

The Church of England's lead bishop for Education, Stephen Conroy, the Bishop of Ely, has called for a cross-Government rural strategy following a meeting of education in rural communities.



The event, attended by Lord Agnew, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the School System, also included representatives from Ofsted, the NFU, the Prince's Countryside Fund together with Council and Education leaders from across England.

Bishop Stephen said: "We have been reassured that the Government has a presumption against the closure of rural schools, which is a positive foundation for the future.

"We have also heard from a number of stakeholder organisations, as well as those who are working with schools and communities across the country, who are exploring innovations in collaboration and the use of new technologies to improve pupil outcomes.

"However, it is clear that these steps alone are insufficient, and an overarching rural strategy is now required for the issues facing our countryside communities to be seen together.

"Such an approach is needed not only to give longer-term stability to our education provision, but for housing, infrastructure, broadband, agriculture, business and industry to be seen in the same lens.

"Over the past 200 years Church of England schools have adapted to significant changes in society and we are confident they will continue as rich expressions of their communities long into the future.

"But the countryside is not uniform, and requires a joined-up approach to give its communities the opportunity to thrive for generations to come.

We are committed to working with the Government to achieve this."

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