



## **Primary School Places in Brixham**

### **A Consultation on Possible Changes**

#### **A Joint Letter from Torbay Council and the Catholic Diocese**

The demand for primary school places in Brixham has been falling in the past few years. There are now over 270 empty places spread across the 6 primary schools in Brixham. This is over 19% of school places in the town.

We are concerned that there are no longer enough children to keep 6 primary schools open and we are consulting over whether to reduce this to 5 schools.

Our shared priority is to ensure that children get the best possible start in life and one way to do this is to create strong schools that are not faced with worries about too many empty places.

Torbay Council and the Catholic Diocese of Plymouth are consulting jointly over options that change the supply of school places affecting Chestnut Primary School and St Margaret Clitherow Catholic Primary School.

This paper sets out the background to the fall in pupil numbers and explains the options for change.

The consultation involves the parents, staff and governors of the two schools, but we are also seeking the views of other interested parties including other Brixham schools, Brixham Town Council, Brixham Community Partnership and the Catholic Parish of Brixham. Because this is a public consultation anyone is entitled to take part and give their views.

If you require this document in a different format, please contact 01803 208279.

No decisions have been made and we are holding this consultation to gather your views.

Yours sincerely

Richard Williams  
Head of Transformation  
Children's Services  
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John Mannix  
Director of Schools  
Catholic Diocese of Plymouth

## Why are pupil numbers falling ?

The fall in pupil numbers was caused by a decline in the birth rate. For several years when older children left primary school they were replaced by smaller groups of younger children starting school.

In most places, primary school numbers are on the increase again. This is because the birth rate is rising in the UK. Certainly, the number of pre school children in Torquay and Paignton has been on the increase since 2002, but this has not been the case in Brixham, although the 2008-09 figure of 172 is unusually high. This figure is being regarded as a “blip” in an otherwise steady trend.

The table below shows how the birth rate for Brixham has changed.

School Year	Live Births By Town		
	Brixham	Paignton	Torquay
1997-98	165	419	662
1998-99	155	427	665
1999-00	192	368	598
2000-01	163	357	564
2001-02	139	370	570
2002-03	141	452	678
2003-04	148	451	666
2004-05	141	468	729
2005-06	110	436	729
2006-07	147	461	789
2007-08	118	476	819
2008-09	172	481	771

Table 1: Live Birth Trends in Torbay 1997-2010. Data Source: Health Authority Data

## What about the future ?

We do not think that the position in Brixham will change very quickly. As you may know, the Council is worried about the strength of the local economy and is trying to revive it. We are also looking at how the Bay can grow in the next 20 years to meet the demand for new housing. We think that most of the growth of population will be in Torquay and Paignton.

The table below shows our forecasts for pupil growth and this is based on trends in the birth rate and an assumption that previous levels of housing growth will continue. This assumes that there will be an average of 90 new dwellings created in Brixham each year. This rate of housing growth is not expected to increase and would only increase if a number of new, unexpected large housing developments came forward.

One thing to bear in mind about housing growth is that Torbay has a very low “conversion rate” from new housing to additional school children. Whilst there are many types of new home, the average across the bay is that each new home produces 0.2 of a school age child.

The high figure for births in 2008-09 casts some doubt over our forecasts, if this signals an end to the steady trend. These children will not start school until September 2013, so do not provide an immediate answer to the difficulties caused by empty places.

Year	Primary pupils	Primary school places	Empty places	Percent empty
<b>2010-11 actual</b>	1151	1428	277	19%
<b>2011-12 forecast</b>	1164	1428	264	18%
<b>2012-13 forecast</b>	1205	1428	223	16%
<b>2013-14 forecast</b>	1224	1428	204	14%
<b>2014-15 forecast</b>	1237	1428	191	13%

Table 2: Primary age pupil forecasts for Brixham until 2015. Source: Torbay Council forecast data

### Which Schools have been affected most by this fall ?

The table below shows how the numbers of pupils attending Brixham schools has changed. Bear in mind that the increase at Brixham CE Primary School was as a result of it changing from an infant school to a primary school in 2005. Also we have merged the Eden Park Primary School figures as if it had been one school, even though in 2005 they were separate Infant and Junior schools.

School	Places	January Pupil Numbers						Oct 2010
		2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	
<b>Eden Park</b>	420	472	444	428	396	356	349	321
<b>Chestnut</b>	168	133	124	114	112	107	91	64
<b>St Margaret Clitherow</b>	140	158	141	115	100	107	92	91
<b>Furzeham</b>	280	242	243	212	234	226	236	268
<b>Brixham CE</b>	210	73	97	129	165	193	198	202
<b>Galmpton</b>	210	222	215	217	218	212	210	205

Table 3: change in Brixham Primary School Rolls 2005-2010. Data source, annual January pupil census and ad hoc census October 2010

### Wasn't there a re-organisation in 2005 ?

Yes. The Council made changes in 2005 which changed Brixham CE from an infant school to a primary school and it created Eden Park Primary school to replace to previous Infant and Junior schools. These changes also removed 72 primary school places.

Unfortunately, we think we may still have too many school places even when taking into account future growth. There are options in this paper that could remove 168 or 98 school places.

The options that remove school places aim to deal with the current difficulty of empty places, but the options also take account of growth in the future.

### What is the impact on schools of empty places ?

As the number of pupils fall, schools receive less money. Funding for schools is based on a head count of pupils, so with fewer pupils, schools will have less funding. A fall in the number of pupils does not lead to smaller class sizes.

Since 2005, Brixham primary schools have "lost" 150 pupils and this has reduced the funding available for Brixham primary schools by over £300,000 though we still have the same number of schools. This means that Brixham schools are managing with lower levels of funding and, if this carried on for a long time, it will probably affect the quality of education.

When schools have fewer children, they often reduce the number of classes and so some classrooms are left empty. These classrooms still need to be cleaned, repaired and heated, which is a waste of money. In the current age of spending cuts, we need to make the best use of the money we are given by the government.

A fall in numbers can also affect the way that a school organises its teaching and can lead to uncertainty. Sometimes schools with low pupil numbers can only afford to offer short term employment contracts which means that they cannot always recruit and hold onto the best staff.

There can sometimes be a loss of confidence in a school with low pupil numbers and this can lead to parents transferring their children to schools where there are more pupils.

Schools with low pupil numbers can be successful, but it can be very difficult when there are other, larger schools nearby who are better able to recruit pupils. Generally, it will always be more a “struggle” for schools in this situation. This can damage staff morale.

### **How can empty school places be reduced ?**

There are several ways to do this.

- We could get rid of poor classrooms and make some schools smaller.
- We could convert empty classrooms to be used for other things.
- We could reduce the number of schools and invest the savings in other schools.

Whatever options are followed, reducing the number of empty places is the best solution for schools and pupils because there is more chance that schools will then be able to fill most of their places. This will help them plan the number of teachers they need with more certainty and help to recruit the best teachers due to job security.

The Council has used all of these ideas to reduce surplus places in the past, but it has not closed a school in Torbay for many years (other than when joining Infants and Junior schools together).

### **What options are being considered for Brixham ?**

We think we need to ask a serious question about whether Brixham can support 6 primary schools any longer. We do not think that reducing the number of places at some or all of the Brixham schools will help the situation.

The options for change focus around Chestnut Primary School because this is the school that has the lowest number of pupils and there is a risk that the number of pupils attending the school might fall further.

Option One is to do nothing i.e. status quo.

Option Two is to close Chestnut Primary School

Option Three is to close Chestnut Primary School and relocate St Margaret Clitherow Catholic Primary School to the site of Chestnut Primary School.

Option Four is any other option that may emerge during the consultation

### **Option One: No Change/Status Quo**

Under this option, we would make no changes and Chestnut would remain open to see if the school can continue to operate as a small school and to see if the pupil roll increases.

#### **Some arguments in favour of Option One**

- Parents in Brixham will still be able to choose between 6 primary schools
- There will still be a primary school in higher Brixham
- Children will not need to change schools
- Closing a school is a big decision that cannot be reversed
- It reduces the risk that future growth will leave us with too few places

#### **Some arguments against Option One**

- Chestnut may become so small that it can no longer afford the things it needs to offer a good education
- Chestnut may become so small that it has to close suddenly without plans in place for the children who need to move schools
- Small schools find it less easy to cope with events such as staff changes, budget cuts and price increases
- There would still be over 270 empty school places in Brixham
- It may be difficult to replace the headteacher when he retires
- With so many empty places, Chestnut will continue to face an uncertain future

### **Option Two: Close Chestnut Primary School**

Under this option, there is a carefully planned closure of the school at the end of July 2011, so that children have a managed transfer to other schools (taking into account parents' wishes) for September 2011.

#### **Some arguments in favour of Option Two**

- It is a decisive way forward and ends uncertainty for Chestnut
- There are places at other local schools for Chestnut children
- It reduces empty places by 168
- It will enable around £80,000 in "fixed costs" to be recycled back into the Torbay school funding pot

#### **Some arguments against Option Two**

- It is disruptive to the children at Chestnut
- Most other Brixham schools will need to reorganise to admit pupils from Chestnut
- It means that there would be no education site in higher Brixham
- It may put the Children's Centre at risk
- It may remove too many school places and leave too little room for future growth

### **Option Three: Close Chestnut Primary School and relocate St Margaret Clitherow Catholic Primary School to the site of Chestnut Primary School**

Under this option, Chestnut Primary School is closed and the Council invites the Catholic Diocese to move St Margaret Clitherow school to the Chestnut site. This is so that a school is

still available within the higher Brixham Community. Pupils from Chestnut would be guaranteed a place (if their parents wish) at St Margaret Clitherow Catholic Primary School.

The relocated St Margaret Clitherow School would have new admission arrangements so that it would give equal priority to children from the local community and to those of Catholic faith. The school would also be enlarged to 210 places (7 classrooms) so that two small schools are replaced by one school with enough space for one class per year group.

### **Some arguments in favour of Option Three**

- It is a decisive way forward and ends uncertainty for Chestnut
- There is still a primary school in higher Brixham
- It reduces empty places by 98
- It is a better fit for future growth in population
- It will enable around £80,000 to be recycled back into the school funding pot
- One 210 place school is better for organising education than two smaller schools
- The Chestnut site offers better scope for school development.
- It secures the future of the Children's Centre
- It is the option that minimises disruption to pupils in Brixham if Chestnut closes
- The two schools are close together and already serve a very similar local community

### **Some arguments against Option Three**

- It is disruptive to the children at Chestnut
- All schools in Brixham would need to reorganise to admit pupils from Chestnut, but St Margaret Clitherow will experience this the most under Option Three
- Some Chestnut parents may not want their children to attend a Catholic primary school
- Some St Margaret Clitherow parents may not want their school to relocate

### **Option Four**

Option Four is "any other option that may emerge during consultation". We are consulting with an open mind and, whilst we think the first three options are the main ones, there might be an option that no-one has thought about until it is suggested during consultation.

### **If Chestnut closes, what does "Managed Transfer of Pupils" mean ?**

If a decision is taken to close a school we can begin working with parents, pupils and other schools to ensure that this is done smoothly. We would ask parents which school(s) that they would like their child to attend and we would try our best to arrange for them to transfer to their preferred school.

Once a place is offered at a new school, we would help the schools to arrange induction events for pupils to make new friends and for teachers to find out all about their new pupils. We would take particular care over pupils with Special Educational Needs.

The option to close Chestnut and move St Margaret Clitherow school is being offered because we think that the best way to manage the transfer of pupils is for them all to join a new school together. Of course, we would still support the transfer of pupils to other Brixham schools.

### **If Chestnut closes, how will a Catholic School serve the higher Brixham community ?**

The Catholic Diocese welcomes children of all backgrounds to its schools. Across the South West, Catholic schools are the school of choice for very many parents of other denominations, of other faiths and those of no particular faith background. Overall, fewer than half the children in Catholic schools are from Catholic families. The Catholic Diocese gives guidance to its schools to make it clear that their job is not to 'convert' people to Catholicism; they are asked to provide a school environment, modelled on Catholic principles, in which all children feel safe and welcome.

If St Margaret Clitherow should be relocated to the Chestnut site, the admissions criteria would be revised to ensure that all the current families of Chestnut pupils would be admitted to the Catholic school, if that is the wish of their parents. The school would also seek to appoint some additional governors from the current Chestnut School to help ensure the continuity of experience for those children who make the transfer.

### **What about pre school education at St Margaret Clitherow if the school relocates to the Chestnut site ?**

If the school relocates to the Chestnut site, the full range of provision from 0-11 will be available on the site with a pre school and a Children's Centre. The detail of the pre-school arrangements has not yet been decided and is not part of this consultation.

### **What will happen if Chestnut closes and there is an empty school site ?**

If Chestnut closes, then there will be an empty site, either at Chestnut or at St Margaret Clitherow. This consultation cannot deal with what happens to an empty school site, since this is a separate decision and the local residents would need to be consulted before anything could be decided.

### **Has anyone else been involved in developing these options ?**

We have been working closely with all schools in Brixham to identify the best way forward. The fall in pupil numbers affects all Brixham schools and so every school is keen to find the best solution. We also asked some independent education experts to carry out investigations into the options before we produced this consultation paper.

### **Why are changes at other schools not being considered ?**

For different reasons, we do not think it would be a good idea to make changes to other schools.

In the case of Furzeham, this is the only school serving north Brixham; Galmpton and Brixham CE are both full and for Eden Park, a period of stability is preferred, since it was only formed in 2005.

St Margaret Clitherow is involved in Option Three partly because it is the nearest school to Chestnut, but also because it is the other small school in Brixham and would benefit from enlargement which is only possible under Option Three.

### **What will happen to school staff affected ?**

If a decision is taken to close Chestnut under Option Two or Option Three, then their jobs will be at risk and we will work with staff and other Brixham schools to see if we can find a

suitable job for them. Under Option Three and, if most Chestnut children transfer to St Margaret Clitherow, then it increases the chances of finding a suitable job, but we cannot make guarantees.

We are holding separate consultations with school staff and, if Chestnut is closed, we have to hold formal negotiations with staff and Trades Unions.

Under Option One where no change is made, jobs at Chestnut may still be at risk from any further fall in pupil numbers.

### **Is the Catholic Diocese consulting separately ?**

No because the Council and the Diocese have agreed to hold a joint consultation and have worked together on this document. The Council and the Diocese are sharing all information and correspondence connected to the consultation.

### **Who is making the decision after consultation ?**

Although there is a joint consultation, there are two separate and independent decisions involved.

The Council will decide whether to close Chestnut. This decision will be taken by the Council's elected Mayor.

The Catholic Diocese will decide whether to relocate St Margaret Clitherow School if Chestnut closes. This decision is taken by the Board of Trustees.

### **When will a decision be made ?**

This consultation will last from 29 November 2010 until 7 January 2011. Then a report will be written for the Mayor who will also see all the comments that have been made during the consultation. The Mayor will see all letters, emails, notes of what is said at public meetings and a summary of questionnaire responses.

The Mayor is expected to make a decision in Cabinet on 15 February 2011.

If The Mayor decides to make a change involving the closure of Chestnut, the Council will then publish Notices that allow 6 weeks for people to make "representations" about the closure.

At the end of the 6 weeks for representation, the Council then has up to two months to decide whether to go ahead with the closure.

All of this means that it may be late May or even June 2011 before a final decision is made. It is a long process, but the good thing about this is that no-one is able to rush into a decision without everyone having a chance to be heard.

If the Council decides to publish Notices in February to close Chestnut under Option Three, then it will make a formal invitation to the Catholic Diocese to move St Margaret Clitherow school to the Chestnut site.

The Catholic Diocese will by then be in a position to say whether it wishes to accept the Council's invitation to relocate its school.



## How to make your views heard

Attached to this document is a response form. We do have to ask for your name since everyone and anyone is entitled to return one form only.

From Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> December, the response form will also be available to download from the Torbay Council website [www.torbay.gov.uk](http://www.torbay.gov.uk) under 'c' for consultations, and can be emailed to [Policy&PlanningTeam@torbay.gov.uk](mailto:Policy&PlanningTeam@torbay.gov.uk)

We are also holding open meetings as follows:

St Margaret Clitherow School	Tuesday 7 December at 6.30 p.m.
Chestnut Primary School	Monday 13 December at 6.30 p.m.

The meetings are open to all, so if you are a parent of a Chestnut pupil you can attend the meeting at St Margaret Clitherow and vice versa.

The meetings will begin with a very short presentation to set the scene, but then the floor will be open for people to ask questions and make their views known. These will be noted down for the decision-makers to see.

In addition to completing a response form, or instead of completing a response form, you can also send your views by letter or email to the following addresses.

Letter	Brixham Primary Consultation	Email	<a href="mailto:Policy&amp;PlanningTeam@torbay.gov.uk">Policy&amp;PlanningTeam@torbay.gov.uk</a>
	Children's Services		
	Oldway		
	Torquay Road		
	Paignton		
	TQ3 2TE		

The Council will gather all of the responses for the joint consultation and forward them to the Diocese.

If you would like additional copies of this document and response form, or require it in a different format or language, please telephone 01803 208279

Plot map of the postcodes of pupils attending Chestnut Primary and St Margaret Clitherow as at Autumn 2010

