

¹ Questions and Answers

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

March 2026



Overview

The following document records questions and answers from public meetings about the proposal to amalgamate Merrow C of E Controlled Infant School (Merrow CE Infant) and Merrow Junior School (Merrow Junior) to form a single C of E primary school called Merrow C of E Primary School (Merrow CE Primary) from September 2027.

Two public meetings were held on 12th March 2026: 09:00 at Merrow Junior (to allow parents to attend after school drop off time) and 19:00 at Merrow CE Infant (to accommodate those unable to attend in working hours).

Across the two meetings, approximately 18 people attended. Of those who signed in, 10 were parents/carers at Merrow CE Infant and Merrow Junior, 10 were local residents and 3 were current or former staff members at either school. It should be noted that some attendees selected multiple options. School governors were also in attendance, with one attending both meetings.

Panel

Matthew Rixson – Assistant Director – Educational Access, Quality & Improvement, SCC

Sarah Jeffery – Service Manager – Education Place Planning, SCC

Sarah Riddell – Education Place Planning Manager - Education Place Planning, SCC

Alex Tear – Director of Education – Diocese of Guildford

Louisa Dormer – Federation Headteacher – Merrow Schools Federation

Summary of presentations at the meetings

Matthew Rixson welcomed everyone to the public meetings. He advised that the meetings were being held to consider the proposed amalgamation of Merrow CE Infant and Merrow Junior to form a single Church of England primary school, and that it was important that all parties had all the information that they needed to consider the proposal. Attendees were reassured that the council wants to hear everyone's comments, feedback and suggestions.

Sarah Riddell outlined the rationale behind the proposal. It was stated that, in recent years, Surrey has been experiencing a significant fall in pupil numbers: the height of Surrey's pupil population in primary schools was in 2016 and since that time, the number of pupils starting school in Reception classes has fallen by more than 11%. This is the equivalent to their being 47 fewer classes in Reception across Surrey in September 2025 than there were in September 2016.

Furthermore, despite a slight increase nationally in 2024, the birth rate is continuing to drop in Surrey and 2024 was the lowest number of births since the 1980s.

This all means that there are simply less children in Surrey, and so, a lot of primary phase schools are now operating with classes that are not full. Schools receive money from central government based on the number of pupils they have on their roll and so schools with a high number of vacant or unfilled places have less funding.

In Surrey, our goal is to ensure that no one is left behind - that every child can access a high quality of education and can experience a wide range of learning opportunities. This is only achievable when schools can admit as many children within their Published Admission Number (PAN) as possible to maximise the funding they receive.

In some areas of Surrey, the current education model of infant schools and junior schools provides additional challenges to securing pupils numbers, as families can prefer an all through primary model and operating as smaller separate schools on two sites can make it difficult to achieve savings through economies of scale.

Amalgamating Merrow CE Infant and Merrow Junior into a single primary school would help to stabilise pupil numbers and support the continued delivery of high-quality education by consolidating funding.

Sarah Riddell then provided detail around what an amalgamation is and why we think amalgamating the schools is a good option. She explained that amalgamating, or 'merging', schools involves the closure of one or more schools and the enlargement, change in age range or relocation of the remaining school. The remaining school would retain its original school number, as it is not a new school, even if its phase has changed.

In this proposal, Merrow CE Infant and Merrow Junior would be amalgamated by closing Merrow Junior and relocating Merrow CE Infant to the current junior school site. The proposal would then include extending the age range of Merrow CE Infant to become Merrow C of E Primary School.

In 2022, Merrow CE Infant and Merrow Junior federated to form the Merrow Schools Federation. The Federation enables the schools to operate under a single governing body, share leadership, and benefit from economies of scale through shared business and educational resources.

In response to declining pupil numbers, both schools have also now reduced their published admissions numbers from 60 to 30. Despite these measures, pupil numbers across the federation remain significantly below capacity, and it is no longer financially sustainable to continue operating two separate 2 form entry capacity schools with only enough pupils to sustain a single 1 form entry school.

As the two schools already operate within a Federation, sharing a common ethos and resources, amalgamating into a single school would simply build on this partnership, whilst helping to stabilise pupil numbers, and supporting the continued delivery of high-quality education by consolidating funding.

Alex Tear then explained why the proposed amalgamated primary school will have a Church of England designation. He noted that establishing a Church of England primary school is the preferred option, supported by the Local Authority, the Governing Body and the Diocese, and is the only way to enable the exchange of the school sites in line with the requirements of the trust deeds.

Alex clarified that Church of England schools are not exclusive 'faith' schools; rather, they aim to serve the whole local community, welcoming children of all faiths and none. He added that the Christian values of the infant school are already closely aligned with those of the junior school, meaning there will be no change to how the primary school operates if the proposal was to go ahead.

Religious Education would continue to be taught in accordance with the locally agreed syllabus for community schools, which already meets the Diocese's expectations. Collective Worship would remain invitational, inclusive and inspiring and would continue to involve representatives from local churches and other organisations, as it does currently.

Lastly, Alex confirmed that the Local Authority will remain the Admissions Authority, so there would be no change to the admissions policy. The primary school would have a Voluntary Controlled status.

Sarah Jeffery then outlined what would happen to the two school sites if the proposal were to proceed, including clarification on current and potential future ownership arrangements.

At present, the junior school site is owned by the governing body. Under the proposed amalgamation, ownership of the junior site would transfer to a joint arrangement between West Surrey Council, the Trustees, and the Guildford Diocese.

The infant site is currently owned by Surrey County Council, the Trustees, and the Guildford Diocese. If the proposal goes ahead, the infant site would be transferred to West Surrey Council for future educational use.

Sarah Jeffery also explained what this proposal would mean for the children. If the proposal is approved, all children on roll at Merrow CE Infant school as of 31 August 2027 would automatically transfer to Merrow C E Primary School from 1 September 2027. These pupils would then attend school on the current junior school site.

Children in Year 2 at Merrow CE Infant School at the end of the summer term in 2027 would automatically progress to Year 3 at Merrow CE Primary School. Parents would not need to submit a separate application for a junior school place.

For pupils currently attending Merrow Junior School, those in Years 3, 4 and 5 at the end of the summer term in July 2027 would automatically transfer to Merrow CE Primary School. They would remain on the same site and continue their education there.

Families wishing to apply for a Reception place at Merrow CE Primary School for September 2027 would do so through Surrey County Council's standard admissions process.

While children already in Year 2 would not need to apply for a junior place, families would still have the option to submit a junior application if they wished their child to attend a different school.

Lastly, the next steps in the process were outlined. Sarah Riddell explained that the proposal is currently in the consultation phase, during which feedback is being sought from anyone who wishes

to respond. Once this stage of the process concludes, all responses will be reviewed and analysed. The analysis will then be presented to the Lead Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning in June 2026, who will decide whether to proceed with the proposal, amend it, or halt the process.

If it the decision is made to proceed, a further representation period will follow. During this stage, statutory notices would be issued, these are legal notices we must serve in order to implement the proposal. This stage gives everyone another opportunity to provide feedback. After this period closes, any additional responses will be analysed, and the Leader of the Council will make a final decision in October.

Questions and answers

Following the presentations, those in attendance had the opportunity to ask questions. For ease of review, we have grouped these questions thematically. If any questions were repeated, we have strived to provide one definitive answer.

Pupil numbers and pupil projections

	Question	Answer
1	What does the long-term future of the proposed amalgamated primary school look like when considering the falling birth rates?	<p>Birth rates have historically been cyclical since around the Second World War. However, the recent decline has been more prolonged, partly due to the impact of Covid. In Surrey, the 2024 birth rate was the lowest recorded since the 1980s.</p> <p>Nationally, there are early signs that birth rates may be beginning to rise again, and we are monitoring whether this trend will also be reflected locally. Birth data for 2025 is expected in the summer of 2026, which will provide a clearer picture of the future demand.</p> <p>In the meantime, we are working with schools across Surrey to develop sustainable solutions that will help secure their long-term future. Current forecasts indicate that there will continue to be a need for school places in Merrow, and a Published Admission Number of 30 for the proposed amalgamated primary school is considered sustainable.</p>
2	Are other local schools experiencing low pupil numbers? Why do other local schools seem to be full?	<p>Falling pupil numbers are being seen across Surrey, although some areas and individual schools are more affected than others. This variation is influenced by a range of factors, including local demographics and parental preferences. For example, some families prefer an all-through primary school rather than an infant and junior model.</p>
3	If the proposed amalgamated primary school struggles with low pupil numbers, what will the financial position of the school be? Are many schools in Surrey struggling financially, and is there a thought process on budgeting for schools?	<p>A key reason for the proposed amalgamation at Merrow is to improve financial sustainability. Operating a single primary school is more cost-effective than running separate infant and junior schools and brings immediate efficiencies by virtue of only having one building for which to pay running costs. If the two schools were to continue operating separately, both would be likely to face increasing financial pressure due to falling pupil numbers.</p> <p>School popularity and pupil numbers can change over time, and while it is difficult to predict exactly when numbers may recover, the move to a primary school model may make the school more attractive to some families who prefer an all-through setting.</p> <p>More broadly, many schools across Surrey are experiencing financial challenges as a result of lower pupil numbers, as</p>

		funding is largely based on the number of pupils on roll. Surrey County Council work closely with schools to support effective financial planning and to develop sustainable approaches for the future.
4	If the birth rate rises in the future, could the proposed amalgamated primary school take more children?	Yes – the junior school site was built relatively recently, and was originally designed with the potential for future extensions, if required. The proposed amalgamated primary school would not occupy every classroom initially, so additional ‘bulge’ classes could be considered in the future if needed to accommodate more children.

Church of England designation at the proposed amalgamated primary school

	Question	Answer
1	Why has the decision been made for the proposed amalgamated primary school to be a Church of England school?	<p>The amalgamated primary school is proposed to be a Church of England school because this is the religious designation of the existing infant school, and the proposal seeks to extend the age range of that school.</p> <p>This is the proposal that received agreement from the three major stakeholders across both school, and current landowners - the Diocese of Guildford, the Governing Body and the Local Authority.</p> <p>The infant and junior schools are already closely aligned in terms of practises and curriculum, so we do not anticipate significant changes, and the primary objective remains to create a single sustainable school.</p>
2	What impact do you anticipate the religious status of the proposed amalgamated primary school will have on its attractiveness to prospective parents?	Church of England schools are generally well regarded across the county. At the infant school, families have not raised any concerns about its Church of England designation. Parents will continue to make their own choice regarding whether they express a preference for a religiously designated school or non-faith school.
3	The consultation to federate Merrow CE Infant School and Merrow Junior School in 2022 made assurances that the	Circumstances have changed since the 2022 consultation, and we must respond to current conditions and projections. Taking no action could risk the long-term viability of both Merrow CE Infant and Merrow Junior School, potentially leading to their closure in the future.

	junior school would not become a C of E School. Why has this changed?	
4	What role would the Diocese have in the running of the proposed amalgamated C of E primary school?	The Diocese has a statutory role in supporting the Christian character and ethos of the school which mainly includes support with the teaching of Religious Education and the delivery of collective worship (for example, assemblies) at the school. The Diocese also provides wider support to school leadership and staff, such as giving access to resources and training. The day-to-day management of the school, however, remains the responsibility of the Headteacher and Governing Body.

Finances

	Question	Answer
1	Can more information be shared on the current financial position of Merrow CE Infant and Merrow Junior School?	<p>The number of pupils on roll at both Merrow CE Infant School and Merrow Junior School is falling. The schools' have already decreased their PANs, so the reality is that the Federation is currently operating two 2FE school buildings but only receiving funding from central government for 1FE's worth of pupils. The Federation is therefore at risk of entering a significant deficit budget, which is unsustainable.</p> <p>Funding for adaptations of the junior site to make it suitable to be a primary school would come from Surrey County Council's basic need grant. The school would not be funding the project.</p>

Future of the infant and junior sites

	Question	Answer
1	Can further detail be shared regarding the plans to make the junior site suitable for infant-age pupils?	<p>Converting a junior school to a primary school requires some adaptations to make the site suitable for younger children. Funding for this project has been committed by Surrey County Council should the proposal go ahead, and initial explorations are underway as to the extent of works required.</p> <p>At this stage, it is intended that the infant classrooms will be downstairs and junior classrooms on the 1st floor. Reception and Year 1 classes will have bespoke outdoor and covered areas, which they will be able to access throughout the school day. It would also be necessary to provide additional toilets for Reception students and refurbish existing downstairs toilets to be appropriately sized for Key Stage 1 pupils.</p>

2	<p>What would the parking arrangements be at the amalgamated Merrow CE Primary School?</p>	<p>Parking is an issue at most schools across Surrey and schools rely on the cooperation of families to support with this. In some cases, families may be able to walk, scoot or ride to school because they will only have to travel to one site, rather than two.</p> <p>If the proposal is agreed, the Safer Travel Team will work with the school to revise their travel plan which will include looking at parking and methods of getting to school.</p>
3	<p>What are the plans for the current infant site? How are you going to ensure that the infant site is put to good use?</p>	<p>The current infant site is intended to remain in educational use, however it would only be secured for this purpose under the current proposal.</p> <p>There is a growing demand across Surrey for specialist provision, alongside a national shortage of specialist places. Using the infant site to support this need would be a cost-effective option, as the site is already configured for educational use.</p> <p>Informal conversations are taking place around the future use of the infant site. More detailed plans will be developed and confirmed once a final decision has been made on the proposed amalgamation.</p>
4	<p>What happens to the ownership of the amalgamated primary school if it becomes unviable in the future?</p>	<p>If the proposal is agreed, the current junior school site will become the amalgamated primary school site. Ownership of the site would be shared between West Surrey Council, and Trustees on behalf of the Diocese of Guildford. There are established governance arrangements in place to ensure that the site continues to be used for educational purposes.</p> <p>Current projections indicate an ongoing need for a one form entry primary school in Merrow, and there are no indications at present that the school will become unviable.</p>
5	<p>If the proposal goes ahead, how will the school ensure that prospective parents for Reception 2027 are made aware of how the newly amalgamated primary school would look for infant pupils?</p>	<p>The 2027/28 admissions round opens in November 2026, by which time a decision on this proposal is expected to have been made by the Leader of the Council.</p> <p>To help prospective parents understand how the amalgamated primary school would operate for infant pupils, Surrey County Council's Land and Property team have already visited the junior site, and illustrative plans will be available to view during school visits.</p> <p>Prospective parents will also be able to visit Merrow CE Infant School to see how provision for infant pupils is currently delivered, as a similar approach would be in place at the amalgamated school. The Headteacher is also actively preparing for the admissions round and supporting a strong Reception intake.</p>

Staffing

	Question	Answer
1	What impact will the proposed amalgamation have on staffing?	<p>Staff currently employed at Merrow Junior School are employed by the Governing Body of the Federation. Their employment would transfer under the TUPE regulations (Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006) to the amalgamated school where they would be employed by the new unitary authority in West Surrey, if the proposal was to go ahead. There would be no change to the location of their employment. Reducing to a 1FE primary school will mean that staffing will reduce alongside this.</p> <p>The employment of staff at Merrow CE Infant School will, on 1 April 2027, have transferred under TUPE regulations from Surrey County Council to the new unitary authority in West Surrey. There will, therefore, be no change of employer for these staff members. However, their work location will move to the current junior site (0.4 miles away).</p> <p>Staff will have their own separate consultation process.</p>
2	How would the requirement for 'reserved teachers' at a Voluntary Controlled (VC) school impact current staff at the junior school?	<p>Staff at the junior school would TUPE across to the amalgamated school if the proposal was to go ahead. Employment contracts transfer in a VC school the employer remains as the Local Authority. Terms and conditions are protected at the point of transfer. Teachers and all support staff transferring would continue in their roles with no change to employment rights.</p> <p>In VC primary schools 'reserved teachers' will typically be the RE coordinator and the Headteacher. For most staff, including support staff, religious criteria cannot be applied, and they must not be treated unfavourably because of religion. In a VC school there is no expectation whatsoever that existing staff who are not reserved teachers deliver denominational RE.</p> <p><u>Background</u> Section 58 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires the appointment in Voluntary controlled (VC) schools of teachers who are able to provide religious education in accordance with the requirements of the Trust Deed of the school or in accordance with the tenets of the relevant religion or denomination. This requirement originates from the Education Act (1944) which created VC schools.</p>

		<p>Where the number of teachers at a foundation or voluntary-controlled school with a religious character is more than two, the teachers must include persons who are selected for competence to teach religious education in accordance with the school's trust deed. These teachers are called Reserved Teachers. The number of reserved teachers must not exceed one fifth of teaching staff.</p> <p>The norm in VC Church of England schools is that RE is provided according to the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Reserved Teachers are not needed for this. However, parents may request denominational Religious Education, and the governing body must make it available. Reserved Teacher designations only exist to ensure that, if parents request denominational RE, the school is legally able to provide it. As in a community school, in VC schools, the default RE taught is the Locally Agreed Syllabus, not denominational RE. Reserved status does <i>not</i> change the terms and conditions of other staff.</p>
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The consultation process

	Question	Answer
1	<p>A single worded question on the consultation makes it difficult for the community to express their true views. Why has the consultation been presented in this way?</p>	<p>This is the proposal that received agreement from the three major stakeholders across both school, and current landowners - the Diocese of Guildford, the Governing Body and the Local Authority.</p> <p>However, respondents can provide further detail through the free text section, and all comments, ideas and suggestions will be carefully reviewed, analysed, and included in the consultation findings.</p>

Alternative options

	Question	Answer
1	<p>Could the alternative options discussed regarding the future</p>	<p>This is the proposal that received agreement from the three major stakeholders across both school, and current landowners - the Diocese of Guildford, the Governing Body and the Local Authority.</p>

	of the schools be published?	However, respondents can provide further detail through the free text section, and all comments, ideas and suggestions will be carefully reviewed, analysed, and included in the consultation findings.
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