

EAP – Education, Skills and Employment 30th June 2022

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

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	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To inform the Executive Advisory Panel of the outcomes of the initial consultation process it approved on Thursday 22nd February 2022 and seek its views on whether to proceed with amalgamation for Tennyson Road Infant School and Alfred Street Junior School as requested by the respective governing bodies.

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 also to address financial and operational challenges, the Council was approached by the Governing Bodies of the Schools to consider an amalgamation. Following a detailed assessment of the concerns, officers supported this request and provided a report for consideration by Executive on 22 February 2022 outlining the background to the request and why it was supported.
- 2.2. Executive resolved to commence an initial consultation process for the amalgamation of the Schools.

- 2.3. This report provides a summary of the initial consultation outcomes undertaken between 1st March 2022 and 29th April 2022 as requested by Executive. The comments and concerns raised through this process have been taken into account in developing the recommendations set out in this report.
- 2.4 Having regard to the consultation outcomes, it is proposed that the Executive progresses to the next step in the amalgamation process by issuing a Statutory Notice of intention to amalgamate the Schools.

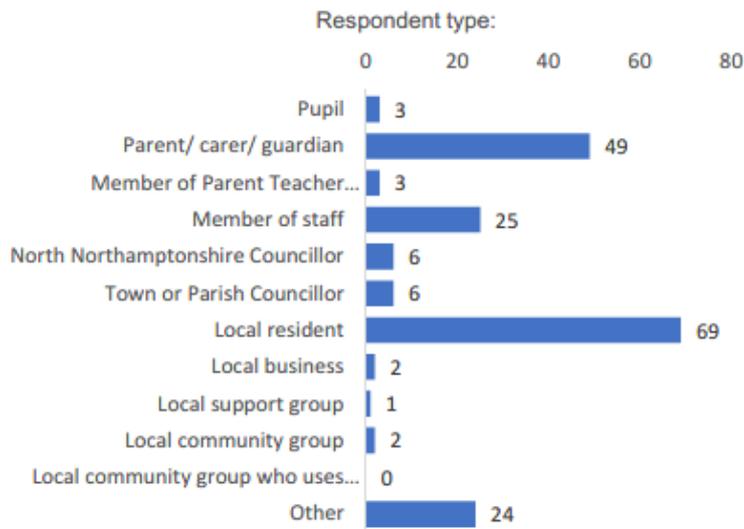
3 Recommendations

- 3.1 The Executive Advisory Panel is asked to note and provide any comments on the proposals to be submitted to the Executive, requesting:
- i) Approval of the publication of a Statutory Notice proposing the amalgamation of Tennyson Road Infant School and Alfred Street Junior School in accordance with the provisions of Part 2 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006;
 - ii) It receives a further report following the formal consultation to enable a decision to be made on the amalgamation of 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

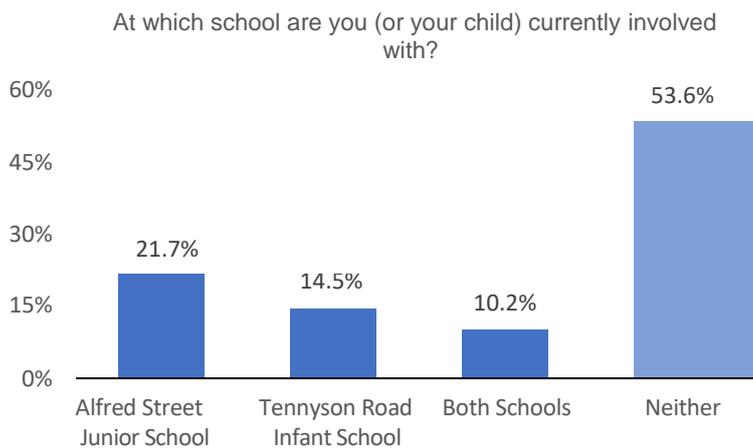
4 Consultation response

- 4.1 The initial consultation was undertaken through an online questionnaire and widely publicised through the schools and the communities they support. This received 167 responses and ran between 1 March and 29 April 2022.
- 4.2 The questions posed in the consultation centred around:
- i) The principle of amalgamating the schools;
 - ii) Where the new school should be situated;
 - iii) Whether the school should be LA maintained or have academy status;
- As well as being asked to choose options, respondents were also able to provide free text comments on the proposals.

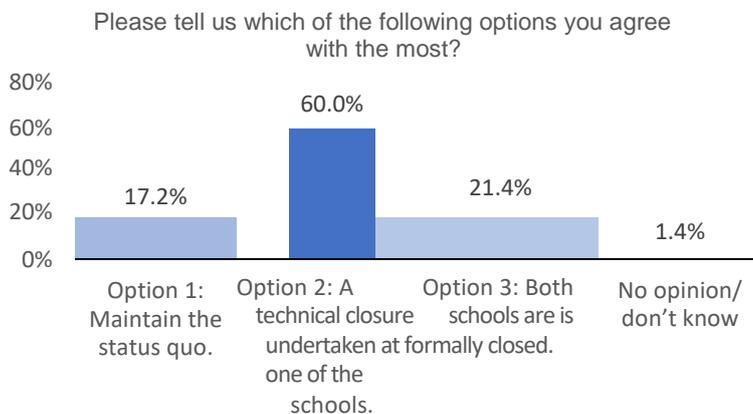
4.3 The respondents to the consultation were made up as follows:



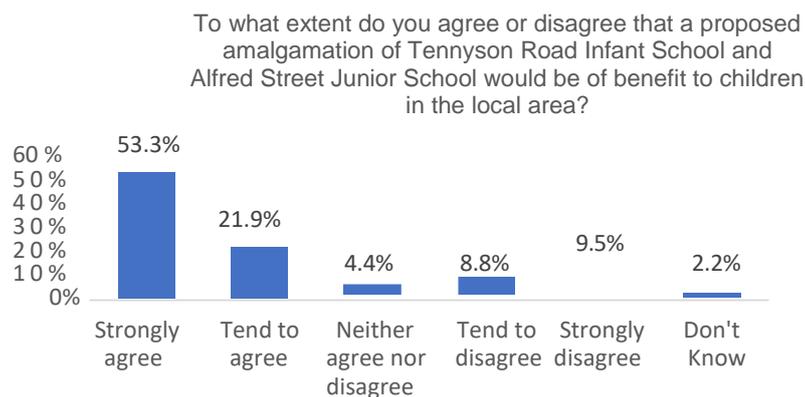
4.4 All respondents provided an answer as to whether they had a prior connection with any or none of the schools. The largest group of respondents to this question were from neither school.



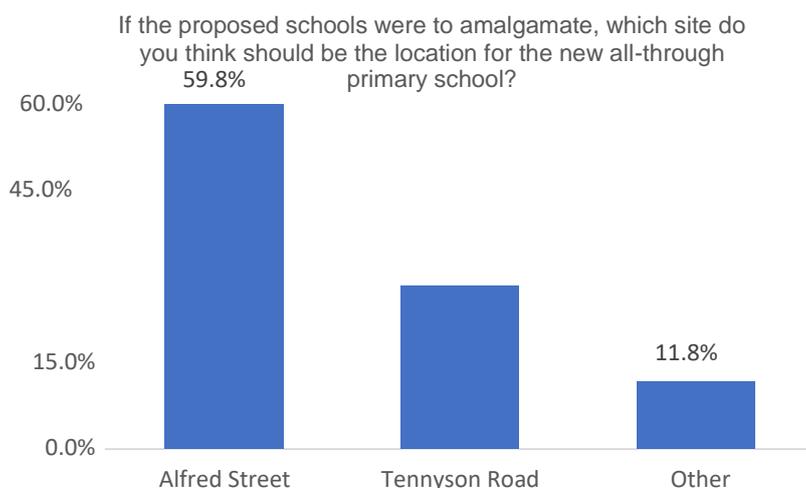
4.5 145 people responded to this question as to which option they favoured:



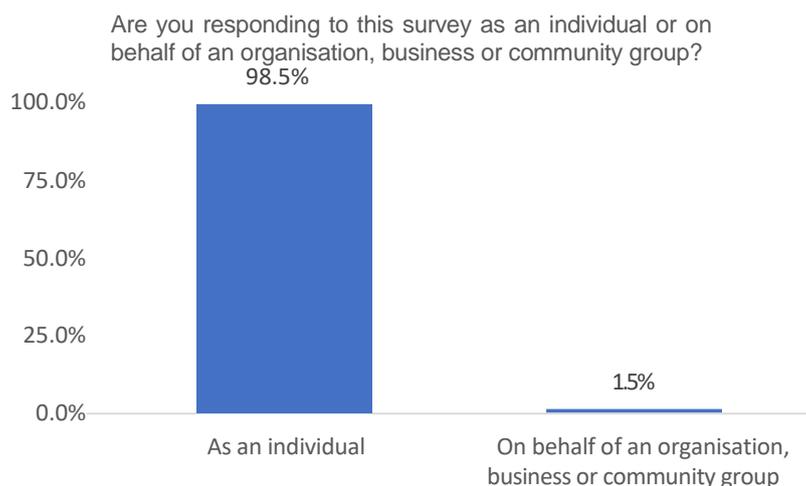
4.6 There were 137 responses to this question on the benefits of amalgamation of the Schools:



4.7 127 respondents indicated a view on the site for the new school:



4.8 The respondents (135) almost exclusively responded to the consultation as individuals:



5 Common Themes Emerging from the Consultation Responses

5.1 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.

Theme	Comment	Question Ref
Historical Site	Several respondents commented on the historical importance of the Alfred Street Site, with references which linked to the theme of the school site being a central part of the town's heritage.	4.4 4.6
Travel, Parking and Safety	<p>Respondents commented on the suitability of the Alfred Street site for the primary school due to the current positive capacity for available parking facilities near to this school site.</p> <p>Conversely, respondents also commented that using the Alfred Street site for the primary school may cause a greater number of parents/carers to resort to travel by car or having to walk longer distances.</p> <p>Tennyson Road was considered by some to be the site which would provide the greatest opportunity for most children to walk to school, stating that this would mean the children do not have such dangerous roads to cross.</p> <p>Concerns were raised about pupil safety if Alfred Street became the site for the primary school especially as this would impact on the youngest pupils.</p> <p>In relation to Alfred Street being the chosen site for the primary school, it was noted that the environmental impact should be considered because a greater number of cars would be coming into the town. It was suggested that this would encourage more driving when the focus should be on encouraging people to walk with benefits to their health and to the environment.</p> <p>In addition to this, other comments reflected the suitability of the Tennyson Road site for the primary school as it provided capacity for staff parking, accessibility for deliveries and capacity for parent/carer parking at the nearby sports centre.</p>	
Academy versus Local Authority Schools	There were comments from respondents to support both arrangements. Some stated that remaining as maintained schools was their preferred option. Others felt that benefits would be gained by becoming an academy in response to option 3 in graph 4.4.	4.4
Location	<p>Respondents who selected 'Other' included references to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a survey of pupils might help to determine the site • a feasibility study will determine this • the site should be away from built up areas • neither site is suitable for a new school without investment in improving the learning environment • other schools in the area being considered • if a new school is being considered, it should be local 	4.6

	<p>Respondents who selected Alfred Street included references to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the site is big enough and can be expanded to accommodate the merge• more parents/carers using this school would increase the footfall in the town• it is historically important to the town and has long standing traditions• seems like the most central option for children based at Tennyson Road <p>Respondents who selected Tennyson Road included references to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• safer location than Alfred Street and walks to school would be safer• better capacity to expand• far greater number of families live in close proximity to Tennyson Road than to Alfred Street• greater parking space available	
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<p>Benefit to Children</p>	<p>Of the strongly agree/tend to agree responses, of which there were 61, comments included benefits as being:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one strong school rather than two struggling ones • children would be educated on one site • having one school takes away financial burden currently being experienced • having one school would have oversight of the whole education of a child and outcomes would improve • there will be consistency of a single curriculum and will reduce differences in 'grades' • more time and money being able to be put into the education, care and maintenance of the merged school • local SEN children without places may be able to benefit from using one of the sites if it is extended to take more SEN pupils • the release of more money to support a better education • children will benefit from not having a 'big change' of schools at 7 years old • many parents/siblings travel between sites, this would make it easier for them if all on one site • a primary school would also bring further capacity to drive improvement and promote progress through to Key Stage 2 (KS2) <p>Of the strongly disagree/tend to disagree responses, of which there were 12, comments included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The town is expanding, and future capacity is needed for school places • More children together with no guarantees that things would improve • Children at Tennyson Road look forward to the transfer days when they visit Alfred Street. This is an important time for them to show that they are getting older and growing up. • Keeping smaller classes would be of benefit to children • Low numbers at both schools • Generally, children will be happy in any school adapting easily to new surroundings • Children benefit from a clear distinction between infant and junior schools • Attendance could drop at the school which children have to travel the longest distance to get to • Increased traffic at the chosen site is not a benefit • If children are having to move to a school outside their immediate locality and do not have the option of travel by car, they may end up having to walk longer distances 	<p>4.5</p>
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6 Summary of Outcomes

- 6.1 The initial consultation responses demonstrate that both schools are valued and have a long association with the local community, as well as a history of connectivity between both schools. Where respondents indicated a preferred school and gave comment, this was led by their own affiliation to the school, whether that be a current connection i.e. a parent/carer or guardian or by way of a previous connection i.e. an ex pupil. 60% of respondents indicated that they supported the formal closure of one school and expansion of age range of the remaining school over the closure of both to allow the creation of a brand new school.
- 6.2 Overall respondents wanted to see an improvement of education opportunities for children, whether that be in relation to whole school performance or with regard to the improvement of assets and facilities. They wanted to see the strengthening of learning for children.
- 6.3 The consultation indicated that some respondents did not fully understand what “amalgamation” means. Several thought that it would be two independent schools on one site. Others expressed their concerns about both schools moving out of local authority control and becoming assigned to academy status. Some respondents said that both schools needed a new start, with some suggesting that a new school on a new site was required which would offer children and professionals a new modern building.
- 6.4 Respondents mentioned allocation of provision for Special Educational Needs (SEN) to be considered as current provision was not adequate. Respondents were also concerned about travel, volume of traffic and general road safety issues at both school locations.
- 6.5 If it is agreed to go forward with the formal processes required to facilitate the amalgamation, further engagement and consultation will be required. Aspects of the ‘initial consultation’ could be tested further in the formal consultation should amalgamation be approved.
- 6.6 Executive will recall from the earlier report submitted to it that a Steering Group has been set up in relation to the potential amalgamation of the Schools. The outcomes of the consultation were shared with the Alfred Street/Tennyson Road Steering Group and they have provided the following feedback for consideration by Executive in the decision-making process:
- Having received and considered the outcomes of the consultation process, the Steering Group recommends that the amalgamation of Alfred Street Junior School and Tennyson Road Infant School is progressed. It is the view of the group that this decision will lead to the development of a stronger, sustainable school that will be best placed to meet the needs of children, parents/carers and the wider community into the future.

- The Group understands that the process of amalgamation may be unsettling for pupils, parents/carers and staff at the school, and so will work with the Council to actively support everyone engaged in or impacted by the process.
- Further key decisions will be required prior to the amalgamation about issues such as the site and Governance of the new school. The Steering Group will support and guide the consultation processes around these issues and ensure communication with all stakeholders remains clear and timely.

7 Proposals and Next Steps

- 7.1 The outcome of the initial consultation shows majority support for amalgamation of the Schools. The Executive will be invited to determine whether to continue towards the amalgamation of the Schools by publishing a Statutory Notice in accordance with the provisions of section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the DfE statutory guidance. Further details as to the statutory process are included in section 7.6 of this report.
- 7.2 In progressing with the amalgamation, it will be necessary to close one of the schools, expand the age range of the other school to create an all-through primary and transfer the pupils to the roll of the amalgamated school. From a school organisation perspective, it is necessary to decide which school will close. Based on discussions with key stakeholders it is recommended that Tennyson Road Infant School is the school that is closed and the age range of Alfred Street Junior School expanded. This does not prejudge the site, name, staffing or any other aspect of the new school, which can be the subject of a further consultation and decision-making processes and is simply a technical decision that will enable the amalgamation to go ahead. This proposal will need to be published as part of the Statutory Notice.
- 7.3 The decision to proceed with the Publication of Statutory Notice would be share with the respective Governing Bodies and other stakeholders.
- 7.4 An indicative timetable would be shared with the Steering Group in support of both schools.
- 7.5 Officers from the Council would continue to work with both schools to address the ongoing operational and financial issues.

7.6 Proposed Process

Stage	Description	Timescale	Comments
1	Publication of Statutory Notice	26 th August 2022	Dependent on approval to proceed given at NNC Executive Meeting 4 th August 2022
2	Representation (formal consultation period)	5 th September – 30 th September 2022	Period of representation must be for a period of 4 weeks
4	Decision	November Meeting 2022 To be confirmed	Final decision made at Executive meeting in October (yet to be arranged) Decisions must be made within a period of two months of the end of the Representation period
5	Implementation	To be confirmed	Decision on when schools will formally amalgamate to be confirmed with Steering Group

8 Implications (including financial implications)

8.1 Resources & Financial

8.1.1 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 primary school.

8.1.2 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.

8.1.3 Should the amalgamation go ahead the new 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.

8.2 Legal and Governance

8.2.1 The procedure followed 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.

8.2.2 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.

8.3 Relevant Policies and Plans

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

8.4 Risk

8.4.1 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.

8.5 Consultation

8.5.1 The Council intends to consult the following persons or bodies in relation to this proposal, using the following mechanisms. The DfE guidance booklet, 'Opening and closing maintained schools' prescribes a number of statutory Consultees when any local authority proposes to close a school, statutory consultees are identified in bold text.

Consultee	Mechanism
Governing Body of the school(s);	Direct Email/Press release/online questionnaire
Pupils at the school;	Via the school(s)
Teachers and other staff employed by the school(s);	Direct Email/Press release/online questionnaire
Relevant Diocesan authorities;	Direct Email/Press release/online questionnaire
Any other LA likely to be affected by the proposal;	Direct Email/Press release/online questionnaire
Governing Bodies or Academy Trusts, teachers and other staff at schools that may be affected by the proposal;	Direct Email/Press release/online questionnaire

Parents of pupils at any other school that may be affected by the proposal;	Press release/Online Questionnaire
Any Trade Union that represents members of staff at the school(s);	Direct Email
The local MP;	Direct Email
NNC Ward Councillors for the area;	Direct Email
Rushden and Higham Ferrers Town Councils;	Direct Email
All other interested stakeholders.	Online Questionnaire

8.5.2 A full summary of all the feedback received during the formal period of consultation will be presented to the Executive prior to the meeting to be arranged in November 2022 and be given full consideration as part of any future decisions relating to this proposal being made.

8.5.3 The feedback received from all stakeholders as part of the formal period of consultation will be used to inform any future decisions required in relation to this proposal.

8.5.4 To ensure corporate awareness and to enable an organisational overview of the proposed the Consultation and Engagement Team have been contacted regarding this proposed amalgamation.

8.6 Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

8.6.1 Any comments from the Executive Advisory Panel meeting scheduled for Thursday 30th June will be provided to the Executive for its consideration.

8.7 Equality Implications

8.7.1 An 'Equalities Screening Assessment' has been completed in respect of this proposal and is attached as **Appendix A**.

8.7.2 This report seeks approval to begin the initial phase of consultation required by the statutory process governing school organisational changes of this nature. The equality implications relating to this report are therefore limited. No detrimental impact on any protected characteristic has been identified as arising from this proposal.

8.8 Climate Impact

8.8.1 The decision to begin formal consultation on the amalgamation will have no direct climate impact. In the event that changes are made to the schools in future, Executive will be provided with appropriate information to assess climate impact and make an informed decision.

8.9 Community Impact

- 8.9.1 The decision to begin formal consultation on the amalgamation of these schools itself will have a limited community impact.
- 8.9.2 A decision not to proceed with the formal consultation 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.

8.8 Crime and Disorder Impact

- 8.10.1 This proposal will have no impact on crime and disorder.

9 Background Papers

- 9.1 [Report to Executive of 22 February 2022](#) (minute 165 refers)

- 9.2 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](#))