



Cantley Primary School (Community) and Freethorpe Community Primary School

Statutory Proposal to amalgamate Cantley Primary School (Discontinue) with Freethorpe Community Primary School and change the catchment areas from September 2025

Contact details

Cantley Primary School

URN: 120797
School Lane
Cantley
Norfolk
NR13 3SA

Freethorpe Community Primary School

URN: 120808
School Road
Freethorpe
Norfolk
NR13 3NZ

Norfolk County Council

County Hall
Martineau Lane
Norwich
Norfolk
NR2 1DH

Implementation

Start date: September 2025

Under Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act (2006) and in line with the Establishment and Discontinuance Regulations, Norfolk County Council and the Governing Body of the AIM Federation intend to formally amalgamate Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School. The two schools would come together to become one single school from September 2025, on the Freethorpe Primary School site. The proposed amalgamation also includes the Cantley nursery currently operated under Section 27 arrangements by the school's governing body.

Cantley Primary School would be discontinued from 31 August 2025.

The proposal further intends to adjust the catchment areas to reflect the change.

Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School are both part of the AIM Federation. Cantley Primary School does not have any provision reserved for children with special education needs.

The decision to consult on the amalgamation was taken by Norfolk County Council in collaboration with the Governing body of the AIM Federation in May 2025. A consultation proposal was published on 13 May 2024, for five weeks and sent to parents of pupils at both schools, along with staff and governors, as well as key stakeholders and the wider federation. A copy of the consultation document is attached at Appendix A and can be located here: [School consultations - Norfolk Schools and Learning Providers - Norfolk County Council](#)

The proposal is happening in the summer term because of the significant drop in pupil numbers at Cantley Primary School, with only 17 children expected in September and no new reception pupils. We know that operating with such small numbers from September 2025 is not in the best interest of pupils. As a result of this, a whole school single-class structure would be necessary going forward. While such a model can offer continuity, we also understand that it may not align with parents' expectations and some families may choose alternative settings, contributing to a further decline in pupil numbers, destabilising the school further.

September marks the start of the academic year. This helps provide a clear transition for pupils, staff, and families, and avoids the additional disruption that can come with changes part way through the school year.

Reason for the amalgamation- The discontinuance of Cantley Primary School

The proposal to amalgamate Cantley Primary School with Freethorpe Primary School is because;

The school is no longer considered viable. Cantley Primary School has experienced a steady decline in pupil numbers, a trend that began before the COVID-19 pandemic and has become more pronounced in the past year. Many parents locally are not choosing to send their children to the school and are exercising their right to send their child elsewhere as there is a significant surplus of places in the wider area. For the reception class of 2025, the school has received no applications, even for children living within the catchment. With falling numbers on roll, and funding linked to pupil numbers, it is therefore difficult to deliver and sustain quality education for children now and in the future.

Both schools are currently part of the AIM Federation, already working closely together with under one shared leadership team and governing body.

All pupils currently attending Cantley can be offered places at Freethorpe.

Reason for the catchment change

If the amalgamation proceeds Norfolk County Council further intends to change the catchment area of Cantley Primary School to merge with the existing catchment area of Freethorpe Community Primary School, creating one larger catchment area that serves Freethorpe Community Primary School from September 2025. If agreed, this variation is outside of the normal admission period will need to be referred to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator for agreement.

Changing the catchment area following an amalgamation ensures admissions reflect the new arrangements and supports fair access for local families. By expanding the catchment area for Freethorpe, the school will be served by a larger area, supporting the longer-term viability of the school in a geographical area with a reducing pupil population.

Pupil numbers and admissions

Like many schools across both the county and the country, this school is experiencing the impact of a sustained decline in the national birth rate. This demographic trend is leading to fewer children entering the education system.

Cantley Primary School is a co-educational mainstream community primary school taking pupils from the age of 2 to 11 and is designated as a rural school (rural village) by the Department for Education. The school has a Planned Admission Number (PAN) of 14 (2025/2026). At the last Ofsted inspection, in June 2021, the school was categorised as 'Good'. The school has capacity

for 97 pupils - for September 2025, it is anticipated that 17 children will be attending, a surplus of 82.5% of places.

There were no applications for reception places for September 2025. The school offers wrap-around-care with before and after-school clubs. Boarding facilities are not offered at this school. A small number of children have been identified as having special educational needs and 3 children have Education, Health and Care Plans.

Please note: Given the volume and granularity of the data, we need to remain mindful of our responsibility to protect pupil confidentiality. To ensure individuals are not identifiable, some information has been suppressed or aggregated for this reason.

Cantley	Date of birth Range	Gender		EHCP
		Male	Female	
Early Years 2	01/09/22 - 31/8/23	1	0	
Nursery 1	01/09/21 - 31/08/22	4	1	
Nursery 2	01/09/20 - 31/08/21	2	1	
Reception	01/09/19 - 31/08/20	2	1	
Year 1	01/09/18 - 31/08/19	1	4	
Year 2	01/09/17 - 31/08/18	2	3	
Year 3	01/09/16 - 31/08/17	2	2	
Year 4	01/09/15 - 31/08/16	1	2	
Year 5	01/09/14 - 31/08/15	0	2	
Year 6	01/09/13 - 31/08/14	4	5	
Total		19	21	3

Freethorpe	Date of birth Range	Gender		EHCP
		Male	Female	
Early Years 2	01/09/22 - 31/8/23	0	0	
Nursery 1	01/09/21 - 31/08/22	0	8	
Nursery 2	01/09/20 - 31/08/21	10	4	
Reception	01/09/19 - 31/08/20	10	6	
Year 1	01/09/18 - 31/08/19	17	8	
Year 2	01/09/17 - 31/08/18	13	6	
Year 3	01/09/16 - 31/08/17	12	5	
Year 4	01/09/15 - 31/08/16	4	11	

Year 5	01/09/14 - 31/08/15	11	12	
Year 6	01/09/13 - 31/08/14	8	10	
Total		85	70	3

Freethorpe Community Primary School is a co-educational mainstream community primary school taking pupils from the age of 2 to 11 and is designated as a rural school (rural village) by the Department for Education. The school has a PAN of 25 (2025/2026). In October 2024, Freethorpe received a 'Good' judgement from Ofsted. The school has capacity for 172 pupils from Reception to Year 6 in total and currently has 133 on roll as of January 2025, with an additional 27 attending the nursery. No boarding facilities are offered at this school.

Of the overall numbers for Cantley, 9 children are not of Compulsory School Age and for Freethorpe this is 22.

We do not need to publish an enlargement proposal for this amalgamation, because if all children choose to attend Freethorpe from September 2025, the overall number moving, is less than 30 pupils.

All future admission applications for Freethorpe Primary School will be processed in line with the published admission arrangements and outcomes determined in line with the admissions policy adopted by the County Council.

Catchment and outside of catchment

Of the current children attending Cantley, only 4 children in Reception to Year 5 are children living within the current catchment area and 18 pupils attend from out of catchment.

For Freethorpe (Year R to Year 5) 115 children, 89 are children living in catchment and 26 attend from out of catchment.

Displaced pupils

Nine pupils currently in year 6 will leave at the end of July 2025 to transition to secondary school.

No children will be displaced because all pupils will have offer of places at the amalgamated Freethorpe Community Primary School.

During the informal consultation, it was noted that some families prefer other local schools and may live closer to them. Several nearby schools currently have vacancies (see page 8). Parents have the right to apply for any alternative school and places will be offered, where possible, in line with the published admissions policy of the particular school.

Special Education Needs provision

Cantley Primary School does not include provision reserved for pupils with Special Education Needs (SEN). However, there are a small number of children with Education Health and Care Plans. If the amalgamation of the schools is approved, it will be essential to review the provision required for these pupils, following consultation with individual parents.

Impact on the community

Cantley School was built in 1872, undergoing extensions in the 1970s, and early 2000's. It is clear from the informal consultation that Cantley holds a special place in the hearts of many within the local community. We fully recognise that any proposal to amalgamate a valued and well-regarded school is likely to be met with sadness and concern. Respondents highlight the school's history and the importance of local schools in fostering a sense of belonging in the community with links to the village hall and parish. The amalgamation would remove primary education provision from the Cantley village. Respondents commented that if the village no longer has a school, it may become less appealing to families moving into the area who may choose to settle in alternative locations. Concern was also raised that children attending school elsewhere may lose connection with their home village.

The school building is not used by any community groups, therefore the potential impact of the loss of the school as a community venue should be minimal.

Both schools share the same curriculum and staff training. Children from both schools often join in activities together, so the merged school will feel familiar. The amalgamated school will continue to meet the different needs of each age group.

Rural Primary Schools

There are particular requirements around the amalgamation of small rural schools, we are mindful of the additional rigour for the discontinuance of a rural setting and that cases should be strong and clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area. These considerations as required by the Department of Education have informed the decision making in pursuing amalgamation:

The likely effect of discontinuance of the school on the community

Please see the section on pages 4 and 5, Impact on the Community

The availability and likely cost to the Local Authority of transport to other schools

If the schools are amalgamated, it is difficult to accurately predict the transport cost implications as they are based on where families live, and parent preference means some parents may choose alternative schools to Freethorpe. The distance between the two schools is 3.2 miles. As a guide, Norfolk County Council has estimated that to transport pupils from Cantley to Freethorpe would cost up to approximately £14,000 per year for the potentially eligible pupils.

Any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from closure of the school and the likely effects of any increase

There may be increased use of motor vehicles if the parents of the children currently at Cantley, choose to attend a school out of catchment, or do not qualify for School Transport. However, due to the low numbers involved with this school amalgamation, and with many pupils already living outside of the school catchment, this is judged to be minimal.

The availability, and likely cost to parents, of transport to other schools and whether the proposal will result in unreasonably long journey times;

The two schools are 3.2 miles apart. Many pupils attending Cantley already live within the current Freethorpe catchment. If the amalgamation proceeds, school transport will be provided free of charge by Norfolk County Council for those pupils who transfer to their nearest or nearest catchment school, where this is beyond the qualifying distance (over 2 miles for under 8s and older children from families on low income, and over 3 miles for other older children). Journeys will take around 10 minutes by car. Where travel is provided by Norfolk County Council, shared vehicles will be used, linking in with existing transport routes where appropriate.

Any alternatives to the discontinuance of the school

The Governors and the Local Authority have considered a number of alternative options before reaching the proposal of amalgamation, including:

- **No change:** The risk to the school's long-term viability would remain unchanged, given the continued lack of in-area demand for places. Over time this will lead to further reduced funding, and a drop in the quality of the educational offer.
- **Adjustments to the Federation:** Unfortunately adding more schools to the federation group would not address the issue of falling pupil numbers at Cantley Primary School.
- **Promote the school to attract more pupils:** Promotion of the school has been tried and unfortunately has been ineffective as there are a reducing number of pupils living in the community and a surplus of school places within the wider area. Parents are not choosing Cantley School.

- **Join an academy trust:** In undertaking their due diligence, both local and national academy trusts find that some small schools with falling pupil numbers are not financially viable to have them join.
- **Scope for extended school services and facilities (e.g. childcare facilities, family and adult learning, healthcare, community internet access):** The building is not suitable to be used by multiple services co-located on site and would not address the issue of falling pupil numbers.
- **Closure of Cantley Primary School:** It was felt that this option is not appropriate as all pupils can be accommodated in another school within the federation as part of an amalgamation.

The size of the school and whether it puts the children at an educational disadvantage e.g. in terms of breadth of curriculum or resources available;

The predicted pupil numbers for the next few years at Cantley Primary School are very low, with 17 pupils predicted for September 2025 and no pupils applying for reception places. As school funding is directly linked to pupil numbers, this decline inevitably places pressure on school budgets and long-term sustainability, limiting the federation's ability to maintain educational standards and breadth of the curriculum. This can also impact investment in classroom resources, experiences, enrichment opportunities and staff development.

Consolidating onto one site supports a more sustainable school model, reducing the financial and operational challenges of running two settings with falling numbers. This helps protect staffing levels, enriches the breadth of the curriculum offer and facilities available to pupils.

The proportion of pupils attending the school from within the local community i.e. whether the school is being used by the local community;

As a result of parental preference, families are entitled to apply for a school place outside of their designated catchment. This level of choice means that families often make decisions based on what they feel best meets their child's needs, which can include factors such as school ethos, peer groups, family logistics or perceived quality of provision.

For some families they have selected Cantley Primary School over their local catchment school as only 4 pupils attending the school live within the designated catchment area.

While this flexibility is an important part of the admissions system, it also means that parental preferences can significantly influence the long-term viability of schools. In the case of Cantley Primary School, sustained low levels of parental preference over time have had a direct impact on pupil numbers, contributing to the current challenges around sustainability.

For September 2025, no children inside or out of the catchment area have chosen Cantley for a Reception placement. When a school receives no Reception-age pupils in a year, it can impact future admissions. Parents can be reluctant to send their child to a school where there are no other children of a similar age, as this can affect both social development and the classroom experience. As a result, the absence of a Reception cohort one year can deter applications the following year.

The overall and long term impact on local people and the community of the closure of the school and of the loss of the building as a community facility;

Please see the section on pages 4 and 5, Impact on the Community

Educational standards at the school and the likely effect on standards at neighbouring schools

At the last Ofsted inspection, in June 2021, Cantley Primary School was categorised as 'Good', and in October 2024, Freethorpe also received a 'Good' judgement. Both schools are part of AIM Federation, already sharing governance, leadership and curriculum.

The Cantley curriculum has been delivered via mixed age groups, however with the anticipated low numbers, all pupils at Cantley would be taught in a single class across the whole school from September 2025.

Freethorpe Community School has capacity to accommodate all pupils from Cantley Primary School. It is considered that the amalgamation will not have a detrimental effect on standards at Freethorpe School or neighbouring schools.

Should families wish to select an alternative school nearby, all are judged 'Good' by Ofsted. They would therefore be able to adjust to additional pupils and provide them with a good education.

Ofsted outcomes for nearby schools;

- **Reedham Primary School**- Joined Consortium Trust 2024- previously rated 'Good' June 2019 (short inspection)
Pupil capacity 77- current numbers 70
- **Acle C of E Primary Academy**- Joined Diocese of Norwich St Benet's Multi-Academy Trust 2023- previously rated 'Good' March 2019 (short inspection)
Pupil capacity 210- current numbers 185
- **Lingwood Primary Academy**- 'Good' June 2024 (short inspection)
Pupil capacity 210- current numbers 175

Surplus capacity and wider school organisation

There is significant surplus capacity across the local area as a result of a declining pupil population. Current projections indicate that this trend will continue and there are no significant housing developments planned for the area that may stabilise or reverse the decline.

The local schools to Cantley have sufficient space to accommodate pupils from the area, and they are rated as providing good quality education. Local demand can be met without compromising educational standards or access for families. In a situation that all the parents of children at Cantley express a preference to attend Freethorpe Primary, the building has capacity to ensure all the children could be accommodated without the need for additional buildings.

Nursery Provision

The proposed amalgamation includes Cantley nursery, currently operated under S27 by the school's governing body. Children attending Cantley nursery will be offered places at Freethorpe Community School nursery. For any families wanting alternative provision NCC's Family Information Service can provide information and support.

There will be no reduction in quality or quantity of places available, which will ensure continuity of provision for existing families. There is also potential to expand the number of places if demand increases.

The nursery at Freethorpe Community School is designed to be both accessible and convenient for local families. Situated in an easily reachable location, it offers parking facilities to enable drop-offs and pick-ups.

Balance of denominational provision

Cantley Primary School is not a school with a religious character and therefore this proposal has no effect on the balance of denominational provision in the local area.

Special Education Needs provision

Cantley Primary School does not include provision reserved for pupils with Special Education Needs (SEN).

However, there are a small number of children identified as having special educational needs and a small number with Education Health and Care Plans. If the amalgamation of the schools is approved, it will be essential to review the provision required for these pupils, following consultation with individual parents.

Travel

Freethorpe Community school is located 3.2 miles from the Cantley site. The number of pupils affected by the proposed amalgamation is small.

The majority of pupils currently attending the school do so through parental preference, and as such, are typically transported independently of the local authority. This means that for many families, existing travel arrangements are already in place. If eligible, pupils will be offered home-to-school transport in line with the local authority's transport policy, which includes pupils from low-income families. Where possible, transport will be shared to minimise the number of individual journeys.

Sixth Form

The schools are primary setting therefore do not have Sixth Form provision.

Equal Opportunities

We recognise the importance of the Public Sector Equality Duty and the requirement to give due regard to eliminating discrimination, advancing equality of opportunity, and fostering good relations between those with and without protected characteristics.

In putting forward this proposal, we have considered the potential impact on all relevant protected characteristics through assessment. Based on the available information, we do not anticipate any issues arising as a result of the proposals. The proposal does not introduce any different access or provision that would negatively affect individuals with protected characteristics. We are satisfied that the proposal supports inclusive access and reflects the ongoing commitment to equality and fairness.

Integration and Community Cohesion

We have considered the potential impact of the proposed school amalgamation on integration and community cohesion.

Given the context of low pupil numbers and the existing links between the schools, we do not anticipate that the proposal will negatively affect community relationships or pupil integration. The schools serve similar local areas, and the amalgamation is not expected to disrupt the broader sense of community identity.

Transition arrangements will be in place to support pupils and families, and we are satisfied that the proposal does not raise specific concerns in relation to integration or cohesion.

Procedure for making representation

Within 4 weeks from the date of publication, any person may object to, express support for, or make comments on the proposals by;

- by emailing Norfolk County Council at schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk,
- by writing to Norfolk County Council at: Cantley Freethorpe Consultation, Norfolk County Council, FREEPOST, 1H 2076, Lower Ground Floor, County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich, NR1 2BR. You do not need a stamp.

The closing date for all comments is 16 July 2025 at midnight

We will not be able to consider any responses received after this date. All responses received during the representation period will be fully considered by the Local Authority, and a final decision will then be made by the Local Authority on whether to implement the school amalgamation and catchment change proposal or not with effect from 1 September 2025.