

# Impact Assessment

Assessment of: Proposal to close Branscombe CofE Primary (Academy) School

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Assessment carried out by (job title): M Matthew, DCEO, Link Academy Trust

### 1. Description of project / service / activity / policy under review

Proposal to close Branscombe CofE (Academy) primary school by mutual agreement with the Secretary of State.

### 2. Reason for change / review

Branscombe CofE primary school is a small rural academy school within the Multi Academy Trust of the Link Academy Trust. There are seven children on roll with numbers forecast to reduce in the following years. A review of area health authority data which provides the number of 0-4 year olds living in the school's catchment area shows very low numbers of pre-school aged children. There are no planned developments for future housing within Branscombe or surrounding areas.

### 3. Aims / objectives, limitations and options going forwards (summary)

As of 1 June 2026 there were 7 children on roll at Branscombe CofE primary school. The school was last inspected in 2023 and continued to be a good school but with a declining number of children it is increasingly difficult to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum. The Trust feels that the school cannot provide a high-quality education to such a small number of pupils spread across year groups. With such low numbers on roll, which are not forecast to improve, it is felt that the school is unsustainable.

### 4. People affected, diversity profile and analysis of needs

The school is designated co-educational for the age range 2-11. Currently there are no pupils on roll in Early Years or Key Stage 1. There is an impact in terms of future provision for children and families who live or may live in the future in the Branscombe catchment area who will not be able to attend a primary school that is local to them.

Devon County Council has confirmed that sufficiency of early years places should not be an issue for local families if places for 2–4-year-olds are not offered at Branscombe CofE primary school. Within 3 miles from the school there is a day nursery and two childminders. Some families will use childcare closer to where they work which may be further away. In nearby Sidmouth, the former children's centre building will be used for childcare and should open by September 2026 creating more places within the locality.

### 5. Stakeholders, their interest and potential impacts

Children and families living in or close to Branscombe, or children and families who may move to the area, or those who start a family, may have considered a place at their local primary school and will be affected by this proposal.

There were 7 children on roll of Branscombe CofE primary school as of 1 June 2026: 1 in Year 6 due to transition to secondary school in September 2026. Of the remaining 6 children, 4 are in Year 4 and 2 in Year 5. There are no allocations for the Reception class in September 2026.

There is sufficient capacity in local schools to accommodate future known cohorts of pre-school aged children living in the Branscombe catchment area.

The distances to nearby schools are as follows:

School	Type	Distance (miles as the crow flies) from Branscombe CofE Primary
Beer CofE Primary	Academy	1.8
Seaton Primary	Community	3.3
Sidbury CofE Primary	Academy	4

The closure of Branscombe CofE Primary School will result in additional travel to school for pupils for whom Branscombe is currently their closest school.

The community do not use the school for any community activities or groups and has not done so for many years. There are no services provided to the school by local businesses. The school acts as an employer in the local area. It is considered that because the school's number on roll has been low for a number of years and there are now only 7 pupils on roll that the impact to any shops and local businesses benefiting from the footfall of parents and children is negligible.

The Link Academy Trust recognises the economic, social and environmental benefits that a school brings to the local community. However, the main duty of a school is to provide quality education to its pupils and meet the statutory responsibilities of the Local Authority regarding school place planning. Unfortunately, with numbers continuing to fall and no likelihood of a sustainable roll, the school is not able to provide its core function nor is able to support the wider community.

#### 6. Additional research used to inform this assessment

The relevant Department for Education (DfE) guidance 'Closure of an academy by mutual agreement' October 2024 has been considered in bringing this proposal forward. Branscombe CofE primary school is designated as a rural primary school. Under Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, there is a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but the case for closure should be strong and a proposal must clearly be in the best interests of educational provision in the area. The matters to consider in closing a rural school are being fully considered by the Trust, the DfE and by the Local Authority. The likely effect on the local community, as well as the availability and likely cost to the Local Authority of transport to other schools has been considered including the capacity of local schools. Consideration has been given to the travel distances to alternative schools as well as the standards and Ofsted rating for local schools.

Whilst the immediate effects of closure and transitioning to a new school can be stressful, the long-term effects can be beneficial to pupils in terms of educational and social development. Schools have unfortunately closed periodically across the county. The underlying benefit to the children will be to provide an educational offer that is educationally and financially sustainable.

## 7. Description of consultation process and outcomes

The Trust is commencing a consultation in June 2026 on a proposal to close Branscombe C of Primary School from 31 December 2026. The consultation is being circulated to parents, carers, staff and Trustees. The consultation is also being widely circulated to the Diocese, County Councillors, District Councillor, Parish and Town Council, all schools in the local learning community and neighbouring schools, local early years providers, MP, any neighbouring Local Authority, Department for Education, equality groups amongst others. An information session will be held during the consultation period for all interested stakeholders with officers from the Trust, Devon County Council and the Diocese.

The decision-maker for the closure of an academy school is the Secretary of State through the Department for Education. As Branscombe C of E Primary School is a rural school it is also a requirement that Devon County Council agree to the closure of a rural academy school. The Local Authority supports the principle of local schools for local children and has a presumption against closure unless there are strong educational grounds. This is considered a key decision of the County Council and, following the end of the consultation period, the proposal will be discussed at a meeting of Devon County Council's Cabinet. All consultation responses sent to the Trust will therefore be shared with Devon County Council so that the Cabinet are informed of the views of stakeholders and the wider community in their decision-making. All consultation responses may also be shared with the Department for Education.

If the proposal proceeds, the Trust will conduct a Listening Period. This will provide stakeholders and interested parties with detailed information about why the school is closing and how the closure process will operate. It will also give them an opportunity to submit their views on how the closure process can be best managed. Details of the Listening Period will be widely circulated and promoted by the Trust to ensure all stakeholders are informed.

The consultation acknowledges the very low pupil numbers in the village and the important role schools play in rural communities. Housing development allocations in the Joint Local Plan have been accounted for in school place planning, and a review of cohorts and admissions shows there is no pressure on school places in Branscombe or the wider Local Learning Community area. While the impact on the community cannot be underestimated, this must be balanced against the educational and financial sustainability of the school.

The Diocese of Exeter (Exeter Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd) holds the freehold for the school site, and decisions about the future of the site, should the school close, are not a matter for Devon County Council.

While the impact on the community cannot be underestimated, this must be balanced against the educational and financial sustainability of the school.

## 8. Equality analysis - Giving Due Regard to Equality and Human Rights

The Link Academy Trust must consider how people will be affected by this proposal and give due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations. In doing so, we must take into account the protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010: age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, sexual orientation, race, and religion or belief. This means ensuring that people with different needs are able to access services and facilities on an equal basis, and that no group is disadvantaged. We must also advance equality of opportunity by recognising the disadvantages faced by protected groups and considering how these can be overcome.

In addition, we must ensure that human rights are protected. This includes:

- Providing a reasonable level of choice in where and how people live their lives and interact with others, as part of the right to private and family life.
- Ensuring dignity and respect in the process, consistent with protections under the Human Rights Act and the Equality Act 2010.
- Safeguarding the right to life by ensuring that nothing we do results in unlawful or unnecessary harm.

The Equality Act 2010 and related legislation do not prevent the Council or the Trust from making difficult decisions, such as service reductions or school closures. However, they require that such decisions are informed, properly considered, and proportionate. This means taking a rigorous and conscious approach, giving due regard to the effects on protected characteristics, and ensuring decisions are fair, necessary, reasonable, and subject to adequate consultation.

The Secretary of State is the final decision-maker on the closure and will determine whether to terminate the Funding Agreement. As Branscombe Primary is a rural academy school, Devon County Council is being asked to agree to the closure. This is considered a key decision and will be considered by the Council’s Cabinet at a future meeting.

Characteristics	Potential or actual issues for this group.  [Please refer to the <a href="#">Diversity Guide</a> ]	How will the project / service / policy / activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• eliminate or reduce the potential for direct or indirect discrimination, harassment or disadvantage, where necessary.</li> <li>• advance equality (meet needs / ensure access, encourage participation, make adjustments for disabled people, ‘close gaps’).</li> <li>• foster good relations between groups (tackled prejudice and promoted understanding), if relevant?</li> </ul> In what way do you consider any negative consequences to be reasonable and proportionate in order to achieve a legitimate aim? Are you complying with the <a href="#">DCC Equality Policy</a> ?
All residents (include generic equality provisions)	There will be an impact to pupils, parents/carers, staff, trustees and local community. Future families will be affected by this proposal.	There are 7 children currently on roll at the school. If the proposal is approved, children will be allocated a local school place fairly in accordance with the School Admissions Code DCC will discuss with schools in the area proposals to redistribute the catchment area should the school close, taking into account capacities at neighbouring schools and the implications for children's eligibility for free school transport. The LA will recommend how the catchment area could be redistributed and it will then be for the schools' admission authorities to decide on their own catchment areas, seeking in-variations where necessary. Cabinet of the LA may consider recommendations should this impact on entitlement to free transport on catchment school grounds.
Age	2-11.	The school is age range 2-11. As outlined in the Impact Assessment, there are sufficient school places locally to accommodate displaced children of statutory

		<p>school age in good quality schools including Church of England schools to provide a balance of denominational provision. Sufficiency of early years places should not be an issue for local families if places for 2–4-year-olds are not offered at Branscombe Church of England Primary School. Within 3 miles of the school there is a day nursery and two childminders. Some families will use childcare closer to where they work which may be further away. In nearby Sidmouth the former children’s centre building will be used for childcare and should open by September 2026 creating more places within the locality.</p>
Disability (incl. sensory, mobility, mental health, learning disability, neurodiversity, long term ill health) and carers of disabled people		Fully considered for pupils with special educational needs.
Culture and ethnicity: nationality/national origin, ethnic origin/race, skin colour, religion and belief		<p>Documents produced during the consultation and the Listening Period will be made accessible to all on request.</p> <p>Places at alternative schools will be available for all children regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or belief. All schools and early years settings work with families to promote a safe, welcoming and trusted provision for all families. All Devon schools promote equality, diversity and inclusive practices to make provision accessible to all types of families and taking into account the protected characteristics in line with the Equality Act 2010.</p>
Sex, gender and gender identity (including men, women, non-binary and transgender people), and pregnancy and maternity (including women’s right to breastfeed)	N/A	Children and their families will be treated equitably should the school close. The local maintained and academy schools are co-educational. Children will be allocated a local school place fairly in accordance with the School Admissions Code of Practice.
Sexual orientation and marriage/civil partnership	N/A	

<p>Other relevant socio-economic factors such as family size/single people/lone parents, income/deprivation, housing, education and skills, literacy, sub-cultures, 'digital exclusion', access to transport options, rural/urban</p>	<p>Devon County Council's Education Infrastructure Plan supports sustainable, high quality provision that maximises accessibility, meets local needs and recognises the needs generated by planned development in specific localities, tackles inequalities for vulnerable pupils but also recognises the needs of a changing population, employment and growth opportunities. It supports local schools for local children thus minimising the reliance on school transport and environmental impact. There will be increased vehicular usage as a result of this proposal.</p>	
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9. Human rights considerations:

Devon County Council has a statutory duty to provide sufficient education places for early years, primary and secondary education. As outlined above, there are sufficient local school and early year's places. The local authority would try to meet parents and carers preferences wherever possible but cannot guarantee to do so. The Local Authority considers that all pupils already impacted, and who may be impacted in the future by this proposal, would be enabled to receive a good quality of education.

10. Describe any linkages or conflicts between social, environmental and economic impacts (Combined Impacts):

There are concerns that delivery of a full and balanced curriculum is very difficult with such a small and decreasing number of children. Teaching and learning will be very difficult for pupils with such a wide age group being taught together. Social and emotional development would also be very challenging. A decision not to close a school can also have a negative impact on pupils' progress and attainment.

11. How will the economic, social and environmental well-being of the relevant area be improved through what is being proposed? And how, in conducting the process of procurement, might that improvement be secured?

The Trust recognises the economic, social and environmental benefits that a school brings to the local community. However, the main duty of a school is to provide quality education to its pupils and meet the statutory responsibilities of the Local Authority regarding school place planning. Unfortunately, with a very small number of students at the school and no likelihood of a sustainable roll, the school is not able to provide its core function nor is it able to support the wider community. It is felt

that the case for closure is strong and in the best educational and social interests of the children.

12. How will impacts and actions be monitored?

In the event that a decision is taken to close the school, the Trust, the DfE, the Local Authority and Diocese will work closely together to implement closure and make the practical arrangements in closing a school.