

# Proposed Amalgamation of Whitefriars Infant and Junior Schools:

## Consultation Report (Stage 1)

### 1. Context to the consultation

In July 2016, the Governing Bodies of both Whitefriars Infant School and Whitefriars Junior School formally resolved to begin the process of amalgamating the two schools into one all-through/standard (4-11) primary school, and approached the local authority to begin the appropriate process of statutory consultation and oversight. The Governing Bodies of both schools and the local authority felt that the proposed amalgamation would deliver the best educational outcomes for children currently on roll at both schools, and for the future.

On 9 August 2016, a Cabinet Member Decision<sup>1</sup> was sought by the county council, asking to begin a process of consultation on the proposed amalgamation. This would be achieved through a 'technical' closure ('discontinuance') of one of the schools, and an extension of the age-range of the other to become an 'all-through' primary school. Approval was given by the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children's Services, initiating a six-week period of consultation beginning on 12 September 2016, and concluding on 21 October 2016. This will be the first of two consultation periods which will be necessary before the schools can amalgamate.

#### 1.1 Statutory guidance underpinning the consultation

Whilst the initial decision to amalgamate was made by the Governing Bodies of Whitefriars Infant and Junior Schools, and both schools would be playing a significant role in all stages of the consultation, as both schools are local authority maintained schools, responsibility for conducting the consultation process, and reporting back on the outcomes of the process, lies with the local authority. This process is outlined in (revised) DfE guidance published in April 2016, *Opening and Closing Maintained Schools: Statutory Guidance for Proposers and Decision Makers*<sup>2</sup>.

#### 1.2 Consultation methodology

Throughout the first stage of the consultation, consultees were made aware of the proposed amalgamation and given information to enable them to submit consultation responses through the following channels:

- Via website – consultation literature directs consultees to the central Consultation Register<sup>3</sup> on the main NCC website. Here, any interested parties can find out more about the proposals, and to access an email address which enables them to leave a consultation response immediately. Information about the consultation was also circulated directly to relevant stakeholders to increase awareness.
- By e-mail – the address of the bespoke mailbox used for consultation ([Schoolconsultation@northamptonshire.gov.uk](mailto:Schoolconsultation@northamptonshire.gov.uk)) by the Strategic Planning Team could be obtained from the website.
- By letter/survey – a consultation document was co-produced by the Strategic Planning Team and the Governing Bodies of Whitefriars Infant and Junior Schools<sup>4</sup>, and could be obtained (and returned) electronically or in a paper-format. As well as outlining the rationale and reasons for the proposed

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<sup>1</sup> For the Cabinet Member Decision of 09.08.2016, please use [this link](#). This document also provides further background information, and an explanation of why the Governing Bodies resolved to pursue a process of amalgamation.

<sup>2</sup> The statutory guidance (April 2016) referred to here can be accessed/downloaded by following the link below:  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/514556/16-04-06\\_FINAL\\_SO\\_Guidance\\_ED\\_Regs.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/514556/16-04-06_FINAL_SO_Guidance_ED_Regs.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> The following link can be used to access the Consultation Register entry for the proposed amalgamation:  
<http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/council/consultations/pages/Details.aspx?cid=a7da48bc-dbbb-4be7-b7df-50f4264bb75f&search=current&page=1&sortBy=3&currentposition=0>

<sup>4</sup> This consultation document can be accessed through the following link:  
[http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/Council/consultations/school-changes/Documents/PDF%20Documents/Whitefriars%20Proposed%20Merger\\_Consultation%20Letter.pdf](http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/Council/consultations/school-changes/Documents/PDF%20Documents/Whitefriars%20Proposed%20Merger_Consultation%20Letter.pdf)

amalgamation of the two schools, the consultation document also contained a short, four question survey, designed to obtain information about how interested parties felt about the proposal. A copy of the consultation document can be accessed by following the link in footnote 4.

- Attending Drop-in sessions – during the consultation period, two hour-long ‘drop-in’ sessions, covering the proposed amalgamations from the perspective of both schools, were organised by, and held at, both schools, on 12 and 14 September 2016. To maximise attendance, one session was held at 2.15pm-3.15pm and the other from 6.00pm to 7.00pm. As well as finding out more information from the school, attendees also had the opportunity to leave consultation feedback. During the drop-in sessions, notes were made by the school on the key themes covered during the meeting. These are shown as an appendix (Appendix A) to this report.

Ultimately, effective consultation should always seeks the widest possible audience, present the proposals of a given consultation in a clear, lucid and concise way, and allow consultees (and potential consultees) to feedback their views and opinions through a variety of different methods, appropriate to the nature of the consultation. The ability to use the web, email, post, survey and attend drop-in sessions at the school, as part of this consultation, has helped to ensure that all interested parties can engage effectively in the process.

## 2. Consultation feedback: analysis and overview of the consultation process

The following sections of this report provide an overview of: the number of consultation responses received, the school/site of interest to consultees (e.g. the infant or junior school or both); respondents’ interest in the consultation; whether or not they were in favour of the proposed amalgamation and the reasons cited by respondents who were not in favour of the proposed amalgamation. Whilst the majority of consultees left their names in the feedback form, these have been anonymised and codes: WF1 refers to the first consultation response logged.

### 2.1 Consultation responses received

Between 12 September and 24 October, a total of 115 consultation responses have been received. Unusually, the overwhelming majority of consultation responses were physically collected by, and sent to, the school, either as a result of the drop-in sessions, or from parents/guardians with children on roll at either of the school.

### 2.2 Respondents Interest in Consultation

The second section of the survey asks for consultees’ interest in the proposed amalgamation, giving them the following tick-box options:

(1). I have a child/children attending Whitefriars Infant School	(2). I have a child/children attending Whitefriars Junior School	(3). I have children on roll at both schools
(4). I am a staff member at Whitefriars Junior School	(5). I am a governor at Whitefriars Infant School	(6). Other (please describe)

**Table 1:** Categories of interest used in the survey (the question asked: “Which category/categories best describe you?”)

As the consultation was primarily aimed at parents, the majority of responses received have been from parents with children on role at either (or both) school(s). However, the consultation was circulated beyond just parents, so the ‘Other’ category is used to ensure that all representations received could be coded to an interest (or potential interest) in the proposed amalgamation. Table 2 below provides an overview of the categories of interest used by consultees.

Consultees may have more than one reason for contributing to the consultation (they could have children on role at both schools, and have an 'other' reason for participating), and as such the number of reasons for interest (122) exceeds the number of consultees (115).

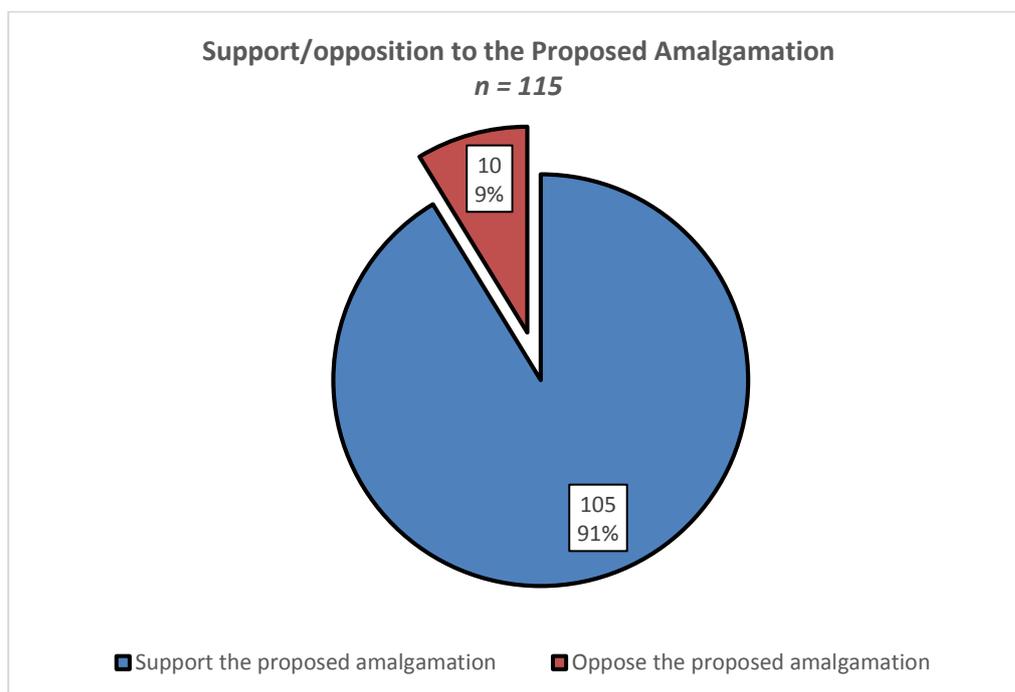
Code	Interest	Number of consultees	% of consultees
1	Child/children attends Whitefriars Infant School	40	32.79%
2	Child/children attends Whitefriars Junior School	23	18.85%
3	Child/ren attend both schools	28	22.95%
4	Staff member (at either school)	26	21.31%
5	Governor	4	3.28%
6	Other	1	0.82%
<b>Totals</b>		<b>122</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 1(a):** Reasons for interest in consultation

As might be expected in a consultation of this kind, the majority of consultation responses have been received from parents/guardians with a child, or children on roll at one, or both schools (in total, 75% of all consultation responses are from these groups). A large proportion of staff from both schools have also contributed to the consultation (26 staff members, comprising 21% of all consultation responses).

### 2.3 Levels of support for the proposed amalgamation

The majority of consultation responses indicated that they were in favour of the proposed amalgamation, as shown below in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1:** Levels of support and opposition to the proposed amalgamation

Ultimately, of the 115 consultation responses, just 10 consultees (9% of all responses received) did not support the proposed amalgamation. The following section provides a breakdown of the reasons consultees cited for not supporting the proposed amalgamation of the two schools.

## 2.4 Reasons for opposition to the proposed amalgamation

**Table 2** (below) provides a thematic analysis of consultees' reasons for not supporting the proposed amalgamation of Whitefriars Infant and Junior Schools. Whilst only 10 consultees were opposed to the amalgamation, some consultees provided more than one reason for their opposition to the amalgamation. These are summarised below:

#	Reason for opposition to proposed amalgamation	Consultees (coded) mentioning reason	Number of times cited
[1]	Consultee prefers existing arrangements	WF4	1
[2]	Consultee feels that amalgamation will lead to a loss of school ethos/depersonalisation	WF100, WF111, WF112	3
[3]	Consultee feels there has been insufficient information about the advantages & reasons for amalgamating	WF101	1
[4]	What is proposed isn't a 'proper' amalgamation	WF108, WF109, WF111	3
[5]	Finance – that the merger will lead to loss of money/impact adversely on the school's financial situation	WF99, WF108, WF109, WF110, WF113	5
[6]	Implications for staff	WF111	1
[7]	Other (please state) - One Consultee mentioned the impact on hot dinners for pupils	WF109	1
<b>Total</b>			<b>15</b>

**Table 2:** Reasons for opposition

## 2.5 Reasons for opposition to the proposed amalgamation (detailed)

Table 2 (above) provides a thematic overview of the reasons consultees cited for their opposition to the proposed amalgamation. A more detailed overview, based on the comments consultees actually left in the surveys, is contained below, as **Table 3**.

Respondent Code	Comments left	REASONS FOR OPPOSITION (see Table 2)
WF4	[1] I'm happy as it is. As 2 separate schools.	1
WF99	[5]. I believe that the schools will suffer a financial loss due to the merger. I don't like the idea of my daughters school being on a much tighter budget meaning that she will get less out of her school years. The schools will just merge with no change to them other than staff cuts too.	4
WF100	[2]. I feel that with the current system it allows for teachers and head teachers to know the children on the role + makes it more personalised. With an amalgamated school children become a number to a head teacher rather than a well-known character.	2

Respondent Code	Comments left	REASONS FOR OPPOSITION (see Table 2)
WF101	<b>[3]</b> All I've read is how there will be no changes/nothing + no-one affected. I've no idea why it's being proposed or what benefits there will be.	3
WF108	<b>[4]</b> . Without a central entrance with offices and a connecting corridor to both schools I do not feel it will become one school in the children's eyes and not have the effect on the children's education that this proposal is attempting to achieve. <b>[5]</b> . The school will have loss of money in its budget and unable to make improvements to recourses and promises which in turn will not help improve the children's education. Leave the schools separate to protect funding, appoint like-minded head teachers to work together to improve links between the schools especially in curriculum issues and create two schools with a common identity.	4, 5
WF109	Consultee raises the following issues: <b>[4]</b> . <b>Amalgamation/transition</b> – a lack of 'funding provided by County' means that the amalgamation isn't a proper one, and that the schools will still function as two separate entities and that this will not provide a more cohesive transition for the children, <b>[6]</b> . <b>Hot dinners</b> – consultee is also concerned that the status of dinners for the children has not been finalised. <b>[5]</b> . <b>Funding</b> – consultee feels that 'amalgamation will result in a reduction in budget....there will be inevitable staff cuts and redundancies,' and the amalgamation may impact on telephony and data exchange as well. Argues that schools should move to becoming an academy, not just amalgamating.	4, 5, 6
WF110	I feel the cut in the budget will have a negative impact on the children.	5
WF111	<b>[2]</b> . I personally feel the ethos of the friendliness/family reputation of the school will be lost. I'm concerned that the day to day minor things although won't be impossible will be more difficult. <b>[6]</b> . I'm worried about the future of my job, the security, the unknown. <b>[4]</b> . The merger of 2 schools into 1 but still using 2 buildings means the children will never be able to all be together as one school due to the restrictions on the size of the buildings.	2, 4, 6
WF112	I feel the nurturing family feel of the infant school would be damaged by the absence of a full-time head in residence. That initial supportive parent partnership relationship is crucial to ensure parents are treated as parents. I also feel it is important that the Early Years approach in the infants is best understood and managed by a head with a sound understanding and appreciation of the benefits.	2
WF113	Decreased budget.	5

**Table 3:** Reasons for opposition to proposed amalgamation. All text is verbatim, except for WF109, where the consultation response required editing due to length. Numbers in square brackets indicate the reason code used in Table 2.

## Appendix A

The following text is a summary, compiled by the schools involved, of the key questions arising from the Drop-in sessions held by the school on 12 and 14 September.

- Is there any money being given to support the amalgamation of the schools and to bring the two separate buildings together??
- What happens if you can't recruit a new head teacher for the primary school?
- Are you looking for a head teacher specifically to merge the two schools or for the longer term?
- How will the head teacher work across both buildings?
- Is this a cost saving exercise?
- If the new primary only receives one lump sum of £125,000 how will the schools finance this cut?
- How much weight do parental views carry?
- The schools have a reputation of providing strong care for all its pupils; how will this be maintained?
- When would the new head teacher take up post?
- How would the governing body be chosen?
- If the two schools amalgamate will there be continuity with all children having access to hot dinners?
- If it becomes a primary will there be the same opening and closing times?
- The two schools currently have different team arrangements for sport, will this change? Will we have to buy different PE kit?
- Would the pupils be "mixed" across the two buildings?
- What will happen during this academic year?
- How do staff feel?
- What will be the impact on the children during the first years of amalgamation?
- What are the views from parents discussing it on the playground?
- The head teachers have regular interaction with the children; will this be lost if it becomes one larger primary school?
- Has it happened elsewhere?
- How does this fit into the bigger picture of academies?
- What is the timescale?

Additionally, questions arising from a drop-in session solely for staff employed by both schools, held on 25 September are summarised below. These have also been compiled by the schools involved.

- How will two separate buildings run as one school?
- When amalgamation hasn't worked well has this been because the two buildings have affected its success?
- What will be the impact of a reduction in budget?
- Will a "phased in" reduced budget impact on staffing?
- Will there be changes to staffing as a result of changes to the head teacher and amalgamation?
- Will there be redundancies as a result of staff re-structuring?
- Is there protected pay for staff?
- How much notice would staff be given about re-structuring and any resulting change in role?
- Both schools have had a head teacher who is accessible to pupils and staff, how will this be managed in a primary housed in two buildings?
- Will teachers be expected to change year groups?