

Consultation on the proposal to amalgamate the Barnes Farm Infant School and Barnes Farm Junior School into a single primary school from September 2024.

Proposal

The Chelmsford Learning Partnership and the Local Governing Bodies of Barnes Farm Infant and Barnes Farm Junior Schools are consulting on a proposal to amalgamate Barnes Farm Infant School and Barnes Farm Junior School into one primary school (age 4- 11) from September 2024 to become Barnes Farm Primary School. The Trust is aware of concerns regarding any school reorganisation, as local communities see a school as being at the heart of the community and sometimes any proposed change may be contentious. Taking this into account, the Trust would have regard to existing local arrangements and seek to avoid leaving existing schools without links on which they have previously depended, whilst ensuring that its leadership team drive one agreed vision and set of values of continuity and progression to further improve standards for pupils. This document explains the amalgamation proposal, attempts to answer some questions, and seeks the views or comments interested parties may have on what is being proposed.

What does “amalgamation” mean?

Amalgamation is the merging of both Barnes Farm Infant School and Barnes Farm Junior School to create one single primary school – Barnes Farm Primary School. Barnes Farm Infant School has a Published Admissions Number (PAN) of 60 and admits 2 forms of entry. Under this proposal the new primary school would continue to admit 60 pupils (2 forms of entry each year). Currently, parents/carers of children in the infant school have to apply to Essex County Council for a place at the junior school at the end of Year 2. As the new school would be a primary school, there will be no need to apply for places at the end of Year 2 as the children will automatically move to Year 3 without the need for any transition.

Why are the Trust and the Local Governing Bodies proposing to amalgamate Barnes Farm Infant and Barnes Farm Junior Schools?

Following the work that has been undertaken between both schools about the provision of a ‘seamless’ curriculum and school experience for pupils from Reception through to Year 6 (The Barnes Farm Journey), trustees and governors have been considering how to continue to ensure that there is seamless and consistent progression for all pupils in both schools. Currently, the two schools have differing approaches and ethos. An amalgamation would enable a single shared ethos building on current collaboration which would aid the development and running of education provision from Reception to Year 6 provided in a continuous and logically progressed curriculum which is proven to be educationally beneficial. The trust and the Local Governing Bodies believe this approach will also help improve outcomes for pupils at Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, ensuring that all pupils have strong foundations as they move into secondary school.

The amalgamation will provide a single school at the heart of the local community, offering a consistent vision and ethos, bringing about benefits for children, staff, parents and carers. The amalgamation of the two phases, infant and junior, will mean the school can develop a clear vision which is shared and understood by all. Having one governing body to drive the school’s strategic planning and monitor whole school development will ensure robust accountability.

If the proposal to amalgamate the schools is approved by the DfE, the Trust would work closely with staff and Governors of the schools to provide support with governance, finance, personnel and curriculum development.

What are the benefits of a single primary school?

There are a number of benefits that primary schools have which are set out below:

Benefits for Children

- A single primary school would allow for high levels of consistency to be achieved throughout a pupil's time at the school.
- Initial leadership restructure plans, if achievable, would create increased leadership capacity to enable sustained improvement
- Removal of the need to change a school at the transition point between Key Stages 1 and 2 would reduce related anxieties often felt by pupils and families as parents/carers would not need to apply through the Essex County Council system for a Year 3 place. This is removed as a primary school.
- Primary schools typically experience a reduced achievement 'dip' seen around the Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 transition point than infant to junior schools
- Pupils who attend primary schools make, on average, better progress by the end of Key Stage 2 than pupils who attend separate infant and junior schools. Growing national evidence shows that primary schools create more consistency between year groups and key stages in learning, planning and assessment. There is improved use of teachers' skills, specialist teaching and improved pastoral arrangements, as well as benefits for management, leadership and financial management.

"Where primary education is provided in separate key stages, there is generally very little effective curriculum continuity and progression. In such situations the scope for discontinuity of learning is increased, together with the attendant, wasteful, repetitive teaching of subject content and learning experiences in the receiving key stage." Source: Educational Management Information Exchange

- Tracking and acceleration of pupil progress and early intervention would be enhanced for those pupils moving between Key Stages 1 and 2. This is particularly significant for children with additional needs, be those educational or social emotional.
- Pupils would have greater opportunities to access aspects of the curriculum or resources provision 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; similarly, for those KS2 children requiring support and provision may be more readily available in a KS1 environment.
- Opportunities for children to work across Key Stages 1 and 2 and interact with/support each other. Pupils would have wider opportunities to interact with children of different ages. This could include older pupils having some appropriate pastoral responsibilities with younger children, and greater opportunities for pupil role models and mentoring.

- Improved sharing of resources and subject/educational expertise across Key Stages 1 and 2 which in turn would support an enriched curriculum.
- The amalgamated school will provide greater continuity for all children, including the most vulnerable children such as those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and allow children to continue to pursue their chosen areas of interest over time.
- The extensive Barnes Farm school site would be open to all pupils with greater outdoor learning opportunities available to all key stages.

Benefits for Parents/Carers

We foresee that parents and carers of children would benefit in many ways from belonging to one school:

- An amalgamated school will simplify communication between school and parents/carers, especially for parents/carers currently with children in both schools. It will remove duplication and ensure a more cohesive approach for planning events.
- Parents/Carers will only need to familiarise themselves with one set of policies and procedures.
- The amalgamated school will enable even stronger partnerships between school and parents/carers with a shared understanding of aspirations and expectations for teaching and learning.
- As a result of building longer-term relationships with the school and its staff, we would improve consistency and known points of contact to reduce conflict and anxiety, improving educational impact.
- Continue to offer a childcare provision (currently Early Birds and Night Owls – EBNO) which already covers the primary age range across both schools.
- Parents/carers would know and understand how the school ‘works.’ Families would not have to adjust to the different demands, communications and routines of a different school as their child gets older.
- Further improve joined up communications and event planning.
- Reduce admin for parents and carers by automatically enabling their children to continue through their primary education to the end of Year 6 without the need to make an application during Year 2 for a place in a junior school.
- The security of a guaranteed place in Year 3 would likely be attractive for parents and carers. A full school (popular or over-subscribed) has significant resource and staffing benefits, and so for Barnes Farm Primary School to become the school of choice for the area would have significant benefits for current and future pupils and families.
- School policies & procedures would be the same throughout the primary years.
- Over time, the staff would build up an in-depth knowledge of children and their families as they progress through the school, creating a sustained sense of the school as a ‘family’, which in turn helps develop trust and confidence.

Benefits for Staff

The points below aid retention of high quality and skilled staff as well as increased personal promotion and career development opportunities.

- Improved knowledge and experience of the full primary curriculum and child development.

- Amalgamation would likely 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 attract a wider pool than posts in infant and junior schools as they offer better career development opportunities.
- A larger school, covering the full primary age range, would offer a greater opportunity to accelerate the professional development of staff.
- Expertise would be targeted across the primary age range enabling senior leaders to more effectively deploy staff where they would have most impact.
- A better opportunity to build on the sharing of resources and subject leadership/educational expertise across Key Stages 1 and 2.
- Workload efficiencies (and resulting redirection of time and funding into improvement and development) in the running of the primary school (leadership, finance, administration and other areas such as pastoral care, IT, etc.)
- A primary school would offer a wider range of facilities, resources and site provision.

General Benefits

- A more efficient school leadership and management system would enable leaders to have the required overview to make the best decision for a school as a whole, with finances and resources being shared more easily.
- School inspectors and school leaders would be able to make judgements more accurately about the education children receive when they can see 'the whole picture' rather than in separate schools.
- Greater financial security for the school, providing stability for pupils, staff and the local community.

What would the admission criteria be for the proposed Primary School?

If the proposed primary school is agreed, the planned admission number (PAN) at Reception age for the school would remain at 60. The oversubscription criteria for admission to the school would be the same as it is for the current infant and junior schools. A draft new Admissions Policy for 2024/2025 will be available on the school websites and will form part of a 6-week Admissions Consultation.

How would the proposal affect Parents/Carers?

If the proposal is agreed, parents/carers would only have to apply for a place in Reception and would not need to apply for a Year 3 place. This would enable consistent engagement with parents and a continued personal approach across the primary phase, with no need to transfer information at the end of Year 2. There would be a new school logo for the primary school. However, the school uniform colours would remain, and the school would work with parents and carers to ensure that there is a phased introduction of new logo uniform as children grow out of the current branded items.

How would this proposal affect Governors?

The Trust would encourage the Governing Bodies to amalgamate whereby Governors of the infant and junior school would form a new, primary school Local Governing Body.

What would be the impact of the proposed amalgamation on staff?

Both schools are academies within the Chelmsford Learning Partnership, which means that the Trust is the employer of all staff. There are no proposed changes to this; Chelmsford Learning Partnership will remain the employer of all staff, and there are therefore no TUPE implications. Staff terms and conditions will remain the same. Any changes to staffing structure will be considered as part of the consultation process and following receipt of approval from the DfE.

Would the standard of education that the two schools currently provide be affected if they become one school?

The Trust and both Local Governing Bodies believe that learning and progress would be improved if the two schools were amalgamated to become a single 'all through' primary school. The amalgamation would build on the positives already identified, improving outcomes for all children.

Where would the proposed primary school be located?

The proposed school would be located on the existing site of the infant and junior schools. Barnes Farm Primary School would need as many classes as there are currently in the infant and junior schools. The established primary school would have greater flexibility to use the facilities at its site more effectively.

The consultation process

The first stage in the process is consultation with interested parties. These are:

- families of pupils at both schools
- All staff working at both schools
- the governing bodies of all local schools
- Essex County Council
- any trade unions who represent staff at the school; and representatives of any trade union of any other staff at schools who may be affected by the proposals
- MPs whose constituencies include the schools that are the subject of the proposals or whose constituents are likely to be affected by the proposals

We want the consultation period to provide enough time for everyone to ask questions and express their views and for these views to be properly considered. Good practice is a period of 4 weeks, mainly within term time, from the date of the publication of the proposal.

The period of consultation will commence on 5th September 2023 until 3rd October 2023.

The following timescale would be adopted for the process of amalgamating the two schools and implementing the new primary school.

<u>Stage Description</u>	<u>Timeline</u>
<p>Formal Consultation</p> <p>All interested parties have the opportunity to attend a consultation meeting and give feedback regarding the proposal. All feedback is considered, and a response given.</p>	<p>Consultation runs from 5th September until Tuesday 3rd October 2023. Drop-in sessions for parents/carers at the Infant School on Friday 8th September 2023 at 9:00am and at the Junior School at 2:30pm on the same day.</p> <p>Local schools and settings consulted with via email correspondence.</p>
<p>Submission of proposal to DfE</p> <p>The Chelmsford Learning Partnership submits the proposal to the Department of Education's Regional Director for consideration.</p> <p>All feedback and views expressed during the consultation will be included in the report to the Regional Director.</p>	<p>By 31st October 2023</p>
<p>Decision making</p> <p>The Regional Director considers the proposal and makes the final decision whether to agree to the proposal or not.</p>	<p>November/December 2023</p>
<p>Implementation</p> <p>Barnes Farm Primary School will open.</p>	<p>September 2024</p>

How do I respond to the consultation?

You can ask any questions and help shape the proposal by giving your ideas and comments.

Please use the form below to respond to key questions related to this proposal:
<https://forms.office.com/e/fsMv8FAXpj>

You can also email comments or questions via this email address: Barnes@clptrust.com

Closing date for responses is 5pm, Tuesday 3rd October 2023