

EXECUTIVE 10th November 2022

Report Title	Update on the formal consultation for the proposed amalgamation of Tennyson Road Infant School and Alfred Street Junior School in Rushden
Report Author	Jo Hutchinson Head of School Effectiveness
Lead Member	Cllr Scott Edwards – Executive Member for Children, Families, Education & Skills

Key Decision	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	

List of Appendices

- Appendix A** – Equality Screening Assessment
- Appendix B** – Statutory Notice
- Appendix C** – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)
- Appendix D** – Copy of Formal Consultation

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform the Executive of the outcomes of the statutory period of formal consultation approved by the Executive on Thursday 25th August 2022 and seek its decision on the proposed amalgamation for Tennyson Road Infant. School and Alfred Street Junior School as requested by the respective governing bodies.
- 1.2 The consultation sought views on the creation of a single all through primary school that would, in the first instance, continue to operate across the two existing sites. Any proposed change to this arrangement would be led by the Governing Body of the new school and be subject to a further consultation process.

- 1.3 The report was discussed with the Executive Advisory Panel Education, Skills and Employment on Tuesday 25th October 2022. Panel members supported the recommendations in the report.

2 Executive Summary

- 2.1 To ensure the best outcomes for children at Alfred Street Junior School and Tennyson Road Infant school (“the schools”) which are located in Rushden, and to address financial and operational challenges, the Council was approached by the Governing Bodies of the schools to consider an amalgamation.
- 2.2 The outcomes of an initial consultation were provided in a report for consideration by Executive on 25th August 2022. This demonstrated majority support for amalgamation of the schools.
- 2.3 Executive approved the publication of a Statutory Notice in accordance with the provisions of section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the DfE statutory guidance, which contained within it a recommendation that, to progress the amalgamation process, Tennyson Road Infant School is closed, and the age range of Alfred Street Junior School is expanded.
- 2.4 The recommended closure of Tennyson Road Infant School does not prejudice the site, name, staffing or any other aspect of the amalgamated school, which can be the subject of further consultation and decision making processes.
- 2.5 This report provides a summary of the outcomes of the formal consultation undertaken between 5th September and 2nd October 2022 as approved by Executive. The comments raised through this formal consultation process have been considered when developing the recommendation set out in this report.

3 Recommendations

- 3.1 Having regard to the formal consultation outcomes, the Executive will make a decision as to whether or not to amalgamate the schools.
- 3.2 Reasons for Proposals:
- i) To support children and young people and their families to access high quality sustainable education that facilitates the achievement of best outcomes
 - ii) To progress the amalgamation of the schools in accordance with legislative requirements and Department for Education statutory guidance.
 - iii) Based upon the financial position and school performance it is not a viable solution to take no action to progress the statutory process for the amalgamation

- 3.3 Alternative Options Considered: Having been approached by the governing body of both schools with the proposal to merge, the Council considered the benefits of this option against the maintenance of the two separate schools. The conclusion reached was that the merger provided a much greater opportunity to drive the improvement in outcomes for children at pace, and to deliver efficiency savings that would contribute to the financial stability of the new school. Further details of these considerations are set out in this report.

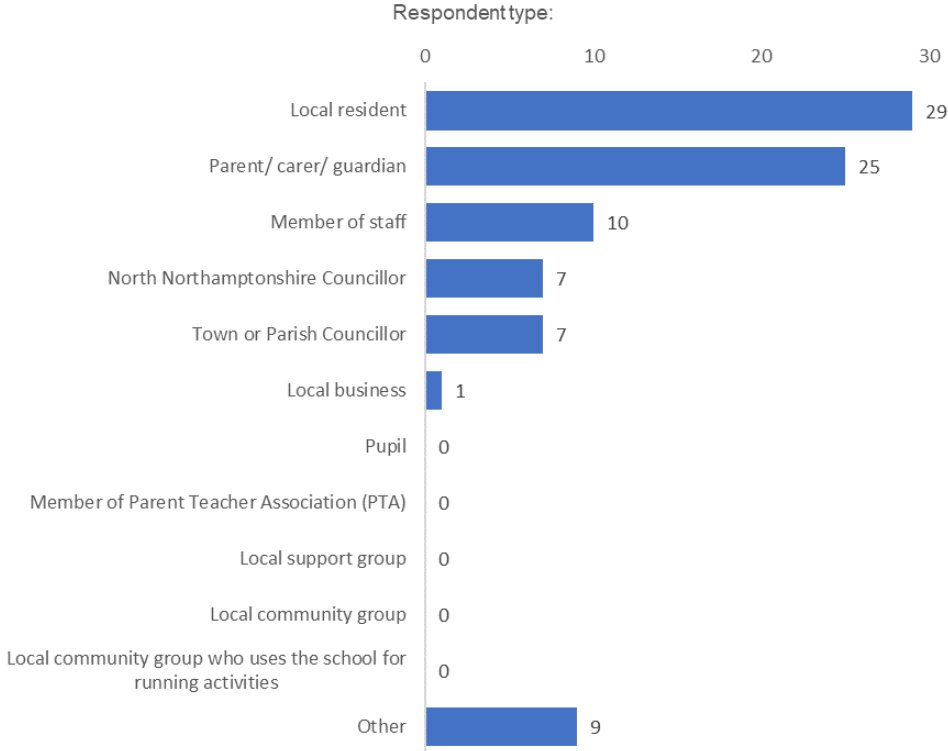
4 Formal Consultation

- 4.1 Formal consultation ran for 4 weeks and was open from 5th September to 2nd October 2022.
- 4.2 The consultation was hosted on the Council's [Consultation & Engagement Hub](#). The consultation was supported by information documents including The Statutory Notice, Frequently Asked Questions and a brief paper containing a clear outline of the proposal so that consultees could provide informed feedback.
- 4.3 Notice of the consultation was promoted by the schools publishing the link on their website and notifying parents/carers and their wider community. The Statutory Notice was published on the Council's website and sent to the Secretary of State for Education.
- 4.4 Notification of the consultation was also published on the local BBC News Website, sent to Councillors, Teaching and Support Staff Union Representatives, local Members of Parliament, town and parish Councils, partner organisations, members of the Council's Consultation Register, and members of the North Northamptonshire Residents' Panel who reside within the local area.
- 4.5 Consultees were able to have their say by:
- Visiting the dedicated consultation webpage and completing the questionnaire or requesting a paper questionnaire
 - Emailing lseadmin.ncc@northnorthants.gov.uk
 - Writing to North Northamptonshire Council, Consultation: Tennyson Road Infant School and Alfred Street Primary School, Sheerness House, Meadow Road, Kettering, NN16 8TL
 - Accessing the questionnaire free of charge at any North Northamptonshire Council library. Alternative formats of the questionnaire were offered upon request.

5 Formal Consultation Response

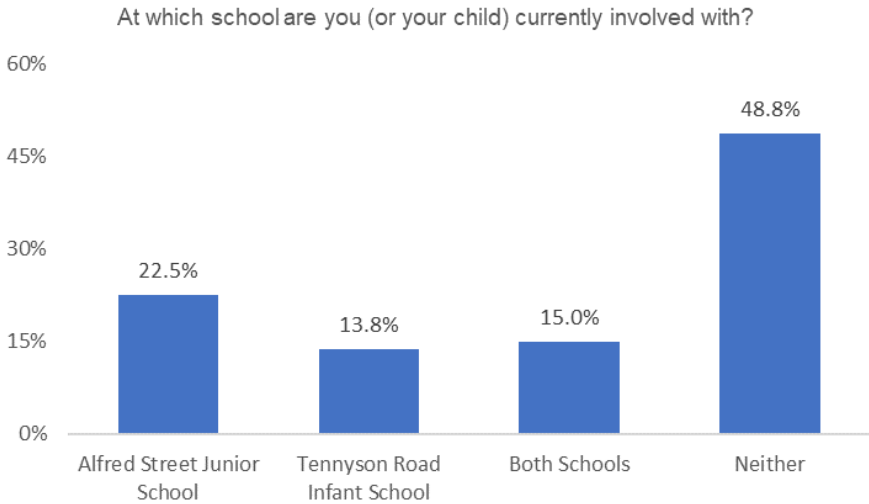
- 5.1 In total, 86 respondents filled out a questionnaire, either partially or fully. Respondents did not have to answer every question and so the total number of responses for each question differs and is shown in relation to each question. There were no written or email responses.

5.2 The respondents to the consultation were made up as follows:

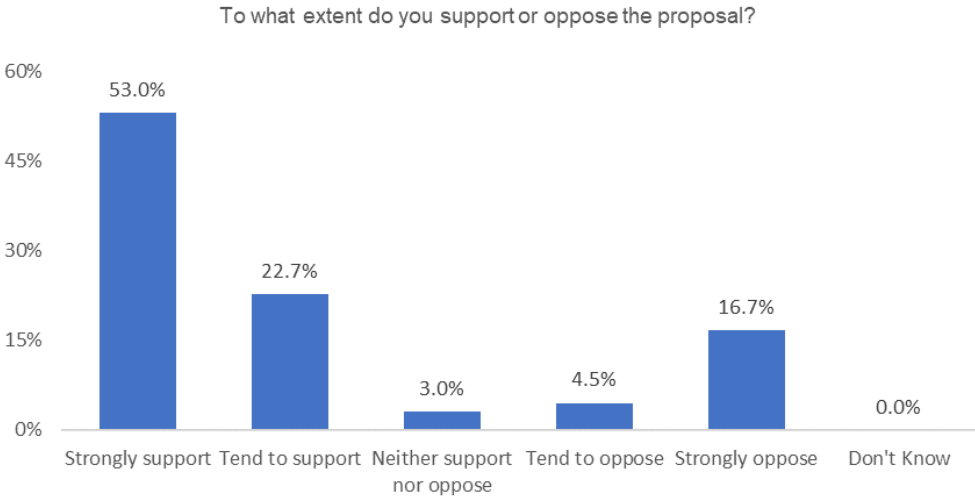


The respondents who said 'Other' included grandparents of pupils, ex members of staff; an ex-pupil, a school Governor and a local architect.

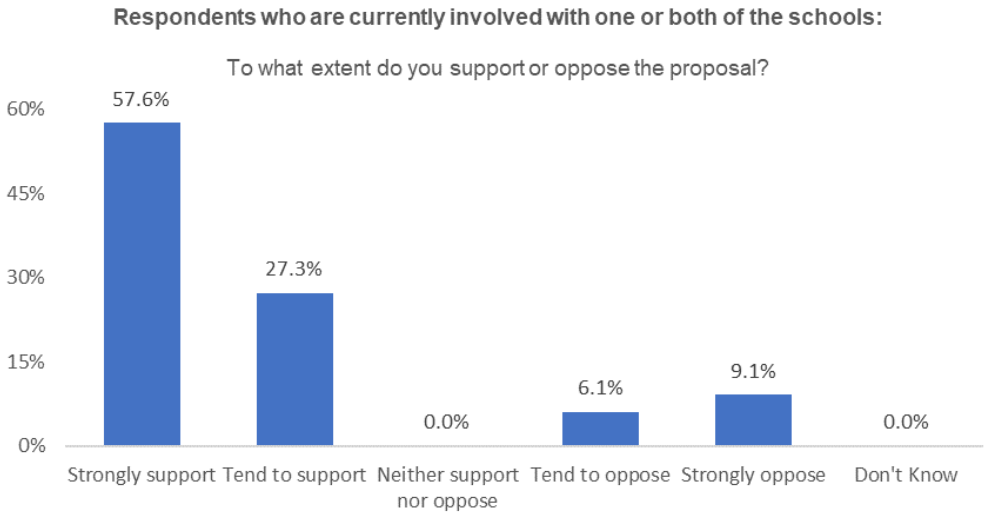
5.3 There were 80 responses to the following question. A total of 51.3% respondents said they are currently involved with either one or both schools.



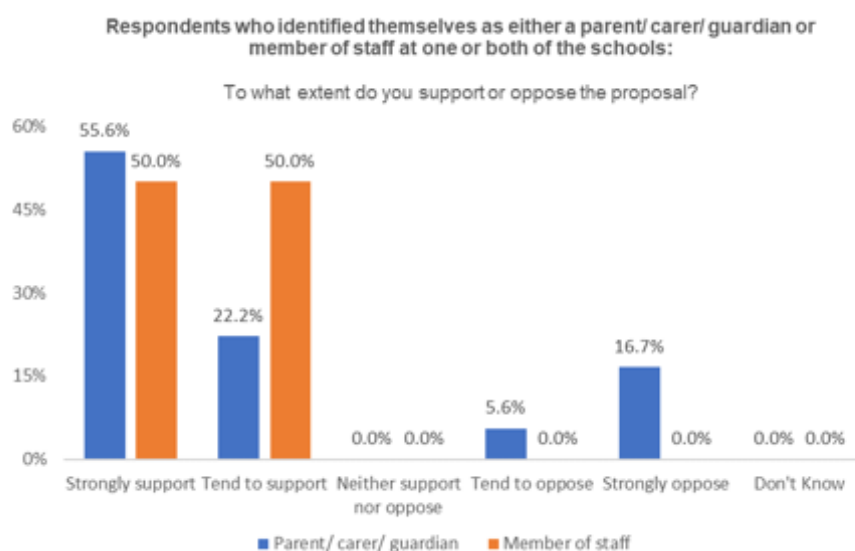
5.4 There were 66 responses to the following question. A total of 75.7% respondents said they support the proposal to amalgamate Tennyson Road Infant School and Alfred Street Junior School. A total of 21.2% oppose.



5.5 There were 33 respondents who said they are currently involved with either one or both schools who also responded to the following question. When looking at these responses 84.9% of these respondents support the proposal, whilst 15.2% oppose.



5.6 When focusing on those respondents who identified themselves as either a parent/carer/ guardian or member of staff at one or both of the schools, from the 18 parents, carers and guardians who answered this question 77.8% support the proposal, whilst 22.3% oppose. From the 10 members of staff respondents, 100% said they supported the proposal.



6 Common Themes Emerging from the Consultation Responses

6.1 The purpose of this section of the report is to give further clarification to the data above by providing free text information aligned to common themes emerging from respondents during the consultation.

6.2 Summary of responses to the question: “If you think the proposal would have a positive impact, then please tell us why.”

6.2.1 There were a total of 40 written responses to this question. A summary of answers which mentioned one or more of the key themes identified is displayed below (*please note that a single response may cover more than one theme*):

Theme Number	Theme	Responses mentioning this theme	% of responses mentioning this theme
1	Greater efficiencies / economies of scale of operating a single site	24	60%
2	Improved building quality / extension of the combined site	4	10%
3	A merger would provide an opportunity to redevelop the closed site	3	8%
4	A merger would benefit the welfare of pupils	25	63%
5	Environmental benefits for the local area	2	5%
6	Benefits for the parents and the wider local community	19	48%
7	Specific benefits of having a combined primary school (including improved transitions)	14	35%
8	Comments on improved staffing / teaching provision	8	20%
9	General support for merging	1	3%
10	Support for merging, but at the Tennyson Road site.	1	3%

6.2.2 Over half (60%) of the responses highlighted positive benefits concerning the improved efficiencies and economies of scale of operating a single school site,

with 63% of responses noting that operating a single school would be beneficial for the welfare of pupils.

6.2.3 35% of responses specifically highlighted the benefits of having a combined primary school covering the junior and infant phases, and the benefits of not having to reapply for a Year 3 place and/or support young people with this transition between schools.

6.2.4 Just under half (48%) of responses highlighted benefits for the wider community, and for parents of children - of these responses, a recurring theme was the benefit for not having to drop off and pick up children from two different school sites.

6.2.5 Of the other recurring themes identified in the responses: 20% noted that the merger would provide opportunities for improved staffing/education provision, 10% highlighted how a merger could lead to necessary building improvements or extensions at the combined site (with 8% of responses noting that the closed site could be further developed to enhance the local area).

6.3 Summary of responses to the question: “If you think the above proposal would have a negative impact, please tell us why, along with any suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be reduced or avoided”

6.3.1 There were a total of 24 written responses to this question. A summary of answers which mentioned one or more of the key themes identified is displayed below (*please note that a single response may cover more than one theme*):

Theme Number	Theme	Responses mentioning this theme	% of responses mentioning this theme
1	High costs of building / rebuilding at the combined site	4	17%
2	Comments that a combined school would not solve the issues faced by both schools at present	5	21%
3	Concerns about the cost effectiveness of the merger	4	17%
4	Concerns about parents/pupils travelling to the Alfred Street site	9	38%
5	Concerns about what would replace the closed site	2	8%
6	Comments about how the merger would need to be accompanied by new school leadership	4	17%
7	Benefits of having smaller classes at separate schools	2	8%
8	Comments that the merger should take place at the Tennyson Road site	7	29%
9	Concerns about the effective management of the process	3	13%
10	Crime / safety concerns at the Alfred Street site	1	4%
11	Support for closing both schools	2	8%

6.3.2 The most frequent response (38%) to this question were concerns about the process of transporting children to and from the Alfred Street site. Areas of concern raised in these answers included young people crossing two busy roads

to reach the Alfred Street site, and concerns about increased congestion in the area around Alfred Street.

- 6.3.3 Seven responses (29%) commented that the merger should instead take place at the Tennyson Road site, with responses noting that the buildings at the Tennyson Road site are of a higher quality, with space to develop further if required, and is in a quieter area with more families.
- 6.3.4 Five responses (21%) noted that a combined school would not solve the issues currently faced by both current schools (with two of these responses (8%) further noting that both schools could be closed, and their cohorts absorbed into other local schools).
- 6.3.5 Four responses (17%) were received which cited concerns about the costs of redeveloping and merging the two schools, and a further four responses raised concerns about the overall cost effectiveness of the project.
- 6.3.6 Of the other recurring themes identified in the responses: 13% highlighted that a merger should be accompanied by new school leadership or improved teaching standards, and a further 13% of responses noted concerns about the effective management of the process, 8% raised concerns about the timely and appropriate redevelopment of the closed school site, and 8% highlighted the benefits of maintaining two schools with a dedicated focus on their respective education phases.

6.4 Summary of responses to the question: “If you have any other comments you would like to make that you have not already told us, then please tell us here:”

- 6.4.1 There were a total of 21 written responses to this question. A summary of answers which mentioned one or more of the key themes identified is listed below (*please note that a single response may cover more than one theme*):

Theme Number	Theme	Responses mentioning this theme	% of responses mentioning this theme
1	Importance of commissioning local people/organisations in any work associated with the project	1	5%
2	Concerns and comments about the costs / disruption of the project	4	19%
3	Comments about respecting the history of the Alfred Street site	2	10%
4	Comments about ensuring the combined school is situated in a safe/secure place, with sufficient and safe parking for staff	5	24%
5	Support for closing both schools	1	5%
6	Comments on the importance of recruiting / retaining high quality staff	3	14%
7	Concerns about the capacity for a merged school to expand further if required	2	10%
8	Concerns about the timing of the merger	3	14%
9	Importance of ensuring student numbers will remain stable or grow	2	10%
10	Comments on renaming the combined school	2	10%
11	Comments that the merger will hopefully lead to improved outcomes	2	10%
12	Importance of transparency in the decision-making process	1	5%

6.4.2 There were multiple themes raised in response to this question. The largest proportion (24%) of responses to this question echoed a concern voiced in the previous section, that the combined site needs to be situated in an appropriate environment, along with a safe place for staff to park their cars.

6.4.3 Four (19%) responses said they were concerned about the cost and disruption of the project. Three (14%) responses raised comments about the timing of the project within the academic year, and a further three (14%) responses were comments (positive and negative) about the quality of the leadership teams at the current schools (and the proposed combined school).

7 Common Themes Emerging from Parents/Carers/Guardians and Staff from One or Both Schools

7.1 The statutory guidance requires account to be taken of the numbers of people expressing a particular view, with the greatest weight given to responses from those stakeholders likely to be most affected by a proposal, more especially parents of children at the schools.

Summary of responses to the question: “If you think the proposal would have a positive impact, then please tell us why here.”

7.1.1 There were a total of 19 written responses to this question which raised positive themes. A summary of answers which mentioned one or more of the key themes identified is displayed below (*please note that a single response may cover more than one theme*):

Theme Number	Theme	Responses mentioning this theme	% of responses mentioning this theme
1	Greater efficiencies / economies of scale of operating a single site	10	53%
2	Improved building quality / extension of the combined site	0	0%
3	A merger would provide an opportunity to redevelop the closed site	0	0%
4	A merger would benefit the welfare of pupils	14	74%
5	Environmental benefits for the local area	0	0%
6	Benefits for the parents and the wider local community	8	42%
7	Specific benefits of having a combined primary school (including improved transitions)	7	37%
8	Comments on improved staffing / teaching provision	4	21%
9	General support for merging	0	0%
10	Support for merging, but at the Tennyson Road site.	0	0%

7.1.2 A large proportion of responses (74%) noted that operating a single school would be beneficial for the welfare of pupils, for example by removing potential anxiety around transitioning between infant and junior school, engendering “a stronger sense of belonging for a longer period of time” and familiarity with staff.

7.1.3 Over half (53%) of responses highlighted positive benefits concerning the improved efficiencies and economies of scale of operating a single school site. 37% of responses specifically highlighted the benefits of having a combined primary school covering the junior and infant phases, and the benefits of not having to reapply for a Year 3 place and/or support young people with this transition between schools.

7.1.4 A significant proportion (42%) of responses highlighted benefits for the wider community, and for parents of children - of these responses, a recurring theme was the benefit for not having to drop off and pick up children from two different school sites.

7.1.5 Lastly, 21% noted that the merger would provide opportunities for improved staffing, especially leadership, and improved educational provision, including SEN provision.

7.2 Summary of responses to the question: “If you think the above proposal would have a negative impact, please tell us why, along with any suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be reduced or avoided”

7.2.1 There were a total of 12 written responses to this question which raised negative themes. A summary of answers which mentioned one or more of the key themes identified is displayed below (*please note that a single response may cover more than one theme*):

Theme Number	Theme	Responses mentioning this theme	% of responses mentioning this theme
1	High costs of building / rebuilding at the combined site	2	17%
2	Comments that a combined school would not solve the issues faced by both schools at present	2	17%
3	Concerns about the cost effectiveness of the merger	2	17%
4	Concerns about parents/pupils travelling to the Alfred Street site	2	17%
5	Concerns about what would replace the closed site	1	8%
6	Comments about how the merger would need to be accompanied by new school leadership	3	25%
7	Benefits of having smaller classes at separate schools	1	8%
8	Comments that the merger should take place at the Tennyson Road site	2	17%
9	Concerns about the effective management of the process	2	17%
10	Crime / safety concerns at the Alfred Street site	1	8%
11	Support for closing both schools	0	0%

7.2.2 There were multiple themes raised in response to this question with no clear trend.

7.2.3 25% of responses felt that the merger would need to be accompanied by new leadership, echoing responses in the previous section.

7.2.4 Six themes were each reflected in 17% of responses. Respondents expressed concerns regarding the cost of redeveloping and merging the two schools, concerns about the cost effectiveness of the merger, concerns that a combined school would not solve the issues currently faced by both current schools, and concerns regarding the process of transporting children to and from the Alfred Street site. Areas of concerns raised in the latter answers included young people crossing two busy roads to reach the Alfred Street site.

7.2.5 Other themes raised by 17% of respondents included concerns regarding the effective management of the merging process and comments that the merger should take place at the Tennyson Road site because its building is more modern, and it is considered to have a better reputation and Ofsted rating.

7.2.6 One respondent voiced concern about what would happen to the closed site, one respondent was concerned about the negative impact of teaching different year groups in one class, and one respondent was concerned about the cost and safety of staff parking at the new site.

7.3 Summary of responses to the question: “If you have any other comments you would like to make that you have not already told us, then please tell us here:”

7.3.1 There were a total of 8 written responses to this question. A summary of answers which mentioned one or more of the key themes identified is listed below (*please note that a single response may cover more than one theme*):

Theme Number	Theme	Responses mentioning this theme	% of responses mentioning this theme
1	Importance of commissioning local people/organisations in any work associated with the project	0	0%
2	Concerns and comments about the costs / disruption of the project	2	25%
3	Comments about respecting the history of the Alfred Street site	0	0%
4	Comments about ensuring the combined school is situated in a safe/secure place, with sufficient and safe parking for staff	3	38%
5	Support for closing both schools	0	0%
6	Comments on the importance of recruiting / retaining high quality staff	2	25%
7	Concerns about the capacity for a merged school to expand further if required	1	13%
8	Concerns about the timing of the merger	0	0%
9	Importance of ensuring student numbers will remain stable or grow	0	0%
10	Comments on renaming the combined school	2	25%
11	Comments that the merger will hopefully lead to improved outcomes	0	0%
12	Importance of transparency in the decision-making process	0	0%

7.3.2 As in the previous section, there were many different themes raised in response to this question and no clear trend.

7.3.3 The largest proportion of responses (38%) contained concerns about the safety of the new site, especially the need for safe staff parking – a concern also raised in the previous section.

7.3.4 25% of responses commented on the costs and disruption of the project, another 25% raised the importance of recruiting and retaining high quality staff, and another 25% felt that a new name was needed to help engender “a fresh start” and to help dispense with “negative reputation[s].” In their responses, two people suggested naming the merger “Queen Elizabeth Primary” and one also suggested “Rushden Town Primary.”

7.3.5 One final response (13%) commented on the current expansion of housing in the Rushden area and expressed concern regarding the new school’s ability to expand if needed and the need to preserve adequate outside space in the eventuality of expansion.

8 Summary of Outcomes

8.1 The outcome of the formal consultation shows majority support for amalgamation of the schools overall.

- 8.2 The outcome of the formal consultation also shows majority support for amalgamation of the schools from parents/carers/guardians and staff from either one or both of the schools.
- 8.3 Overall respondents wanted to see an improvement of educational provision, including SEN provision, whether that be in relation to improvement in the welfare of the children or with regard to the improvement of assets and facilities.

9 Proposals and Next Steps

- 9.1 The Executive is now invited to consider the outcome of the formal consultation.
- 9.2 The Executive decision must be made within a period of two months of the end of the formal consultation period. The reasons for the Executive decision must be published within one week of making a determination.

10 Implications (including financial implications)

10.1 Resources, Financial and Transformation

- 10.1.1 Revenue funding for schools is provided for through the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and distributed via the National Funding Formula (NFF) for Schools. The proposed amalgamation of the two schools will be reflected in a change to the funding formula that acknowledges the move to a single all-through primary school.
- 10.1.2 There is no revenue financial implication of this proposal on the general fund of the council. The process will be supported through officer time from within existing resources.
- 10.1.3 Should the amalgamation go ahead the all-through school will continue to be maintained by the Local Authority and so there will be no financial impact on the capital funding received or the council's liability to maintain the infrastructure of the school.

10.2 Legal and Governance

- 10.2.1 The procedure followed, including the consultation and considerations set out in this report comply with the Council's duty to exercise its functions with a view to promoting high standards and the fulfilment of each pupil's learning potential in accordance with S13A of the Education Act 1996.
- 10.2.2 Regard has been had to the provisions of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (Part 2) as well as the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013/3109, in particular Schedule 2 of those regulations.

10.3 Relevant Policies and Plans

- 10.3.1. Improving outcomes for children and young people and their families is a key element of the Council's Corporate Plan.

10.4 Risk

- 10.4.1 There is a risk to the Statutory Process if timelines are not met and the anticipated improvements will not be made for children and young people as a result.

10.5 Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

- 10.5.1 This report was discussed by the Executive Advisory Panel on Tuesday 25th October 2022. Panel members were in favour of the amalgamation of the schools.

10.6 Consideration by Scrutiny

- 10.6.1 The report was not considered at scrutiny as not required

10.7 Equality Implications

- 10.7.1 An 'Equalities Screening Assessment' has been completed in respect of this proposal and is attached as **Appendix A**.
- 10.7.2 The equality implications relating to this report are limited. No detrimental impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as arising from this proposal.

10.8 Climate and Environment Impact

- 10.8.1 In the event that a decision is made to amalgamate the schools, there will be minimal impact on climate change issues.

10.9 Community Impact

- 10.9.1 The impact on the community, should the amalgamation of the schools go ahead, will be limited.
- 10.9.2 A decision not to proceed with the amalgamation will result in children within the community attending schools that do not provide the best possible educational environment because of the financial challenges each school is facing.

10.10 Crime and Disorder Impact

10.10.1 This proposal will have no impact on crime and disorder.

11 Background Papers

11.1 [Report to Executive of 22 February 2022](#) (minute 165 refers) - [Update on the proposed amalgamation of Tennyson Road Infant School and Alfred Street Junior School in Rushden](#)

11.2 Documentation issued by the DfE as follows:
[Opening and closing maintained schools1012.pdf](#)
[\(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)
[Making significant changes \('prescribed alterations'\) to maintained schools](#)
[\(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)
[Education and Inspections Act 2006](#) ([legislation.gov.uk](#))

