the form which is attached as Appendix D. Alternatively, you can send an e-mail to mike.tuer@cumbriacc.gov.uk.

Comments received from individuals will be summarised. Those received from recognised organisations such as parish councils, governing bodies and parent teacher associations, will be made available in full to County Councillors when taking decisions.

The Results of the Consultation Process

Following the consultation process, a report will be prepared for the County Council's Cabinet. The report will include notes of the consultation meetings, the summary of individual comments received and photocopies of the responses from recognised organisations. It will be a public document and, as such, will be accessible to all and will automatically be made available to the media.

The Cabinet will consider the response to the consultation and take decisions about what they believe to be the appropriate provision for the future. This is likely to occur on 20 September 2005.

The Publication of Formal Proposals

If the Cabinet decides that Satterthwaite and Rusland School should close, a formal proposal to achieve that, almost certainly with effect from the end of the current academic year, would need to be published by the County Council.

Any formal proposal arising from this review would probably be published in October. The legal process involved allows for a subsequent six week period for statutory objections and other representations to be made.

The Final Decision

At the end of the six week period, the matter would be referred to the School Organisation Committee for Cumbria. This would be likely to occur in early December 2005.

The School Organisation Committee is a body which is a separate entity independent of the County Council. It comprises representatives of the LEA, church authorities and the governing bodies of Cumbria's schools.

The School Organisation Committee normally has two months to consider any proposal. As it is in the interests of all parties for decisions to be taken as soon as possible, the Committee would be likely to meet to consider this issue in late December 2005 or early January 2006. If the Committee was to approve or reject the proposal, its decision would be final. In the unlikely event that the Committee felt unable to reach a firm conclusion on the proposal, it would be referred to a nationally appointed School Adjudicator who would take the final decision.

REVIEW OF PRIMARY EDUCATION PROVISION IN THE SATTERTHWAITE AND RUSLAND AREA

This form is to assist parents and others to put their suggestions and comments in writing. All views will be made available to County Councillors. The last date for responses to be received is **8 August 2005**.

From	
Name:	
Address:	
	Postcode:
The Possibility of Closure	
Given the situation regarding pupil numbers, available resources and educational quality covered in this paper, do you think there is any viable alternative to the closure of Satterthwaite and Rusland School?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES/NO
If yes, please provide any ideas or comments you wish to make.	
Alternative Provision	
If Satterthwaite and Rusland School were to close, which alternative school would you prefer your child to attend?	<input type="text"/> School
(This question is intended only for parents of pupils attending Satterthwaite and Rusland School and those with pre-school children living in its catchment area)	
Please provide any additional comments you wish to make on the above question	

Further Comments and Suggestions

Please provide below any further comments or suggestions you wish to make on the content of the consultative paper or more generally.

Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Signature

Signed:

Date:

Please indicate the nature of your interest as:-

Existing Parent

Governor

Pre-School Parent

Local resident

Member of Staff

Other

Form to be returned to

Mike Tuer, Property and Transport Services Unit, 18 Portland Square, Carlisle
CA1 1PE