

Consultation Analysis

The future of Merrow C of E Controlled Infant School and Merrow Junior School

August 2026

Introduction

Surrey County Council published a consultation on options for the future of Merrow C of E Controlled Infant School and Merrow Junior School from 15 June 2026 to 10 July 2026. This was the second period of consultation, after an initial consultation on a specific proposal between February and April 2026.

This report provides an analysis of responses received during the second consultation period. The consultation sought views on two options: the amalgamation of the two schools into a single Church of England primary school or the amalgamation of the school into a single Foundation primary school with no religious designation.

Consultation Summary

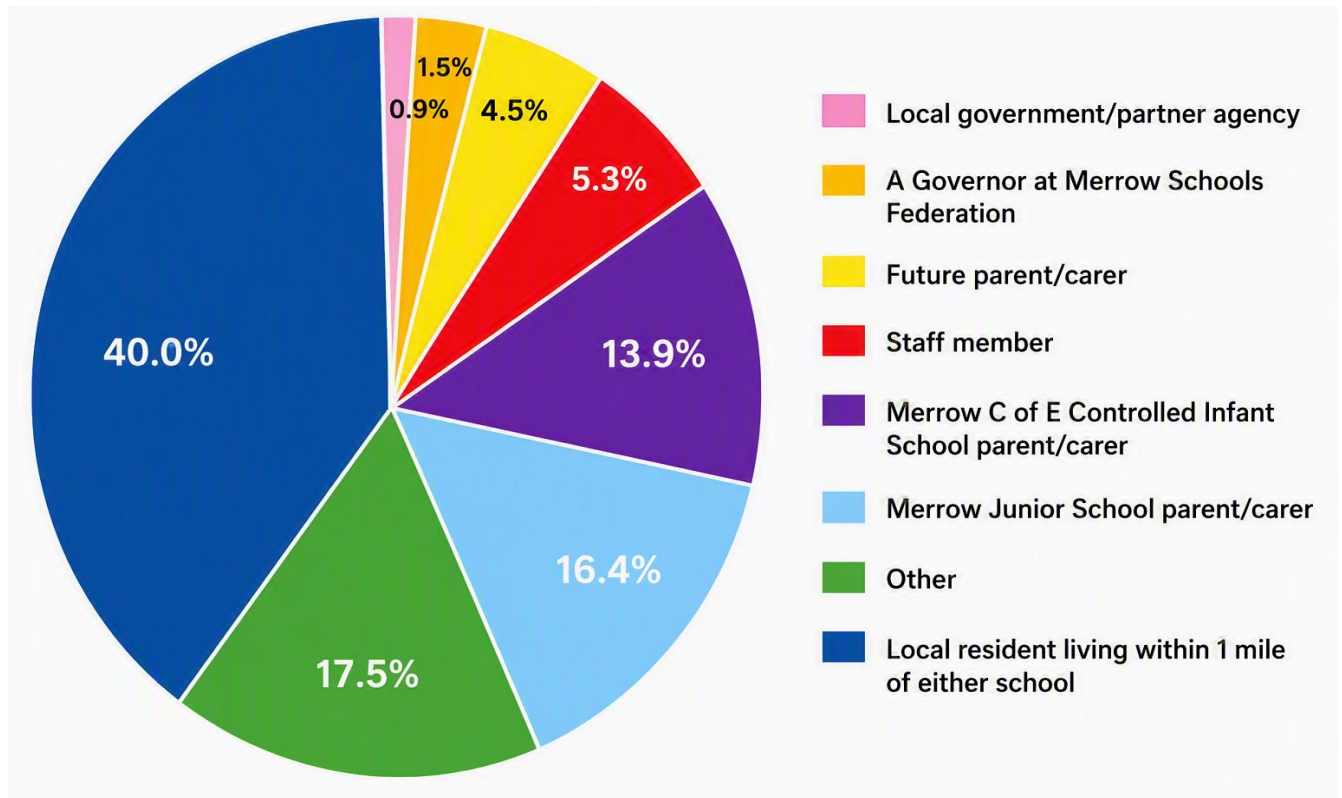
The aim of the consultation was to seek views from all interested parties. The council recognises that the parties most impacted by this proposal are likely to be current and future pupils at the two schools and their families, as well as staff members and governors. The council was also interested in the views of residents from the local community who may have an interest in the school by virtue of location or proximity, and any other interested parties, including those from professional organisations or bodies.

Overview of responses

- In total, there were **816** responses to the consultation.
- **587** respondents (71.94%) supported Option 1, to amalgamate the two schools to form a Church of England Primary School
- **228** respondents (27.94%) supported Option 2, to amalgamate the two schools to form a Foundation Primary School
- **1** respondent (0.12%) stated that they did not agree with either option and would prefer the schools to remain as separate infant and junior schools.

Quantitative Analysis

Stakeholder groups



Preference by stakeholder group

Relationship group	Option 1 %	Option 2 %	Option 3 %
Governors	75%	25%	0%
Staff members	51.2%	48.8%	0%
Infant School families	66.4%	33.6%	0%
Junior School families	52.2%	47.8%	0%
Future families	64.9%	35.1%	0%
Local government/partners	85.7%	14.3%	0%
Local residents	78.8%	21.1%	0.1%
Other	86.7%	13.3%	0%

Impact analysis by stakeholder group

Local Residents

- Largest respondent group (40% of all responses)
 - Strongly favoured Option 1 (257 vs 69)
 - Generated 53% of Option 1 preferences.
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Other and Local government/partners

- Most divided respondent groups, but with a strong preference for Option 1
 - Provides 22% of preferences for Option 1
 - Unable to analyse extent of interaction with the school and thus quantify impact as specific relationship not detailed.
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Junior School families

- Most balanced stakeholder group
 - Only a 6-vote difference
 - If consultation weighting prioritised directly affected current families, the result would appear far more evenly split.
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Infant School families

- More deeply divided opinion than junior school families with a clear preference for Option 1
 - Considerably more supportive of a Church school model than junior school families, but it must be acknowledged that these families are currently attending a Church school.
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Staff members

- Most polarised stakeholder group
 - Essentially no consensus among employees, which suggests significant internal division on future designation.
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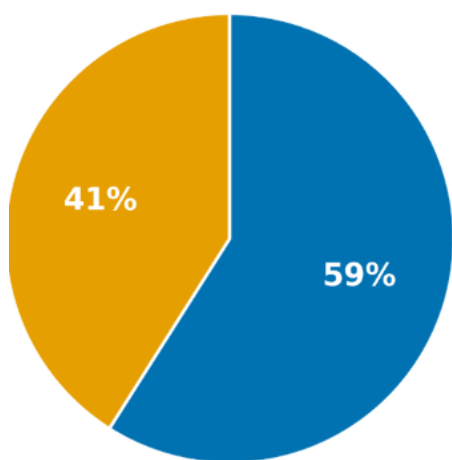
Governors

- 75% support for Option 1
- Strong governance preference toward Option 1, but absence of full consensus suggests some internal division.

Affected stakeholder analysis

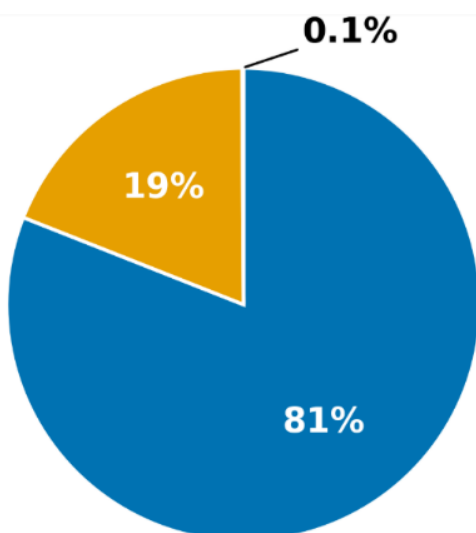
Directly affected stakeholder groups bring together the groups of respondents experiencing the impact or change consulted on in this proposal on a first hand, day to day basis. It contrasts with being indirectly affected, where any impact or changes from this proposal happen through a chain of secondary events. For example, pupils and families will be directly affected as they interact with the school/s daily, but residents will be indirectly affected as they may experience secondary effects such as increased school related traffic.

Directly affected stakeholder analysis



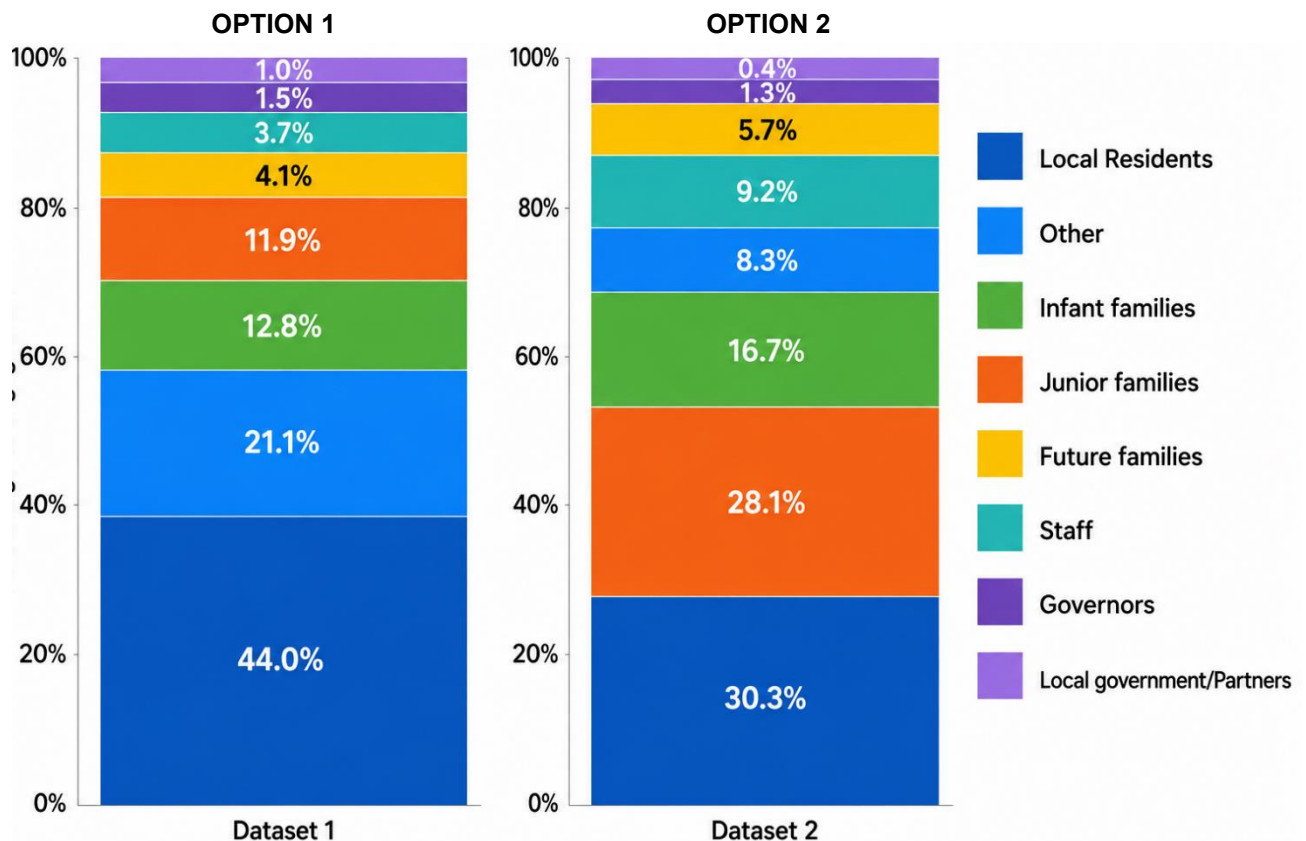
- 339 responses with a small preference for Option 1
- Groups together families of children attending the infant and junior schools now or in the future, staff members and governors.
- This margin is substantially narrower than the overall consultation result.

Indirectly affected stakeholder analysis



- 477 responses with a significant preference for Option 1
- Groups together local residents living within 1 mile of either school, 'other' and local government/partners.
- Respondents who are affected by this proposal in an indirect way are the single biggest driver of the overall result.

Contribution to options by stakeholder groups



- Local residents contribute a much larger share of Option 1 support (43.8%) than Option 2 support (30.3%).
- Other respondents form a much larger share of Option 1 support (21.1%) than Option 2 support (8.3%).

Overall, results of the consultation were driven primarily by responses from those only indirectly affected by the proposal. Support for Option 1 was disproportionately drawn from outside of the school community, from residents (43.8%) and respondents classified as 'Other' (21.1%). In contrast, Option 2 attracted a much higher proportion of support from current school families and staff.

Key Quantitative Insights

- 72% overall support for Option 1
- Staff are split almost exactly 50/50
- Junior School families are nearly evenly divided
- Infant School families are materially more supportive of Option 1 than Junior School families
- Residents account for 40% of all responses and almost 44% of all responses favouring Option 1
- If only directly affected stakeholders (families, staff, governors) are considered, support falls from **72% to 59%**, indicating a much narrower margin for those directly affected by the proposal
- The strongest support for Option 1 comes from Local Residents, "Other", Governors and Local Government respondents
- The strongest support for Option 2 comes from Local Residents and Junior School families.

Overall, the consultation delivers a clear numerical majority for Option 1, but the data also shows that the groups most directly affected by the school's operation are considerably more divided than the headline result suggests.

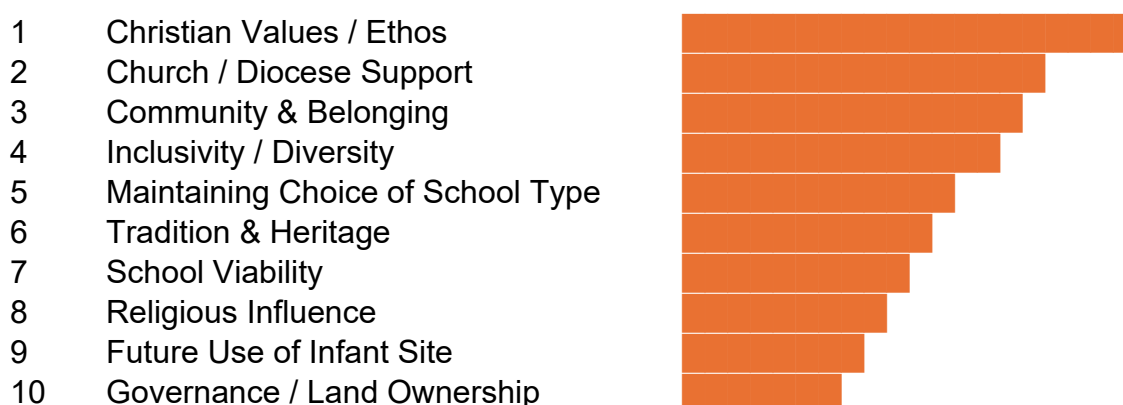
Qualitative Analysis

Respondents had the opportunity to add comments at the end of the survey. Out of the 815 responses received, **292 comments were made** on the proposal. This section of analysis is based on the content of those comments, all of which have been read and analysed.

Responses overall appear to be characterised by:

- Strong support for amalgamation itself, with debate focused primarily on the future designation of the merged school.
- A clear divide between respondents who view Church of England status as a source of community value, continuity and support, and those who view it as potentially reducing inclusivity or secular choice.
- Significant concern about long-term school viability, regardless of designation.
- Distinct differences in opinion between stakeholder groups
- Several cross-cutting themes that appeared regardless of preferred option.

Key Themes Raised



Most frequently cited positive themes

- Christian values and ethos
- Church and diocesan support
- Community identity and belonging
- Heritage and tradition
- Maintaining Church school choice

Most frequently cited concerns

- Inclusivity and diversity
- Religious influence in education
- Governance and asset ownership
- Loss of secular choice

Sentiment Heat Map

Theme	Positive Sentiment	Neutral/Mixed	Negative Sentiment
Christian values / ethos	■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■	■
Church / Diocese support	■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■	■
Community belonging	■ ■ ■ ■ ■	■	
Tradition / heritage	■ ■ ■ ■	■	
Educational quality	■ ■ ■ ■	■	
School viability	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■	■ ■
Inclusivity concerns	■	■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Religious influence concerns		■	■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Governance concerns		■	■ ■ ■ ■
Consultation process		■	■ ■ ■ ■

✓ **Strongly positive sentiment clustered around:**

- Christian values
- Church partnership
- Community cohesion
- Heritage
- Educational support

⚠ **Most negative sentiment clustered around:**

- Inclusivity concerns
- Religious designation
- Governance influence
- Consultation process
- Land ownership questions

Thematic analysis by theme

Value of Church of England Ethos

This was one of the most dominant positive themes. Supporters frequently described:

- Kindness and compassion
- Respect
- Moral framework
- Character development

Many comments emphasised that respondents were not personally religious but nevertheless valued the school's Christian ethos and associated values. Support was often framed less around religious doctrine and more around values-based education and personal development.

Church and Diocese Support

This was perhaps the strongest operational theme. Respondents referenced:

- Governor and leadership support
- CPD and school improvement expertise
- Pastoral support
- Volunteers
- Assemblies and reading support
- Community activities

Many comments argued that Option 1 provides additional capacity and resilience during a period of declining pupil numbers. Supporters frequently described diocesan support as a practical rather than purely religious benefit.

Community and Belonging

A major recurring narrative highlighted:

- Longstanding links between church and schools
- Heritage stretching back decades
- Merrow village identity
- Sense of belonging

Respondents often described the school-church relationship as central to community cohesion.

Inclusivity and Diversity

This was arguably the most prominent opposing theme. Respondents expressed concerns that:

- A religious designation may not reflect modern demographics
- Families of other faiths may feel less represented and secular families could feel less welcome
- Religious designation may deter future applications

Many comments specifically argued that a Foundation Primary School would better reflect an increasingly diverse community. Opposition was generally focused on perceptions of inclusivity rather than criticism of existing school staff.

Secular Education Preference

This theme was especially common among respondents supporting Option 2, in which a significant number of respondents argued for:

- Separation of religion and education
 - Public schools remaining secular
 - Equal treatment of all beliefs.
-

Governance, Land and Asset Concerns

A notable minority raised concerns regarding:

- Governance arrangements
 - Diocesan influence
 - Ownership of assets and future land use
 - Transparency of financial arrangements
-

Future Use of Infant Site

Strong support emerged for using the infant site to provide specialist education provision for children with Additional Needs and Disabilities. This was one of the clearest consensus themes. Many respondents supported:

- Retaining educational use
- Specialist SEND provision
- Community benefit

This appears to be a point of broad agreement across both sides of the consultation, reflecting that both proposals involved the resultant primary school being located on the junior site and leaving the current infant site vacant.

Consultation Process

Several respondents raised concerns regarding:

- Consultation design and perceived repetition of consultation
- Transparency and information gaps, especially around financial evidence.

While not dominant overall, this theme generated strongly worded responses from both sides.

School Viability

One of the few themes shared by both Option 1 and Option 2 supporters.

Respondents generally agreed that:

Amalgamation is necessary

Falling rolls present a challenge

Maintaining a viable school is important

Differences emerged only in the perceived solution.

Thematic analysis by stakeholder group

Infant school families

This group raised the common themes of church support and ethos, preserving a parental choice for a Church of England education and providing continuity of education. Respondents in this group were most concerned with:

- preserving Christian ethos
 - continuity
 - maintaining existing character
 - diocesan support
-

Junior school families

This group raised the common themes of inclusivity, secular choice and governance concerns, and appears more divided than infant school families. They most frequently discussed:

- inclusivity
 - secular education
 - governance
 - future school attractiveness
-

Local Residents and 'other'

The predominant themes discussed by responses from this group were

- community identity
- tradition and heritage
- the future use of the school sites.

This group contained strong support for both options with polarised opinion.

Staff and governors

Staff and governor responses were mixed but commonly focused on:

- continuity
- school values
- operational viability
- impact on children

The tone was generally pragmatic and child focused.

Quotes panel by theme

Christian Value and Ethos

"Although I'm not personally religious, I greatly value the Christian values embedded throughout the school community."

"Christian values such as compassion, forgiveness, honesty and integrity are important for children."

Church and Community Support

"The church community gives valuable support including assemblies, reading support, trips and enrichment activities."

"The connection between school and church provides opportunities for children to engage with the community in a meaningful way."

Inclusivity and Diversity Concerns

"I believe a merged school should be inclusive and reflective of the diversity of the local community."

"A foundation school would better represent modern society and all backgrounds."

Secular Education Preference

"I strongly prefer the separation of education from religious doctrine."

"Schools funded by the taxpayer should not have a religious designation."

Governance / Asset Concerns

"The public is entitled to see a full valuation to ensure the proposal represents value for money."

"I would hope the church should not gain ownership of the junior school site."

School Viability

"The most important point is to keep the school alive and away from closure."

"Ensuring the school appeals to as many children as possible is crucial for long-term survival."

Future Use of Infant Site

"The infant school is a perfect location to support the SEND shortage in West Surrey."

"I think converting the infant school into a SEN school is desperately needed."

Key Qualitative Insights

What united respondents?

- ✓ Keep education provision in Merrow
- ✓ Protect children's education
- ✓ Ensure long-term viability
- ✓ Retain educational use of the infant site
- ✓ Support SEND provision opportunities

What divided respondents?

- △ Church of England designation
- △ Inclusivity and secular choice
- △ Governance arrangements
- △ Land ownership implications
- △ Religious influence in education

The consultation **is not fundamentally divided over whether the schools should amalgamate** – majority of respondents acknowledge that this is the preferred solution to the sustainability challenges that the schools are facing and acknowledge the cost savings that could be achieved by consolidating on to one school site.

Rather, respondents are deeply divided over **what identity the resultant primary school should embody**. Supporters of Option 1 primarily frame their arguments around values, community, diocesan support, heritage and parental choice. Supporters of Option 2 primarily frame their arguments around inclusivity, secular education, and concerns around what governance and land ownership mean for the school's future.

Despite these differences, the consultations evidence **substantial consensus around maintaining local educational provision and safeguarding school viability, while striving to minimise disruption for the children and ensuring a continuity of education for them in the long term.**