

Monks Eleigh: Students and staff rally to save tiny primary school

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Teachers and pupils outside Monks Eleigh Primary School.

A seven-year-old student has written to a Government minister to tell him an Ofsted inspector's report about her primary school was "unfair".

Parents, students and staff are rallying to save their tiny Suffolk school after the inspector judged it inadequate.

Following a visit in July, Ofsted concluded "special measures" were required to bring Monks Eleigh Primary School up to scratch.

Since the report was published, the number of students has dropped from 30 to 15, the board of governors has stepped down and the county council confirmed that closing the school is an option.

However, this week parents told the *EADT* they did not think the Ofsted report recognised enough positive aspects of the school.

Meanwhile, Year 3 student Henrietta Watson has written to Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove about why she thinks the school is special.

Since September 2011, the Churchfield-based school has been part of a federation partnership with nearby Boxford Primary, but the collaboration between the two establishments is due to come to an end at Christmas.

But the school has been given a lifeline with the appointment of Karen Harmen as headteacher.

The ex-head of the former All Saints Middle School in Sudbury has been given a six-month contract to help raise the profile of Monks Eleigh Primary.

She said: "All of the students have futures and what matters is making sure that they have the best futures possible. It's been a difficult six months but the school is doing everything it can to attract more pupils and get things back on track."

Leanne Pugh, whose five-year-old daughter Isla attends the school, said: "We are all really shocked about what has happened but the way forward is to get our heads back up and make people realise that from the perspective of the people who use the school daily, it is a great place.

"We could have panicked and taken our kids away, but we chose to leave them here because we believe in the school."

Ex-governor Alison Russell said the board had resigned voluntarily to enable the county council to appoint an interim executive board of "experts" to give the school the best possible chance. She said: "It was a hard step for us to take but it's not about us as individuals. We all want to keep the school here because it's very important for the whole village community. Schools attract younger families into an area, which is vital to keeping a good social mix in the village."

Fellow parent Jenny Maynard believes Monks Eleigh Primary was "greatly needed" in an area where most primary schools are already oversubscribed.

She said: "We had a county council inspector out in the spring who judged the school as good with some outstanding features so we were all really shocked and appalled that a Government inspector could make a judgement that could have such a devastating effect on everyone."

Former teacher Barbara Sims added: "It's illogical this school should shut. Everywhere else in the area is full so this is going to pose a problem going forward. I think with a bit of extra support for the school, children should be able to come out of here with an excellent education."

Monks Eleigh Primary is holding an open afternoon on December 10 from 1.30 to 3pm.

“We would invite everyone to come along and see just what a great little school we have here,” Mrs Harmen added.

In her letter, Henrietta Watson wrote:

Dear Mr Gove,

In my old school I was very stressed and unhappy but Monks Eleigh has made a huge difference. At Monks Eleigh I am now doing much harder maths and I have a free choice of what book I can read. They have also done a lot to help me feel calmer and happier. I'd also like you to know that now nearly everyone is leaving because their parents believed the inspector even though they thought it was a good school before. Now most of my friends have gone and it seems so unfair. I am really upset that this could happen to such a nice school.