

Monks Eleigh: Parents claim they were used as scapegoats over school closure

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[Emma Brennan](#)



Monks Eleigh Primary

Parents, governors and community members claim they have been unfairly blamed for the demise of their tiny village primary school.



Monks Eleigh

Primary School

The number of students at Monks Eleigh Primary near Lavenham dropped from 37 to just nine after it was judged inadequate by Ofsted following an inspection last July.

County education officers said the school could not function with so few pupils, but villagers believe if the council had intervened sooner to reassure parents, the school could have been saved.

Despite no official decision by the local education authority to close the school, the last pupils left at Easter and a consultation process over its future has just ended.

However, local people believe their opinions will not be taken into consideration because the county has already effectively closed the school and there is “no way back.”

The county council maintains it did everything possible to keep the school open including putting in a temporary headteacher and an interim executive board.

But Sharon James, a member of the SaveMe School group and a teacher said: “There was a huge gap between the Ofsted inspection taking place and the report being published. So when it finally came out, there was no-one there to advise parents and there was a panic, knee-jerk reaction because there is such a dire shortage of primary school places in the area.

“We all thought the county council would do something positive to get the school back on track like they have with other poorly rated schools and it came as a quite a shock they weren’t going to.

“If there had been a collection of people there to say don’t worry we are going to get this sorted, then it would have been a very different picture.

“They put in an interim executive board but by the time that happened, the school was totally unviable and the community had no power to reverse what was happening.

“We feel the parents and governors were very unfairly blamed for what we see as a lack of leadership.”

The county is now analysing responses received during a consultation process and these will be discussed at a meeting on September 9. The current proposal is to officially close Monks Eleigh Primary School on October 24.

Barbara Syms, who helped set up the community shop in Monks Eleigh, said: “A lot of parents have written in to the consultation but they know they are not going to get a response.

“There are at least 100 people who support keeping the school open but we feel that it’s a forgone conclusion because the council had already made up their minds to close the school.”

A county council spokeswoman said the authority had a good track record of helping under-performing schools to come out of special measures. She said “intensive support” had been provided to Monks Eleigh Primary, both before and since its Ofsted inspection, using tried and tested interventions.

The council has received 122 consultation responses. The spokeswoman added: “We had two different versions of ‘multiple letters’ which were copied, signed and sent in as a batch. We received 52 copies of one letter and 36 of the other and therefore, we received only 34 individual responses and five of those also sent in copies of the copied letters.”

A statutory notice period will run from June 27 to July 25 which will give the public another opportunity to comment on the proposal.