

Swale Borough Council – Polling District Review 2024

Polling station	Feedback	Action/Response
St. Augustine church, Painters Forstal	<p>I am responding to your review of polling districts and places. I am one of the Trustees of Painters Forstal Community Association and help run a community drop in session on Tuesday afternoon since we opened in 2023.</p> <p>I have spoken with many residents in Painters Forstal who are unhappy with the current voting situation. Presently it takes place at the Anglican Catholic church of St Augustine. Residents feel that a church is not a suitable place in order to cast their vote and would prefer a neutral venue with parking facilities. We now have a community hall which provides not only better facilities for your polling volunteers, but far more parking spaces.</p> <p>Although we do have a preschool there, they are only in one half of the hall. You would only need the other half of the hall and perhaps the lobby area. The hall is divided by a removable wall which would remain until voting had closed.</p>	Election staff have inspected the Community hall and met with staff and this venue is a suitable facilities that could be considered in the future.
Ethelbert Road School, Faversham	1.I am concerned that Ethelbert Road School seems to now be regularly used as a Polling station. Post covid with the high school absenteeism rate and school being seen by some as optional I think using Ethelbert sends the completely wrong message- that school can take second place to other priorities, when in fact it should be top priority. With so many other buildings available in Faversham I am sure must be more suitable venues that don't carry this cost.	

	<p>2. I would like to express my concern about the continued use of my son's school Ethelbert Road primary as a polling station. So far he has lost at least a week's worth of schooling whilst he's been at there. On top of that we then have to make childcare provision which are not only costly but completely unnecessary when everyone has the optional of a postal vote. There is a post box in the middle of Athelstan Road accessible for everyone in the vicinity.</p> <p>The use of the school discriminates against all the parents that send their children there disadvantaging not only the lost days of our children's education and their finances. I look forward to hearing from you.</p> <p>3. I am writing as a Faversham resident and parent. My children's school, Ethelbert Road Primary School, is used as a polling place for each election. There have been multiple elections every year, and each day there is one, the school must close. This is extremely disruptive to the children's education. While this would always be difficult, it is made worse given the gaps in education that occurred during lockdowns. It is unreasonable to continually shut down an entire school multiple times a year. Apart from the lost days of teaching, the closures also mean that we have to take time off of work, reducing our impact on the economy. It also places great burdens on the staff and teachers of the school as they have to still prepare the school to make it suitable for polling, including removing furniture, and taking down (and putting back up) displays with any children pictured/identifiable for safeguarding reasons. The school also has no parking, which means it is not a suitable place to any voters with mobility needs. There is a high school (Abbey School) nearby with multiple buildings that could be used or a football club at the Mount. Both of these would not need to disrupt children's education and they have parking.</p> <p>4. In relation to the review of Swale polling districts and venues I would like to comment on the use of Ethelbert Road Primary School in Faversham as a polling station.</p>	<p>Electors must be given the choice of how they vote and postal voting does not suit all voters.</p> <p>The Abbey School option will be investigated, but replacing a school venue with another school venue requires careful management. The football club at The Mount will be investigated.</p>
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	<p>Both my children attend Ethelbert Road Primary School and each time it is used as a polling station the whole school is shut for the day. This means either my husband or I lose a day's work in order to look after the children, therefore there is a financial cost to us each time it is used. In addition, this is usually on a Thursday and taking time off work or moving shifts mid-week is not very easy. Furthermore when the school is closed my children lose a day of education that they will not get back; it is hugely disruptive for them and they are negatively impacted.</p> <p>I live in the ward myself and my polling station is Preston School rooms next to St Catherine's church. There is never anyone in there when I have voted in the past; so I wonder why it would not be able to cover the whole ward? There would certainly be sufficient space and St Catherine's Church itself could also be used for overflow if required. Alternatively, other venues could be the Club house on the Mount (which would also have toilets and parking) or the sports hall at the Abbey School.</p> <p>5. I am writing regarding the Polling District Review and the use of Ethelbert Road Primary School as a polling station venue. The closure of the school on election days creates significant challenges for working parents who need to arrange alternative childcare.</p> <p>To help address these issues, I'd like to suggest two alternative polling venues that may be more suitable and reduce the impact on families:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Mount Sports Hall (from Strike Force)– located at King Georges Playing Field (The Mount) London Road . This venue is centrally located, fully accessible, and frequently used for community events. It would offer a convenient option for local voters while avoiding the disruption of a school closure. 2. The Abbey School sports Centre – has ample space for setting up a polling station and is accessible for people with disabilities. Its 	<p>Preston School Rooms has been used as a double station for some elections and can be considered as an option.</p> <p>St. Catherine's Church, the Clubhouse on The Mount and the Sports Hall at Abbey School will be investigated.</p> <p>The Mount Sports Hall will be investigated.</p>
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	<p>proximity to public transport could also make it a convenient choice for residents.</p> <p>Thank you for considering these alternatives as you work to ensure accessible polling arrangements. I hope this helps to find a solution that minimizes disruption to school schedules while maintaining accessible facilities for voters.</p> <p>6. I am writing to you to request you reconsider the use of Ethelbert Road Primary School as a polling station. It is incredibly disruptive to the education of my daughter, and all her peers. Last academic year the school was closed twice (2nd May, 4th July), which aside from being disruptive to my daughter' development and wellbeing, as well as being a challenge for myself and my husband to arrange and fund alternative childcare arrangements or use up limited annual leave allowances, it is also hugely hypocritical considering recent increase to fines due to school absence- introduced because of the importance of school attendance.</p> <p>While the Department for Education's stance is that <i>"Every moment in school counts and days missed add up quickly. Evidence shows that pupils who have good attendance enjoy better wellbeing and school performance than those who don't."</i> (Fines for parents for taking children out of school: What you need to know – The Education Hub), the use of Ethelbert as a polling station directly contravenes this, and instead demonstrates a distinct lack of consideration for the pupils there.</p> <p>I strongly urge you to stop the use of Ethelbert Primary Road School as a polling station, and instead find a more appropriate venue that does not displace over 200 children.</p> <p>7. Further to your communication regarding the review of polling districts and venues and asking for people who are impacted by the closure of a school that is used as a polling station venue, I'd like to confirm that the</p>	<p>The Abbey School sports centre will be investigated.</p>
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	<p>use or Ethelbert Road Primary School in Faversham as a polling station causes an impact.</p> <p>Annual leave has to be taken by those parents who work in order to look after their children when they are off school for the day.</p> <p>The Abbey School, which is in very close proximity has a number of halls and some of which can exclusively be used by the public without having to close the school, could be used instead.</p> <p>I believe for some occasions it is used instead.</p> <p>8. Please accept this email as my views and thoughts on the polling station within our local primary school.</p> <p>I have previously spoken to the Chair of Governors at our local primary school (Ethelbert Road Primary School, Faversham) where we not only vote but our child is also a pupil.</p> <p>It is my strong opinion that not only are there alternative options locally to locate a polling station but that it is also wholly possible to accommodate the polling station as well as open the school for the pupils if only they tried.</p> <p>I have given my suggestions on how this could be achieved whilst maintaining safeguarding for the staff and pupils, which were accepted during that conversation as workable suggestions.</p> <p>The difficulty for many families to accommodate these unnecessary school closures cannot be underestimated and the decisions to close the schools are clearly made by those who themselves are either unaffected by such school closures or simply don't care or consider the community.</p> <p>I struggle to understand how a family can be fined for taking their child out of school without authorisation yet the constant closure of a school for polling station duties is an acceptable loss of educational time!!</p> <p>You MUST do better by the communities you serve. I know of families who cannot afford to take time off work to look after children whenever there is a closure of this kind. I will repeat. YOU MUST DO BETTER!!</p> <p>9. We've been invited to submit comments as per your review.</p>	<p>Halls at The Abbey School will be investigated.</p>
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	<p>As a parent of attendees of the school I would like an alternative to be found. I don't think it's right that the school should close on polling days. There must be suitable alternatives, one of the Sports Halls at the Abbey School for example or even the Strikeforce clubhouse on King Georges Playing Field.</p> <p>These could be used with no impact to school children and their families on polling days.</p> <p>10. I would like to request that Ethelbert Road School is not used as a polling station. It disrupts the children's learning and places additional pressure on parents for childcare expenses.</p> <p>Please consider alternative venues.</p> <p>11. I am the Headteacher of Ethelbert Road Primary School and I am writing to you to consider using a different venue for polling.</p> <p>The school is forced to close when it is used as a polling station, which impacts on 210 children's education. Due to a packed curriculum learning is lost and the teachers do not have time to go back and revisit lost learning due to the school closure. Our children with Special Educational Needs are extremely affected by the closure of the school, as they require the security of routine. Our parents are also greatly affected, with most having to take days off work unpaid for child care.</p> <p>Ethelbert Road Primary does not have a carpark, and the only available parking spaces are on the roads leading to the school. This impacts on local residents, as well as people coming to vote, as they need to walk to the school.</p> <p>The only room available is a small wooden lodge in the playground. This room is only large enough for one booth, leading to queues of voters, who have to wait outside.</p> <p>I would like to suggest you use the Abbey School site, as it has a large carpark and a room which can be used without impacting on the school.</p> <p>The local authority could run a minibus to collect and return disabled voters who do not drive as in the past I have been informed that the Abbey School</p>	<p>Sports Halls at Abbey School and Strikeforce Clubhouse on King George's Playing field will be investigated.</p> <p>It is not practical to run a minibus for voters but other suggestions will be considered</p>
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	<p>could not be used due to the footbridge not being accessible for wheelchair users.</p> <p>12. As a parent from Ethelbert Road Primary school I am writing to contribute to the decision of the school being used as a polling station. As a self employed person, additionally my husband is self employed, when schools are used for polling and the schools have to closed for safe guarding this is a huge impact on our income as a family as one of use has to take the day off work for child care reasons. We are not fortunate to have careers where we work from home nor do we have family to assist with child care.</p> <p>It is irresponsible in this day and age to expect parents to take additional time off work with the cost of living rising aside from the impact it has on children missing vital education. There are plenty of mostly un-used churches and village halls empty in the area to use for polling days. I hope this email is taken into consideration on your decision of a location for the next polling days.</p>	
Various polling stations in Minster	<p>I would like to see us move polling stations out of school's where possible, I understand that public buildings are available at cost but hate to see children's education affected by elections.</p> <p>Alternative locations in minster could be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minster on Sea Parish Council meeting room Friendship house Minster working men's club Minster Abbey Church hall 	All suggestions will be investigated