



Hampshire
County Council

Consultation on the future of The Clere School, Burghclere

This non-statutory consultation will run from Friday 4 September 2026 to Friday 2 October 2026.

Why is the local authority proposing this?

On 13 May 2026, the Chair of Governors, on behalf of the Governing Body, wrote to Hampshire County Council requesting that it initiate the statutory process to consider the closure of The Clere School and undertake the required consultations. The request was made on the grounds that the school is no longer considered financially or educationally viable.

The Clere School currently has a cumulative budget deficit of £2.7 million. The school's budget first moved into deficit during the 2012/13 academic year, and its financial position has worsened over time, largely due to declining pupil numbers. Schools are funded primarily through the national funding formula, with the majority of funding allocated on the basis of pupil numbers. While some reductions in the deficit have been achieved in certain years, these have been limited, and the deficit is forecast to increase to approximately £7 million by the end of the 2028/29 financial year.

Against a total capacity of 725 places and a Published Admission Number (PAN) of 145, the 382 pupils recorded on roll in Spring 2026 leaves the school with approximately 343 surplus places, representing around 47% surplus capacity. Pupil numbers at The Clere School are expected to remain low, and the school is not the preferred choice for the majority of parents living within its catchment area. As a result, the school is forecast to remain in significant financial deficit, with no realistic prospect of returning to a balanced budget within the current planning period.

The combination of declining pupil numbers and ongoing financial pressures has made it increasingly challenging for the school to deliver education efficiently and sustain a broad and balanced curriculum. These pressures have reduced the school's ability to provide the full range of educational opportunities that are typically available in larger, more financially sustainable secondary schools.

What are the problems with surplus places/declining pupil numbers?

The majority of a school's funding is based on the number of pupils attending the school. Funding is allocated by the Government through a national funding formula. When pupil numbers fall, the amount of funding a school receives also reduces.

A reduction in funding presents significant challenges for a school. While income decreases, many costs, such as leadership, building maintenance and other operational costs, remain largely unchanged. This can make it more difficult for the school to balance its budget and plan effectively for the future.

Declining pupil numbers can also affect staffing and the ability to deliver the full range of curriculum opportunities to pupils. Reduced funding may limit a school's ability to maintain staffing levels, recruit new staff and retain existing employees. This can increase workload pressures and reduce flexibility in how teaching and support services are organised.

There are also implications for pupils. Smaller year groups may reduce opportunities for social interaction, participation in extracurricular activities and the range of experiences available through school life.

In secondary schools, where sufficient numbers of pupils are needed to make subjects and courses viable, low pupil numbers can make it increasingly difficult to provide a broad and balanced curriculum within the available budget. It can also be more challenging to recruit and retain specialist subject teachers and expertise across the curriculum, which may limit the range of subjects and learning opportunities available to pupils. Over time, this may affect educational outcomes and the school's long-term sustainability.

What is optimum in terms of running a school?

As a rule, Hampshire County Council aims for schools to operate at around 95% of capacity. This allows some flexibility for parental preference and pupil movement while enabling schools to make efficient use of resources and maintain a broad curriculum.

While falling pupil numbers are affecting many schools, The Clere School is operating significantly below this level. Against a capacity of 725 places, the school had 382 pupils on roll in Spring 2026, leaving approximately 343 unfilled places and representing around 47% surplus capacity. This level of surplus places makes it increasingly difficult to sustain a broad curriculum, specialist staffing and the efficient use of resources over the long term.

How can you be sure that the number of pupils expected in the future is accurate?

Hampshire uses a well-established forecasting model to predict future demand for school places. Forecasting pupil numbers is complex and is influenced by a range of factors, including birth rates, housing development, population movement and parental preference. The forecasts are based on historical trends and data, including immunisation and vaccination data, school admissions and local population information and some assumptions rather than certainties. While pupil forecasts are derived from sound methodology, external influences mean pupil forecasts come without a guarantee.

In the case of The Clere School, pupil forecasts have consistently reflected a long-term pattern of lower demand for places. On average, around 60 pupils per year group who live within The Clere School's catchment area attend secondary schools in West Berkshire and, to a lesser extent, Wiltshire. This reflects a long-established pattern of parental preference and cross-border pupil movement. The trend is not expected to change significantly because there are several alternative secondary schools, including independent schools, within a relatively short distance of The Clere School, particularly in and around Newbury.

Why closure rather than amalgamation or federation?

Other options have been considered in respect of the future of The Clere School, including academy conversion, federation and other forms of collaboration with neighbouring schools.

The Department for Education (DfE) issued an academy order for the school on 2 April 2025, indicating that the school was expected to become an academy. While the academy order remained in place, Hampshire County Council could not progress any structural change proposals. Following discussions between the County Council and the DfE, the DfE confirmed on 5 May 2026 that the County Council could proceed with consultation on closure if governors requested it.

On 13 May 2026, the Chair of Governors, on behalf of the governing body, formally requested that Hampshire County Council begin the statutory process and public consultation to consider closure of the school. This request was made because governors considered the school to be no longer financially and educationally sustainable in the long term.

Amalgamation or federation may change governance or leadership arrangements, but they do not address the underlying issue of low pupil numbers. The Clere School currently has around 47% surplus capacity. As funding is largely linked to pupil numbers, this level of surplus capacity creates ongoing educational and financial challenges that would remain regardless of the school's governance structure.

The school's low pupil numbers, declining demand for places and significant financial pressures mean that alternative governance arrangements alone are not considered likely to provide a sustainable long-term solution. These factors have therefore led to the request from the governing body that closure be considered through a formal public consultation process.

What evidence has informed the proposal?

The proposal follows a formal request from The Clere School's Governing Body for Hampshire County Council to begin the statutory process and consultation to consider closure of the school. Governors made this request because they understand that the school to no longer be educationally and financially sustainable in the long term.

A range of evidence has informed the proposal, including:

- pupil number forecasts
- admissions and place planning data
- patterns of parental preference
- Ofsted inspection outcomes
- financial information and budget forecasts
- wider context of local education provision and future demand for school places

The school recorded 382 pupils on roll in the Spring 2026 census against a capacity of 725 places, representing approximately 47% surplus capacity. As of August 2026, 35 offers had been made for Year 7 admission in September 2026, significantly

below the previously forecast intake of 75 pupils. This indicates that the total number of pupil numbers are likely to fall further.

As school funding is largely based on pupil numbers, falling rolls has contributed to increasing financial pressures. The school currently has a budget deficit of £2.7 million, based on budget planning information submitted by the school, is forecast to increase to approximately £7 million by 2028/29.

The evidence also indicates that low pupil numbers and associated lower income are affecting the school's ability to maintain a broad and sustainable curriculum, recruit and retain specialist teaching staff, respond to its Ofsted improvement priorities and achieve long-term financial sustainability. These factors have contributed to significant concerns regarding the school's ability to provide a sustainable educational offer in the future.

Historic data and the current pupil forecast are shown below:

Academic Year	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32
Yr 6 Population	158	137	118	136	138	116	125	120	107
Year 7 Forecast	122	73	57	75	76	64	68	66	59

Pupil forecasts are produced using Hampshire County Council's established forecasting methodology. This uses historical participation patterns, local demographic information and trends in parental preference. Forecasts are based on a weighted participation methodology using data from the previous three years, with greater emphasis placed on the most recent participation trends.

However, as of August 2026, only 35 offers had been made for Year 7 admission in September 2026. While it is not yet known how many of these offers will result in pupils taking up places at the school, the current level of demand is significantly lower than previously forecast and should this reduced number of pupils enter the school it is expected to have a material impact on future forecast numbers. The revised forecast below illustrates the potential impact on future pupil numbers if the September 2026 intake is broadly consistent with the current number of offers made.

Academic Year	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	2029/30	2030/31	2031/32
Yr 6 Population	158	137	118	136	138	116	125	120	107
Revised Year 7 Forecast	122	73	57	35	52	44	48	46	41

What would happen to the pupils currently at The Clere School?

In accordance with the School Admissions Code, specific arrangements will be determined and published by the Local Authority in collaboration with other schools

in the local area to secure provision for affected children who will be on the roll of the school at the time of closure.

Subject to the outcome of the consultation process and any subsequent decision to close the school, the County Council is proposing, with the agreement of The Hurst School, that all the pupils on roll at The Clere School will transfer to the roll of The Hurst School at the point of closure. It is anticipated that any additional accommodation required at The Hurst School site could not be delivered before the potential closure date of The Clere School. Therefore, it is likely that, for a period of time, pupils who were on roll at The Clere School may continue to be educated on the existing school site until suitable accommodation becomes available at The Hurst School. The detail of this is currently being worked through.

Parents can though, make an in-year application for another school place at any time, and request information about schools with places local to them. The County Council's Admissions Team will be able to support each family to ensure they have all the information and guidance around admissions processes and can be contacted via admissions.team@hants.gov.uk.

Any in-year applications submitted will be processed in line with published admissions arrangements. In-year applications in Hampshire are processed on an individual basis directly by the school. If the preferred school has availability, the child will be offered a place at the school. If any applications are refused, the child will be added to the waiting list, and parents will be offered the right to appeal any refusal decisions via an independent appeal panel hearing. Information about a school's oversubscription criteria can be found here: [Find a school | Hampshire County Council \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://www.hants.gov.uk/Find-a-school/Hampshire-County-Council).

How will pupils with SEND be supported if the school closes?

Supporting pupils with SEND will be a key consideration in any transition arrangements. Hampshire County Council will work closely with parents, schools and relevant professionals to ensure pupils receive the support they need and that any changes are carefully planned. For pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the County Council would work with families and receiving schools to ensure the provision specified in the plan continues to be delivered. The aim would be to provide a smooth transition and minimise disruption to pupils' education, support and wellbeing.

What will happen to current staff?

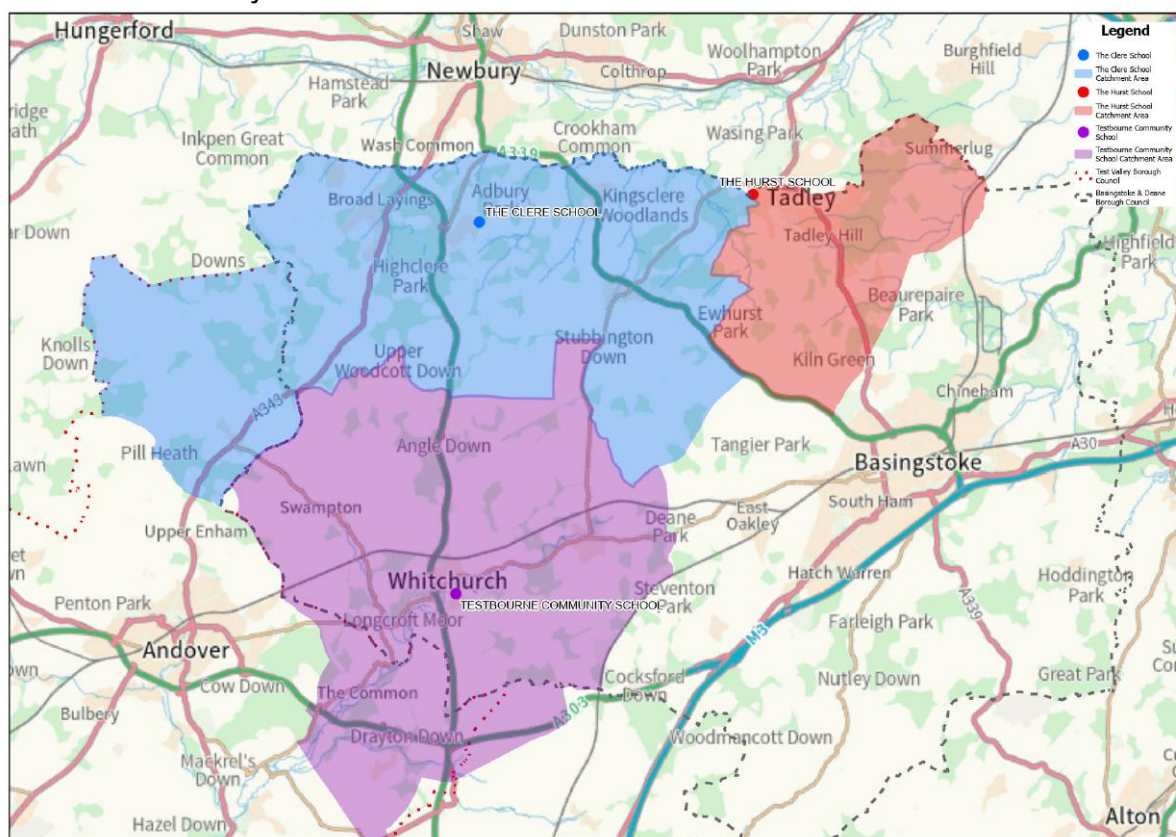
The retention of high-quality staff is a crucial element in the Hampshire County Council's drive for improving education standards and raising pupil achievement. Should the decision be made to close The Clere School, consultations will take place with all staff who may be affected and with their respective professional associations and trade unions at the appropriate time with appropriate support being provided.

What will happen to The Clere School's current catchment area?

If the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services decides to move forward with the statutory consultation process, The Clere School's admission arrangements will be reviewed. Any proposed changes, including what will happen to the school's

current catchment area, will be included in the statutory consultation for the public to consider and comment on.

Current Secondary Catchment Areas:



I am due to apply for a Year 7 place for September 2027; what should I do?

The main admissions round for Year 7 in September 2027 is subject to statutory timescales outlined in the School Admissions Code. In Hampshire, the admissions round will open on 7 September 2026 and the deadline for on-time applications is midnight on 31 October 2026. The deadline cannot change as this is a national deadline, and all Local Authorities must abide by this.

The School Admissions Code does not allow Hampshire County Council to extend the deadline for applications, nor can the outcome of any public notice period be pre-empted. Therefore, The Clere School will necessarily remain as an option for parents to express as a preference. Parents are advised to identify their preferred schools and if they wish, include The Clere School among their preferences, however, the Admissions Team strongly encourages all parents to utilise their three preferences as part of any application. The Admissions Team can support parents in identifying their local schools or parents can access the County Council's school catchment finder [GIS | Hantsweb](#) or find a school [Find a school | Hampshire County Council \(hants.gov.uk\)](#) webpages. All submitted applications will be processed in line with the published admissions arrangements. Where necessary parents can make late applications, but it is worth noting that late applications will be considered after all on-time applications.

In the event of a school closing will School Transport be provided?

The Hampshire County Council school transport policy provides local authority funded transport to the nearest school with a space when the home to school journey is more than the statutory walking distance or if the journey is less than the statutory distance, but the walking route is unsafe. The statutory distance is 2 miles for a child who is 7 years or under and rises to 3 miles for children aged 8 or over.

For each child, who is a resident in the Hampshire County Council Local Authority administrative area, who moves school following a school closure an application for school transport would be required and then an individual transport assessment would be made based on their home address and the journey to their new school.

What is the proposed timeline?

Action	Key Date
Non-statutory Public Consultation – 4 weeks	4 September - 2 October 2026
Executive Member Decision Day	20 October 2026
Publish Public Notice – 4 weeks	30 October – 4 December 2026
Executive Member Decision Day	TBC – December 2026
School closed subject to above decisions	31 August 2027

What will happen to the school site?

Should the decision be taken, following the conclusion of the statutory consultation stage, to close The Clere School, discussions will take place between regarding all opportunities that exist for utilising or disposing of any surplus accommodation and land that might be realised. This process would be subject to further detailed analysis, appropriate legal advice, and all required approvals.

Can I propose other options?

During the consultation, Hampshire County Council will carefully consider any alternative options suggested.

Comments on the proposal can be received by emailing strategicplanningunit@hants.gov.uk or by writing to:

Rebecca Prowting, Strategic Development Officer, Children's Services Department, EII Court, Winchester, SO23 8UG

by Friday 2 October 2026.

Will I have the opportunity to discuss the plans and ask questions?

Drop-in events where you will be able to discuss the proposal with County Council Officers will take place on;

- Year 7 and Year 8 families: Tuesday 22 September 2026 between 3:45pm – 5:45pm at The Clere School, Earlstone Common, Burghclere, Newbury, RG20 9HP

- Year 9 and Year 10 families: Wednesday 23 September 2026 between 4:00pm – 6:00pm at The Clere School, Earlstone Common, Burghclere, Newbury, RG20 9HP
- Year 11 families and other stakeholders: Thursday 24 September 2026 between 5:00pm – 7:00pm at The Clere School, Earlstone Common, Burghclere, Newbury, RG20 9HP

These sessions are intended to provide opportunities for stakeholders to discuss the proposal and ask questions about the consultation process. There will be no formal presentation or speech, and attendees are welcome to drop in at any point during the advertised times. We ask all attendees to help create an environment where everyone feels able to ask questions and share their views.

What happens after this consultation?

This consultation will run from Friday 4 September 2026 to Friday 2 October 2026.

The decision-making process is outlined below:

- This initial non-statutory consultation will run from Friday 4 September 2026 to Friday 2 October 2026 and will include drop-in events, detailed above.
- A report setting out the consultation responses received will be taken to the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services in October 2026 to decide if the proposal should continue to the statutory consultation stage.
- If approved, a statutory Public Notice would be published for a period of four weeks during which representations can be made to the Local Authority. This will likely run from November to December 2026.
- If, at this stage, a decision is taken to proceed with the closure, a report would be taken to the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services for final approval.