

Higham Primary School

Having attended the Extraordinary Parish Council meeting on 27th April and made some observations, I have been asked to provide some commentary regarding the impact that the Gravesham Plan for House Building could have on Higham Primary School in terms of impact on the school population, stakeholders and infrastructure.

These matters have previously been discussed by Governors regarding local planning applications, as they often seem to have been designed without thought about the school. Some of the commentary from Higham Parish Council was incorrect and therefore I merely wanted to place on record the facts as evidenced by the Governors and Senior Leaders of the School.

This is written without the use of AI and without reference to specific planning applications and so is therefore untainted by inaccuracy and generally applies to the village and not a specific application.

Higham Primary School was founded in 1848. No doubt at that time School Lane was adequate for pedestrians, horse drawn carriages and farm equipment. If someone was building a school in Higham in 2026, School Lane would not be the chosen site.

Amenities

In the last 3 years Higham Primary School has been forced to close on 5 separate occasions (with the latest two times being in June 2025 and March 2026) due to issues with the water supply. Without notice, the water supply was turned off and so no water was available at the school. This impacts on cooking meals on site, cleanliness and of course use of the toilets for circa 250 people. No communication was received beforehand and so the Headteacher had no option but to close the school.

When these outages have occurred before the commencement of the school day, messages are circulated to parents who then have a last-minute change of plans to arrange care for their children. This severely inconveniences parents who may have to take last minute time off work.

These outages have also occurred during the school day, where parents must then collect their children. Naturally, if parents are working in London this may take a while to return to Higham. The school would never send children home alone and so staff would wait until the last child was collected by an adult/carer, in a school that had no water.

Once water was restored the site manager would then need to carry out checks on the water supply to ensure it was properly restored and clean to be used for cooking and drinking.

Aside from all the inconvenience to parents and staff the children have lost out on valuable education time. Education time was lost during the Pandemic, through the fault of nobody, but these outages are unacceptable from the water provider.

In addition to the water issues there has also been a closure due to power being lost to the school within the last 2 years. The school was again closed due to lighting, heating, phone lines and computer teaching resources being unavailable.

Pupil Numbers (Primary School)

Higham Primary School has one form entry. We have 7 year groups from ages 4 – 11, with 30 children in each year group. We have 210 pupils currently. For the Infant part of the school (years R, 1 and 2) we cannot take more than 30 children unless exceptionally agreed by the Local Authority (this would only be after the infant school class had 30 children and the Local Authority compelled us to take another child due to a safeguarding issue, looked after situation (like foster care), Special Education Need or disability need for a child in the village that could not be satisfied in a school further afield). Higham cannot voluntarily go over the 30 child infant restriction and nor would we want to, as large classes would negatively impact on the children's learning.

As far back as I can remember (I have been a Governor for 20 years and Chair of Governors for 15 years) the Reception class intake has been full every year. In September 2025 the furthest pupil admitted with that intake lived a mere 1.86 miles away. This certainly makes the school part of the local community and helps with settling children in initially.

There have been examples in the last 10 years where new reception classes have had 15 – 25 siblings which has meant that children within a mile of the school have not secured a place as siblings of existing pupils take priority in our Admissions Policy. This has caused angst for parents of children who have not been able to secure a place in the Reception class and they have had to look at other alternative schools outside of the village.

An answer that has been discussed previously, is enlarging the school however aside from the financial cost of such a venture, the local infrastructure just could not sustain an increased number of pupils (see below Road Network section).

Secondary Education options

Higham Primary School is on the border of Kent Local Authority and Medway Local Authority which means that our children travel to probably the most diverse range of secondary schools compared to any other Primary School in Kent.

This year our pupils will go to 10 different secondary schools. Some in Medway (Strood Academy and Fort Pitt Grammar), some in Kent (Gravesend Grammar School, Thamesview, Mayfield Grammar, Meopham, St Georges, St John's Catholic School, Northfleet School for Girls) and Gads Hill Private School.

Previous years have seen children move on to Rochester Grammar School for girls, Chatham Grammar for Boys, Joseph Williamson Mathematical School for Boys, Rainham Mark Grammar School in Gillingham, Brompton Academy in Gillingham, Northfleet Tech, Holmesdale School and Hundred of Hoo.

Children have to get public transport or school buses, often leaving home around 7am due to the distances that they travel. Those travelling to Medway Schools always have numerous hoops to jump through to obtain bus passes as they pay Council Tax to Gravesham (Kent) but are educated in Medway and often receive travel passes much later than other children causing anxiety and financial impact.

Approximately 2 years ago, I attended a virtual Governors meeting for Kent West (our area) where secondary places were highlighted as a major concern due to demand exceeding supply, especially with the growth of the Ebbsfleet settlement with new housing developments.

This was partly being satisfied by a new secondary school being built in Ebbsfleet called Alkerden. This was planned before the Pandemic but due to delays only received its first intake of Year 7 pupils in September 2025 into a temporary building. The Infant and Secondary permanent site will open in September 2026 and ultimately will be a through school from nursery age to age 18. Their admissions for September 2026 are already full (I am also a Governor at Alkerden School).

With the delays due to the Pandemic plus increased costs due to construction labour and raw materials and general inflation the cost of the new school has escalated.

Priority is given to children from certain postcodes around Ebbsfleet and so that new school would not be available to children at Higham Primary School.

The only option would be to build new secondary schools in Gravesham if new houses increased the number of families in and around Gravesend.

Road Network

Safety of staff, parents and children is the paramount concern of Governors at Higham Primary School.

Every weekday morning (8.30am - 9am) and afternoon (2.45pm - 3.30pm) there is a log jam outside Higham Primary School in School Lane. Parents are parked on the school side which effectively makes School Lane a single carriageway with one very small (3 car lengths) passing place which is totally inadequate). Staff must don high vis jackets to ensure that pupils are safe from traffic congestion. Often cars have to reverse to unblock the congestion. We have had minor traffic accidents but thankfully no serious injuries or fatalities due to this congestion. It is miraculous that these have not occurred.

Increasing the number of children at Higham Primary School would naturally increase the traffic to an already over congested area. There are no alternative

parking places within the village. School Bus walking initiatives have been used in the past with little success due to the availability of volunteers and the fact that this merely moves the congestion to other parts of the village. Despite numerous requests minimal road safety measures have been agreed by Kent Highways (eg zebra crossings, traffic calmed areas, speed limit restrictions). All that has been added are speed bumps which damage cars and are such that large wheel-based vehicles can negotiate these without slowing their speed.

The situation has worsened over the last few years with increased traffic flow of goods vehicles, skip lorries and construction traffic despite assertions provided, that traffic restrictions would be placed on these vehicle movements through the village at planning stage (eg the Nuralite Development). The Parish Council have supported the school with support for warning lights outside the school, but their efforts have been delayed by “red tape” and finances with Highways Agencies and Councils. Also, the vehicle movements cannot be “policed”.

With the location of Higham Primary School there are no alternative routes that parents or other traffic can use, and so School Lane is a bottle neck. If ever there was a medical or fire emergency in Lower Higham or at the school, I do have a significant fear that the emergency services would be delayed, if the incident happened around the key morning drop off and afternoon collection times, with severe repercussions.

Another consideration that Governors have discussed, is where housing developments or construction work is carried out in Lower Higham with the added traffic during the day from construction vehicle movements.

This means that the children are exposed to extra noise from increased traffic and extra air pollution (some children have respiratory medical conditions like asthma). This impacts concentration and therefore learning as well as health.

The wear and tear on School Lane by heavy vehicles mean that potholes are significant in terms of size and number. This can cause damage to parent's vehicles, gravel chippings being sprayed across pavements, hazards for children who cycle to school and of course when they are subsequently repaired the extra noise from road repair works. This is in addition to material which falls from construction vehicles (mud, soil, gravel etc) and is dispersed across the carriageway making it slippery and muddy in wet weather.

However, the biggest fear is that a construction vehicle collides with a parent, staff member or child with the obvious tragic results. Increase construction traffic increases the risk to all school stakeholders.

People on planning committees either consider that risk to be unimportant or do not actually understand the potential consequences. If they did then they would NEVER agree these planning applications without alternatives to considerably reduce the risks to the school children, parents and staff.

I hope that this will assist you in understanding the unique situation of Higham Primary School within the village and in particular the limitations which are not evident to a planning application but are real life issues in a real village setting. Thank you for your time.

Kind regards

