

Consultation Analysis

on the proposed amalgamation of
Merrow C of E Controlled Infant School
and Merrow Junior School

April 2026



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Proposal to amalgamate Merrow C of E Controlled Infant School and Merrow Junior School

Introduction

Surrey County Council published a consultation from 2 March 2026 to 27 April 2026.

This report is an analysis of responses gathered on the proposal to amalgamate Merrow C of E Controlled Infant School and Merrow Junior School to form a single primary school called Merrow C of E Primary School (Merrow CE Primary) from September 2027.

Consultation Summary

The aim of the consultation was to seek views on the proposal from all interested parties, particularly from pupils and their families who attend Merrow C of E Controlled Infant School and Merrow Junior School, pupils and their families who may attend the schools in the future, staff members at Merrow C of E Controlled Infant School and Merrow Junior School, local schools and the local community.

The consultation was open from 2 March 2026 to 27 April 2026. The associated documentation was published on the Surrey County Council 'Surrey Says' website, circulated by the schools to the school communities and circulated to stakeholders, including dioceses, councillors and MPs. Interested parties were invited to return responses to the consultation via an online form or by email or post.

Two public meetings were held on 12 March 2026, as follows:

9am Merrow Junior School
7pm Merrow C of E Controlled Infant School

A summary of the meetings, along with questions and answers, is available on the Surrey County Council 'Surrey Says' website.

Key points from the consultation responses:

- There were **99** responses to the consultation.
- In response to the question 'Do you support the proposal to amalgamate Merrow C of E Controlled Infant School and Merrow Junior School?' **53%** do not support the proposal.
- **34%** of online respondents indicated 'other' when selecting their relationship with the schools.

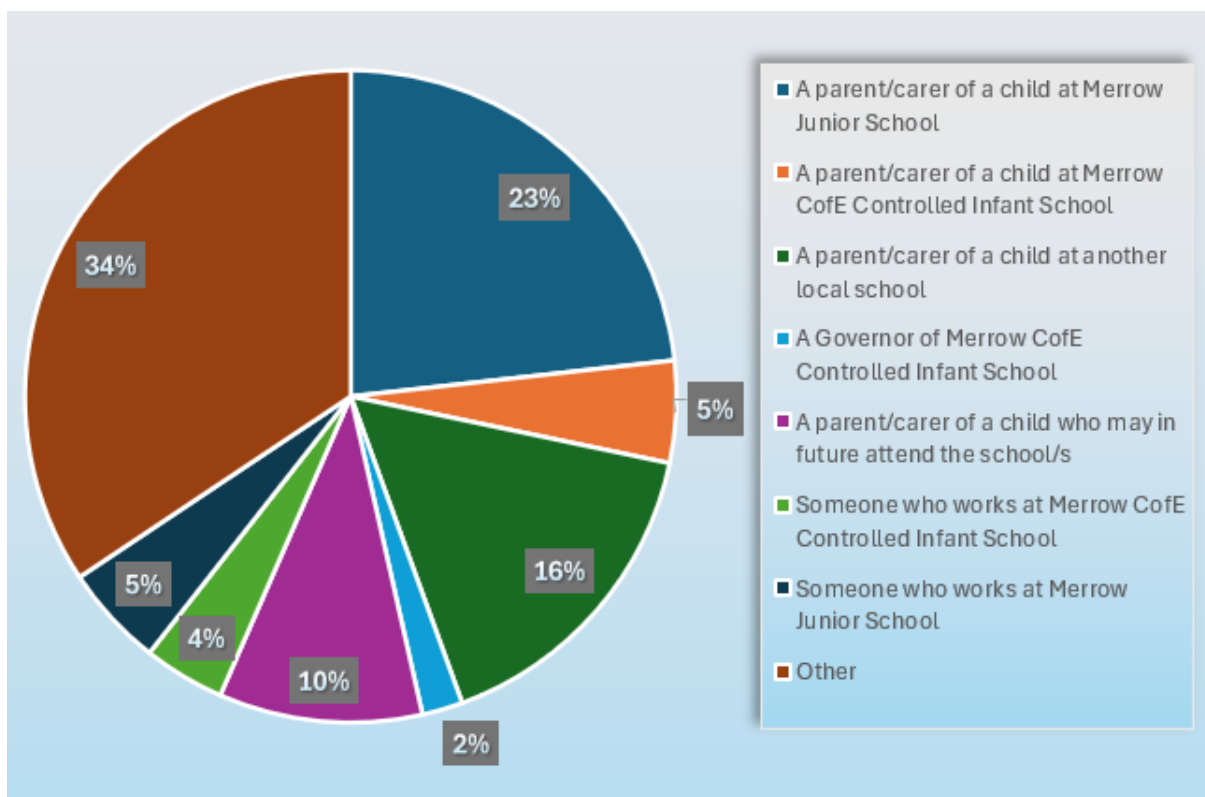
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Quantitative Analysis

In total, there were **99** responses to the consultation. The responses to the consultation are:

- **53 (53.5%)** respondents do not support the proposal
- **43 (43.5%)** respondents support the proposal
- **3 (3%)** respondents stated they were unsure.

The **99** respondents indicated their relationship with the school. The chart below shows the distribution of those respondents to the consultation.



Percentage who disagreed/agreed/were unsure by individual groups

Relationship to school	Disagree	Agree	Unsure	% of Respondents
A parent/carer of a child at Merrow Junior School	13	10	0	23%
A parent/carer of a child at Merrow CofE Controlled Infant School	1	3	1	5%
A parent/carer of a child at another local school	10	5	1	16%
A Governor of Merrow CofE Controlled Infant School	0	2	0	2%
A parent/carer of a child who may in future attend the school/s	9	1	0	10%
Someone who works at Merrow CofE Controlled Infant School	1	3	0	4%
Someone who works at Merrow Junior School	0	5	0	5%
Other	19	14	1	34%
TOTAL	53	43	3	99

Qualitative Analysis

Respondents had the opportunity to add comments at the end of the survey. Out of the 99 responses received, **63 comments were made** on the proposal. These comments were broadly themed and separated into 15 possible tags. Each response could have more than one tag attached. The overall frequency of each of the tags provides an indicator of respondent's main concerns regarding the proposal.

Sub theme	Tag	No. of responses	Prevalence (% out of 63 comments)
Negative	C of E designation of the proposed amalgamated primary school	42	67%
	Lack of clarity around alternative options explored and why they were rejected	10	16%
	Concern regarding the future use of the infant school site	10	16%
	Concerns around future staffing of the school	7	11%
	Constraints of the single-question format of the consultation	6	9%
	Transparency of financial justification and long-term financial viability	5	8%
	Loss of an infant school	4	6%
	Planned housing developments in the area	4	6%
	Concerns that the proposal conflicts with assurances provided in 2022	4	6%
	Traffic and parking	2	3%
	Longer journey time to school	2	3%
Positive	The proposal supports the future viability of the school	11	17%
	Benefit of an all-through primary school	4	6%
	Importance of the school to the community	2	3%
Ideas & Innovations		5	8%

Key themes from the consultation

Negative

Respondents identified numerous potentially negative aspects of both the proposal and the consultation itself.

Concerns around the Church of England (CofE) designation of the proposed amalgamated primary school

The most contentious issue of the consultation, cited in 67% of all comments, is the proposed Church of England (CofE) designation of the amalgamated primary school. A significant majority of respondents expressed that this move is *“not representative of the local community”*, with many comments referring to the 2021 Census data showing a decline in Christianity and a rise in those identifying with *“no religion”*. Respondents argued that removing a successful secular Key Stage 2 option would *“alienate 100s of local families”* and *“create an environment that feels ‘exclusive’”*.

Furthermore, there is concern regarding the amalgamated primary school’s future sustainability if it were to be a CofE school. Respondents noted that nearby secular schools are *“consistently oversubscribed”* and *“consistently outperforming CofE schools locally”*, many of whom have seen *“persistently low demand”*. A large number of respondents warned that the religious ethos would *“turn some families away”*, with some parents explicitly stating they *“would not place [their] children at this school”* if the merger proceeds under this *“unilateral condition”*. The prevailing sentiment among these respondents is that to reflect the increasing diversity of the area, the amalgamated school should be a non-faith community school rather than *“forcing a child into an environment where they will be taught a particular faith is the ‘correct’ one”*.

Many stakeholders feel the proposal prioritises religion over community preference. A recurring theme in the comments was that *“the data simply does not support the idea that our local area should see the loss of a secular school”*, especially when many respondents believe that society is *“moving away from Christianity generally”*.

Respondents highlighted that an amalgamated school without a religious designation would *“better reflect the beliefs and preferences of Merrow’s diverse local community”*, which includes a growing number of families from multiple faiths, such as the *“huge community from Hong Kong”*.

There appears to be an overarching concern that introducing a religious ethos to the proposed amalgamated primary would be a *“scary step”* that could *“risk the school’s future”*. One respondent declared, *“any amalgamation is fine as long as it’s based on financial and educational stability”*.

In contrast to the majority view, a small number of respondents expressed support for the CofE designation. These contributors argued that the amalgamation as it is proposed would *“provide more consistency”* for the community, as *“most children*

already transfer from one school to the other” and are already accustomed to the religious character of the infant school. One respondent commented, “I don’t see a problem with turning the junior school CofE” given the existing established relationship between the two institutions.

Lack of clarity around alternative options explored and why they were rejected

A theme identified by 16% of respondents centres on a perceived lack of clarity regarding alternative options to the proposal, and the rationale for their rejection. Many stakeholders expressed frustration that the consultation felt *“extremely biased”* and was a *“failure of transparency”*, as it did not clearly present any genuine alternatives to a Church of England (CofE) model.

A recurring comment was that the consultation document refers to the CofE designation as *“the only option which provides a viable solution”*, yet it *“provides no evidence that alternatives were assessed or why they were ruled out”*. This lack of evidence was described as *“concerning,”* with one respondent highlighting that a consultation *“should be supported by a clear and open options appraisal”*.

“The consultation document does not set out: what alternative options were considered, and why these were considered unviable, whether a community primary school model was explored, and what criteria were used to assess viability”.

“A decision such as this, that is one that could result in a publicly funded school with a religious character, should be supported by a clear and open options appraisal, including an assessment of how different models would serve the whole community”.

Concern regarding the future use of the infant school site

The future use of the current infant school site was a further point of interest for 16% of respondents, who were *“worried about what will happen to the infant school site”*. With the proposal intending to amalgamate both schools onto the existing junior site, some stakeholders questioned how the council *“intend to safeguard the future use of that {infant site} land”*. There is a strong desire for the space to remain a community asset, leading to direct enquiries as to whether the council can *“guarantee that the Merrow Infant school site will be retained for educational/child development purposes”*.

Concerns around future staffing of the school

11% of respondents expressed concerns regarding the future staffing of the school, primarily the retention of experienced staff and potential changes to hiring practices. A point of apprehension is how the governing body will *“retain the best teachers in light of the uncertainty”* caused by the amalgamation, with several respondents noting that the current quality of teaching is one of the school’s greatest strengths.

The transition to a CofE designation introduced worries regarding religious requirements for staff. One respondent pointed out that the Equality Act exceptions allow faith schools to *“favour faith staff”* or *“apply a religious test in appointing, remunerating & promoting 1/5 of teaching staff”*. This led to doubts about whether such policies would *“negatively impact the existing teaching staff”*.

Additionally, the impact of the restructure was noted to extend beyond the classroom, with one respondent highlighting that even *“catering staff would have to find new jobs”*.

Constraints of the single-question format of the consultation

9% of responses expressed concern around the format and the structural limitations of the consultation. The consultation presents a single proposal covering two aspects: the amalgamation of Merrow C of E Controlled Infant School and Merrow Junior School, and whether the amalgamated primary school should carry a CofE designation. Several respondents expressed a view that respondents to the consultation have no way to express a view on either matter independently, for instance to support the amalgamation while opposing the religious designation, or vice versa.

One respondent expressed their view that *“a one question response requirement is not a sufficient consultation”*, whilst another commented that *“The consultation should also have included a discussion of this religious affiliation and a yes/no choice of it becoming a designated church school”*.

Transparency of financial justification and long-term financial viability

8% of respondents raised concerns regarding the transparency of the financial justification around the proposal. A key point of contention was the lack of accessible data, with one respondent noting that *“without the fully costed scenarios given, it is impossible to partake in this ‘consultation’”*. This sentiment was echoed by others who argued that it is *“impossible to form a reasoned response”* when the core aim of future financial sustainability of the school is not supported by provided financial data. Concerns were also raised regarding the long-term financial viability of the school if the proposed amalgamation were to go ahead:

“Public financial data shows that the infant school is in a much worse position than the Junior school. It is unclear why the weaker CofE school should takeover the site, assets, reserves of the more successful school”.

“The proposal refers to the need to resolve ‘land and trust deed constraints’ but does not set out the terms of any asset transfer, nor has any valuation or assessment of value for money been published”.

Loss of an infant school

6% of respondents expressed regret over the potential loss of the standalone infant school, noting a preference for the separate infant/junior model. One respondent remarked that it *“would be such a shame to close the lovely little infant school”*. Others highlighted the practical benefits to the current infant school, such as the *“community atmosphere”* that is tailored specifically to younger children.

A concern raised was that an amalgamated primary school might dilute this protective environment, as one respondent noted not having to worry about *“bullying or other activities of older children”* is a factor in choosing the school, *“especially at age 4”*. One

stakeholder declared they were *“disappointed to hear”* that the schools might be combined on a single site, fearing the loss of a specialised setting for Key Stage 1.

Planned housing developments in the area

Overdevelopment in the area was an area of concern for 6% of respondents, with respondents stating that they were worried that new housing would *“overcrowd the area”* and subsequently make it difficult for local families to secure a place at the newly amalgamated primary school.

A number of stakeholders referred to the Gosden Hill Farm housing development, which is still in the planning stages and initially proposed a new primary school in its plans. Respondents questioned this considering the proposed amalgamation; *“has the proposed Gosden Hill Farm development and likely increased need for school places been considered?”*

Concerns that the proposal conflicts with assurances provided in 2022

6% of respondents referred to a perceived breach of trust in their comments, specifically regarding conflicts with assurances they believe were provided in 2022 when Merrow CofE Infant School and Merrow Junior School formally federated to create the Merrow Schools Federation. Stakeholders noted that during the federation process, it was *“widely understood, and I believe publicly stated, that Merrow Junior would not become a Church school”*.

For some stakeholders, the current proposal represents a reversal of these prior commitments, with one respondent stating directly that the plan is *“inconsistent with assurances given in 2022”*.

There is a clear level of frustration that the pledge that was made at the time of the formal federation is now being discarded.

Traffic and parking

A small number (3%) of respondents referred to the potential of increased traffic and parking issues if the proposal were to go ahead, with one stating *“I think it will have an impact on the traffic in the area with more traffic going to one school...also could be parking issues”*.

Longer journey time to school

Two respondents to the consultation expressed concern regarding an increased journey time to school if the amalgamation were to go ahead. One comment stated that they are *“currently able to walk 2 minutes to school...will now be around 15 or a car journey (with resultant pollution)”*.

Positive

Respondents also identified some potentially positive impacts on the proposal, with one describing it as *“absolutely the right decision”*.

The proposal supports the future viability of the school

The most prominent supportive theme (17% of respondents) was the belief that the proposal supports the future viability of the school. Many respondents viewed the amalgamation as a necessary step to protect local education, with one stating it is *“vital for the Merrow and Bushy Hill community”*. Supporters of the proposal highlighted the practical benefits of amalgamating the schools, noting that the junior school site has *“great facilities and more than enough room”* to accommodate both cohorts, a move some parents stated they had been *“hoping would happen for the last 6-7 years”*,

There was a strong sense of pragmatism among these respondents, who argued that it *“makes sense to be financially more efficient”* in order to *“protect the future of these great schools”*.

Even among those who may have had reservations about other details, there was a feeling that the community should prioritise *“ongoing educational provision in this part of Merrow”* above all else.

Ultimately, these stakeholders viewed the amalgamation as a proactive solution, describing it as *“the best decision for the future of both schools and the families in our community”*.

Benefit of an all-through primary school

6% of respondents noted another positive theme of the proposal being the practical and administrative benefit of an all-through primary school model. One parent commented that they *“personally prefer all-through primary schools”* and believe the amalgamation will be *“positive for many families”* by providing a more cohesive educational journey.

A key logistical advantage cited was the simplification of the school run. Respondents noted it is *“difficult for parents dropping children at 2 schools”* and that consolidating onto a single site *“seems sensible”* given the available space.

Additionally, the move to a primary model offers a streamlined administrative process, with one respondent welcoming the shift to a *“1 point admission application”* in the hope that it would reduce admin for parents and ultimately *“help improve numbers”* for the school.

Importance of the school to the community

Finally, 3% of respondents focused on the importance of the school to the community, expressing an emotional and social investment in the schools. These stakeholders described both schools as being *“fantastically nurturing”* environments. One respondent noted that *“there is something magical about Merrow Infants CofE School that provides a real sense of community”*. This group of stakeholders viewed the proposed changes as a way to preserve the spirit of the schools, with one comment stating they *“fully support the change and wish the school much success in the future”*.

Ideas & Innovations

8% of respondents offered proactive ideas and innovations for the future use of the infant school site, focusing heavily on community and educational needs. A prominent suggestion was to repurpose the land for “*specialist SEND school*” provision, with contributors noting that the existing site would provide an “*ideal location*” for such a facility. Supporters of this idea suggested that the new amalgamated primary school could then foster a “*mainstream link and a positive collaboration*” with the specialist school.

Other practical suggestions included utilising the building for a “*nursery*” or addressing local infrastructure gaps, specifically noting that Merrow Park is in “*dire need of a playground*”. Respondents urged the council to consider opening the current playground for “*public use*”, ensuring the land remains a valuable resource for local families rather than being lost to private development.

Formal representations

In addition to individual responses, the consultation received formal representations from statutory stakeholders and advocacy groups, namely Humanists UK and the National Secular Society (NSS), both of whom formally opposed the amalgamation in its current form.

The National Secular Society clarified that while they “*do not oppose amalgamation in principle*”, they reject this specific proposal due to a “*failure to provide a coherent explanation as to why the resulting school must be a faith school*” and the “*failure of transparency in not publishing discussions about alternative proposals*”.

Similarly, Humanists UK expressed significant concern regarding the claim that a CofE model is “*the only viable option*”, noting that the consultation document lacks evidence on whether a “*community primary school model was explored*”.

Both organisations highlighted the shifting local demographics, with Humanists UK pointing out that publicly funded schools should reflect the reality of the “*36.6% of Surrey residents [who] identify as having no religion*”.

Ultimately, these groups argued that the proposal as it stands risks “*extending the role of religious character*” across the full age range, without “*sufficient safeguards to ensure inclusivity and balance*”.

What happens next?

The Council will consider all the views put forward during this consultation period before making a decision on whether to publish proposals required by law. These formal proposals may be altered, amended or different from this consultation.