# Teachers strike as gentrification drives London families from Charlotte Sharman primary school



Teachers at Charlotte Sharman primary school in Elephant and Castle are on strike this week, protesting the impending closure of their institution, a decision driven by a significant decrease in the under-four population in the locality. This primary school is emblematic of a troubling trend in inner London, where many schools are facing similar fates owing to demographic shifts exacerbated by gentrification. The most recent census indicates a drastic 25% decline in children under four across several boroughs, sparking alarm among educators and community advocates.

Situated near the former Heygate estate, now transformed into Elephant Park—an award-winning development of luxury apartments—Charlotte Sharman has faced dwindling numbers since the area's revitalisation took root. The site of the demolished estate has been reimagined as an environment that includes high-end residential options, global retail brands, and premium amenities. However, this transformation has come at a cost. The new developments, while hailed for their “placemaking excellence,” often replace family-centric housing with luxury flats, effectively displacing lower- and middle-income families who have historically called the area home.

The financial implications of this shift are stark. Two-bedroom apartments in Elephant Park are currently being marketed for between £900,000 and £1 million, and among the 2,704 new homes, a mere 82 are designated for social housing. While a quarter of these new homes are classified as “affordable,” the government’s adjusted definition, which permits rents up to 80% of market value, renders most of these options prohibitively expensive for a significant portion of London’s residents. Commenting on this issue, Alex Mees from the National Education Union stated, “They’ve got rid of family homes in the area and replaced them with one- or two-bedroom apartments – all the families are moving out; they should have seen this coming.”

The pattern extends beyond Elephant and Castle, as regeneration efforts across London—ranging from King’s Cross to the Olympic Park—exemplify the city’s broader tale of gentrification and soaring living costs. A study by the Affordable Housing Commission revealed that 13% of British adults under 45 in a relationship have delayed or opted against starting families due to housing constraints, impacting nearly 2 million people. Particularly in London, where property prices have surged increasingly, the demographic changes are pronounced. Data shows that, while the city’s overall population is on the rise, there has been a 4% decline in the 25-39 age bracket, a demographic often associated with family formation.

This demographic shift is prompting many millennials to abandon London for more affordable locales such as Bristol, Brighton, and coastal towns like Hastings and Deal, where house prices are climbing in turn. Some have even coined a derogatory term—DFL or “Down from London”—to describe the influx of those leaving the capital. The changes are felt acutely, as local ecosystems, which encompass not just schools but also GP surgeries and small businesses, begin to erode. An architect and mother residing in Hackney recounted how families are moving out, noting invitations to multiple farewell gatherings as those with younger children seek larger living spaces.

Despite the optimistic branding surrounding efforts to revitalise urban areas through placemaking, the reality often presents a more sterile environment. Promoting vibrant communities, these developments frequently lead to areas stripped of diversity and essential urban life, retaining only the high-priced services. The city's landscape is increasingly devoid of children and families; impeccable restaurant reservations might fill up weeks in advance, yet the essential components that foster community connection are crumbling. Older residents, having often benefited from historical property value increases, remain in the city as younger populations exit, leaving regions marked by both affluent luxury and a stark absence of family-oriented spaces.

In essence, the inability of cities like London to adapt to the needs of families signals broader societal issues. With decreased child populations—a clear indicator of a community's vibrancy—urban spaces that ostensibly thrive can, in reality, be hollowed out, revealing a city that is neither fully alive nor capable of supporting a diverse populace. If strategies for urban development do not address the critical need for family housing and community amenities, we may witness a continued decline in the very qualities that make cities liveable and dynamic.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/placemaking-gentrification-london-luxury-apartments-expensive-restaurants-schools), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/placemaking-gentrification-london-luxury-apartments-expensive-restaurants-schools)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/placemaking-gentrification-london-luxury-apartments-expensive-restaurants-schools), [[4]](https://www.bigissue.com/news/housing/housing-gentrification-london-cost/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/primary-school-closures-southwark-charlotte-sharman-st-mary-magdalene-b1226661.html), [[5]](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/dec/17/all-my-friends-have-moved-how-uk-cities-have-been-hollowed-out-by-housing-price-rises)
* Paragraph 4 – [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/oct/23/high-rents-and-benefit-cuts-push-poorer-renters-out-of-uks-cities-report-finds), [[7]](https://www.ft.com/content/4dac2611-6d93-44ce-ab12-036fbc687324)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/placemaking-gentrification-london-luxury-apartments-expensive-restaurants-schools> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/26/placemaking-gentrification-london-luxury-apartments-expensive-restaurants-schools> - This article discusses the impact of gentrification in London, focusing on the closure of Charlotte Sharman primary school in Elephant and Castle due to a significant decline in the number of children under four. The school, located near the former Heygate estate, has seen its student population drop following the area's redevelopment into Elephant Park, a luxury apartment complex. The piece highlights how such developments, while praised for 'placemaking excellence,' often lead to the displacement of lower- and middle-income families, resulting in the closure of local schools and the erosion of community infrastructure.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/primary-school-closures-southwark-charlotte-sharman-st-mary-magdalene-b1226661.html> - This article reports on the confirmed closures of Charlotte Sharman and St Mary Magdalene primary schools in Southwark, London, due to a sharp decline in pupil numbers. The closures are attributed to a growing exodus of families from the capital, driven by high living costs and housing affordability issues. Despite efforts from parents, teachers, and community members to keep the schools open, the demographic changes have made it unsustainable to maintain these educational institutions.
4. <https://www.bigissue.com/news/housing/housing-gentrification-london-cost/> - This article examines the financial impact of housing gentrification on low-income Londoners. It highlights a report from University College London, which found that regeneration projects often fail to deliver sufficient affordable housing, leading to an average rent increase of over £80 per week for council and social housing tenants. The piece underscores the need for a fundamental rethink of estate regeneration strategies to prevent further displacement of vulnerable communities.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/dec/17/all-my-friends-have-moved-how-uk-cities-have-been-hollowed-out-by-housing-price-rises> - This article explores how rising housing prices are causing demographic shifts in UK cities, particularly London. It discusses how high rents and benefit cuts are pushing poorer renters out of central areas, leading to a 'suburbanisation' of poverty. The piece highlights the broader implications of these trends on urban communities and the challenges faced by low-income families in accessing affordable housing.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2023/oct/23/high-rents-and-benefit-cuts-push-poorer-renters-out-of-uks-cities-report-finds> - This article reports on a study that found high rents and benefit cuts are pushing poorer renters out of UK cities. The research highlights how the diminished role of the state in providing social housing and cuts to housing benefit have resulted in people in poverty being priced out of areas with access to essential amenities. The piece calls for a re-examination of urban policies to address these growing spatial divisions.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/4dac2611-6d93-44ce-ab12-036fbc687324> - This article discusses the UK's housing crisis, particularly its impact on younger generations who are increasingly unable to afford rent or purchase homes. It examines how soaring property prices and restrictive mortgage lending regulations have made homeownership unattainable for many, leading to increased political polarization and social challenges. The piece suggests potential solutions, including converting commercial spaces into homes and promoting urban infill, to address the housing shortage.