

Amalgamation of Stamford Park Infant and Junior School – Representation Comments and Responses

On 28 January 2021, the Council published statutory notices of its intention to discontinue (close) Stamford Park Infant School and to extend the age range of Stamford Park Junior School to offer provision for pupils aged 3 years to 11 years. The Council announced a 4 week statutory representation period that lasted until 25 February.

The Council received 18 responses to its consultation:

12 consultees stated their support for the amalgamation of the 2 schools, although 4 of these raised concerns about the proposed implementation date;

The remaining 6 did not state their specific support of, or objection to, the amalgamation but did restate concerns, expressed in early stages of the consultation process, about the governance arrangements, the state of the buildings and disappointment that the provision of a new school was not included in the proposal.

The comments received and the responses provided are detailed below:

Comment 1

Please advise how are you going common concern raised by most of the parents about unprofessional behaviour of the SPJS management team and governing body?

Referring to the comments provided during informal consultation process, it looks like there is strong agreement among the people that SPJS headteacher and governing body are not suitable for their roles, so must not extend their control further over the SPIS. Previous council's feedback is not reassuring in any way as it seems do not have any substance behind it. Considering the current circumstances more than ever school requires a strong committed leadership who puts children's interest on top of everything else and it is absolutely evident that SPJS management only cares about their own personal interests."

Comment 2

Whilst the amalgamation makes sense, it is concerning that so many people are concerned about the suitability of the Junior Head to take over as Head of the whole school. I have little personal knowledge of the school staff, so it is hard to separate fact from grudge, but one reason we didn't choose this school was the relatively poor performance of the Junior School compared to the Infant School. I trust serious consideration will be given to the appointment of a new Head, and it doesn't make a lot of sense to me to appoint someone who will then get the opportunity to turn the whole school into an academy.

Comment 3

I have read all the comments from the consultation and I am slightly disturbed that Trafford Council does not seem concerned about the worrying comments in relation to the junior school leadership made by several contributors, not least of all comments from the highly valued retired head teacher of the infant school. Would it be appropriate to have an independent person to step in and run the consultation at this stage?

Response to Comments 1, 2 and 3

Trafford Council recognises the expertise and commitment of the Headteacher and Senior Management Team at Stamford Park Junior School. In its last Ofsted Inspection, which took place in February 2020, Ofsted reported that “Pupils feel comfortable at school” “because they know that the staff understand them and look after them well”. Pupils said, ‘It’s a safe place to learn and have fun.’ They said that teachers are fair, want them to be successful and make lessons interesting. Ofsted found that the school’s Leaders “have designed a vibrant and challenging curriculum. They find out about pupils’ opinions. As far as possible, leaders respond to pupils’ interests, planning enjoyable topics and subjects. Pupils achieve very well in reading, writing and mathematics. Over several years, the attainment of pupils in Year 6 has been in the top fifth of all schools nationally” and confirmed that the School continues to be good.

It is also important to note that many consultees have expressed support for the Headteacher and her Team throughout the various stages of the process.

Ofsted did find that a minority of parents were very concerned about the ongoing uncertainty caused by the possible amalgamation or conversion to academy status. The Council believes that the amalgamation of the two schools, bringing together the undoubted expertise recognised within the Infant School, will address parents uncertainties about the future and will strengthen the school for the children and families it serves.

The LA recognises it has been an unsettling time for both schools and will fully support them as they create an inclusive vision which benefits children of all ages. In February 2021, the LA facilitated a meeting between the Chair of Governors and Headteachers of both schools and their shared external provider of human resource support. The LA will continue this engagement of the Governing Bodies of both schools, alongside key partners including HR, the unions, and governor services, throughout the spring and summer terms to facilitate a smooth transition into a primary school.

Comment 4

Is this happening? Where is the clear communication? What happened to our new build school? Our new school needs to happen.

Response 4

On 9 November 2020, the Council announced the start of a 6 week informal consultation process on a proposal to amalgamate Stamford Park Infant and Junior Schools by closing Stamford Park Infant School and simultaneously expanding the age range at Stamford Park Junior School from the current 7 to 11 years, to 3 to 11 years. Information on the proposal was published on Trafford Council’s website which invited all interested parties to participate in shaping the proposal, by submitting their comments and ideas for consideration.

Information was sent to all parents, staff members and to all those who registered to receive updates about the project. The proposal was announced on the council’s digital channels including their website, social media and in a press release. Online meetings for staff and union representatives were held on 11 and 12 November 2020 and meetings were held with the school governing bodies on 18 November and 4 December 2020.

In September 2019, consultation was carried out on a different proposal which was to amalgamate the two schools and also expand them through building a new school. The proposal was to be funded from Trafford’s Basic Need Allocation which is provided by the Department for Education specifically to secure additional school places. Trafford proposed a budget of £8m from its allocation for the ambitious proposal and, although the cost to provide

each extra place was higher than is normally the case, it was considered that the benefits that could be achieved were well worth the additional costs. Subsequently, a private individual, made an application to Historic England and the building was awarded Grade 2 listed status on 7th February 2020. The listing protects Stamford Park Infant and Junior School, master's house and play sheds with surrounding walls, gates and railings. It was this decision alone that effectively halted the proposal to deliver a new school. There is ongoing work to consider site options involving a range of partners including education, place development, planning, heritage and strategic parks. This group are developing an options paper.

Comment 5

I think the amalgamation of the infant and junior school is an excellent plan. This will provide stability for pupils who will be under the same system for 7 years

Response 5

Thank you for your participation in the consultation process. Your comments have been considered by Officers and will be included in a Report to Trafford's Executive for consideration before a final decision is made.

Comment 6

In favour of amalgamation. Disappointed that this proposal does not also include a proposal to improve or replace the school buildings.

Response 6

Thank you for your participation in the consultation process. Your comments have been considered by Officers and will be included in a Report to Trafford's Executive for consideration before a final decision is made.

Comment 7

As a parent of one child at SPIS and another at SPJS, I wholeheartedly support the amalgamation of the schools.

I was never in support of a new school building at least until after the schools amalgamate.

Having read other comments from the consultation I feel there is unfair criticism of the head of juniors. I was fully supportive of both head teachers previously but it makes sense that the juniors head would become the head of the new school following the retirement of the infants head. If anyone ever doubted the commitment of the Juniors head then that is surely answered by her commitment throughout the covid pandemic to stand at the school gate every single morning to welcome the pupils of SPJS and, have encouraging words for SPIS pupils on their way past. I have absolutely no doubt about her commitment to ALL pupils going forward and believe she will be an excellent head of the new school.

Finally, I submitted comments during the initial consultation but received no response to those nor saw them in the report. It makes me concerned for the number of other comments that could have been lost during this process."

Response 7

Thank you for your participation in the various stages of the process. Your comments have been considered by Officers and will be included in a Report to Trafford's Executive for consideration before a final decision is made.

Your previous comments were published as Comment 52 of 282 responses received:

"A great proposal. Stamford park needs a fit for purpose facility. The local population is growing. This is the only primary school which is actually within walking distance of Hale. Provision for parking for staff and visitors can only be a good thing. Very much in favour of our pupils having a more continuous education from nursery to year 6."

And the LA responded:

"Thank you for your support for Trafford's proposal. All comments, questions and objections will be considered to help shape the final proposal as it moves through the various processes. Your comments, and any information provided in response, will be included in a Report to Trafford's Executive. You can view all the comments received so far on Trafford website www.trafforddirectory.co.uk/stamfordparkresponse"

Comment 8

I am writing to support the proposal to amalgamate Stamford Park Infant School with the Junior School.

A unified primary school would bring many benefits to pupils and parents in terms of continuity of staff and education, should result in more efficient use of both buildings and resources, and would eliminate the misunderstanding and poor communication that has led to an unhappy relationship between these schools currently.

Even in the past few years, issues such as academy conversion, school rebuilding, and the current public health emergency have highlighted the disadvantages of having two separate schools each following their own independent strategy. These issues and other new ones are likely to arise again. It will only be possible to address the future direction of the schools in a satisfactory way if they are combined, rather than working against each other."

Response 8

Thank you for your participation in the process. Your comments have been considered by Officers and will be included in a Report to Trafford's Executive for consideration before a final decision is made.

Comment 9

I am strongly in favour of the proposed amalgamation of Stamford Park Infant and Junior schools.

As a parent of a child in Year 2, a child in Reception and a child who will join the school in 2 years time, I feel that an amalgamated school would be a vast improvement on the current situation. Joined up communication and planning would be major benefits for us, with children who will be in both halves of the school at the same time.

As was shown in the recent new building proposal, two schools may have conflicting interests or opinions and so the decision making process for school improvements are much more difficult. A single school could proceed with improvements in a much more efficient manner. The lack of communication between the schools is quite an embarrassment and a cause for concern. I am aware that parents have left the school and others have been put off joining, due to this lack of coordination between the two schools. A single school would be able to give off a more confident appearance of community and would become a more attractive option for local families.

I believe that the brilliant Infant School teachers will continue to provide a welcoming and nurturing environment for the younger children and this will not be adversely affected by joining onto the Junior School.

I was in favour of amalgamation when it was first proposed last year and with the departure of Mrs McDowell, I feel that it is the best route for the school to take.

Response 9

Thank you for your participation in the process. Your comments have been considered by Officers and will be included in a Report to Trafford's Executive for consideration before a final decision is made.

Comment 10

The amalgamated school should have a governing body and SLT that is taken from and is representative of both schools. This is essential.

Comment 11

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback and comments regarding the proposed amalgamation of the Stamford Park Schools. I have a daughter who currently attends Stamford Park Junior School.

I fully support the amalgamation of the two Schools and believe this is necessary to best meet the educational needs of the local children. I hope this is a stepping stone in the Council's process of delivering a new school building which is vital for the long term provision of education and I will continue to fully support the Council in this area.

I have two main objections to the current proposals to amalgamate.

1. Mrs Downing as head teacher

It is abundantly clear the Junior School currently have a head teacher who has put other interests ahead the children. Her attempts to thwart the Council's new build proposal, provide disinformation and mislead parents is a grave concern and a reflection of her lack of suitability for the role.

Many parents hold similar views but have been afraid to raise them for fear of any impact on their children's education.

The disputes and current relationships between the two Schools is largely the result of the actions of the Junior School head teacher. I would therefore strongly argue a new head teacher is also in the best interests of uniting the two Schools.

I do not see how the Council can support and have faith in an individual who has brazenly undermined the work being done over recent years.

2. Governance

I have previously raised concerns over the governance of the Junior School, most notably around conflicts of interest. These have been ignored by the head teacher and the governing body.

The recent new build and academisation proposals have shown that there are individuals who are not adequately fulfilling the role of School Governor. Not devoting time to the role because "you know I don't get paid to do this" is no excuse. If they are unable to fulfil the role for whatever reason then they should be removed. I have heard this excuse from four different Junior School Governors. Most concerning of these was the current Chair of the Junior School Governing body who also failed to attend the two academisation consultation evenings.

Not having a clear conflicts policy and allowing the School leadership team to vote on the new build proposal when redundancies within the leadership team was cited as one of the main reasons against is an unacceptable way to govern a School.

The decisions made over the last few years are amongst the most important a School Governor could make and to have individuals in the role who act in this way is reckless failure and should not be allowed to continue.

I would therefore strongly argue a new Governing Body is also needed to take the School forward.

Comment 12

I am in agreement of the amalgamation of the two schools. However it must be done in a manner that takes into account all aspects of running an amalgamated school. Imposing what some people see as a conflicting Governing Body and senior leadership team is not a good start.

It is patently wrong that the Council is ignoring the wishes of the staff, governors and parents at the Infants School in respect of the composition of the governing body of the expanded Junior School. They could, if they wished, ensure that the new governing body is representative of the two schools that will comprise the new school.

It is well known that in the past the approach to amalgamation from the two schools was different. Those two views should be represented in the Governing Body of the expanded school to ensure one set of views does not dominate the future.

It is also wrong that one person who is hiding behind anonymity should be able to prevent the new school being built. The Council should challenge this decision by Historic England which is prejudicial to the interests of future generations of children. It is the duty of the Council to take a long term view of the educational needs of the children in Trafford. A school that is over 100 years old clearly cannot fulfil that requirement particularly when that has been confirmed by an independent inspection, and the Leader of the Council, that it does not meet modern standards."

Response to Comments 10, 11 and 12

The LA recognises it has been an unsettling time for both schools and will fully support them as they create an inclusive vision which benefits children of all ages. In February 2021, the LA facilitated a meeting between the Chair of Governors and Headteachers of both schools and their shared external provider of human resource support. The LA will continue this engagement of the Governing Bodies of both schools, alongside key partners including HR,

the unions, and governor services, throughout the spring and summer terms to facilitate a smooth transition into a primary school.

The method of amalgamation proposed is in accordance with Trafford's Presumption to Amalgamate Policy which was determined through Trafford's democratic processes after consultation with all Trafford Schools.

Trafford's Presumption to Amalgamate Policy states:

"Amalgamations will be achieved through linked proposals to discontinue (close) one school, where the headship is vacant, and to extend the age range of the remaining school. If there are vacancies in both schools, the school where the first resignation was made will be discontinued and the vacant post for the primary school will be advertised externally."

The LA considers that this method provides a consistent and objective approach that does not imply any issue of underperformance or of take over and is that method that has been employed in every amalgamation undertaken to date, even in those where the amalgamation was achieved before the Presumption Policy was in place.

In this case Stamford Park Infant School will close and the Board of Governors will cease to exist. Since the Junior School will remain, then the Board of Governors of the Junior School will remain although, over a relatively short period of time, the members of the Board will be bound to change as the current terms of office end and new members are elected and appointed from the extended range of staff and parents without any partiality. In the meantime, the Department for Education's Governance Handbook lays out the core role and functions of a governing body and summarises the legal duties on boards. Boards must be ambitious for all children and young people with a commitment to continuous school improvement that enables the best possible outcomes. Trafford recognises the Boards commitment to these principles.

The Head and Board of Governors have stated their commitment to working with the staff of both schools and have provided the following statement:

"The Head Teacher and Governors at SPJS are all fully committed to providing the best education for all children in our care, whether that has been as a Junior School or for the proposed future Primary School. We are looking forward to working with the Local Authority and staff of both schools to ensure that there is a smooth transition during the amalgamation. We are excited by the challenges ahead of us, in enabling our two schools to build on the existing excellent provision for all our children and families going forward."

As to the issue of the listed building status; the Council received 282 responses to its proposal to build a new school on the existing playing field and to demolish the current school buildings to replace the required outdoor space. 71 consultees (25% of all the consultees) opposed the demolition of the school buildings. Although it is not known who applied to Historic England it was obvious that retaining the building was important to a significant section of the local community.

Comment 13

Stamford Park Junior school provides a great education for local children and is very well-run. However the building that houses both schools is not fit-for-purpose for modern schooling. The facilities and space expected today are different to years gone by. In addition a sustainably-built school will have lower running costs and fewer structural/building problems than a victorian school.

I endorse the amalgamation of the 2 schools and hope that the excellence in the junior school is not lost in the process.

The school building does not, in my opinion, have particular architectural or historic merit. It is a single storey, sprawling building in a densely populated area. Other uses for the site could include social housing or housing for vulnerable people."

Response 13

Thank you for your participation in the process. Your comments have been considered by Officers and will be included in a Report to Trafford's Executive for consideration before a final decision is made.

Comment 14

I am a parent of children in both schools, and wish to raise the following objections and frankly disbelieve that Trafford Council have chosen this time to amalgamate these 2 schools during these unprecedented times;

1. When our children potentially return to school-based education next month, some will have missed 8 months of learning, and will return to class rooms under social distancing measures and within their class bubbles. Catchup and booster groups will be of paramount importance for their long-term learning, as will pastoral and wellbeing care for their mental health. To integrate our children back into education and into social settings, as a parent I would like the teachers, TA's and SLT's in both schools to be concentrating on my children and their holistic wellbeing, and not on the amalgamation of 2 free standing businesses.

2. Can you tell me if an independent mergers team is being brought in to support and guide the schools and their SLT's through this process? I believe that firstly both Head Teachers have more than enough to do right now managing their schools during this pandemic, and secondly what experience and training do Head Teachers have in this area? For this amalgamation to proceed efficiently, you cannot expect the 2 Head Teachers to undertake their jobs as leaders of these 2 schools during a worldwide pandemic, whilst merging them at the same time. That you believe that the SLT's can is worrying and shows a disregard of all they do on a daily basis and the pressure and stress they are under.

3. As a compassionate human being I have concerns about the short- and long-term impact of stress the Covid-19 pandemic will have on teachers, they have continued to work at the frontline for the past year with weekly if not daily changing SOP's in place, when the children return next month, both the staff and our children deserve a semblance of normality and continuity, not uncertainty and change.

I strongly believe that an amalgamated school is in the best interests of children and parents/careers in the long term, due to consistency of education, teachers, school policy's, communication and outcomes, however not during a global pandemic and a time of such uncertainty."

Comment 15

As a parent of 2 children currently in the school I fully support the proposal to amalgamate the infant and junior schools.

It is a gross misuse of public funds to continue to pay for two senior leadership teams, 2 SENCo's and 2 administration teams for a school that is based effectively on a Single site. There may be separate entrances but they share a playground!

However the timing of this workload is an absolute joke. All staff at the schools have been working under unprecedented circumstances for the last 12 months, to add to this by expecting the staff to also facilitate the school amalgamation at this time is a ridiculous idea.

Either delay the amalgamation to suit the needs of the school (September 2021) or provide suitable consultants/help to facilitate the process at no cost to the school if the deadline of April is so imperative."

Comment 16

Having always been in favour of the amalgamation, with a new school, I write to express my disappointment at the given timescales for the current proposed amalgamation. There has been no clear rationale as to why, in the middle of a pandemic, it was necessary to for this to happen from 12th April rather than September. I would have expected health and safety and staff mental health and wellbeing to be a priority and would have expected Trafford to have given clear reasons why April would be more beneficial as oppose to September.

There has been no change to the physical buildings to support the amalgamation and there has been little forward planning in terms of the operational running of the new school. The children and staff will have little, if anything, to gain from an amalgamation in April rather than September.

In one of your responses to the informal consultation you wrote:

Separate to its initial proposal, Trafford had determined a Presumption to Amalgamate Policy to support its long standing strategic aim to amalgamate separate infant and junior schools where there were no contrary indicators to a proposal. That presumption is automatically triggered when the following criteria are met:

That the site(s) can be effectively managed as one school; and That the buildings can be adapted to meet the needs of an amalgamated school.

To date, there have been no shared plans regarding the buildings being adapted and no shared plans as to how the school will be effectively managed. No reference has been made to lockdown and the pandemic.

I support the amalgamation but I do not support the proposed timescales."

Response to Comments 14, 15 and 16

The Local Authority recognises the challenges that all our schools have faced throughout this pandemic and the impact it has had, and continues to have, on teaching staff, support staff and school leaders. We have ensured support has been in place through weekly briefings and question and answer sessions with Public Health and Education colleagues. Toolkits of support with resources for teaching, learning and wellbeing have been made readily available to all schools.

After careful consideration of the ever changing Covid-19 situation it is proposed that the implementation date for amalgamation be changed to September 2021. As schools now prepare to re-open to all children following a period of restricted attendance during national

lockdown, this will allow them to concentrate their energies on meeting the needs of their pupils.

As the two schools currently share a site, there are no planned building adaptations scheduled as part of this proposal to achieve an amalgamated school.

Comment 17

Thank you for the opportunity to give feedback. I support amalgamation, the logic for which is self-evident and the implementation of which should have taken place much sooner. It is deeply disappointing and frustrating, however, that it will not take place alongside development of a new school building.

In that regard it is particularly negligent of Trafford Council to fail to offer a substantive reply on the question of the new school building in its responses to the informal consultation. It also beggars belief, given what the Council itself has put on record regarding the poor condition of the infant school building, that this consultation envisages the amalgamation taking place with "no proposed physical alterations" and that "no capital costs are anticipated". I would be grateful if the Council could explain how its assessment of the condition of the infant school building has changed and why it now regards it as fit for purpose.

It is sadly ironic that the weak handling of this matter by the Council and others has delivered an outcome which has failed to deliver the stated goal of any of the three main stakeholders. The Junior School sees its aspiration of academisation unfulfilled and put further out of reach by having been obliged to take responsibility for the Infant School and its rapidly deteriorating buildings. The Infant School achieves amalgamation but as a voiceless partner and while seeing its hopes for a new school building seemingly dashed. And the Council achieves nothing to meet its desperate need for additional school places.

I hope Trafford Council reflects on how its prevarication and lack of resolve, and the obstructive, parochial approach of key parties at the Junior School and the individual/s behind the listing, has at best significantly delayed and at worst squandered the opportunity to deliver a fit-for-purpose learning environment to best serve the current and future children and families of the Stamford Park community. There is still an opportunity for the Council to move swiftly to revive the new school project which, to my huge regret, will now be too late for many of the children for whom it would have delivered such great benefits."

Response 17

Trafford has consistently reported that the school building does not meet the Department for Education's current suitability requirements and its assessment of the condition of the building has not changed. The condition issues remain, as they do at other schools across Trafford, but these have to be dealt with through the asset management programme against the priority criteria, along with all other schools that the Local Authority maintains. Stamford Park Junior School is supportive of the proposal and it will be a future decision for the governing body about whether they progress with academisation of the whole amalgamated school. The Local Authority believes that if academisation were to progress, it would be better for the children for this to be as a whole primary school.

The previously proposed new school building was to be funded from Trafford's Basic Need Allocation which is provided by the Department for Education specifically to secure additional school places. Trafford proposed a budget of £8m from its allocation for the ambitious proposal and, although the cost to provide each extra place was higher than is normally the case, it was considered that the benefits that could be achieved were well worth the additional

costs. Subsequently, a private individual made an application to Historic England and the building was awarded Grade 2 listed status on 7th February 2020. The listing protects Stamford Park Infant and Junior School, master's house and play sheds with surrounding walls, gates and railings. It was this decision alone that effectively halted the proposal to deliver a new school. There is ongoing work to consider site options involving a range of partners including education, place development, planning, heritage and strategic parks. This group are developing an options paper.

Comment 18

I am writing to you with a number of concerns related to the proposed amalgamation of Stamford Park Infant and Junior School, which could take place on 12th April 2021. These concerns are shared by some staff at the Infant School.

Covid-19

- One of the primary concerns is that an amalgamation is being proposed during a national emergency. The Covid-19 situation is not under control at present and staff and children are in a vulnerable position as it is, without expanding the number of staff and children in the current organisations. It cannot be guaranteed that staff in an amalgamated school will not be utilised in an emergency, crossing from one school to another. This proposal puts all adults and children at greater risk of contracting or spreading the virus. Cross contamination is currently not possible with the two schools being independent of each other.

'Minimising contacts and mixing between people reduces transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19).'

'Schools must do everything possible to minimise contacts and mixing while delivering a broad and balanced curriculum.'

(Restricting attendance during the national lockdown: Guidance for all schools in England January 2021)

- A true amalgamation cannot be organised via video calls and emails and staff are dismayed that we are being asked by Trafford to do so during a national emergency. The health and safety of both school communities is being compromised by this proposal and we are shocked that it has been proposed at this time.

- Both schools have worked very hard to implement health and safety routines that work for each setting. Each school have been asked to generate their own criteria for accepting key workers, have generated independent risk assessments and have their own routines for keeping children as safe as possible. There has been enough change for children, staff and parents and changing the criteria, during a national lockdown, is unfair to all parties involved. 'All schools must cover all key elements, but the way different schools implement some of the requirements will differ based on their individual circumstances.'

(Restricting attendance during the national lockdown: Guidance for all schools in England January 2021).

- There is a local president for halting a merger during Coronavirus. The propose merger of Cheadle and Marple Six Form Colleges has been postponed. I refer you to the article extract below -

A cash-strapped college's merger plans have been delayed owing to the coronavirus pandemic.

'Cheadle and Marple Sixth Form College, which was told by FE Commissioner Richard Atkins last year that it could not survive as a standalone due to its "terminal" finances, had scheduled to join the Trafford College Group by August.'

'A consultation on the move was run at the end of March and while both parties are still committed to it, they have pushed back the date for completion to October 30.'

'In a joint statement the colleges said: "In light of the ongoing Covid-19 situation and the impact this will have on the due diligence process, the merger transition board, along with the Education and Skills Funding Agency considered the July 31, 2020 merger date and agreed that it was sensible to reschedule the merger date for October 30, 2020.'

(<https://feweek.co.uk/2020/05/18/coronavirus-delays-troubled-colleges-merger-until-autumn>)

- These two education establishments are not functioning by themselves which has led to the proposed merger. Stamford Park Infant and Junior Schools are thriving independent of each other. Why hasn't our proposed merger been pushed back due to the virus? As the presumption to amalgamate states,

'There is no maximum limit on the time between the publication of a proposal and its proposed date of implementation. Therefore the implementation date will be determined by the particular factors of each individual proposal and to achieve the most efficient and effective amalgamation.'

(Presumption to Amalgamate Community Infant and Junior Schools Policy)

- To summarise, some staff are dismayed that an amalgamation of two schools is being proposed at the current time, and feel the health and wellbeing of staff, children and parents will be compromised by an amalgamation during the Covid-19 pandemic. An amalgamation at this time will not be 'efficient' or 'effective'.

The consultation process has been compromised by Covid-19

- It has been brought to the attention of the Infant School that a high proportion of our parents did not know there was a merger being proposed at this time. Although communication has been sent on the evening of 28th of January, and signs displayed outside school, it has not filtered through to parents.

- There are currently only around 35%-40% of parents travelling to the Infant School on any given day. Numbers fluctuate on a daily basis due to parents sending in children on a part time basis, if possible. Furthermore, we have requested that only one parent pick up and drop off, reducing the numbers even further. Parents use the time before and after school to discuss various issues, and this opportunity has been denied them.

- Furthermore, the two signs displayed near the Infant School are in very small print on A4 paper and have been placed next to notices relating to Covid-19. This combined to the large reduction in parent attendance and lack of interaction has seriously compromised the communication from Trafford. It has therefore gone unnoticed by a large proportion of parents.

- Also, many parents are balancing home learning and working from home and have simply not had the time to read in depth the proposed amalgamation. As, previously stated, some parents were dismayed and angry to find out that this consultation had proceeded so far without them knowing about it.

- To summarise, conducting a consultation during a national crisis is unfair, compromised and potentially deceptive. Surely Trafford wish to obtain an accurate cross section of people's feelings?

Workload

- A recent 'Staff Wellbeing' survey conducted by the Infant School concluded that Covid-19 was responsible for almost doubling staff workload. The SLT have done all they can to reduce any work for the staff, but despite their best efforts these extra tasks are unavoidable.
- The pandemic is responsible for creating this pressure on staff and we have implemented weekly mental health walks to help combat stress. A large number of staff have expressed concerns over holding more meetings and having extra workload relating to a proposed amalgamation. The staff of the Infant School recognise nothing can be done at present by the Senior Leadership Team about the current workload and that it is down to the extra systems and procedures in place to combat the Covid-19 crisis.
- An amalgamation and the extra pressures, meetings and workload are not welcome by staff at this time. We need to focus on the children's routines, provision and closing the gaps in learning for the children. Amalgamation is not a current priority. A number of our staff have been seriously ill with Covid-19 and are not yet operating at full strength. They are giving everything they have to ensure our school continues to operate and asking them to go through an amalgamation as well is simply unacceptable.

The School Buildings

- The school buildings are in a poor state of repair and they are unfit for purpose. The informal consultation document reflects this view.
- The buildings in their current state do not lend themselves to a united Primary School. The only link is via the kitchen, and this is unusable during school hours due to health and safety procedures in place in the kitchen. If an amalgamation goes ahead, we will still have two separate staff rooms, halls and many other facilities which will drive a wedge between the two existing schools, even post Covid-19.
- Due to the listing of the two buildings it has made a new Primary School build difficult, but not impossible. The possibility of a rebuild or at the very least a multimillion pound refurbishment of the existing sites needs to be seriously considered before any amalgamation is proposed.
- Even parents in favour of amalgamation state the following,

'Although I am very much in support of the amalgamation of the infant and junior schools, it is extremely disappointing to find out that this is unlikely to take place alongside the development of a new school building. The current building is unfit for purpose with cramped classrooms, a leaky roof and some children being taught in the corridors.'

(Stamford Park Infant and Junior School – Proposal to Amalgamate Consultation Comments and Responses)

- To summarise a new or heavily revamped building surely needs to be in place before any amalgamation is considered. Any new developments or rebuilds should be submitted with a future proposal, after the Covid-19 crisis is over.

The vulnerability of the Infant School staff and children in the proposed model

- The Informal Consultation Document, Comment 4 raises a valid point surround the fairness of any future leadership of a proposed amalgamated school. 'I also hope the Council will ensure that the views and interests of the Infant School community and leadership will be properly reflected in the governance arrangements for the future of the combined school. Recent history suggests that, sadly, key parties at the Junior School cannot be relied upon to act in the best interests of the full school community.'

(Stamford Park Infant and Junior School – Proposal to Amalgamate Consultation Comments and Responses)

- It is extremely concerning that Stamford Park Infant School will close and over 100 years of history lost. The proposed structure would see the Junior School effectively taking over the Infant School. The composition of the Senior Leadership Team would be biased towards the staff of the Junior School and a glass ceiling would be in place for staff of the Infant School, whether assurances were in place or not. Without proper representation at management level, staff of the Infant School would be vulnerable to redundancies and the possibility of having management roles removed in favour of the current Junior Staff.

- The Infant School Governing body will also cease to exist. There are currently two members of the Senior Leadership Team and one member of Support Staff on the Infant Governing Board, ensuring a broad and fair representation of the school, the children and its staff. Current proposals suggest that one member maybe invited to sit on the proposed amalgamated school governing body. This is simply not good enough.

- Some of our staff feel very vulnerable and let down by Trafford who have ignored our concerns.

- Indeed, during a previous consultation document dated January 2018, a stakeholder from the Junior School stated the following,

'I disagree with the need to close the school with the departing head teacher and to expand the remaining school. This approach destroys the history and traditions of the closing school and gives no impetus to the surviving school to encompass and promulgate the closing school's ethos. Instead, a better approach would be to close both schools and create a new school which takes on aspects of both original schools' best practice, tradition and history. For teachers and other staff, pupils, parents, and the newly constituted governing body of the new school, this would give both original schools the chance to come together as equal parties in a new venture under a common leader, without the feeling that one school has been effectively "taken over" by another for no good reason other than its head teacher has resigned. The government's own guidelines in respect of amalgamation, makes it clear that the latter approach is acceptable (DoE April 2016 - Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers on Amalgamations of Schools):

"There are two ways to amalgamate two (or more) existing maintained schools:

- The LA or governing body (depending on school category) can publish a proposal to close two, or more, schools and the LA or a proposer other than the LA (e.g. diocese, faith or parent group, Trust) depending on category, can publish a proposal to open a new school or presumption free school (see part 2). This results in a new school number being issued.
- The LA and / or governing body (depending on school category) can publish a proposal to close one school (or more) and enlarge / change the age range / transfer site (following the statutory process as / when necessary) of an existing school, to accommodate the displaced pupils. The remaining school would retain its original school number, as it is not a new school, even if its phase has changed."

My view is that any school created from the amalgamation of an infant school and a junior school in Trafford LEA will be such a different entity than either of its original parts, that a new start would be the better approach.

- Both schools are clearly in agreement regarding any future proposed amalgamation of the Infant and Junior Schools.

- Furthermore, once the initial settling in period is over, the Infant School will effectively begin to lose funding and its control over government initiatives such as the 'Sports Premium Grant'. The 'Outstanding' provision will be lost and the 'Stretch and Grow', 'Yoga', 'Freddy Fit' and many other Infant based specialists will be lost.
- The staff and a number of Infant School parents are extremely surprised at the reaction of Trafford towards the Informal Consultation Document and its decision to proceed to the Formal Consultation. The view in our eyes is not for an amalgamation as proposed, but one which is a true coming together of both schools – in a new school building.
- To summarise the proposed amalgamation on the table does not fit with the view of either schools and any benefits of amalgamation as stated by the parents (such as a continued curriculum) can be obtained by forging closer links between both schools, allowing amalgamation to come naturally in the future, instead of being forced upon us by Trafford.

Closing statement

Amalgamation at the current time has the following drawbacks.

- 1) It puts the health and safety of children, staff and parents at risk for no reason, other than to save money. This is unacceptable.
- 2) Holding the consultation during a national pandemic renders the data collected flawed and unrepresentative of staff, parents and stakeholders. It must be postponed until the pandemic is over.
- 3) Staff workload is currently unsustainable; focus must be on keeping staff and children safe and helping them to plug gaps in their learning, not planning an amalgamation from scratch. The education of children and mental health of staff are being put at risk.
- 4) The proposals for a new school building and expansion need to be looked at again, as the new build was the primary basis for many staff in Infant School supporting Trafford's original proposal. The current buildings are unfit for purpose and do not lend themselves towards amalgamation.
- 5) The current proposal leaves the staff and children of the Infant School with very little say in their future and a fairer proposal needs to be implemented.
- 6) To be very clear I am not against the principles of amalgamation or working closely with our colleges next door at the Junior School. The process can be made so much fairer, safer and open.

Proposed actions

- 1) Delay all consultation until the Covid-19 crisis is over to allow staff and parents to focus on the children's health, education and wellbeing.
- 2) Make absolutely clear the process of amalgamation that is proposed to all stakeholders, the Junior School will be 'taking control' of the Infant School.
- 3) Delay any amalgamation until a new school building/or heavily revamped current site is ready to house a new primary school.
- 4) Any amalgamation will be a fair reflection of both current; Senior Leadership Teams, Governing Bodies and staff, offering equal opportunities for all.
- 5) A working party be formed that has equal numbers of Infant/Junior staff to look at the process of amalgamating the schools."

Response 18

Thank you for your comprehensive response.

The Local Authority recognises the challenges that all our schools have faced throughout this pandemic and the impact it has had, and continues to have, on teaching staff, support staff and school leaders. We have ensured support has been in place through weekly briefings and question and answer sessions with Public Health and Education colleagues.

Toolkits of support with resources for teaching, learning and wellbeing have been made readily available to all schools.

We have all had to operate in a reactive way, in accordance with updated guidance from Government and Public Health which has made planning strategically more difficult.

After careful consideration of the ever changing Covid-19 situation it is proposed that the implementation date for amalgamation be changed to September 2021. As schools now prepare to re-open to all children following a period of restricted attendance during national lockdown, this will allow them to concentrate their energies on meeting the needs of their pupils.

All schools must follow the health and safety hierarchy of controls to reduce the risk to the lowest reasonably practicable level. These risk assessments are living documents which are regularly reviewed and updated as circumstances in schools and public health advice changes. Within the amalgamation proposals there are no plans to expand the number of children across the shared site and it would be the responsibility of the leadership of the amalgamated primary school to implement sensible and proportionate control measures to reduce risk.

The amalgamation proposal was announced on the council's digital channels including their website, social media and in a press release. Information was sent to all parents, staff members and to all those who registered to receive updates about the project. Parents and carers of children at both schools are key stakeholders within this consultation process and care was taken to make sure that they were informed about this proposal via well-established school systems which have been used to support regular communication with families during the pandemic.

Trafford has consistently reported that the school building does not meet the Department for Education's current suitability requirements and its assessment of the condition of the building has not changed. The condition issues remain, as they do at other schools across Trafford, but these have to be dealt with through the asset management programme against the priority criteria, along with all other schools that the Local Authority maintains.

As the two schools currently share a site, there are no planned building adaptations scheduled as part of this proposal to achieve an amalgamated school. There is ongoing work to consider site options involving a range of partners including education, place development, planning, heritage and strategic parks. This group are developing an options paper.

The method of amalgamation proposed is in accordance with Trafford's Presumption to Amalgamate Policy which was determined through Trafford's democratic processes after consultation with all Trafford Schools.

Trafford's Presumption to Amalgamate Policy states:

"Amalgamations will be achieved through linked proposals to discontinue (close) one school, where the headship is vacant, and to extend the age range of the remaining school. If there are vacancies in both schools, the school where the first resignation was made will be discontinued and the vacant post for the primary school will be advertised externally."

The LA considers that this method provides a consistent and objective approach that does not imply any issue of underperformance or of take over and is that method that has been employed in every amalgamation undertaken to date, even in those where the amalgamation was achieved before the Presumption Policy was in place. The LA has taken care to explicitly

describe the proposed method of amalgamation in every consultation document and at every meeting.

In this case Stamford Park Infant School will close and the Board of Governors will cease to exist. Since the Junior School will remain, then the Board of Governors of the Junior School will remain although, over a relatively short period of time, the members of the Board will be bound to change as the current terms of office end and new members are elected and appointed from the extended range of staff and parents without any partiality. In the meantime, the Department for Education's Governance Handbook lays out the core role and functions of a governing body and summarises the legal duties on boards. Boards must be ambitious for all children and young people with a commitment to continuous school improvement that enables the best possible outcomes. Trafford recognises the Boards commitment to these principles. The Head and Board of Governors have stated their commitment to working with the staff of both schools.

The LA recognises it has been an unsettling time for both schools and will fully support them as they create an inclusive vision which benefits children of all ages. In February 2021, the LA facilitated a meeting between the Chair of Governors and Headteachers of both schools and their shared external provider of human resource support. The LA will continue this engagement of the Governing Bodies of both schools, alongside key partners including HR, the unions, and governor services, throughout the spring and summer terms to facilitate a smooth transition into a primary school.