

# Proposed Amalgamation of Earls Barton Infant and Junior Schools:

## Consultation Report: Stage 1 (5 September to 17 October 2016)

### 1. Context to the consultation

In July 2016, the Governing Bodies of Earls Barton Infant School and Earls Barton Junior School resolved to begin the process of amalgamation, and approached the local authority to begin the appropriate process of statutory consultation and oversight necessary before any amalgamation could take place. Collectively, the Governing Bodies of both schools, and the local authority, felt that this proposed amalgamation would offer the best option for the future development of both schools, and deliver the most positive educational outcomes for pupils attending both schools.

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 Earls Barton Junior School, and an extension of the age-range of the infant school to become an 'all-through' (4-11) primary school. Approval was given by the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Children's Services, initiating a six-week period of consultation beginning on 5 September 2016, and concluding on 17 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 Earls Barton 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 also be obtained from the Consultation Register and from consultation leaflet.
- By letter/survey – a consultation document was co-produced by the Strategic Planning Team and the Governing Bodies of Earls Barton Infant and Junior Schools<sup>4</sup>, and could be obtained (and returned)

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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=e3c7afc1-336c-44ab-9e69-ec65834f7259&search=all&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/Earls%20Barton%20Merger\\_Consultation%20Document.pdf](http://www.northamptonshire.gov.uk/en/councilservices/Council/consultations/school-changes/Documents/PDF%20Documents/Earls%20Barton%20Merger_Consultation%20Document.pdf)

electronically or in a paper-format. As well as outlining the rationale and reasons for the proposed 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, three ‘drop-in’ sessions covering the proposed amalgamations from the perspective of both schools, were organised by, and held at, both schools, in line with the following schedule:
  - 8 September 2016 (19:00 to 19:45) drop-in session for the infant school
  - 8 September 2016 (20:00 to 20:45) drop-in session for the junior school
  - 9 September 2016 (14.30 to 15.30) drop-in session for both schools.

Effectively, these sessions were actually public meetings, as they were not restricted to parents or school staff. To maximise attendance, sessions were held at different times and venues, and 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.

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 feedback received during the first stage

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 5 September and 17 October, a total of 85 consultation responses have been received. 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 Earls Barton Infant School	(2). I have a child/children attending Earls Barton Junior School	(3). I have a child/children on roll at both schools
(4). I am a member of staff (at either school)	(5). I am a governor (at either school)	(6). Other (please indicate)

**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 1(a)** (below) provides an overview of the categories of interest used by consultees. As consultees may have more than one reason for contributing to the consultation (they could, for instance, have children on role at both schools, and have an 'other' reason for participating), the number of reasons for interest (93) exceeds the actual number of consultees (85).

<b>Code</b>	<b>Interest</b>	<b>Number of Consultees</b>	<b>% of Consultees</b>
<b>1</b>	Child/children on roll at Earls Barton Infant School	22	23.7%
<b>2</b>	Child/children on roll at Earls Barton Junior School	23	24.7%
<b>3</b>	Child/children on roll at both schools	30	32.3%
<b>4</b>	Staff member (at either school)	10	10.8%
<b>5</b>	Governor	3	3.2%
<b>6</b>	Other*	5	5.4%
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 1(a):** Reasons for interest in consultation, cited on consultees' surveys. \*For 'other' see analysis below.

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, just over 80% of all consultation responses are from parents/guardians with a child on roll either at the infant school, the junior school, or both.

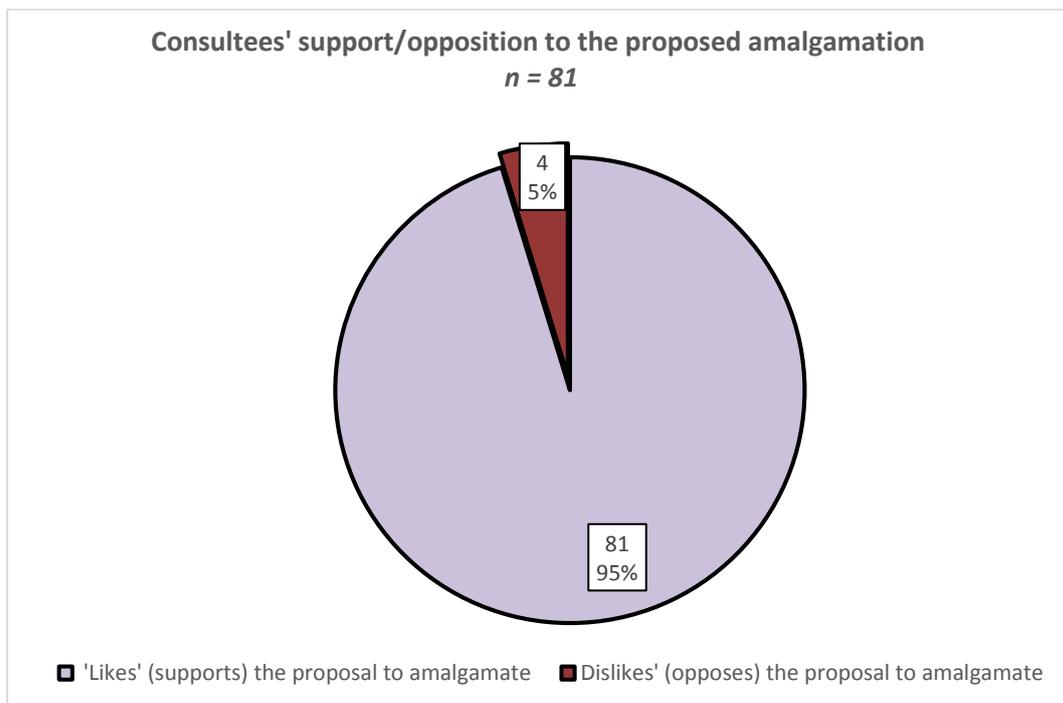
In comparison to a similar consultation around the subject of a proposed amalgamation running simultaneously at Whitefriars Infant and Junior School, Rushden (and also the subject of the August 9 2016 Cabinet Member Decision referred to earlier) a significantly smaller proportion of staff are contributing to this consultation: 10 consultees, or 10.8%, compared to 26 members of staff, or 21% of the Whitefriars consultees. Nonetheless, behind Categories 1-3, this is still the second biggest category of consultees.

Lastly, of the five consultees who selected 'other' as their reason for interest in this consultation, four noted their reason(s) for interest:

- The Clerk to Earls Barton Parish Council,
- The supervisor of a pre-school, The Pied Piper Pre-School, on the site of the junior school,
- The Head teacher of Redwell Primary (a primary school in central Wellingborough)
- A member of 'Friends of EBIS', a fund-raising association affiliated with Earls Barton Infant School, (and also a parent with a child on roll at the Earls Barton Junior School)

### **2.3 Levels of support for the proposed amalgamation**

Of the 81 consultees contributing to the first stage of consultation for the proposed amalgamation, the clear majority of consultation responses indicated that they were in favour of the proposed amalgamation, as shown on the following page in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1:** Levels of support and opposition to the proposed amalgamation of Earls Barton Infant and Junior Schools

Of the 81 consultation responses received, just 4 consultees (5% of all responses received) did not support ('disliked') 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 brief, thematic analysis of consultees' reasons for not supporting the proposed amalgamation of Earls Barton Infant and Junior Schools. As mentioned above, only 4 consultees were opposed to the amalgamation, and of these, only two provided reasons to explain why they were opposed to the amalgamation.

Consultee Code	Reason (coded)	Verbatim
EB60	Viability	I think the change between schools is a good skill to learn. [The site is] nowhere big enough for both schools to meet.
EB67	Amalgamation is a 'political' move	The proposal was put forward when people knew the school was to be put in special measures and therefore a vote by Governor's was done without the facts being in the open. This looks like a political move to take the schools into academies and should be withdrawn until at least the junior school is rated as good.

**Table 2:** Reasons for opposition to proposed amalgamation, cited on surveys received by consultees.

## 2.5 Reasons for supporting the proposed amalgamation

In addition to the two consultees who explained why they were opposed to the proposed amalgamation, an additional nine consultees also gave reasons explaining why they are supporting the proposed amalgamation. As with the reasons for opposing the proposed amalgamation (summarised above), these are summarised on the following page, as **Table 3**.

Consultee Code	Reason (coded)	Comments left by consultees (verbatim)
EB50	Leadership/governance	My only concern about the schools merging is that Mrs [name removed] automatically becomes head of the primary school. I would rather executive heads stay in place until a suitable head is recruited.
EB51	Improved transition	I strongly like the proposal to merge schools to improve the transition from Y2 to Y3.
EB65	Leadership/governance	I think the proposal to merge the school is a positive step forward, however I am concerned in relation to leadership. I would be concerned if the current head at the infant school automatically becomes the head of the primary school. I do not think this will help the transition. The primary school needs a new, dynamic, forward thinking head with experience of leading a large primary school. My daughter's only concern about the merge was that [name removed] would be the new lead.
EB66	Leadership/governance	I fully support the proposal under the right (strong vision and direction) leadership.
EB68	Leadership/governance	I love the idea of the two schools coming together. It needs to be the best leader we can wind who has great vision for a primary school.
EB70	Leadership/governance	My concerns would be about the junior schools situation (Ofsted and staffing) would this continue to be given the support it clearly is on need of. Also whether the head teacher role would continue to be split.
EB75	Leadership/governance	My only concern is that the right head will be found who will give some long term leadership to the school.
EB82	Leadership/governance	I am hoping that this [amalgamation] would help to reduce some of the issues at the junior school. Regardless of the outcome, clear communication and enough notice for informative meetings etc. is paramount.
EB85	Leadership/governance	I have concerns about the leadership of the new primary school. The junior school has struggled to recruit a good head for many years. Does the current infant school head have the experience to amalgamate both schools? I believe a new, experienced, primary head is needed to make a success of the new school: a primary [school] is very different to an infant school. I also find from personal experience, and from what I hear outside the school, that the current head does not communicate well with parents, or the children, and there are many [people] unhappy with the fact that they will have to deal with this issue again.

**Table 3:** Reasons for support to proposed amalgamation, cited on surveys received by consultees. Any editing/textual amendment is indicated by square brackets.

As **Table 3** indicates, only two main reasons/themes for supporting the proposed amalgamation can be explicitly drawn from consultees' comments:

1. That the amalgamation of the schools provides an opportunity to reflect on, or ensure, **effective leadership and governance of the school(s)**.
2. That amalgamating the two schools will create a more **seamless transition** between NCY2 (the end of the infant phase) and NCY3 (the first year of junior school)