

# Consultation on the potential closure of Calverton Primary School

## Frequently Asked Questions

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### Why is this happening?

The number of pupils applying to Calverton primary school significantly decreased in recent years which has contributed to the school's financial budget deficit position.

This is as a direct result of the reduction in the number of families expressing a preference for the school in line with the falling birth rates affecting the general demand for primary school places across the borough. The falling birth rates across Newham and London mean that the current reduction in demand for school places will continue in the coming years, exacerbating the current surplus of places at the school which means the school is likely to have an ever-increasing budget deficit.

### What actions have Newham Council taken to avoid the potential closure of Calverton Primary School?

Over the past four years, Calverton Primary School has been working with the Council on a financial recovery and sustainability plan that has included:

- entering into a federation in 2021 with CPD Federation of schools to pool resources and create leadership capacity, due to a range of previous concerns about the school's performance, with the intention of maintaining the breadth of education offered whilst enabling the school to return to financial viability;
- reducing its published admission number from 90 to 60 in September 2023, to enable the school to better organise and avoid classes with low numbers where the teacher may be largely unfunded;
- undertaking a staffing restructure in recent years, whilst going through the process of downsizing to a one form entry school.

Regrettably, all these did not yield the desired outcome. Given that the classes are not currently full, it is impossible that, even with the further planned reduction in the school's PAN from 60 to 30 pupils per year group, from academic year 2026/2027, the school will be able to operate effectively.

### Why is the school not being allowed to remain open to recover and return to financial viable position?

Newham schools are recognised for their high performance and excellent results, however, they face significant challenges due to the budget pressures caused by falling pupil numbers.

Unfilled school places have an immediate cost for schools through a reduction in budgets, as well as affecting the overall viability and quality of education standards.

At the end of the 2023/24 financial year, Calverton primary school had a deficit balance of £0.6m. The forecast for the financial year 2024/25 is £0.6m taking the cumulative deficit position to £1.04m. This has impacted on the school's ability to purchase resources, equipment, and organise activities for children. Unfortunately, given pupil numbers are expected to fall further, it will not be possible for the school to reduce or recover the accumulated deficit over a reasonable period. This will also place significant funding pressures on the already challenging finances of the council.

### **Aren't small class sizes good so why can't the school remain open with less pupils?**

Smaller classes may sound like a good idea, but the opposite is true. This is because many costs are driven by the number of classes in a school, whereas funding levels are driven by the number of pupils. Therefore, the amount of money a school has is directly linked to its number of pupils. The more pupils a school has, the more funding it receives.

With fewer pupils choosing Calverton, it is less likely that the school will be financially viable to keep running. This means that with a high number of unfilled places they have less money for resources, equipment, extracurricular activities for children, maintenance of the school estate and the staffing level needed to operate effectively.

### **What support has Newham Council put in place to keep the school open?**

An intensive support package have been made available including cash advances from the Council of £709k to date. The school will require further monthly cash advances over the next few months to cover outgoings.

The leadership of the school, working with Council officers, have thoroughly explored a range of options such as:

- reducing the school's published admission number;
- seeking income generation opportunities;
- reducing staffing levels further;
- exploring amalgamating (merging) with another school; or
- the school joining a multi academy trust (MAT)

Unfortunately, given pupil numbers are expected to fall further, none of these options will be able to reduce or recover the accumulated deficit over a reasonable period.

### **What can the local school community do to keep the school open and what measures can be taken to improve school numbers?**

All available options as highlighted above have been explored including income-generating initiatives. Unfortunately this will not reduce the deficit in the school's finances or enable the recovery to a stable financial position.

The only way the school can become financially viable is to have more pupils. The issue of the school being significantly undersubscribed has been made worse due to falling pupil numbers across Newham and in most inner London boroughs. This situation will likely continue for a number of years to come.

The council has worked collaboratively with the governing body, which has provided the school with stable and experienced leadership and an intensive school improvement support through partnership working with the CPD federation. Whilst the academic performance of the school has improved in recent years, it still does not have enough pupils to be financially viable.

### **If the school closes what will happen to the land and buildings?**

There are no proposals on the future use of the school site. No decision have been made regarding the closure of the school. Only after any decision to close the school can future decisions be made on the land and buildings.

## **The Consultation process**

### **What happens during the consultation period and how will you ensure it is accessible for all?**

The consultation process must follow the statutory process as set out in the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013/3109 and detailed in the consultation document.

Over the six weeks' period we will be consulting with pupils, parents and carers, staff, the governing board, other local schools and trade unions and the wider local community.

All stakeholders are encouraged to respond by completing the consultation response form online to ensure all views are heard.

Engagement meetings for staff, parents and carers have also been scheduled with representatives of the governing body and Newham Council officers as detailed in the consultation document. This will be an opportunity to seek any further clarifications on the proposal.

### **How will you assess the impact of the potential school closure on the community?**

An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of this consultation. Responses received will be carefully analysed and will form part of the report that will inform whether or not we can proceed to the next stage of the process.

**Staff****What support will be available to staff affected by this proposal?**

We would work together with governors and school leaders to support staff and ensure their wellbeing as we navigate this process together. We will be providing advice and support to school staff, including continuing professional development (CPD) and redeployment opportunities should a decision be taken to close the school.

**Parents /Carers****What support will be available to parents whose children will be affected by this proposal?**

No decision has been made at this stage to close the school and no closure would take place before August 2026

The Council is working closely with the school leaders and governors to keep the school operational and avoid disruption to children's education and ensure that the curriculum can be effectively delivered.

We are also ensuring that the relevant support is provided for those children at the school with additional needs, including those children with a place in the school's Resource Provision.

Parents/ Carers are entitled to apply for 'in-year' admission to an alternative school at any time.

**What does a future change mean for my child?**

The council is committed to supporting every child to ensure that they continue to have access to high-quality education in a setting that is right for them.

There are currently sufficient good and excellent Newham primary schools with capacity to admit children who may require a place.

If the final decision is taken to close Calverton, we will work closely with families, schools and professionals to ensure that each child is supported through a carefully considered and well-planned transition, based on their individual needs.

We want to offer reassurance that, should the Resource Provision at Calverton close, we would ensure that appropriate SEND provision is available in other settings, including the potential for additional capacity within other Resource Provisions nearby and within the borough.

**Thank you for your continued support and engagement. We remain committed to keeping you updated throughout this process.**

