

# **SAVE YOUR SCHOOL HANDBOOK**

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## Introduction

This book is compiled from the posts made on the Parents Against School Closure Web site into a more manageable PDF report.

I set up the Parents Against School Closure site to hopefully act as a place where parents (and anyone else for that matter) who are undergoing the rigours of a proposed school closure can come and

- Vent their anger
- Give their views
- Detail their experiences
- Talk to others in a similar position
- Get useful information
- Gain confidence
- Get even with the local authority
- Plan your campaigns
- Understand your options
- Avoid the pitfalls
- Find the best arguments
- etc.
- 
- 

I have been through this process and have a great deal of experience and knowledge to impart to those who are maybe at the beginning of the process.

You can fight these proposed closures effectively if you know which buttons to press. Even if you don't win you can make it very difficult for the local authority and make them justify their actions. But you can win and stop unnecessary and unwanted school closures. This site will give you the motivation and strength that you need and the knowledge to challenge that great big beast called the local authority.

If you really feel that your school has been targeted unfairly for closure and you want to fight the council to try and save the school, then you must get ready for a fight.

Clearly, if you can make the council see sense and they are happy to work with you to achieve a mutually beneficial solution, this is the best way to go. However, realise that the council probably has made its own assessment already and will drive the process to achieve that end. Any consultation is likely to be tainted by this predetermination of the outcome by the council.

It won't be a quick fight. It will be long and drawn out. You will need large reserves of patience and tenacity. We continually managed expectations amongst parents by saying that the process would be a marathon not a sprint and not to take any precipitate action (ie take your child out of school) before a final resolution of the issue.

Get to know the key characters involved in the process from the council's side – usually the Director or Deputy Director of Children's Services, a school place planning manager, elected members with responsibility for children's services and education, local ward councillors, the board of governors and local head teacher.

Carry out your own research. Check the council's own policies. Check out central government policies and guidance. Know your options for action at each stage. Manage your and everyone else's expectations. Check council reports carefully. Look for anomalies and inconsistencies. Look at the reference documents. Is relevant information being missed out or misrepresented by the council to fit their arguments?

Keep notes of everything that happens. What meetings are held? What happens at those meetings? Who says what. Who does what?

Ask questions. This is evidence that you will probably need at later stages of the process.

Make a nuisance of yourself by asking legitimate questions regularly. Don't take what the council says or provides you in writing at face value. Be sceptical.

Don't get downhearted by the time it takes. The wheels of local government and central government move pretty slowly. This is actually a good thing because it gives you time to organise and mobilise your resources.

Don't get intimidated by the council either. It is easier than you think to trip them up. Challenge them wherever you can through whatever means you can.

Take effective action. I was going to say just take action but some actions are more effective than others so concentrate on them.

Try to get them off balance. Don't allow them to have their own way. Get them out of their comfort zone.

Gain confidence by involving someone who has experience of local authorities, someone who knows their way around the local government systems and procedures.

Don't be afraid to stand up in front of meetings and have your say. Make your viewpoint known. Send letters to the council. Respond to every consultation opportunity. Get others to respond to consultation opportunities.

I've just given you a scatter gun of ideas and tactics there. I will go into these and many more things in detail as we go along.

David Coulbeck 4 November 2010

## The Bigger Picture

With the coalition government's public spending review just published there are likely to be major impacts on education (even though it has been protected). You need to be aware of the bigger picture around your school's closure proposal.

## School Populations

Recent months have been very interesting with information coming out of the ONS and the Department of Education indicating that, far from primary school numbers forecast to fall, these numbers are set to rise to record levels by 2018! This, coupled with the effective moratorium on the schools building programme, may cause some headaches for school planners. Indeed, it must cause some consternation in many local education authorities that have based their strategies on falling rolls rather than increasing rolls.

In June 2010, the BBC reported on this issue. The full news item can be seen by clicking the link below:

BBC news item – Primary Pupil Numbers “Growing”

A newspaper article in the Daily Mail in July 2010 reported the following:

“Children face an unprecedented scramble for primary school places following forecasts that pupil numbers will rise by more than 500,000 in only eight years.

Schools will come under intense pressure as the number of four to eleven year olds increases to its highest levels since the 1970s.

They will be forced to accommodate 540,000 extra youngsters at a time of severe public spending cuts prompting fears that pupils will be taught in classes of more than 40 or in temporary buildings. According to projections by the Department of Education the numbers at nursery and primary schools is predicted to soar to 4,526,000 by 2018 – the biggest total for four decades. This is a 13.5 per cent increase on the current number 3,986,000.

The equivalent of more than 2000 extra primary schools will be needed to accommodate the extra pupils.

London will be particularly hard-hit. The primary population in the capital is expected to grow by 16% to 748,000 by 2014.”

This just acknowledges what many parents groups have felt for some time that primary school populations are on the verge of explosion after evidence of high birth rates over the last few years.

It does seem a pity that many education authorities have been blind to these trends even when they have had them pointed out by parents groups.

On the evidence now provided by ONS (Office of National Statistics) many local authorities should now have the good grace to at least review their school place planning strategies and the assumptions they are built on. The current emphasis on school closures should now be challenged strongly as the primary school stocks must be seen as assets rather than liabilities in the current economic climate.

The new coalition government has promised to review capital spending in the autumn spending review with priority going to primary school building.



## Politics

Have you seen the debate going on about the cancelling of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme? To my mind it typifies the ineptitude of both the outgoing and incoming governments.

I understand the coalition government has a big task on its hands in finding cuts in public sector spending and the big juicy BSF programme was ripe for cancellation. However, they have raced into a hurricane of criticism because of the mistakes and errors that have been made by in compiling their list of schools affected. Now Michael Gove is having to backtrack a little (and so he should in certain cases) but he is now being hounded by Ed Balls, the previous Education Minister.

The other big idea from the coalition government is to axe the Census with no clear idea of what will replace it. All public services need base data on population trends from a national to a local level so that they can plan public services. The danger here is that a decision will be taken before the options are assessed and a viable alternative is agreed to satisfy a short term financial pressure.

Ed Balls on the other hand has been ramping up the pressure on the government with much public support for this popular programme which the country cannot afford in its present state. However, he is also the Minister who presided over the closure of many perfectly good primary schools by local authorities that are now having to replace them because of the pressure now being put on the areas by rising pupil populations! They encouraged local authorities to close primary schools because of falling rolls yet failed to see the big wave of school pupils coming over the hill! What brilliant forward planning!

## Spending Cuts

It seems to me that the present government is in a bit of a bind on school closures. On the one hand, it now has to plan for an increasing number of primary school children for the next decade at least (15 -18 % increase up to 2018) and yet it is in the middle of the worst recession since the second world war and feels it has to make serious cuts in public spending. It has already indicated that the Building Schools for the Future programme has been scrapped in its present form. So how is it going to cope with added pressure on current school accommodation?

Many local authorities are way behind the times with their school provision strategies. They are still stating in their consultation literature that they expect rolls to fall so there is, in their eyes, an argument for closing schools. Clearly, this is not the case with government statistics verifying the forecast increase. But they seem to be wary of reviewing their current strategies as they still have surplus places that need to be dealt with now. But surely the surplus places issue will begin to diminish as pupil numbers rise over the next few years. Closing schools just reduces capacity at a time when that capacity may be needed. Schools are becoming assets now and not the liabilities they have been treated as in the last decade.

Everyone would like to have brand new, purpose-built schools for their children but this may have to be sacrificed to deal with the recession. New building may make way for refurbishment where possible as a lower cost option to help reduce public spending. Maybe all will become clear in the Spending Cuts this autumn. But any local authority closing schools now may hamstring themselves if there is no more money for new build into the future. Maybe they should look after what they already

have and avoid the embarrassing situation that some London and Midland authorities found themselves in last year and this year where they do not have enough places for their primary school population because of a previous over-zealous school closure programme.

Local authorities should take stock now and not make any decisions on school closure that will disadvantage their electorate over the next decade. Now is the time for contemplation and not action until the Government's policy on school provision becomes clear.

We have seen the coalition government unveil how it is going to claw back the enormous borrowing deficit on Wednesday this week. It is comforting to see that Education generally is being shielded from the swingeing cuts proposed for other public sector services. There were a number of interesting announcements which may give cause for concern in schools.

The government has said that there will be a capital programme for new schools and refurbishment of schools but significantly curtailed from the previous government's building schools for the future programme. A figure of £600 million in total was mentioned but with no indication of how this will be spent and what criteria will guide the allocation of money. Perhaps this will become clearer in November to councils. It may persuade some councils to re-evaluate their current strategies with regard to school closure.

There is also the proposed pupil premium where it is proposed that more money will be attached to children in disadvantaged areas. This is to be commended but the impact of such a radical redistribution of educational budgets will help some schools but create major challenges for others. The size of the cake will still be getting smaller despite the acceptance that more

children will be funnelling into the educational system over the next decade.

And there is still no indication of how the new idea of free schools is going to be paid for. Will it be taken from the existing education budget or will there be some additional, separate and distinct funding available? Again we will only find this out through time.

In my opinion, there are still some choppy waters ahead for schools and parents need to be aware that councils will still be looking to save money and closing schools is still the way to achieve significant

I suppose my point is that, whatever government is in power, parents should not expect any help in their fights to save their primary schools. Both government and opposition have different agendas to each other and parents and parents must fight their own corner with the help of the law and its guidance and seek to get an objective view on their case. What seems blindingly obvious to parents isn't even given a backward glance by the political parties.

Education policy is now in a big mess. Parents need to be vigilant because anything can happen in these dangerous and volatile times for education. Parents have few rights and governments pay lip service to parent participation in education so parents really need to form a national body so that their views on education policy have to be heard. We can fight the good fight when our backs are against the wall ie when our school is threatened with closure but we need to strike earlier and more strategically. Insert some common sense into governmental thinking.

I have seen a number of cases recently where parents and carers groups are or have been fighting closure proposals made by local councils both in England and Scotland. The one common denominator is that the councils have clearly contradicted the law and its guidance in trying to close particular schools. And not just in small ways.

The question is why have the councils involved done this? Shouldn't they be upholding the law as they are local "government"? Or do they see themselves above the law? I can understand that councils have a great deal of pressure on them at the moment to make savings in view of the parlous state of public finances. But surely this should be done within the law as it stands. I can also believe that councils, under this type of pressure and timescale, even with their enormous resources, make mistakes. What I haven't heard is any council apologising to parents and admitting they got it wrong.

What I have seen is councils being arrogant and denigrating the wishes and views of the people that matter most in these exercises, the pupils and parents. Their consultation exercises have been a joke and the information they provide is partial and in some cases wrong and misleading. They have ridden roughshod over schools that are not only good but thriving. The law and its guidance have been lost in all of this, well, maybe just the parts that cause the councils a problem.

Why do they do this? Because they believe they can get away with it! Parents can be bullied into submission. The Department of Children, Schools and Families wash their hands of any dealings with school closures. They leave it to the councils and the Schools Adjudicator. If you are in the wrong category of school then you have no rights of appeal over an unscrupulous

council. Even where you can point out that there has been an obvious significant breach of the law and its guidance there is a vacuum. It has to be tested through the courts, through judicial review.

This puts parents and lay people in a greatly disadvantageous position. The council with its superior financial and legal resources can afford to contest even a hopeless case. Parents with a good case have only a small chance to win. The law seems to be only for the strong. This contrasts pointedly with the law and the central government rhetoric about an education system shaped by parents.

Maybe its time to lobby the DCSF for a change in the law to help parents fulfil what the government (apparently) want them to do, shape the education system. Maybe we should band together to try and redress this one-sided contest. Is anybody up for another battle?

*(Since this was written the coalition government have formed a new Department of Education which has taken over the responsibilities for Education in England anyway. However, there are still important links to legislation at the DCSF web site)*

## First Principles

If you want to challenge a school closure proposal EFFECTIVELY then there are certain actions that must be taken. However, it is as much about attitude, commitment and patience.

## Form an Action Group

You can take action yourself to fight the council on school closures but I would advocate forming a small action group of like-minded and committed parents and carers to take on work necessary to progress your campaign to save your school.

Never was the adage “Two heads are better than one” more appropriate. Several heads are better than two although I would advise you keep it to a small and manageable number. Too many and you may end up looking like the local authority you are fighting. You may also find it more difficult to gain consensus on action to be taken. Six to ten people would be the optimal number in my experience.

You need to be clear about what your “Save Our School” action group is designed to do. You also need clear separation between the action group and the school you are trying to save.

For instance, having the head teacher as part of the action group is not a good idea. They are employed by the local authority and may be compromised by this. Equally, the action group can do things that the head teacher might not be able to condone but are necessary nonetheless.

However, you need a good relationship with the head teacher and the board of governors. It is useful to meet them regularly to keep them updated with the work and plans of the action group. They can fight the battle in their own way then without putting their jobs or positions at risk.

Local ward councillors may also be useful to have as co-opted members of the action group. We have found that our local independent ward councillors have been extremely helpful but this stems from the fact that they are not part of the ruling political group and are therefore not hamstrung by the

collective “whip”. Be aware of the political constraints when you invite ward councillors on board as co-opted members.

Try and get people on board with useful skills and experience. Knowledge of how councils work is a very important experience to have. I fulfilled that role in our group as I spent 28 years in local government before retiring. A solicitor or someone with in depth knowledge of local government law would be highly desirable. If you cannot get this within the group it can be sought from other channels.

Most of all you all must be prepared to do actual work. Decide amongst yourselves who will do what – who writes the press releases/ newsletters, who manages the web site, who photocopies the leaflets, who distributes them, who talks to the local media, who liaises with the school etc. Division of labour helps the campaign enormously.

A small active group can take on the council effectively and this needs to be set up as early as possible.

**PS** Just as a postscript to this, we had to look at the option of the Head Teacher being involved in the action group. We took the view in the end that the Head Teacher should remain separate to the “Save Our School” action group for a number of reasons. Firstly, the Head Teacher is an employee of the council and could be vulnerable to disciplinary action if seen as part of a group actively challenging the council. Secondly, the Head Teacher has a particular role to play in defending the school. And, thirdly, the action group can do things and say things that the Head Teacher could not do – contentious words and acts. The Head Teacher needs to be able to step away from the group sometimes and assume a more neutral position. We felt that this was the right way to approach this and it would ultimately protect the Head Teacher from criticism by the local



authority. That is not to say that we did not keep the Head Teacher informed of our actions and have regular meetings with them.

## Know Your Opponent

When you get ready for a fight you need to know your opponent – in this case, the council. What are its strengths and weaknesses? Where is it vulnerable? How can you exploit these weaknesses? How can you side step areas where it is strong? What are your own strengths and weaknesses? How can you play to your strengths and get rid of your weaknesses?

Here are a few pointers:

### Council Strengths

- They have the law on their side. A council has a statutory duty to consider the organisation of schools within its area. Each council has a Schools Organisation Committee which makes formal decisions on closing and amalgamating schools and other educational issues.
- They are big organisations with many staff providing educational services.
- They have large budgets – money is no object in achieving its aims
- They have teams of solicitors dealing with the minutiae of education law.
- They have previous experience of dealing with school closures

Wooah! You must be thinking how can we hope to compete with this? Simple. It also has a number of weaknesses that can be exploited.

### Council Weaknesses

- Arrogance – most councils think they know what is best for their schools and pupils and that parents and carers views are not important. (This is not actually the case) Councils can act like bullies to get their own way.
- Complacency – Councils are rarely challenged effectively on school closures and they think they are always going to get their own way. This often leads to sloppy and unprepared action which can be the basis of challenge and criticism for an action group.
- Councils have to abide by the law and statutory guidance – this seems obvious but councils have been known make up their own rules, legal or not
- Councils should abide by their own policies, procedures and strategies – I have seen on a number of occasions where councils agree policies that conflict with one another. This is gold dust for an action group to be able to raise conflicting policies.
- Councils are big and cumbersome and take time to progress matters – this gives an action group time to check everything that the council does, do its own research and conduct a nimble campaign against the closure
- Councils are divided naturally – officers and elected members. Often there are tensions between the two groups that can be exploited

- Councils dislike negative publicity – it calls into question their competency and has a political dimension to it. Bad decisions could cost local ward councillors their jobs. Poor processes and decisions could bring the council in the line of sight of national scrutiny bodies such as the Audit Commission and the Local Government Ombudsman.
- Councils do not always have the final decision – in certain circumstances, there can be an appeal against the council's decision to an independent body such as the Schools Adjudicator

I've listed just a few things that should be of help and forms the basis of how an action group can be effective in challenging the council. More detail will follow.

## Realism

Just a short note about being realistic about what you can achieve. If you definitely believe that you have a good case to keep your school open then use whatever means necessary and mobilise whoever you can in a campaign to keep it open.

However, if the arguments and facts and figures are against you remind yourself that you may be fighting a losing battle and that whatever you do is merely prolonging the inevitable and being an annoyance to the local authority.

In the final analysis, though, you may still feel that the effort is worth it to make the council justify its decisions and, personally, you will feel that you have done everything that you can to keep the school open.

## Attitude

This is very important. I'll say it again. This is very important. The attitude of your action group is key to your success or otherwise.

Why? I'll tell you. As I've said before, you are in a fight, usually with the council. It or some other organisation is trying to close your school. Your action group may be the only thing preventing them getting their own way.

But you're ordinary people who have never really been involved with the council in any deep and meaningful way before. You don't have the knowledge. How do we tackle something like this? Surely, the council will listen to reason. Let's wait and see what the council does. If you are thinking like this, it will be music to the council's ears.

The council will think you are going to be a pushover. It will carry on regardless without valuing your (very valid) reasons for not closing the school. It has its own rationale and it will not match with your point of view. It will think it is bigger, stronger, have more expertise and can bulldoze its way to what it wants. A timid action group is not going to be effective. Politeness will not work.

Firstly, the action group has got to get over any possible inferiority feelings it has. You need to develop a righteous sense of grievance and let that fuel your working group. How dare they try and close our school? They are not going to get away with it!

Secondly, treat the council as if it were a person – a schoolyard bully. Challenge it as often as you can. Don't retreat into a corner and hope that it will come to its senses. Don't give it any

respect. It is not giving the parents of the school any respect. Believe me, you can challenge it effectively (particularly if you read the articles on this site). You can make life hard for them and make your presence felt. You can punch above your weight if you know how.

Thirdly, don't make the action group a mini council. By that, I mean don't let internal bureaucracy divert your focus from the main target – taking effective action against a council who doesn't care about your school.

Fourthly, don't procrastinate. Keep taking action. Keep the campaign ideas flowing. Do things now rather than later. Keep the council guessing about what the action group will do next. Let them fear you.

Your action group must be assertive and active. It must have a confidence born of righteous grievance. Don't be afraid to try things even if they don't work. The action group needs to set the agenda rather than follow the script laid down by the council. The group must prove itself a worthy opponent. Discussion has its place but action speaks louder.

A better term for the group is a pressure group. Your group is there to pour pressure on to the council. Try and make it see sense. Carry out actions that create pressure for the council by exploiting its weaknesses.

Nice and polite and doffing your cap does not work. Make the council wish that it had never followed its course of action. Make them understand that there is a high price to pay for trying to close your school.

This type of attitude is very important in galvanising the group and will sustain your campaign over the long months while you

are trying to save your school. Don't let the council have an easy ride.

## Process

There is usually a long process leading up to the closure or discontinuance of a school. The Local Authority will lead this and tell you what the next steps are throughout the process. It looks something like this:

- LA decides to review surplus places at the school or schools in the area
- LA sets up a group to manage this
- The group decide on the factors to be used in the review (sometimes the LA consult parents and carers on the factors to be used)
- LA sets up a public meeting and possibly other consultation events to which parents and carers are invited
- First Public meeting is held that allows parents and carers to voice their opinions
- (At this stage they will present the facts and figures and options they have put together but they will say that all comments and opinions will be taken into account at this stage. One of the options will be closure of the school).
- LA go away from the meeting and conduct an option appraisal to select the preferred option to be implemented. They use the factors previously agreed to carry out the option appraisal.

- LA sets up a Second Public meeting at which the preferred option is revealed and the meeting, in their eyes, is to consult parents and carers how best to implement this option.
- During this process, the LA will also be taking reports to Council committees and Cabinet to gain political support.
- A final report will be compiled with all of the comments and objections and go to Cabinet for agreement.
- If this is agreed then the LA will go into the statutory phase. This is prescribed by law and they have to follow the rules to the letter. They will advertise a statutory notice in the local paper and invite comments/ objections within a statutory period.
- A report will be prepared and then a meeting of the Schools Organisation Committee or a Final Cabinet meeting will be held to make the final decision on closure. Parents and carers can attend the SOC or Cabinet meeting but after the decision is made at this committee there is no opportunity to contest it unless the school falls into certain categories (Faith-based, Trust-based)
- This is likely to be the end of the road and the decision must be carried out by law (unless there is right of appeal)

This is a brief summary of what happens and it may vary from local authority to local authority.

The main message is to understand what the process is in your context and use every opportunity to make your views known. At the beginning it may not be clear that your school may be threatened with closure and parents may not get involved until later on in the process. Use the public meetings. Use any consultation forms. Write

letters. Involve your local councillors. Create local protest events. Involve the local media. Give the local authority a hard time.

I'll go into more detail with some of these things in forthcoming posts.

### SOC or Final Cabinet Meeting

The most important meeting you are likely to face is the Schools Organisation Committee (SOC) meeting or the Final Cabinet meeting called by your local council. This means that a proposal to close has been agreed by the council and you are in the statutory phase of the process. Statutory notices will have been posted in the local area and advertised in the local paper. You and other parents and interested parties will be given a short period of time to make written objections and representations before this meeting is called. This meeting will make the final decision on whether to close your school (in most cases, unless your school has an automatic right of appeal to the Schools Adjudicator).

This meeting is different in each council and you will have to look on the council web site to find out its terms of reference and who sits on the committee. It is important to know who is making the decision and what you can do within the rules.

At this point you are definitely in opposition to the council who have nailed their colours to the mast and are at a disadvantage. The council will no doubt have been in this situation before, you have not. The council has the upper hand but you can do things to unsettle them and make their life difficult. Prior to the meeting you must:

- Get as many people to put WRITTEN objections to the council before the meeting. Many people will be getting weary by now



as they will have been to the consultation meetings and made their views known then. These views will be acknowledged in the council's report to this committee but it is imperative to get as many written objections in at this stage even if they reiterate what has been said before. It is a numbers game to a certain degree.

- Encourage parents and carers and members of the community to attend the meeting. The more the better. Tell them the date early and keep it in the forefront of the minds.
- Depending on the administrative rules on the conduct of the SOC meeting, register with the council as many voices to speak at the meeting as possible.
- Check the statutory notice – check against the statutory guidance and if there are omissions or discrepancies. If you do find any then inform the council and they will more than likely have to start the process again and it may give you more time to prepare your case.
- Try to get the SOC or Final Cabinet meeting held at your school or on your patch. If the town hall or civic centre is a long way from your school then it may be difficult to get people to the meeting. Difficulties with transport, childcare arrangements etc. are legitimate arguments to use if the council are reticent to allow this. This has the bonus of making the council officers and members less comfortable in this environment. It can unsettle them as well as helping you to maximise the attendance.
- Also make sure it is at a time that will maximise attendance as well. Should the council not agree to this, it will make them seem uncaring if an appeal happens.

- Assume that the council party have come to the meeting with a rehearsed script to close the school. Your job is to make them (particularly the elected members) think twice and feel uncomfortable about making a decision that day.
- Prepare your case – concentrate on key issues to your case. Try and keep some of your powder dry for the meeting. By this, I mean don't provide all of your arguments prior to the meeting so that the council can prepare their response to your points. Have a few things that you hand over at the meeting that they have not seen before and will find difficulty digesting at the meeting. This is another strategy to unsettle the council officers and make the elected members feel uncomfortable.
- Organise people to speak at the meeting giving them a particular topic to major on. It can be a mix of emotional appeals but must have some hard evidence-based arguments about why it is not the best idea to close the school. A comparison with the statutory guidance on school closure will give you the basis for any challenges. The speakers may only have a few minutes to put across their points. Get the presentations written and rehearse them beforehand. Agree the running order. Agree the written documents that you are going to hand to the committee members and hand them in only after you have made the appropriate presentation. Don't give them time to read them during the presentation. Have people in the audience briefed to ask questions of the council officers if they get the chance.
- Examine the council's committee report in detail. Check for inaccuracies, discrepancies and omissions. This can be useful in exposing the council's failings, accuracy and lack of thoroughness.

During the meeting it is important to present yourselves as professional and controlled. That is not to say that the emotions associated with losing your school cannot be expressed. Just control it. No one benefits from a slanging match. Keep them on their toes. Take them out of their comfort zone. Make the elected members question their own officers' recommendations. Wrong foot them with additional, never-seen-before relevant information. Get the audience involved but in a strong and dignified way.

This does not mean to say they will not shut your school but you make them work for it.

### Campaigning

Before any decisions are made and, hopefully, as soon as you are told that your school is being considered for closure, you need to plan a campaign to stop the closure happening. It needs to be planned by the action group and be effective. You have a number of weapons at your disposal.

### Weapons

"Weapons" is a loose term to denote effective actions you can take as an action group to further your campaign. Using only one of these actions will not do. You have to fight the battle on a number of fronts and the campaign needs to be continuing throughout all of the process. At Gillas Lane we used all of these "weapons" during our 15 month campaign.

### Statutory Guidance

I cannot stress highly enough how important understanding the statutory guidance for closure of schools is in any part of the UK. It is the basis on which any Schools Adjudicator or appeal process will assess the council's closure proposals. It shows anybody what factors must be taken into account in coming to

the decision to close a school. If the council does not take into account all the factors they are supposed to then you can start to build a case against the council's proposal.

There are links to the statutory guidance in both England and Scotland on the right hand side bar.

On the face of it, it might seem complicated but you must get to understand it and that may mean going through it several times. Once you have understood it you must then think about your particular situation and start asking yourselves questions about whether the council has actually considered these factors. Where is the evidence they have considered the factors? What evidence is there that they have not considered these factors? The Government think that a good case must be made by councils when proposing the closure of schools but it is surprising how many councils do not consider all the factors they are supposed to.

In many cases, councils produce the closure recommendations from a review process involving a number of schools and busy themselves trying to find ways of choosing the right schools for closure that meet their objectives. These objectives are not always transparent to parents and carers. Nor are they necessarily in the best interests of your children. They are so keen to get this selection process right that they move straight to recommendation to close without checking to see whether it meets the statutory guidance. Either that or they play on the fact that parents will not know what to do to challenge them effectively and thus they can get their own way.

In our experience, councils fall down at this stage. Only parts of the statutory guidance will be demonstrated and there will be big holes that you can exploit and build up evidence to show that the council have not taken into account major factors that

they should have. For example, the guidance gives a certain amount of weight to the views and wishes of parents. Can the council demonstrate that they have taken your views and wishes into account in coming to their decision? Educational standards are also important and the council should be able to show how standards will tangibly improve as a result of the closure. Has your council done this? These are just two factors out of many.

If you want an example of how to assess your situation against the statutory guidance for closure click the link below and you will see what we did at Gillas Lane. This should help you visualise what it might look like for your school situation. It is a great way of structuring your evidence and it shows you where the council's weaknesses are and where you should be concentrating your fire power.

### [Comparison Against Statutory Guidance – Gillas Lane](#)

I urge everyone involved in school closure fights to do this early on as it can form the basis of any campaign and evidence-getting exercise. This enables you to challenge the council effectively.

### [Importance of Community](#)

I just thought I would do a short post about the importance of community in the closure of a school. As part of the decision making exercise, local authorities are supposed to take into account community use of the school. It usually centres on how much use is made of the school premises by local community groups. This is actually what the guidance states. If there is a lot of use by community groups then it is more difficult to close the school.

However, in the case of Gillas Lane Primary School, we found The Schools Adjudicator to be open to a much wider interpretation of “community”. We argued that the community valued and supported the school in different ways even though there was little community use of the school’s premises. We pointed to the history of the area and the role the school had played when there was social disruption for several years. The school was seen as an oasis of calm for the children of the area and it never received any vandalism during this period. We were supported at meetings by members of the local community who did not have any links to the school. They stood up in meetings and supported the school in their own way. The school was a living symbol for the community of the good things in the area rather than a resource to be used.

The Schools Adjudicator did comment on this. He felt from the meeting and the written representations made that the local community valued the school and was impressed by the support given. I am sure that this had an impact on his final decision.

It just shows how The Schools Adjudicator is more likely to take a much wider view of the overall context of the school than the minimum that the statutory guidance states.

## Parents Rights

If you have ever been involved in a school closure it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that parents seem to have no rights and their views are ignored during the consultation process. This is how many local authorities

treat the parents in the process either deliberately or inadvertently.

But it is important to know that even the law says that parents have an important influence. The statutory guidance says:

### **“A System Shaped by Parents**

4.17 The Government’s aim, as set out in the Five Year Strategy for Education and Learners and the Schools White Paper Higher Standards, Better Schools For All, is to create a school system shaped by parents which delivers excellence and equity. In particular, the Government wishes to see a dynamic system in which:

- weak schools that need to be closed are closed quickly and replaced by new ones where necessary;
- the best schools are able to expand and spread their ethos and success; and
- new providers have the opportunity to share their energy and talents by establishing new schools – whether as voluntary schools, Trust schools or Academies - and forming Trusts for existing schools.

4.18 The EIA 2006 amends the Education Act 1996 to place new duties on LAs to secure diversity in the provision of schools and to increase opportunities for parental choice when planning the provision of schools in their areas. In addition, LAs are under a specific duty to respond to representations from parents about the provision of schools, including requests to establish new schools or

make changes to existing schools. **The Government's aim is to secure a more diverse and dynamic schools system which is shaped by parents.** The Decision Maker should take into account the extent to which the proposals are consistent with the new duties on LAs.

### Standards

4.19 The Government wishes to encourage changes to local school provision which will boost standards and opportunities for young people, **while matching school place supply as closely as possible to pupils' and parents' needs and wishes.**

### Surplus Places

4.34 It is important that education is provided as cost-effectively as possible. Empty places can represent a poor use of resources - resources that can often be used more effectively to support schools in raising standards. The Secretary of State wishes to encourage LAs to organise provision in order to ensure that places are located where parents want them. LAs should take action to remove empty places at schools that are unpopular with parents and which do little to raise standards or improve choice. **The removal of surplus places should always support the core agenda of raising standards and respect parents' wishes by seeking to match school places with parental choices."**

These are not idle words but local authorities seem to be blind to these sections of the guidance. These words can be used to support your case particularly when you have



experienced a poor consultation and will resonate with The Schools Adjudicator if they get involved.

### Use the Consultation

There may be a time and place for extreme tactics but, first of all, you must use the opportunities provided by the consultation to get your views and objections across and have them officially registered.

Here are some key actions for using the system:

- Read all the reports provided by the council in fine detail – there will be a lot of facts and figures you can use in your own arguments. After all, this is the council's interpretation of a set of facts and figures and there will be other interpretations. The council is bound to use facts and figures to fit its own arguments. If you don't agree, challenge them.
- Highlight mistakes in the reports – there will be some. This can be used to question the professionalism and accuracy of the council.
- Always question forecasts of population figures, pupil numbers and house building in your area and how they have been calculated. Find out why the figures are as they are.
- Always question financial figures – again the council is probably going to provide only those figures that support its argument. The council may well skew the financial costs so that its preferred option looks more financially viable than the one supported by the parents.
- Check the factors used in the option appraisal process and whether the facts and figures are being used properly in this

process. For instance, in our fight at Gillas Lane, the council did not have an education factor in the option appraisal (how the options would affect the children's education in the future) and many bricks and mortar factors which we felt prejudiced the whole option appraisal.

- Galvanise as many parents and carers to write in or fill in comment forms when asked by the council. Numbers of objections and comments do matter in this process all the way down the line.
- Make sure the children have a say – get the head teacher to arrange a sensitive consultation with them. Maybe get the older children to write in letters saying what they like about the school. It all helps.
- Make sure your action group gets some status in the process. Lead the way and write to the council as a representative group. Keep the parents and carers informed of what you are doing or proposing to do. At Gillas Lane we produced a newsletter every so often delivered to all parents with information.
- Galvanise as many parents and carers to attend public meetings as possible. Again numbers are important. Equally, come prepared with relevant questions and be prepared to grill the officers at the meeting. The action group can be more organised than many parents and put the officers on the spot. Not every one likes to get up in front of a large room full of people but make sure the officers don't run the meeting. Control the meeting from the floor!
- Read the minutes of these public meetings carefully. They do not always reflect what you have heard or experienced. If there is something wrong in the minutes, complain to the council in

writing. Then you have a written record that can be produced later if you have the opportunity of an appeal.

## Formal Complaints

If you feel that your consultation process is poor or been mishandled then you should complain formally. Not just to your friends and your nearest and dearest but to the Council. Use their published complaints system. You'll find details on their web site.

Put the complaints in writing and the council are bound to respond to your complaints. It is usually a staged system where the department that are responsible for the consultation will respond firstly. If you are unhappy with their reply or lack of action then you can move it to the second stage. The second stage usually moves up a level to a different department or officer who is more independent. Once you have been through all the stages and you are still unhappy then you can contact the Local Government Ombudsman service.

The Ombudsman will only act if you have been through the council's published complaints process and are still unhappy. They will investigate and prepare an independent report on your complaints. The council does not have to act on the Ombudsman recommendations but most councils do as they know that this could affect their image and assessment by the Audit Commission.

This is a useful weapon as the council will be scrutinised by an independent body if they do not respond and respond to your complaints satisfactorily. However, make sure your complaints are real and not frivolous and are having an impact on you or the parents and carers of your school. Keep detailed notes, correspondence and dates of when things happened so that you can provide the Ombudsman with accurate and relevant information.

The more professional and thorough your submission to the Ombudsman the more chance you have of getting the Ombudsman to investigate. If you can convince them of your case and/or the council's failure to deal with the matter in a rational and satisfactory way then you are two thirds of the way towards initiating an investigation.

The council will not like this. It will create more work for them and potentially expose weaknesses in their case or their organisation. Elected members do not want the council to be seen as failing in its duties and bad PR can have an impact on their re-election chances. It worked at Gillas Lane because it made the elected members think twice as they eventually decided to postpone a final decision until the Ombudsman report had been published and they would then respond to that. Happily, the council, by doing this, ran out of time and the whole case had to be passed over to the Schools Adjudicator, the independent body that acts as an appeal mechanism for proposed school closures.

Formal complaints can be a very useful weapon as you are using their own system against the council. It is legitimate and should be used as just one of a number of tactics in your overall strategy.

### Challenge the Council

We've already talked about about how to use the consultation on school place planning / school closure effectively and register your views and objections. However, there are other legitimate ways in which you can challenge the council.

- The Council has published strategies, policies and procedures which you can usually find on their web site. During a school place planning / school closure exercise it is very likely that there will be some conflict between their existing published policies and what they are actually doing as part of the exercise. Make sure you check what is happening and see

whether it conflicts with any of these. In the Gillas Lane fight we found inconsistencies with the following published policies:- Community Cohesion Strategy, Community Consultation Strategy, Corporate Equality Scheme, Primary Strategy for Change and others. If you challenge these then at the very least you will embarrass the council and, possibly, have the basis for a formal complaint.

- If you are unhappy with the way the consultation has been carried out you can always try the council's published formal complaints system. If you feel aggrieved then why shouldn't you complain. You may get a negative response, as in our case at Gillas Lane, where the council did not recognise the complaint as being a legitimate one for their own published system. This did not stop us going to the Local Government Ombudsman and asking him to investigate the complaint on our behalf.
- To make progress on closing a school the council has to report to its cabinet and obtain formal decisions. There are mechanisms where a decision made by cabinet can be "called in" for scrutiny or review. It is usually helpful to have the assistance of a friendly ward councillor or two in achieving this. During the Gillas Lane fight, we were able to get the first decision that reduced the options to one (ie closure of the school) scrutinised by a separate committee. We had the opportunity to make short presentations to this committee and the councillors on the committee were able to ask questions and make comments. Whilst this committee cannot overturn the cabinet's decision it can ask the cabinet to look at it again and take note of their comments.
- And last, but definitely not least, look at the legislation itself covering school closures. There is statutory guidance on school closure. Check what the council has done against the

detailed statutory guidance. Assess whether the council has missed issues, or not followed the guidance properly. You can find an example of how I did this on the Save Gillas Lane School web site called something like assessment against the statutory guidance. If there are areas that you feel have been missed note these and use them in your arguments. It may be very useful if you are able to get to an appeal stage.

These are key actions if you plan to mount a long term campaign as they will give you a strong basis for challenge. Make sure everything is written down with all the “i”s and “t”s dotted and crossed. You will always get back from the council that they understand how difficult and emotional closing a school is for parents. Yes it is and so it should be but the way to challenge the council is not by saying “Oh woe is me and my child” or “You cannot shut this good school”. They will not listen to emotional arguments. And, to a certain degree, anyone hearing an appeal will do likewise.

It is by discrediting their arguments, using logic and sensible rational arguments back at them and tripping them up using their own facts, figures and policies that you will stand a chance of saving your school from closure.

It will be a long campaign. You will need patience, resilience and fortitude. You have to stick at it until all of the options you have are exhausted. Give them a real run for their money.

## Correspondence

Writing letters to the council can be very powerful. A letter is a written document (an email can also be seen as a letter) and as such is evidence. A letter to a council must be replied to as long as it is serious and is sent by a specified named person from a specified address. Anonymous letters have no credibility.

Letters can ask the key questions you want answers to. You should expect an answer from the council. If they don't answer then you have the basis of a complaint. If they do reply they may try to evade an answer to your question which gives you licence to continue the correspondence until you do get a satisfactory answer. Either way you have more evidence for your portfolio which you can share with others.

Councils usually have targets to meet in terms of timescales to respond to correspondence. You should monitor these timescales as you may have yet another ground for complaint if they do not reply within the timescales.

Letter writing (or email writing) is an important way of ramping up the pressure on the council. You are using their own systems against them and it creates more work for someone in the organisation to find an answer to your question, consult with other people in the council, get the letter written and agreed and finally post it back to you.

A letter campaign can be a useful tactic where there is a co-ordinated effort to send in many letters on the same issue. It is, however, not much use sending in a standard format letter with a different signature at the bottom. This just gives the council an opportunity to send a standard letter in reply. The best way to approach a letter campaign is to ask people to write their own letters and address on different aspects of the issue. All different letters, all different people and addresses. If this can be co-ordinated from a central point – say, an action group where the group get copies of the letters sent and those received back – all the better.

Replies can then be monitored for discrepancies, inconsistencies and errors in the council's position. They can be the source for further correspondence and legitimate complaint to the council.

But most of all it puts pressure on the council. It shows them you are organised and you are not going to go away until you have what you want.

Write to the elected members as well as the officers in charge of the review. Write letters throughout the council's organisation. Write to the Director, the manager in charge of the review, the Chief Executive, the Cabinet Member for education, the Leader of the council, your ward councillors, every member of the Cabinet. This causes a co-ordination problem for the council as there are divisions in the council. The council cannot dismiss you lightly.

All the time your hard evidence portfolio is growing and this will be important when you submit to the Schools Adjudicator. The Council needs to be challenged robustly at all stages.

### The Media

What weapons have you got to fight this big nasty bully, the local authority? One of the most useful is the local press and media.

I have found that a good relationship with the local press provides you with good publicity. I mean, who doesn't like a "David vs Goliath" story? They are always on the lookout for good local stories and interesting photo opportunities.

In our fight at Gillas Lane, one of our group was tasked with contacting the local paper and keeping them updated with our actions. We got many useful and positive articles in the paper highlighting our campaign. Remember, the local authority does not like negative publicity and makes great efforts to try and manage its public relations image.

You also have to remember that the local authority may be a major contributor to the paper in terms of money and advertising revenue so the article will be balanced to a certain degree



explaining both sides of the argument. In my experience though, the headlines and first paragraph will be favourable to your campaign.

Start a relationship with your local paper.

If you are super lucky then you may be able to get a TV station interested in your story. We were lucky to get BBC Look North involved and we had very good publicity through their coverage of our plight. As a local saying goes “Shy bairns get nowt!”

### Local Councillors

Local councillors can be a great help in your campaign. After all they are supposed to serve the people that elected them into office and the local community. They can get answers to questions that you, as an action group, cannot. They can talk to the decision makers direct and advise you how best to tackle the council.

However, there are a number of issues that you must be aware of. You might have thought that if they were a member of the ruling party then they would be great people to have on your side. You could have access to the key decision makers. However, if your local councillors are members of the ruling party then they may not be able to support you wholeheartedly as they are likely to be controlled by the party whip. If the party is in support of the proposal to close the school, then they would be fighting against their own party which may have disciplinary consequences for them. They may have to step back and be of little use.

Opposition or independent local councillors are generally better to have as supporters. They do not usually have such shackles on them. Particularly, independent councillors who have no overarching political agenda and are keen to work with local

groups. In our fight at Gillas Lane, we have two independent councillors who have worked tirelessly with us and allowed us to get access to the council that we would not normally have enjoyed. They have spoken up at council meetings on our behalf; they have presented petitions to council for us; they have made written representations on our behalf; and they have generally given us good advice and practical support in distributing leaflets etc.

We have found that they can be a great asset if they are motivated to help. Get to know them and involve them. You can invite them to be associate members of your action group and invite them to your action group meetings. They can help you form your strategy and campaign plan and get information for you. Don't be shy. Get them involved.

### Mobilising External Support

Whilst using the statutory guidance against the authorities is the best line of attack and defence, in my view, it does help to get as many people and organisations supporting your case as possible. I am not talking about parents, carers and the local community but other relevant external people and organisations to support you.

For instance, the local Member of Parliament (MP) can be helpful in asking questions of the council. If they support your campaign, all the better. The Local Member of the European Parliament (MEP) may be helpful but less so as their remit does not usually cover education.

Local celebrities can help to raise the profile of your campaign. If you have well known people in the entertainment, business or academic world who were born in your area then why not contact them and explain your plight and see whether they would be prepared to support your campaign. Even a letter from

them which you could use in your PR will gain the interest of the press. It will help to keep your campaign high profile.

There are one or two national organisations that may be able to help. The National Association of Small Schools (NASS) promotes the value of small schools in the UK. They can provide small schools under threat of closure with good arguments about the benefits of small schools in improving educational standards.

There are, sadly, many other groups fighting to save their schools at the moment. Many have web sites on the internet and a google search will find many of them. Why not contact them and provide mutual help and support in whatever ways you can. Sharing experiences with other like-minded groups can be extremely beneficial. You will get more ideas for action. As I find such web sites I will put links to them from this site. If you have seen others please let me know so I can share that information through this web site. Most groups think they are alone and it is daunting to start from scratch. If they know there are others out there and can contact them easily it will help to maintain and even boost morale.

So, please, if you have any information that you think might be helpful to other “save our school” action groups let me have it and I will publish it on this site. Thanks.

### [Sharing Ideas](#)

I cannot believe that I am the only one with examples of effective action against school closure. Surely there must be other people, other groups who have been successful in fighting off a school closure proposal! Give me your examples and experience and let's put them on this site for all to see and benefit from. The more examples of effective action we can display, the better the site will be for those folks who are suffering from a school closure proposal for the first time.

Please comment here or email me your experiences so that we can improve the advice and assistance that we can give on this site. The site is well regarded by Google and generally appears on the first page of searches involving the term “school closure”. So people looking specifically for information on fighting school closures will generally find this site. The Parents Against School Closure toolbar and the site itself have links to groups who have set up web sites and this will be invaluable for new groups to contact them and benefit from their experiences.

Let’s give people the ability and the confidence to resist any closure proposals that parents do not want. Please help the cause.

## Appeals

Even when the council has made its formal decision through the statutory Schools Organisation Committee (SOC) or Final Cabinet meeting, you may still have the opportunity to appeal against this decision. All is not lost at this stage for some schools.

You note that I said “some” schools because various categories of schools have an extra level of protection. If your school is:

- A Faith-based school
- A Trust school
- 

then you will probably have access to an appeal mechanism through the Schools Adjudicator. Check your situation through the Statutory Guidance for School Closure. This can be invaluable if your local council is intent on closing your school.

The Schools Adjudicator will look at the proposal with fresh eyes and examine whether the proposal meets all of the statutory guidance where the local council may have just concentrated on areas that support its case.

As a general rule, if you are a maintained, mainstream school you will not have this access in law. This was the case with Gillas Lane where the primary school is a maintained school. However, we were able to get access to The Schools Adjudicator because the council could not come to a decision within the statutory timescale and therefore, in law, the case passed to The Schools Adjudicator for determination.

We knew that if we could get to The Schools Adjudicator we would get a fair and objective hearing, something that we felt Sunderland City Council had not given us. The trick is to get to that position. Sowing the seeds of doubt is a major strategy here. But that is another story in its own right.

If you can, prepare for an appeal early. Keep some of your powder dry. Do not show your full hand to the council and try to be one step ahead of them at each stage. Keep them off guard. Appeals can tip the balance in your favour.

I've talked a little before about the Schools Adjudicator and their role in hearing appeals against a council's school closure proposal. I feel that they provide an objective assessment of your case as opposed to the heavily biased case for closure that your council puts forward. (Many councils do not even tell parents there is a possibility of an appeal to the Schools Adjudicator!)

However, you can learn a lot from reading some of the previous decisions made by the Schools Adjudicator. If you go to the Schools Adjudicator web site and look down the menu you will be able to find all the published decisions made by the Schools Adjudicator for

several years back. The decision reports are short (10-20 pages long generally) but packed with information. They are in date order generally but with a bit of effort on your part you can find decisions made about schools that are a close fit to your situation. You just need to read the beginnings of the reports.

When you have identified the decision reports that closely match your own situation print them off and read them carefully and make notes. They may not all be favourable results but you can learn so much about what the Schools Adjudicators are looking for, what are important factors in their assessments, what factors are less important and how they come to their decisions. This is invaluable information when you are planning a campaign or drawing up your response to consultation or, if you are very lucky, writing a report for the Schools Adjudicator at an appeal.

The key thing is that the Schools Adjudicator will make an assessment based around the Statutory Code of Guidance for school closure but inevitably there will be different emphases on different factors. Reading the reports will give you an insight into what the Schools Adjudicator generally deems as important. You can also see how each individual inspector interprets the statutory guidance from the way they write the report and summarise their findings.

My advice would be to spend some time researching these reports as they are a very useful resource in planning terms.

## Scotland

A recent email from a parent at St Matthews RC Primary School in Wishaw, Scotland, reminded me that there is a significant difference between the law in England and the law in Scotland on school closures.

I have put a link on the site to the guidance that is relevant to Scotland as well as that relevant in England. They are fundamentally different with different emphases and different appeals criteria.

My general advice is:

- Read the guidance that is relevant to your situation at an early stage thoroughly so that you know how the process can unfold.
- Plan your campaign on the basis of what can happen
- Know whether you are likely to have the chance of an appeal – in England it is to The Schools Adjudicator, in Scotland it is to a government minister. And the eligibility criteria for an appeal are different. Use any legal facilities you can – we used the local university legal studies department who were quite helpful in giving general advice for free.
- Preparation is vital to all stages of the campaign. Understand the criteria that the councils have to satisfy to make the case for closure. Be sure to argue against these criteria and not other irrelevant criteria. Evidence and facts rule in this fight. Emotion is useful to sustain your commitment but counts for little in the assessment and decision-making.
- If you feel that the consultation has been handled badly, then formally COMPLAIN to the council. In England, Wales and Scotland, if you are not happy with the way that the council handles your complaint, then you can refer it to the Local Government Ombudsman. In Scotland, it is the SPSO or Scottish Public Services Ombudsman. (In our fight for Gillas Lane, this was an integral part of our campaign as we were deeply unhappy about the way the consultation was carried out by Sunderland City Council. We complained to the council formally but were told that the council was only treating it as a negative

response to the consultation. We referred the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman which made the council sit up and think about what could happen. At the SOC meeting the council decided to postpone any final decision until the Ombudsman had reported. This delay put the council over the statutory time limit and we got our appeal to The Schools Adjudicator. Referral to the Ombudsman can be useful!)

There are differences but there are similarities in how you should approach the campaign. Know what you are letting yourself in for.

## Wales

Closing a school in Wales is governed by the Welsh National Assembly. You can access the details below:-

[School Organisation Proposals: Welsh Assembly Government Circular No: 021/2009](#)

However, the situation appears to be changing as the Minister wants to reduce the time taken to make a decision and reduce the involvement of the Minister in appeals cases where there are objections.

It seems to me that the National Assembly is trying to get out of the difficult process of making the final decision in most cases. However, it is not clear if there will be a replacement for their appeals process at local level that is fair and objective. May be now is the time to lobby the National Assembly to keep a workable appeals process in the new proposals.



## Important Resources

There are a number of web sites that are very useful and can provide a lot of information and help.

Department of Education

<http://www.education.gov.uk/>

DCSF web site - Every Child Matters

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/>

Free Schools

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/leadership/typesofschools/freeschools>

Free Schools - DirectGov

[http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/N11/Newsroom/DG\\_188665](http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/N11/Newsroom/DG_188665)

Statutory Guidance for Closing a School (England)

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg/guidance.cfm?id=3>

Guidance for Closing a School (Scotland)

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/Buildings/guidance>

Guidance for Closing a School (Wales)

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/publications/circulars/schoolorganisation/?lang=en>

Welsh Assembly - Guidance on Schools Organisation Proposals

<http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/090918schoolorganisationen.pdf>

Local Government Ombudsman (England)

<http://www.lgo.org.uk/>

<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/>

No. 10 E-petitions

<http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/>

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

<http://www.spso.org.uk/how-complain>

Office of National Statistics

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/default.asp>

National Association of Small Schools

<http://www.smallschools.org.uk/index.htm>

The Schools Adjudicator

<http://www.schoolsadjudicator.gov.uk/>

Ofsted

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