

**St Thomas of Canterbury
Church of England Infant School
and
St Thomas of Canterbury
Church of England Junior School**

Consultation on a proposal to amalgamate the infant and junior schools with effect from 1st September 2023

Introduction

The Governing Bodies of St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England (VA) Infant School and St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England (VA) Junior School are committed to maximising the best educational outcomes and realising the full potential for all our children.

It has become clear to both Governing Bodies during the autumn term 2022 that the new leadership structure has resulted in improved outcomes for all children as teaching and learning is aligned throughout both schools. As a result of this, both Governing Bodies have agreed to explore the benefits of amalgamating the two schools into one Primary School. These benefits include:

- greater consistency of approach to teaching and learning from ages 4 to 11;
- seamless monitoring of pupil progress and attainment from ages 4 to 11;
- increased potential for strong leadership and governance;
- continuity of experiences for young children;
- our shared Christian ethos being developed over time into a stronger sense of a Christian community living out Christian values;
- 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 knowledge, skills and other resources.

The purpose of this consultation is to seek the views of parents, carers, staff, governors, the parish and the wider community of St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Infant and Junior Schools before a decision can be taken on whether or not to amalgamate the two schools.

We look forward to hearing your views on the proposal either during the face-to-face meetings or through the online forms.

St Thomas of Canterbury
Church of England Infant School
Governing Body

St Thomas of Canterbury
Church of England Junior School
Governing Body

Dear Parents/Carers, Staff and Members of the Local Community of St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Infant and Junior Schools

The Governing Bodies of St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Infant School and St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Junior School are consulting on a proposal to build on the strengths and good progress in place at the schools by the creation of a single primary school, under the unified leadership of one Headteacher and one Governing Body. The Governing Bodies, with the support of Essex County Council, are therefore proposing that the two schools amalgamate to form a primary school for children aged 4 to 11 with effect from 1 September 2023.

Why is amalgamation being proposed?

Mrs L'Estrange resigned as the Headteacher of St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Infant School in August 2022. With the position of Headteacher becoming vacant at the Infant School the Governing Body considered a range of options available to it in relation to securing the long-term future leadership of the school. The Governing Bodies of each school then met and agreed unanimously that the best way forward in the interim would be that Mr Moran (Junior School Headteacher) would become Executive Headteacher across both schools. Since the 1 September Mr Moran has been working as Executive Headteacher across both schools. This, though, was only put in place for one academic year and ends on the 31 August 2023.

Since the 1 September 2022 both schools, under the leadership of Mr Moran, have been working hard to continue developing the curriculum in both schools to ensure all our children receive the best possible education.

The Junior School is currently rated as Good and the Infant School is rated Outstanding by Ofsted and both schools have a history of working closely together to serve the school community, including promoting the best outcomes for all children. Some services are already shared, for example, catering services, boiler, premises management, Caretaker and Business Manager.

Given these positive outcomes, the Governors see significant advantages in combining the schools into a primary school under the leadership of Mr Moran, to continue to drive up standards and performance. Therefore, a decision has been taken by the Governing Bodies of both schools to consult on a proposal to amalgamate the two schools. This would involve the formal closure of the Infant School on 31 August 2023 and changing the age range of the Junior School from 7-11 to 4-11 to become a primary school from 1 September 2023. Mr Moran would then become Headteacher of St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Primary School from 1 September 2023.

What are some of the advantages of amalgamation?

The Governing Bodies 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;
- organisational structure is aligned with the National Curriculum Key Stages. Planning across Foundation, Key Stage 1 and 2 as a coherent whole for the primary phase provides greater flexibility across and between the Key Stages;
- monitoring pupil progress from 4 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 removing any worries children may have about moving to a different school;
- greater opportunities are created for older children to take on responsibility within the school. For younger children, the presence of older children provides aspirational role models and also mentoring support;
- collective worship would benefit from the sharing of resources and staff knowledge providing a richer experience for all children and staff;
- the continuity of pastoral care provided by a primary school enables relationships to deepen and enables staff to support children and families more effectively to facilitate their learning and growth as individuals;
- children would be able to come together 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;
- a single primary school will bring both schools together to become one community, sharing a consistent vision and shared values across one school;
- combined schools sharing the same site can maximise the efficiency of their resources.

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;
- improved use of facilities, for example, improved use of shared spaces;
- a single governing body providing strategic governance and vision for all primary key stages and be accountable for outcomes across the school phases;
- streamlining communication for parents, carers and the wider community, ensuring one consistent approach for all.

Leading up to amalgamation the Governing Bodies would begin to provide opportunities, where appropriate, to further collaborate across the schools, including collaboration between the Governors.

Opportunities for staff professional 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.

The proposal would enable the schools to merge and strengthen their performance so that there is greater consistency in policies and practice.

Who would be the Governors of the new primary school?

If the amalgamation proceeds, the existing Governing Body of the Junior School would formally become the Governing Body of the primary school in September 2023. The Junior Governing Body is committed, however, to ensuring that the governing body of the primary school would comprise governors from the current Infant School Governing Body and both Governing Bodies are already exploring ways of working more closely together prior to the proposed amalgamation. Both schools currently carry vacancies on their respective Governing Bodies, so bringing them together should give a full Governor contingent.

The composition of the new Governing Body of the primary school will be in accordance with governance guidelines for Voluntary Aided schools.

Who would be the Headteacher of the primary school?

The Headteacher of the Junior School at the time of the proposed amalgamation, Mr Moran would be the Headteacher of the primary school.

Would the teachers and support staff stay the same?

Should the amalgamation proceed, 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. Pupil number forecasts indicate that the primary school would need at least as many classes as there are currently across both the Infant and Junior Schools. It is therefore planned and expected that all 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.

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. The staff currently employed in the closing Infant School will be able to be recruited to the new primary school staffing structure. There is no intention to make any changes to existing contracts as a result of the amalgamation and a commitment has been made that the amalgamation would not proceed if redundancies

were deemed necessary. Any external staff appointments will only be made after current staff at the Infant and Junior Schools have been considered.

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

The primary school would be able to use both the existing buildings more effectively as a single school. The existing schools have the capacity to admit 75 pupils into Reception, and 77 pupils into Year 3. The total capacity of the primary school would be 535 places. This is not planned to change under the new structure.

The primary school would be able to use all the buildings on the two existing sites more effectively as a single school. Governors do not have any plans 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.

What would the admission arrangements be for the primary school?

The Governing Body 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 registration process. This will come into effect for those starting Year 3 in September 2025.

How can I make my views known?

Meetings have been arranged to provide an opportunity for parents and carers, the children at the school, staff and members of the local community to ask questions and express their views on the proposal outlined here. At this stage, no decision has been made and all the views received, either at the meetings or separately in writing, will be considered prior to a final decision being taken as to whether to go ahead with the proposal.

There will be two meetings for parents, carers and members of the local community on Wednesday 8 February 2023. One will take place at 2:30pm in the Infant School hall and the other will be another at 6:00pm in the Junior School hall. These meetings will give an opportunity for as many people as possible to find out about the proposed primary school and to give us their views.

In addition to the meetings for parents, carers and the local community, Governing Bodies of the Infant and Junior Schools, will also be seeking the views of other interested parties, particularly members of staff and children at the school.

Your Comments

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

<https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/school-organisation/st-thomas-of-canterbury-amalgamation>

Alternatively, you may wish to write to or email us with your comments to the address given below by 5pm on Thursday 23 February 2023. All comments received through these mechanisms will be collected and included in the analysis of feedback received.

All written comments should be received by St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Infant School and St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Junior School by 5pm on Thursday 23 February 2023.

St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Infant School and St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Junior School 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 school.

If you have any queries about the consultation process or the proposal you can email the School Organisation Officer at school.organisation@essex.gov.uk, or alternatively contact the Chairs of Governors at the Infant or Junior Schools, via the school office or email admin@stthomasinf.essex.sch.uk or admin@stthomasjnr.essex.sch.uk

The information contained in this leaflet can be made available in alternative formats: large print, Braille, audio tape or disk. Please call 01277 223606 or 01277 223651

What happens next?

At the end of this consultation period the Governing Bodies will consider the feedback and views expressed by all interested parties and decide whether to progress with the proposal. If it is decided to proceed with the process, a statutory notice will then be published in the local press and will be displayed at the schools 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 the Governing Bodies of the schools, and a final decision will be taken on the proposal by Essex County Council.

Timescale

This consultation period will run from Thursday 26 January 2023 until 5pm on Thursday 23rd February 2023. Meetings will be held with staff, governors, school councils, parents, carers and other interested parties during this period.

Date	Activity
26 January 2023	Consultation commences – consultation document can be viewed on the schools' websites.
8 February 2023	Meetings for parents and carers of both schools and the local community to be held at 2:30pm till 3:15pm in the Infant School hall and 6pm till 7pm in the Junior School hall.
8 February 2023	Meeting for staff to be held at 3:45pm in the Infant School hall
5pm on 23 February 2023	End of consultation period
March 2023	Publication of statutory notice
April 2023	End of period for representations
May 2023	Final decision on proposal
31 st August 2023	St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Infant School closes*
1 st September 2023	Age range of St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Junior School is extended to become a primary school*

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

You can contact us in the following ways:

By email: admin@stthomasinf.essex.sch.uk or admin@stthomasjnr.essex.sch.uk

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

By post: St Thomas of Canterbury Church of England Infant & Junior Schools, Sawyers Hall Lane, Brentwood, Essex CM15 9BX.

Visit our website: www.stthomasofcanterburyinfantschool.co.uk or www.stthomasjnr.org

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

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