

Portsmouth School Place Planning Strategy 2024-29

1. Introduction and context

- 1.1 Portsmouth is a compact City covering 40 square kilometres. The estimated population (mid 2022) is 208,400 residents, 75% of whom live on Portsea Island. Portsmouth is the second most densely populated area outside of London. A map showing the 62 LA maintained schools and academies is attached at Appendix 1.
- 1.2 The island nature of the City means that the number of Portsmouth resident pupils attending schools outside the City (and pupils living outside Portsmouth attending schools in the City) is relatively low. The dense urban population also means that where additional school places are required the availability of space on existing sites or potential new school sites is extremely limited. Whilst the government has provided some funding to deliver additional mainstream and specialist places within the City, both the council and individual schools are working within the context of very limited funding for capital works.
- 1.3 The purpose of this strategy is to set out Portsmouth's overall approach to ensuring the supply of sufficient high quality mainstream and specialist places over the period 2024 - 2029. It provides a framework for local authority maintained schools, academies, and multi-academy trusts (MATs) working within Portsmouth to plan for and take decisions in respect of individual school changes.

2. Background

- 2.1 This document builds on and replaces the School Organisation Policy 2019-24, the Primary School Place Strategy 2019-24, the Secondary School Place Strategy 2019-24, and the Special Provision and Alternative Provision Place Strategy 2019-2024.
- 2.2 Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 requires Portsmouth City Council to ensure that there are sufficient school places for resident children. This duty requires the Council to forecast future pupil populations so that sufficient places are provided.
- 2.3 The Government uses an assumption of 2% surplus for both primary and secondary as the basis for basic need funding allocations to Local Authorities. In light of this, the council uses the aim of a 2% surplus for school place planning, with the expectation that every year group will have a minimum of 2% surplus capacity. 2% is equivalent to 40-50 places, depending on the size of the year group. It should be noted that many other local authorities work to ensuring a

minimum of 5% surplus places, rather than the 2% we allow in Portsmouth.

2.4 All councils are required to submit their pupil projections to the Department for Education (DfE) on an annual basis. The mainstream pupil projections inform the Government's allocation of Basic Needs Capital Funding to Councils. Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) data has been a statutory return since July 2023. There is no direct source of funding associated with the SEND Statutory Return.

2.5 This strategy is focused only on school-age placement demand and our actions in response to that demand. In addition, however, the Sufficiency and Resources Service regularly collate wider information associated with pre-school and post 16 demands specifically for pupils with SEND.

3. Linked documents

3.1 This Portsmouth School Place Planning Strategy covers the five year period 2024-2029 and will be updated in 2029. The following documents are updated and published on an annual basis:

- 3.1.1 The methodologies used to forecast mainstream and specialist places;
- 3.1.2 The annual school capacity survey (SCAP) return to DfE;
- 3.1.3 An annual summary produced by PCC setting out the wider picture associated with SEND demand (for pupils with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) aged 0-25 years).

4. Key issues for the 2024-2029 planning period

4.1 There are seven key issues that the local authority will need to navigate with schools over the next planning period:

- Providing additional places for secondary aged pupils to accommodate the larger year groups that will be moving through secondary schools in this period, with the largest cohort now expected to join Year 7 in September 2027.
- Securing sufficient suitable places for the growing number of children with SEND, including those with EHCPs, in mainstream schools, special schools and inclusion centres. Over the period to 2029 we expect the number of Portsmouth children of compulsory school age with EHCPs to increase by 42% from 1325 in January 2024 to 1887 in January 2029.
- Managing the anticipated reduction in the number of children entering infant and primary schools in a way that does not threaten the viability of any individual school. Based on the 2024 forecast we expect the number of children starting Reception to drop from 2191 in September 2024 to 1904 in September 2028.

- Being ready to respond to continued volatility in pupil numbers. This can be affected by a wide range of factors from recruitment of staff to local health services to changes in government policy to international events resulting in significant immigration.
- Supporting and encouraging the amalgamation of Infant and Junior schools as the opportunities arise.
- Being ready for a likely significant increase in pupil numbers in the period from 2030 to 2040 due to substantial planned residential development in the City over the next 5-15 years.
- Securing an alternative site for the Bay Campus of the Harbour School (at Tipner) which will be needed for the Tipner regeneration project to go ahead.

4.2 These issues are explored in more detail below.

Providing sufficient secondary places for this growing cohort

4.3 The table below shows the forecast secondary pupil numbers in Portsmouth over time. Pupil numbers entering Year 7 remain high across the admission years to 2027/28 when they are forecast to peak, before falling sharply to reflect the smaller cohort currently working their way through primary school.

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
2024/25	2232	2179	2119	2229	2086
2025/26	2222	2246	2189	2200	2232
2026/27	2255	2238	2257	2278	2212
2027/28	2292	2268	2246	2343	2288
2028/29	2131	2304	2275	2331	2354
2029/30	2177	2137	2309	2363	2337
2030/31	2184	2186	2145	2403	2376

4.4 Over the last five years permanent expansion projects across the City have created a total of 261 additional permanent places per year. Further projects have been agreed with Charter, Priory, St Edmund's and Trafalgar to create additional capacity in the peak years between 2024/25 and 2027/28. However, the latest forecast data, which suggests that pupil numbers will continue to rise in many year groups, suggest that more capacity is likely to be needed in some year groups. The table below shows the forecast surplus capacity per year group, with years with less than 2% surplus highlighted in ***bold italics***.

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11
2024/25	67	65	95	90	233
2025/26	<i>27</i>	53	55	119	87
2026/27	<i>44</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>42</i>	66	107
2027/28	<i>37</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>3</i>	56	56

2028/29	103	25	24	43	65
2029/30	57	97	20	61	37
2030/31	50	48	89	51	48

4.5 These numbers will need to be monitored very closely. We may need to bring some schemes forward to create additional places for the cohort joining secondary school in September 2025, and then seek new projects to ensure that we have sufficient places available for the cohorts moving into secondary school in 2026/27 and 2027/28.

B: Securing sufficient suitable places for children with SEND

4.6 Over the last two years Portsmouth, in common with the rest of England, has seen an unprecedented increase in requests for Education Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHNA), with particularly large numbers of requests in respect of children in early years. As well as larger numbers of pupils, we are also seeing a higher level of need amongst our youngest cohorts, reflected in a higher proportion of children with "highly exceptional" needs in our Reception and Year 1 cohorts compared to older year groups.

4.7 The reasons for this increase, and how far it may be due to the impact of the pandemic and how far down to wider factors such as improved survival rates for premature babies, better diagnosis, financial and other challenges affecting mainstream schools, and the effects of austerity on both vulnerable children and the services available to support them are difficult to unpick. Forecasting in times of rapid change is challenging.

4.8 Portsmouth has forecast on the basis that the number of pupils in year R with an EHCP will remain at the current high levels in 2024/25 and 2025/26 then start to slowly reduce from 2026/27 stabilising at 5% of the projected Year R mainstream school population. Similarly, we are forecasting that the year on year growth for each pupil cohort as it progresses from one year group to the next will remain at the high levels we have seen recently for 2024/25 to 2025/26 and then gradually reduce.

4.9 Based on these figures we are expecting the total number of children of statutory school age with an EHCP to increase from 1325 in January 2024 to 1887 by January 2029, a 42% increase.

4.10 We are expecting that the proportions of children in special and mainstream provision will remain as now, which means that mainstream schools will see a growth in the number of children with EHCPs. Currently 2.52% of children in mainstream schools (excluding those in inclusion centres) have an EHCP, with a higher proportion in infant and primary schools than secondary schools. Over the next five years we expect this proportion to increase.

4.11 We will continue to work with our mainstream schools to enhance their ability to meet the needs of a wide range of children with SEND through their Ordinarily Available Provision, including by developing our inclusion outreach services, through inclusion capital grants, and by providing relevant continuing professional development (CPD) for all staff working with children with SEND including teaching assistants.

4.12 For secondary aged pupils it will sometimes be appropriate to meet the needs of children with SEND through school-based alternative provision. 10 of Portsmouth's 11 secondary schools (all bar the UTC) now have internal alternative provision settings. Where appropriate, we are supporting schools to increase the number of students who access these provisions as part of our overarching strategy to educate as many students with EHCPs as possible within mainstream settings.

4.13 A minority of pupils with SEND will require specialist places in special schools or inclusion centres. In recent years Portsmouth has significantly increased the number of specialist places through a number of projects:

- The new Wymering School
- Increased places at Mary Rose by opening the Lantern and Craneswater Annex satellites
- Expansion projects at Cliffdale Primary Academy
- New Inclusion Centre provision at Penbridge and Arundel Court
- New primary alternative provision at Flying Bull Academy.

4.14 However, to support the growing number of children with EHCPs in Portsmouth we will need to create approximately 150 additional specialist places in total across special schools and inclusion centres over the next five years. A breakdown of the need for places is show below:

	Special school places			Inclusion centre places		
	Primary	Secondary	Total	Primary	Secondary	Total
2024/25	285	363	648	122	46	168
2025/26	308	374	682	137	45	182
2026/27	328	388	716	147	46	193
2027/28	331	398	729	150	47	197
2028/29	340	396	736	155	50	205

4.15 It is important to note that across Portsmouth's special schools (Cliffdale, Mary Rose, Redwood Park, The Harbour School and Wymering) there are currently 731 places (September 2024 figures), excluding the alternative provision places at The Harbour School. However, not all of these are available to Portsmouth children with EHCPs. There is a large and growing number of post-16 children at Mary Rose Academy (43 in January 2024). Around 7% of the places in Portsmouth schools are taken by children who are not resident in the

City (53 in January 2024). At any one time there will also be a small number of children in specialist provision who do not yet have an EHCP. Therefore the increase in numbers of children needing specialist provision will need to be matched by a similar growth in the number of places.

- 4.16 Plans are currently being finalised to increase specialist capacity further with a new site for Mary Rose Academy at the Omega Centre, and by establishing a new inclusion centre for primary aged pupils. Depending on the size of these developments, one or two further projects are likely to be needed to ensure that specialist places are available to those pupils whose needs are best met in that setting.
- 4.17 We are also extending the range of opportunities for some secondary age young people with SEND by increasing clarity and transparency in relation to offsite alternative provision. We have created an [Alternative Provision Directory](#). Schools and local authority commissioning teams (such as the SEND Team and the Virtual School) can use this resource to identify suitable, PCC quality assured provision, for students with EHCPs.
- 4.18 By providing support to mainstream settings and creating sufficient specialist capacity in the City we aim to keep our use of out of City independent provision at current low levels. Over the forecast period we are expecting the number in independent provision to increase very slightly from 18 to 22 pupils. We have also started to see some use made of independent tutoring, with 9 young people currently being supported in this way.

C: Managing the anticipated decline in primary numbers

- 4.19 In recent years we have seen a significant drop in the number of children joining Reception in Portsmouth schools. 2191 children are forecast to start school in September 2024/25, meaning that the cohort is 10% smaller than the cohorts currently in Years 4, 5 and 6. Over the next five years we expect to see a further fall of a similar magnitude, with 1904 forecast to be starting school in September 2028.

	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
2024/25	2191	2175	2232	2208	2386	2394	2376
2025/26	2076	2220	2202	2259	2224	2398	2401
2026/27	1967	2105	2251	2227	2278	2250	2421
2027/28	1922	1991	2133	2271	2240	2267	2268
2028/29	1904	1944	2014	2151	2284	2244	2318

- 4.20 The demographic changes affect some areas of the City more significantly than others, with the "King Richard planning area" (Paulsgrove) projected to experience a sooner and more significant drop in pupil numbers than other

areas.

- 4.21 Even at a City level, however, these drops in pupil numbers will result in significant surplus capacity, exceeding 15% in certain year groups (highlighted in ***bold italics***).

	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6
2024/25	224	260	203	217	69	61	79
2025/26	339	215	233	166	201	57	84
2026/27	448	330	184	198	147	175	64
2027/28	493	444	302	154	185	158	187
2028/29	511	491	421	274	141	181	137

- 4.22 Whilst some surplus capacity is essential to allow a degree of parental choice and ensure there is space to admit new pupils, a high level of surplus is problematic for a number of reasons.

- 4.23 Schools' budgets are determined by the number of pupils on roll, and therefore low and/or fluctuating pupil numbers can cause significant difficulties for schools. These difficulties can be particularly acute at key stage 1 where the infant class size limit regulations (School Standards and Framework Act 1998) mean that infant children cannot be taught in classes of more than 30. A two-form entry school with 32 children in Reception would therefore need to teach these children in two groups of 16, creating a budget pressure, or move to mixed age classes, which can make it more difficult to ensure strong educational progress for all children.

- 4.24 We are therefore working with schools in the planning areas that are likely to experience the larger drops in pupil numbers to make temporary reductions in schools published admission numbers (PANs) in a co-ordinated way.

- 4.25 In the main these will be temporary reductions. In some cases, however, a permanent change may be agreed where it supports the freeing up of space for another educational purpose, for example to enhance capacity to meet the needs of children with SEND, or to create or increase nursery places.

D: Being ready to respond to continuing volatility in pupil numbers

- 4.26 Traditionally the rise and fall in the local birth rate has been the major factor in determining pupil numbers in Portsmouth.

- 4.27 In the period since the pandemic in 2020, however, we have seen unprecedented volatility in pupil numbers, driven largely by inward migration. Between January 2021 and January 2024 the total number of pupils in Portsmouth's primary, secondary and special schools increased by 4.0%, with 1066 additional pupils joining our schools. A large proportion of these were new arrivals to the City who were also new to the country. Whilst the rate of new

arrivals has slowed, our pupil population continues to increase in many year groups.

4.28 Pupil numbers are affected by national and international factors, as well local factors. A new government and international instability mean that further volatility is likely. Factors that could influence pupil numbers include:

4.28.1 Government policy on immigration. Changing the rules about international students bringing family members has made a big difference to the number of overseas students seeking schools for their children in Portsmouth. Different approaches to work visas could affect recruitment to the health service and other employers.

4.28.2 New education policies including the introduction of VAT on private school fees and the proposed register of elective home educating families, either or both of which could see some children coming back to local state schools.

4.28.3 A possible change of approach to planning laws, which could mean that more residential development takes place in Portsmouth more quickly than might otherwise be assumed.

4.28.4 International instability. As a port city and City of Sanctuary Portsmouth provides a place of safety for families fleeing difficult situations. Even where numbers are small, the needs of these children and their families can be significant.

4.29 What this means in practice is that the local authority will need to continue to work closely with schools and MATs communicating up to date information on numbers, and looking together for opportunities to either increase or decrease capacity as needed in ways that represent good value for money and make sense educationally.

E: Supporting the amalgamation of Infant and Junior Schools

4.30 Historically Portsmouth has had a large number of separate Infant and Junior Schools. Over the last few years many schools and MATs have taken the decision to amalgamate creating new primary schools including Copnor, New Horizons, Langstone and Wimborne. Other schools have chosen to work together through federation or other linked arrangements without the full amalgamation, such as those at the King's Academy schools, and Penbridge.

4.31 The Local Authority supports the amalgamation of Infant and Junior schools on the basis that it can strengthen the capacity of schools to sustain school improvement, provide financial sustainability and reduce the number of transition points that pupils have to go through in their education. Further information about the benefits of amalgamation are set out at appendix 2.

- 4.32 Decisions about the amalgamation of academies will be principally for the relevant MAT in discussion with the schools concerned.
- 4.33 In the case of LA maintained schools, the Local Authority will actively explore amalgamation proposals when two or more of the following criteria or 'triggers' apply:
- 4.33.1 The standards of pupil achievement in one or both schools are below those of other similar Portsmouth schools and/or one or both schools are inspected and deemed by Ofsted to be less than "good"¹;
- 4.33.2 The schools are on the same site or in close proximity to each other
- 4.33.3 One or both of the Head Teacher posts at the schools has become, or will shortly become, vacant
- 4.33.4 One or both of the schools currently has surplus capacity of 15% or more, or is projected to reach that point in the foreseeable future
- 4.34 The council's preference is for amalgamation rather than a hard federation, but we recognise that there will be some circumstances when a hard federation represents a pragmatic first step towards a future amalgamation.

F: Being prepared for a likely increase in pupil numbers from 2030 - 2040

- 4.35 The birth rate remains low for the remainder of the current planning period. However, the emerging [Portsmouth Local Plan](#) for the period 2020-2040 includes ambitious plans for substantial regeneration and redevelopment. The housing target is for a total of 13,603 new homes in the City by 2040, which is an annual target of 680 new homes per year. There will be significant housing development in the City Centre and Tipner areas in particular which, if realised, will contribute to a large increase in pupil numbers over time.
- 4.36 In the main this is not yet included in the forecasting figures, because our forecasts only include developments for which planning permission has been granted.
- 4.37 The early phases of this growth will generally be absorbed by the existing surplus places in the system. However, the latter phases of planned development will, if realised, require a substantial increase in the numbers of primary, secondary and specialist school places.
- 4.38 We will also need to work closely with colleagues in Planning to understand the timing of likely developments, as any significant secondary pupil yield before 2030 would need to be covered by increased secondary places.

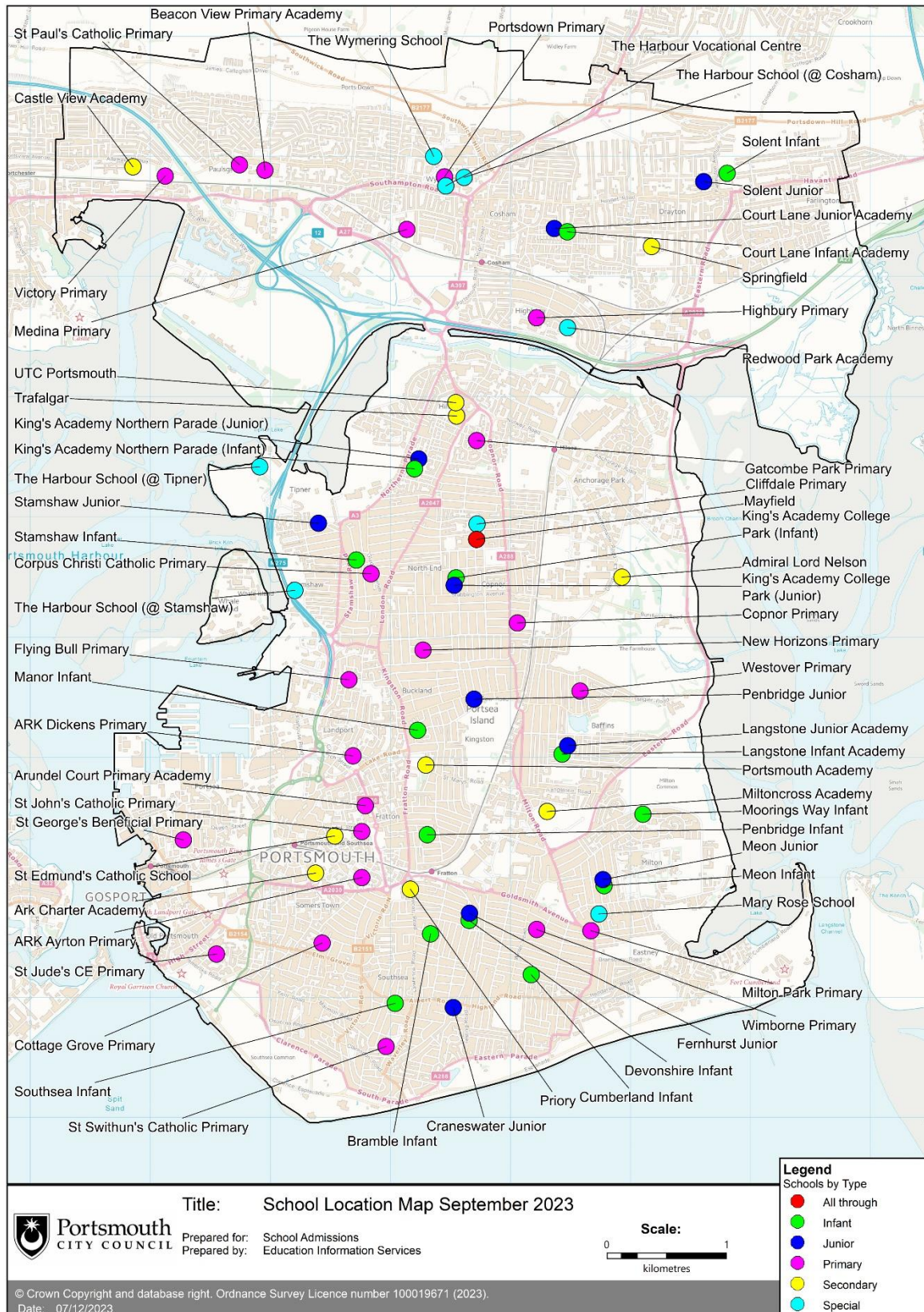
¹ This criterion will be updated in due course to reflect Ofsted's move away from single word judgements.

- 4.39 This longer term picture also has a bearing on decisions about how to remove surplus capacity from primary schools, reinforcing the need to remove capacity on a temporary rather than a permanent basis where possible. It may also have a bearing on decisions about projects to increase secondary capacity to accommodate the current "bulge", as places that are created on a temporary basis now may be needed on a permanent basis in future.

G A new site for Harbour's Bay Campus

- 4.40 The emerging Local Plan allocates Tipner West and Horsea Island for development, thus displacing the Harbour Bay Campus from its current home. The Council as the site promoter is working on a new masterplan for Tipner West and Horsea Island East.
- 4.41 Portsmouth was granted £48.75 million by the government through the City Deal to explore how this area could be regenerated to create new employment opportunities in the marine and maritime sector as well as new homes for people in the city.
- 4.42 The aim is to provide between 814 and 1,250 homes, at least 30% of which will be affordable, and create a minimum of 58,000 sqm of marine focussed employment space.
- 4.43 In order for this development to go ahead The Harbour School's Bay Campus will need to be relocated elsewhere in the City. Funding has been allocated from the Tipner Regeneration budget for this purpose and a decision will be made about the new site for the Bay Campus will be made before the Tipner planning application is submitted towards the end of 2025.

Appendix 1 - map of Portsmouth schools



Appendix 2 - benefits of amalgamation of Infant and Junior Schools

Leadership and vision

- Single governing body and one agreed vision and set of values to continue to drive up standards and promote continuity and progression
- Parents and carers of children who attend the primary school will benefit from knowing one school and one staff.
- They will know and understand how the school works and will not have to adjust to the demands of a different school as their child gets older 2

Transition and supporting pupils' progress

- An amalgamation will allow for high levels of consistency to be achieved throughout a pupil's time at the school and will provide better capacity for sustained improvement
- Removal of the need to change a school at the transition point between Key Stages 1 and 2 will eliminate the achievement 'dip' that can often be experienced at this time and any anxiety felt by pupils.
- Tracking of pupil progress and early intervention will significantly be enhanced for those pupils moving between Key Stages 1 and 2
- Expectations for behaviour and learning would be more consistent than if the schools were operating in two separate ways
- Pupils will have greater opportunities to access aspects of the curriculum which might otherwise be denied to them because of the phase in which they are working. Some pupils in Key Stage 1 might be ready to access aspects of the curriculum and staff in Key Stage 2 but this is difficult to achieve outside of an all through primary school

Sharing of resources / expertise and efficiency gains

- A better opportunity to build on the sharing of resources and expertise across Key Stages 1 and 2 which in turn will support an enriched curriculum.
- Enable the single Governing Body to make efficiencies in the running of the primary school (particularly in respect of leadership, finance, administration and caretaking but also in other areas such as pastoral care, IT, etc.).

Admissions

- All through primary schools support parents and carers by automatically allowing their children to continue through their primary education to the end of Key Stage 2 without the need for making an application during Year 2 for a place in a Junior School.
- The security of a guaranteed place in Year 3 would be attractive for parents and carers if the two schools were to amalgamate providing them with the certainty of a school place for their child throughout the primary phase.

Recruitment and retention of staff

- Amalgamation is likely to lead to a more effective policy of recruitment and retention of staff. Nationally, there are significantly more primary schools than

infant and junior schools, and teaching staff and non-teaching staff find that posts in Primary Schools are more attractive than posts in infant and junior schools as they offer better career development opportunities.

- A larger school, covering the full primary age range, offers improved opportunities to develop staff which in turn aids the retention of staff.
- Expertise can be targeted across the primary age range enabling senior leaders to more effectively deploy staff

Role models / social development of pupils

- Opportunities for children to work across Key Stages 1 and 2 and support each other. 4 year olds will not be educated alongside 11 year olds, but pupils will have the opportunity to interact with different aged children. This can include older pupils having some appropriate pastoral responsibilities for younger children

Ofsted / financial audit

- An amalgamation will mean just one financial audit each year and one Ofsted inspection