

Monks Eleigh: Education chiefs say closing primary school would be a ‘last resort’

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Emma Brennan emma.brennan@archant.co.uk

Monks Eleigh Primary School.

Closing a Suffolk primary school which is down to just 11 pupils after being judged inadequate by Ofsted will be a “last resort”, the county council has pledged.

Following a visit last July, government inspectors deemed “special measures” were required to bring Monks Eleigh Primary School, near Boxford, up to scratch.

Since the report was published, the board of governors resigned and the number of students has tumbled from 30 to just 11.

An interim executive board (IEB) has been installed along with a new headteacher, but some parents fear the county council will shut the school unless student numbers can be boosted.

This week, a council spokesman denied the future of the school would be dependent solely on a minimum number of students attending.

He said levels of student attainment and the quality of teaching and learning were more important than the size of any school.

All schools encounter unavoidable overheads such as staffing, heating and maintenance but they are funded by central government on a “per pupil” basis, using a national formula.

Therefore, the larger the proportion of a school’s budget that goes on overheads, the less flexibility it has to spend money on teaching and learning, which is an issue nationally, not just in Suffolk.

The county council spokesman said: “It’s impossible to say whether or not a school will be viable purely on student numbers and funding. To help secure their futures, we believe that small schools should enter into stable partnership arrangements with other schools so that educational standards can be improved and maintained for the children in their care.”

Despite the falling number of pupils at Monks Eleigh, the council maintains it has [no intention of closing the school at this stage](#).

The spokesman continued: “We are now working with the IEB and the head to develop a strategy to provide for the children the best quality education possible. We are also investigating various potential partnership arrangements.

“Closure is the absolute last option we would consider and only after exhausting all other possibilities. That’s what we’re doing now.”

Headteacher Karen Harmen said Monks Eleigh Primary was now [back on track](#) and she hoped parents would reconsider sending their children to the school. She added: “At the moment, Monks Eleigh is a happy school with a positive environment and we are cautiously optimistic that when Ofsted comes back in, they will recognise that we are a school coming out of special measures.

“No decisions have been made about the long-term future of the school and we are a very long way off a decision to close.

“That wouldn’t happen without extensive consultation and all other avenues being explored.”