

Grove Road Primary School



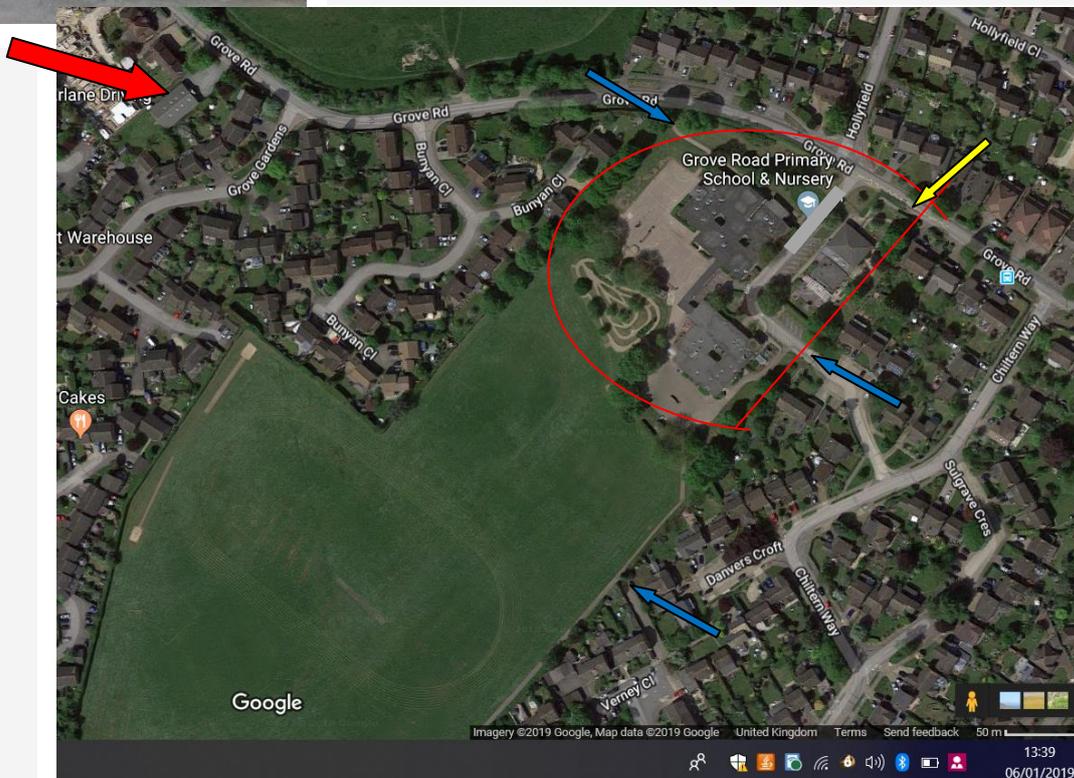
REQUEST TO MOVE POLLING FACILITY FROM GROVE ROAD PRIMARY SCHOOL IN TRING

Friday 4th January 2018

I met recently with Jim Doyle to discuss the possibility of moving the polling facility from Grove Road Primary School to an alternative venue such as the local Scout Hut, further along Grove Road.



- Scout Hut location =
- Access throughout the day =
- Access locked 9am-3pm =



Our priority is to keep the school open on polling days (especially given the high number of working parents we serve). We are also obliged to align our INSET days with Tring School due to the number of sibling connections. We have a combined school population of 2000 pupils as well as parents who work across both schools. As such, closing on a day when polling is taking place creates significant issues for parents and subsequent child care costs as well as disruption to learning at a key time in the school assessment calendar. Closing is not an easy or appropriate option.

The increasing safeguarding standards and requirements from Ofsted make it increasingly difficult to justify having members of the public on site when voting is taking place. To put this in context, any visitors on site without a DBS check on normal school business have to be escorted when moving around the building. So to have members of the public on site for voting, with free access to large areas of the school, presents all sorts of safeguarding issues for us. We go to great lengths to increase supervision on polling days, especially at playtimes. We have also needed to put members of staff out on duty at the gates for peak arrival and departure times, pulling them away from their normal duties. We have over 450 pupils between the ages of 3-11 on site each day, some arriving with parents and some independently. Parents are not allowed to drive onto site for the safety of the pupils, and yet every year there are members of the public who expect full access and become very agitated if they cannot drive onto site or park. We have always made provision for Blue Badge holders. Although they have complained about the distance from the car park to the voting hall and the number of kerbs they have to navigate.

Grove Road Primary is a large site and as such we have multiple access points for pupils and parents arriving on foot. These are locked during the day for pupil safety. For the last two elections we have posted public notices for local residents to give them advance warning of gate closures and the available access points to the school for voters during the 9:00-3:00 school day. During this time the main Grove Road pedestrian gate is open for voters. (marked in yellow on the map above)

On polling days myself and the staff repeatedly experience:

- verbal abuse from the public because gates they want to use are not open
- verbal abuse because we cannot allow parking on site (other than for disabled drivers)
- members of the public bringing dogs on site, despite requests and signs saying not to
- dogs fouling on school premises
- complaints about access
- parking and congestion issues for local neighbours, blocking pavements and designated crossing points for pupils
- members of the public ignoring the extensive signage and wandering onto the school grounds (hence the need for additional staff and parents)
- cars coming on site and creating issues at the start and end of the day when children are arriving and leaving.
- Pupils have expressed concerns about strangers coming onto the school site on polling days.
- A previous Returning Officer declined to return to Grove Road due to the complaints she received about gates being locked during the day and access being restricted to the front gate only.

- Voting takes place in the KS2 hall which does not have any means of preventing access to the main building. The hall leads directly into the KS2 dining room and is in close proximity to the Y3 and Y4 classrooms. Current security relies solely on the Returning Officer preventing access. This is insufficient.

Whilst I appreciate that a school is perceived as a local amenity, hosting the polling is becoming an increasing issue for us. We have tried every possible option in recent years to accommodate this community service; meanwhile Ofsted safeguarding requirements have become more and more stringent.

My staff should not have to deal with verbal abuse from the public when we are simply working to keep 450 children between the ages of 3 and 11 safe and observing the standards expected of us by Ofsted and the parents.

Whilst Jim Doyle told me we have the option to close, this seems an unsatisfactory solution given the disruption it would cause to 450 families and the resultant loss of teaching time, often at a crucial point in the school year.

The Scout Hut has been refurbished and is very close to the school. They have parking on site available, which we do not and it is available during the day without creating a safeguarding issue for children.

The recent letter received from Tring Town Council declined our request to have the polling facility moved on the grounds that it would create a precedent. This does not sound like sufficient grounds to decline our request given the safeguarding issues outlined above. The world is changing and as such I ask the council to appreciate the changing face of school site safety and security and the challenges to parents when school closes mid-week. This is no longer the straight forward issue it was 10 years ago.

Yours sincerely,



Sharon Sanderson