

St George's Infant School and Nursery and St George's New Town Junior School

**Consultation on a proposal to amalgamate the infant and
junior schools with effect from 1 January 2021**

June 2020



Essex County Council

Introduction

Essex County Council is committed to maximising the educational opportunities for your children. Our approach to developing diversity and improving standards in the school system includes considering the amalgamation of infant and junior schools to provide all-through primary schools where appropriate because of the benefits they offer.

These benefits include:

- greater consistency of approach to teaching and learning from ages 3 to 11;
- seamless monitoring of pupil progress from ages 3 to 11;
- increased potential for strong leadership and governance;
- continuity of experiences for young children;
- avoidance of transfer to another school at the end of Year 2 and the impact this can have on the child and their learning;
- greater sharing of curriculum and other resources.

We are therefore keen to support schools and governing bodies where they wish to pursue amalgamation to improve and enhance local educational provision.

However, not all circumstances are the same and it is important to hear the views of the local community. Please read this document and let us have your comments in order that we can provide the best possible opportunities for children in the New Town area of Colchester.



Clare Kershaw
Director, Education

Dear Parents/Carers, Staff and Members of the Local Community of St George's Infant and Junior Schools

Essex County Council (ECC), together with the governing bodies of St George's Infant School and Nursery and St George's New Town Junior School, started a consultation process in March 2020 about a proposal to create a single primary and nursery school for children aged 3 to 11, under the unified leadership of one headteacher and one governing body.

Because of the impact of Covid-19 on schools we decided to pause the process. Now that lockdown rules are being eased, and more children will be returning to schools, we felt that it was the right time to recommence the consultation. However, because of the time which has passed, ECC and the governing bodies are now proposing that the two schools amalgamate to form a primary and nursery school with effect from January 2021, rather than from September 2020 as set out in the original proposal. This will give time to make the appropriate preparations required for the primary school.

The rationale for the amalgamation remains the same and is set out again below. Even if you responded to the earlier consultation we would still value your views on the proposed amalgamation.

Because of social distancing restrictions it is not practical to hold public meetings to discuss the proposal. Instead, stakeholders will be able to book 10-minute time slots to discuss the proposal with ECC officers at the schools if they wish to. This will allow social distancing rules to be maintained but still give the opportunity for face-to-face interaction. There will also be a feedback and questions page on the ECC website, which will be updated with new questions and answers as we move through the consultation process. More details about these measures are set out below.

Why is amalgamation being proposed?

When the position of headteacher became vacant at the infant school in 2019, the governing body considered the range of options available to it in relation to securing the future leadership of the school. Mrs Vicarey was appointed by governors as the acting headteacher during this period to provide stability for the school. More recently, Mrs Cooke has been supporting the school in the capacity of Interim Head of School.

After careful consideration, the governing bodies of both schools asked ECC in late 2019 to consult on a proposal to amalgamate the schools. Governors saw significant advantages in combining the schools into a single primary and nursery school under the leadership of Mr Messer, to continue to drive up standards and performance. The amalgamation would involve the formal closure of the infant school on 31 December 2020 and increasing the age range of the junior school from 3 to 11 to become a primary and nursery school from 1 January 2021.

Although the governance arrangements at the infant school have changed recently, both schools are still fully committed to the amalgamation proposal and consider that this approach will provide the best opportunities for the children in the area.

What are some of the advantages of amalgamation?

The governing bodies and ECC believe that amalgamation would have the following benefits:

- consistency of approach to teaching and learning policies, curriculum planning, behaviour management, equal opportunities and special educational needs;
- monitoring pupil progress from 3 to 11 years of age would enable staff to build up a comprehensive profile of individual children and build consistently on their achievements;
- avoiding transfer at the end of Year 2 and any worries children may have about moving to a different school;
- children would be able to come together more easily for social and creative activities;
- planning and delivery of a continuous and coherent curriculum – Ofsted inspection reports show that planning for progression and continuity for Key Stage 2 is better in primary schools than junior schools;
- it would be easier to achieve continuity and progression in children’s learning;
- it would be possible to share curriculum resources and avoid unnecessary duplication.

What can I expect to see?

The key features of previous successful amalgamations have been:

- strong leadership and governance;
- promotion of high educational standards;
- high quality, good teaching as a minimum;
- consistency of approach to learning policies, curriculum planning and behaviour management;
- stability of staffing and improved staffing structures and opportunities for staff development;
- a single conversation with the community about primary education;
- improved use of facilities, for example specialist teaching spaces, reception areas and outdoor areas.

Leading up to amalgamation the governing bodies would provide opportunities to further develop teaching and learning across the schools and ECC would continue to support leadership at all levels, including governors.

Opportunities for staff development would be further enhanced by amalgamation, enabling teaching and support staff to draw upon their current expertise, experience and specialist knowledge in order to share and develop best practice more effectively. It would also enable the further development of community links and pastoral support.

Who would be the governors of the new primary school?

If the amalgamation goes ahead the existing governing body of the junior school would formally become the governing body of the primary school. The junior governing body is committed to ensuring that the governing body of the primary school would include governors from the current infant governing body. Both governing bodies are already exploring ways of working more closely together prior to the proposed amalgamation.

Who would be the headteacher of the primary school?

The headteacher of the junior school at the time of the proposed amalgamation, Mr Messer, would be the headteacher of the primary school.

Would the teachers and support staff stay the same?

If the amalgamation proceeds, both governing bodies are committed to putting in place a staffing structure that best suits the needs of the children in the primary school, with all staff at the infant and junior schools being treated fairly and transparently. It is expected that the vast majority of staff employed in the current schools (at the time of the proposed amalgamation) will be able to be recruited to the primary school staffing structure. There may, however, be a need to reduce potential duplication of posts/job roles and some of the current posts/ job roles and grades may need to change.

Where restructuring is necessary as a result of duplication of posts/job roles, or the amalgamation in general, the governing body of the junior school has expressed its intention to treat staff at both the infant school and junior schools equitably and to create a staff structure that maintains the knowledge and skills from both current staff teams.

All the teaching and support staff employed at the junior school (at the time of the proposed amalgamation) would automatically continue their employment in what will become the primary school, save for where any workgroups are subject to restructuring. The staff currently employed in the closing infant school will be able to be recruited to the new primary school staffing structure although, in common with staff at the junior school, there may be a need to reduce potential duplication of posts/job roles and some of the current posts/ job roles and grades may need to change. Any external staff appointments will only be made after current post holders at the infant and junior schools have been considered.

Would there be any changes to the size of the school and the accommodation?

There are no plans to change the size of the school. The existing schools have the capacity to admit 90 pupils into Reception, and 90 pupils into Year 3. The total capacity of the primary school would be 630 permanent places and up to 90 children would be admitted into Reception each year. The primary school would be able to use all the buildings on the two existing sites more effectively as a single school. Although this would be a large primary school there are other schools of this size across Essex which work very well.

Governors do not have any plans to make changes to the existing nursery provision or to significantly change the location of year groups. There would be opportunities to look at how administration and leadership spaces in the two buildings could be used more effectively, and how other areas of provision, e.g. catering, might be further developed.

What would the admission arrangements be for the primary school?

ECC would be the admission authority for the primary school and would set the admission arrangements, as it does for the existing schools. The amalgamation would mean that children at the school would automatically move from Year 2 to Year 3 without need for the current transfer process.

How can I make my views known?

You are invited to respond to this consultation using the following electronic survey form:

<https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/school-organisation/st-georges-amalgamation>

Alternatively, you may wish to write to or email us with your comments to the address given below by 9 July 2020. All comments received through these mechanisms or made directly to council officers or members will be collected to be included in the analysis of feedback received.

All written comments should be received by ECC by 9 July 2020. ECC handles information in accordance with the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Data Protection Act 1998 and is the data controller for the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1998. Your answers to this consultation will only be used to assess the community's view of the proposed amalgamation and not for any other purpose. We will not give information about you to anyone outside the County Council.

If you have any questions about the consultation process or the proposal you can call Kevin Wilby, School Organisation Officer, on 03330 131147, or alternatively contact the chairs of governors at the infant and junior schools, via the schools.

The information contained in this leaflet can be made available in alternative formats: large print, Braille, audio tape or disk. Please call 03330 131071.

A feedback and questions raised sheet will be available on the ECC website at this address: <https://www.essex.gov.uk/school-organisation-and-place-planning/consultations-and-statutory-proposals>. The sheet will be updated with new questions and answers as they arrive and you will be able to ask follow-up questions, to explore all the amalgamation issues fully.

We know that some people might also want to have the opportunity to discuss the proposal in person, although this is not essential as questions and comments will be posted on the feedback and questions sheet. If people do want a face-to-face discussion we have arranged some drop-in sessions to give parents and carers, staff and members of the local community the chance to ask questions and express their views on the amalgamation.

Because of the rules on social distancing we will be holding the drop-in sessions in a very structured way. If you would like to discuss the proposal please contact Lauren Chown at St George's New Town Junior School (01206 506800) to book a ten-minute time slot, where two people from the same household can meet with an ECC officer and Mr Messer. There will be five-minute breaks between the slots. This will allow participants to social distance from each other and make sure that there is no need to queue whilst waiting for an appointment. The drop-in sessions will be held in the school building, or if it is a fine day they will be held outside. One will take place in the infant school and there will be another in the junior school.

We very much want to hear peoples' opinions about the proposed amalgamation. In addition to the drop-in sessions we will also be seeking the views of other interested parties, particularly members of staff at the school.

At this stage no decision has been made and all the views received, either at the drop-in sessions or in writing, will be considered prior to a decision being taken about going ahead with the proposal.

What happens next?

At the end of this consultation period the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills will consider the feedback and views expressed by all interested parties during the consultation and decide whether to proceed with the proposal. If he decides to continue a statutory notice will be published in the local press and will be displayed at the main entrances to the schools and at some other conspicuous places in the area served by the school for a four-week period. This four-week representation period provides the final opportunity for people and organisations to comment on or submit objections to the proposal.

At the end of the four-week period any objections to, or comments on, the proposal will be considered by ECC and a final decision will be taken on the proposal by the Cabinet Member.

Timescale

The consultation period will run from 11 June 2020 until 9 July 2020.

Date	Activity
11 June 2020	Consultation commences – consultation document can be viewed at: https://www.essex.gov.uk/school-organisation-and-place-planning/consultations-and-statutory-proposals
23 June 2020	Drop-in session for staff
24 June 2020	Drop-in session for parents and carers of both schools and the local community to commence at 2pm at the infant school and 6:30pm at the junior school
9 July 2020	End of consultation period
10 July 2020	Feedback on consultation shared with governing bodies
Mid-July 2020	Report on consultation prepared for Cabinet Member
End July 2020	Publication of statutory notice
End August 2020	End of period for representations
Mid-September 2020	Decision on proposal made by Essex County Council
31 December 2020	St George's Infant School and Nursery closes*
1 January 2021	Age range of St George's New Town Junior School is extended to become a primary and nursery school*

*These stages only apply if the proposal is approved by Essex County Council.

This information is issued by **Essex County Council**.

You can contact us in the following ways:

By email: school.organisation@essex.gov.uk

By post: **Essex County Council, School Organisation and Planning, PO Box 4261, County Hall, Chelmsford, Essex CM1 1GS.**

Visit our website: essex.gov.uk

The information contained in this document can be translated, and/or made available in alternative formats, on request.

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