

# **Proposed Amalgamation of St George's Infant School and Nursery and St George's New Town Junior School**

## **Frequently Asked Questions Updated 7 July 2020**

Q1 When would the amalgamation take place?

A 1 January 2021.

Q2 Would the school uniform stay the same?

A The infant and junior schools are already adopting a common uniform from September 2020, and this would remain the official uniform if the schools amalgamate.

Q3 What will happen if the amalgamation does not proceed?

A If a decision was made not to amalgamate, then the schools would remain as they are now, as separate infant and junior schools. The infant school would need to consider the appropriate way forward, which might be to join an academy trust. The infant school would in any case need to appoint a permanent headteacher.

Q4 What happens after this consultation?

A Once the consultation period has ended, a report will be written for the Cabinet Member for Education to decide whether to proceed with the amalgamation process. Statutory notices would be published, hopefully at the end of July, with a final decision on the proposals in September.

Q5 Would there be any changes to the size of the school and the accommodation?

A 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.

Q6 What would the admission arrangements be for the primary school?

A Essex County Council 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. There are no plans to change the admission arrangements for entry into reception year.

Q7 Will the comments made at drop-in sessions and on the online survey carry equal weight when the decision is taken?

A All comments made whether verbal, written or electronic survey will carry the same weight. All comments will be included in the report for the Cabinet Member, who will take them all into consideration when he makes his decision.

Q8 Who would be the governors of the new primary school?

A If the amalgamation goes ahead the existing governing body of the junior school would be 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 infant school. Both schools are already exploring ways of working more closely together prior to the proposed amalgamation.

Q9 Who would be the headteacher of the primary school?

A The headteacher of the junior school Mr Messer, would be the headteacher of the primary school.

Q10 Are there any negatives in amalgamating?

A Statistics show that children that attend primary schools tend to do better both educationally and socially than children that attend infant and junior schools. The primary school would be large and could have up to 630 pupils over the two existing sites, but the headteacher and governing body would put an appropriate staffing structure into place to ensure that all children are happy and can flourish.

### **Added 16 June 2020**

Q11 How do you plan to support and develop the children now, not in September, and then moving forward?

A The proposal originally was to amalgamate the schools with effect from September 2020, but due to closure for Covid-19, this has now been moved to January 2021. However, the proposal to amalgamate the schools is only one part of the steps being taken to support the infant school. At the end of February 2020 Mr Messer, who is proposed to be the Headteacher of the enlarged school, stepped in to become the Executive Headteacher whilst the amalgamation consultation is in place. In addition, Mrs Cooke has been appointed to be the Interim Head of School for the same period. This ensures that new leadership is in place with immediate effect, and that the school can be supported prior to amalgamation.

Q12 This seems like a takeover not an amalgamation. Staff at the junior school have priority over jobs. The qualities and qualifications should be considered for each role without any priority given to one school?

A The proposal being consulted upon is for a closure and an expansion of schools. The infant school would close on 31 December 2020 and the junior school would expand its age range on 1 January 2021 to become a primary school with a nursery. The number of pupils admitted to each year group would remain the same, meaning that similar staffing levels would be required. Once a final decision on the proposal is made, a process will begin to restructure the workforce. The broad

approach is stated in the consultation document, although the staff restructure proposal itself would not be readied until the final decision on amalgamation is made.

Q13 My main concern around the amalgamation is the employment rights of the infant school staff. It says in the document that both schools will be treated the same but then goes on to say that the infant school staff will be recruited whereas the junior staff will automatically continue their roles. With both a head and governing body of the junior school running things I cannot see how the infant school staff will get a fair deal and I feel there is no one to speak for them.

A The governance bodies have secured Mr Messer as Executive Headteacher of both schools whilst the process is in place, with Heads of School appointed to ensure the day-to-day running of the schools. The junior school governing body has also committed to ensuring that its membership has representation from the infant school. Both governance bodies are committed to a process that is fair and transparent.

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.

Q14 I'm guessing the cost would be prohibitive, but consideration should be given to putting the schools on one site for a truly integrated primary school?

A The proposal is for the current buildings on the infant and junior school sites to be used by the primary school. Funding is not available through the amalgamation process to meet the cost of a new school building. (Constructing a primary school of the size required could easily cost £7m - £8m and a new site would need to be found in the area, which would also need to be funded.)

### **Added 7 July 2020**

Q 15 The LA has stated the benefits quite clearly of the advantages of a merger such as a continuity of provision and not needing to apply for KS2 entry to a junior school. Could the LA and GBs provide the financial 'benefits' of such a merger. How much would the estimated savings amount to and where would those savings be made?

A The amalgamation proposal has not been prompted by financial reasons. If the schools were to amalgamate the resulting primary school would be funded in line with the existing funding formula. The primary school would be in receipt of just one lump sum amount each financial year, so overall funding would be reduced when compared with the joint budgets of the infant and junior schools. However, to offset this the primary school would only require one headteacher and would also be eligible to receive a split-site grant.

Q 16 As the proposal states there might be some need for job roles to be redefined to avoid duplication of posts I request that all staff on both sites are informed that at the very least a protection of salary of at least three years for a teacher and 18 months for other staff would be applicable should an employee be adversely affected.

A In the event that any areas within the newly formed primary school are restructured, a consultation process will take place in line with the school's redundancy and restructuring policy, which is the usual Essex County Council policy. If appropriate, salary protection will apply in accordance with the terms outlined in the both the Teachers and Support Pay and Conditions documents.

A staff restructure proposal will not be readied until the final decision on amalgamation is made. Therefore, at present, we are unable to inform staff on either site whether any restructures are required.

Q 17 It would be helpful that the GBs of both schools could state on the record that there has been no discussion or plans to make redundancies.

A A staff restructure proposal will not be readied until the final decision on amalgamation is made. It is therefore not currently known whether any areas of the newly formed primary school will restructure or whether this will result in any employees being at risk of redundancy. If any restructures are announced the school has a responsibility to mitigate against redundancies and all staff affected will be fully consulted with.

Q 18 There seems to be a contradiction in the information. One para says:"... 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."

But the next para says:

"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. "

How is it fair and equitable if priority is given to staff working at the Junior school?

A Please see answer to Q13 above.

Q 19 The infant school still has 2 demountable classrooms which are not ideal. Are there any plans to replace this with permanent buildings or extension to the school? The infant school is not fit for purpose and you have to go through teaching areas to reach other rooms.

A There are no plans to replace the demountable classrooms with permanent accommodation.

If the schools amalgamate the primary school governing body will have the opportunity to consider how the existing buildings on both sites can be best used. A small amount of capital funding will be available to the governing body to support limited remodelling of the buildings.