



June 2025

Consultation report to the Executive Director of Children's Services on the proposed amalgamation of Cantley Primary School, School Lane, Cantley, Norfolk, NR13 3SA, and Freethorpe Community Primary School, School Road, Freethorpe, Norfolk, NR13 3NZ

and

Change of Catchment Area of Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School

From September 2025

There are two parts to this proposal:

- **Amalgamation:** Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School amalgamate from September 2025. All pupils attending Cantley Primary School will be offered a place at Freethorpe Community Primary School. The proposed amalgamation also includes the Cantley nursery currently operated under Section 27 arrangements by the school's governing body. Cantley Primary School will be discontinued from 31 August 2025.

If the amalgamation proceeds, we further propose to:

- **Catchment change:** 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.

Reason for the proposed changes	<p>The governors alongside Norfolk County Council are reluctantly consulting on the amalgamation of Cantley Primary School with Freethorpe Community Primary School.</p> <p>Unfortunately, Cantley Primary School is no longer considered viable, and is proposed for discontinuance.</p> <p>There has been a steady decline in the number of children attending Cantley Primary School, and we are concerned about how the school can continue to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum, and remain financially viable, in its current form. Current modelling suggests there will be 17 children on roll at Cantley in September 2025. The school has capacity for 97 pupils.</p> <p>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.</p>
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	<p>If the amalgamation proceeds, the proposal further intends to align the catchment areas to reflect the change.</p> <p>The full consultation document is available at Appendix A.</p>
Consultation details	<p>The consultation was delivered, as set out by the DfE statutory guidance 'Making significant changes (prescribed alterations) to maintained schools', March 2025 and 'Opening and closing maintained schools', October 2024.</p> <p>An informal consultation was held from 13 May 2025 to 16 June 2025 at 12 noon, over five weeks with one week falling in of May half term.</p> <p>A total of 821 consultation documents were sent to governors (6), staff (115) and federation parents (651) at including those at Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Primary School and key stakeholders (49) (full list is in Appendix B).</p> <p>The consultation was shared with the wider AIM Federation and hosted on the federation webpages. There was an online consultation survey, and one response was hand delivered to the school office using a form provided.</p> <p>Consultation events were held on at both schools on Monday 19 May and Tuesday 20 May 2025.</p> <p>These events were supported by the Co-Chairs of Governors, Governors, Executive Headteacher and senior staff members as well as the Admissions Manager, School Organisation Manager, the Head of Schools Infrastructure, and the Assistant Director Education Intelligence and Effectiveness from Norfolk County Council.</p> <p>28 people attended the first event held at Cantley School and two people attended the event the following day at Freethorpe School.</p> <p>A change.org 'Prevent Closure of Cantley School and Nursery' petition was created by the local community, receiving around 450 signatures.</p> <p>Details of the key issues raised from the meetings and questions through the online response form can be found in Appendix D, these Question and Answers were also shared on the school website during the informal consultation period.</p>
Number of responses	<p>Total: 91 responses 87 via online survey 3 email responses 1 hand delivered to the school office</p> <p>In addition, one parent submitted a voice-note recording via email from a six-year-old child which said "Please save our school. I love Cantley. Please"</p> <p>Some respondents chose to select 'neither agree nor disagree' in their responses. As a result, figures may not total 100% across all questions, and</p>

	<p>some charts may appear to show incomplete data due to these neutral responses.</p> <table><tr><th colspan="3">Responses</th></tr><tr><th colspan="3">Amalgamation (84 responses)</th></tr><tr><td></td><td>Agree</td><td>Disagree</td></tr><tr><td>Online survey</td><td>9</td><td>71</td></tr><tr><td>Email</td><td>0</td><td>3</td></tr><tr><td>Paper form</td><td>0</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Amalgamation Total</td><td>9</td><td>75</td></tr><tr><th colspan="3">Catchment (82 responses)</th></tr><tr><td></td><td>Agree</td><td>Disagree</td></tr><tr><td>Online survey</td><td>10</td><td>68</td></tr><tr><td>Email</td><td>0</td><td>3</td></tr><tr><td>Paper form</td><td>0</td><td>1</td></tr><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr><tr><td>Catchment Total</td><td>10</td><td>72</td></tr></table>	Responses			Amalgamation (84 responses)				Agree	Disagree	Online survey	9	71	Email	0	3	Paper form	0	1				Amalgamation Total	9	75	Catchment (82 responses)				Agree	Disagree	Online survey	10	68	Email	0	3	Paper form	0	1				Catchment Total	10	72
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<p>Summary of views expressed in favour of the proposals</p> <p>Amalgamation: 9 responses (10%)</p> <p>Catchment: 10 responses (12%)</p>	<p>Efficiency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respondents stated that the current arrangement of running two schools is seen as unsustainable and inefficient for the federation. Amalgamation is viewed as a practical solution to deliver education more effectively to local children.• A significant drop in birth rates has led to excess school capacity, making some closures inevitable; Falling pupil numbers at Cantley make it financially unviable to maintain two schools in such close proximity. <p>Community Impact:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• While the closure of Cantley is acknowledged as a loss to the community, it is understood as a necessary step. There is hope that the nurturing qualities of Cantley will be preserved at Freethorpe.																																													
<p>Summary of views expressed against of the proposals</p> <p>Amalgamation: 75 responses (89%)</p>	<p>Education and Wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Respondents feel that small class sizes at Cantley support individual pupils and are better suited for children with additional needs such as autism, ADHD and anxiety.																																													

Catchment:
72 responses
(87%)

- Larger schools are seen as overwhelming and less nurturing for young or sensitive children. Many suggested a nurturing; local environment is preferred and has unique features.

Community

- Views were shared that Cantley Primary has been a central 'heartbeat' to village life for over 150 years, which has fostered strong community ties, as well as contributing the employment and social wellbeing.
- According to consultation responses, there has been investment in the school by local business, which would be lost.
- The school supports intergenerational connections and village events (e.g. VE Day, Coronation), and that these opportunities would be lost, including the strong connection with the village hall.
- Closure is seen as a threat to the village's identity, cohesion, and long-term viability, as the village would be seen as less appealing to new families, becoming a retirement or commuter village. Respondents highlighted the importance of considering the wider impact, particularly the sustainability and long-term viability of small villages, emphasised that decisions cannot be made in isolation of wider consideration.
- Concern was raised that children attending school elsewhere may lose connection with their home village.

Transport

- According to responses that were received, Cantley is considered easily accessible for many families, including those without cars. Concerns were raised about increased travel time, dependency on cars, environmental impact, and safety risks (e.g. icy roads, lack of footpaths) if children attend Freethorpe.
- Some respondents felt that Freethorpe School already experiences traffic congestion and lacks safe drop-off zones.

Strategic Leadership and Planning

- There were suggestions that new housing developments in nearby areas (e.g. Acle, Brundall, Blofield) could increase demand for school places.
- The A47 dualling project will improve access to Cantley, making it more viable for a wider catchment.
- Suggestions include expanding Cantley's catchment area to boost numbers and that the Planned Admission Numbers across the area should have been better managed.
- Comment was made that the issues at Cantley School are not due to a lack of interest from families, but rather due to systemic problems within the leadership and its integration into the federation.
- Some respondents noted that the school has previously experienced low pupil numbers and viability concerns but was able to recover and

	<p>remain open. Suggesting that, with the right support or circumstances, a similar turnaround could be achieved again.</p> <p>Governance and Consultation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder feedback suggested there has been a perceived lack of transparency and short notice in the consultation and active promotion of Cantley School to increase pupil numbers. • Respondents highlighted that the unique strengths and selling points of the school were not effectively promoted, and that it appeared to receive less visibility and marketing compared to other schools within the federation. • Concern has been raised around the timing of the consultation in the academic year, during SATs examinations and not allowing time to support adequate transition opportunities for pupils. • Concerns about conflict of interest among governors and lack of dedicated governance for Cantley. • Respondents expressed criticism of past leadership and federation decisions, management and marketing. The negative media coverage and reputation of the school had not had a chance to recover, with a lasting impact on community perception. <p>Alternatives and Proposals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some participants shared suggestions to delay the amalgamation, invest in and promote Cantley rather than close it, suggesting there is sufficient funding to run the school for an additional year. • Calls were made for open days, community engagement, changing office arrangements, creating revenue streams and targeted advertising to attract more families. • The Cantley School Association (CSA)- Parent Teacher Association (PTA) has offered commitment to the school by offering hands-on support to help sustain provision and recover pupil numbers (full response from CSA in Appendix E). • Emphasis was made on Cantley's potential to serve as a model small school with a unique offer (e.g. nursery, outdoor space, STEM links via local industry, forest school potential). • Respondents highlighted that the presumption against the closure of rural schools needs to be considered.
Commentary	<p>It is clear from the informal consultation process that the school is very much valued by the local community, with strong opposition to the proposals from residents, families, pupils and stakeholder groups and we recognise the important role the school has played in the lives of many.</p> <p>Regrettably, despite this strength of feeling, the school is considered no longer viable due to a significant and ongoing decline in pupil numbers. This decline has been exacerbated by a surplus of school places in the local area and no applications for September 2025 reception year have been made. At the</p>

beginning of the informal consultation, there were 17 pupils on roll for September 2025. Given the very small number of pupils anticipated, the school would need to operate as a single-class structure. School leaders have expressed concerns that this model would not enable them to maintain a good breadth and quality of education. The CSA/PTA has played an important role in supporting the school, and their generous offers of time and energy are greatly appreciated. However, unfortunately, CSA/PTA funds cannot be used for day-to-day running costs such as salaries.

The new housing developments mentioned in the response will be accommodated by the space available in schools, in areas such as Acle, Lingwood, Blofield and Brundall. The new school at Blofield has been expanded in order to meet some of this need. This will also be offset by a significant decline in the birth rate which will impact the child yield from the number of homes expected from the Greater Norwich Local Plan. The assumptions of the Local Authority are made alongside regular review with the Local Planning Areas and assessment of housing modelling to continue to monitor and review the delivery timescales alongside the pupil population. It is expected there will not be any requirement for Cantley to meet this additional and future growth.

The school has relied on parental preference from children living outside of catchment. We note that a number of families living within the school's catchment area are already choosing to send their children to other schools. This reflects a broader trend that has made it increasingly difficult for the school to attract and retain pupils, even from its immediate community. While promotional activity is possible, it is unlikely to lead to a significant increase in admissions, given the ongoing demographic decline in the area. The issue unfortunately is not visibility, but of a reducing local school-age population.

Pupil movement has occurred rapidly in recent months, and we have worked closely with the school to consider carefully the most appropriate time to launch a consultation. Our aim has been to ensure a thorough and transparent process while also being mindful of minimising disruption to pupils and families. September is a natural and commonly accepted point of transition within the academic year and aligning any potential changes to this timescale has been a preferred approach.

Should the school remain open, the start of the next academic year would see it move to a single-class structure. This would involve children from Year 1 being taught alongside those in Year 6, with multiple key stages being delivered by a single teacher. Such an arrangement would significantly compromise the quality of education and make it increasingly difficult to meet the diverse academic and developmental needs of all pupils. With a reduced staff team, it would also become more difficult to meet the individual needs of children with SEND.

We understand that some respondents have requested time to explore ways to improve the school's viability. However, given the continued lack of demand from both within and beyond the catchment area, it is unlikely that pupil numbers will recover. Once a school receives no applications for reception places, it becomes less attractive to prospective families, particularly as new

	<p>pupils do not have an age-appropriate peer group. This creates a cycle that can be challenging to reverse, and current patterns suggest that the trend will continue in future years. Expanding the catchment area will not increase the numbers of children at the school due to the overall surplus of school places in the area.</p> <p>Freethorpe Community School, the receiving school has the capacity and flexibility within its class structures to accommodate all additional pupils, ensuring they are welcomed in all year groups.</p> <p>We acknowledge the presumption against the closure of small rural schools, (referred to in statutory processes as discontinuance), and have taken this fully into account throughout the considerations. We recognise that proposals of this nature require additional rigour, including careful assessment of alternative options, community impact, travel and long-term viability. These factors have been considered during the development of the proposal.</p> <p>During the informal consultation process, the timing of the proposed amalgamation was raised, with some concern expressed about the importance of supporting pupils fully and carefully through any potential transition, and the impact of the uncertainty and change on wellbeing. While a final decision has not yet been made, and recognising the pressures of the timescale, the school responded to the request and suggestion of parents by offering a range of informal, educationally valuable activities that children could choose to participate in. This was intended to provide continuity and reassurance, while ensuring pupils' experiences remained meaningful in the event that the amalgamation does not proceed</p> <p>Should the proposed amalgamation proceed, it would be appropriate to adjust the catchment areas to reflect the new school landscape. This would help ensure clarity for families, support future planning, and provide a fair and consistent approach to school admissions.</p> <p>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. 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.</p> <p>The consultation has been run in accordance with the DfE statutory guidance 'Making significant changes (prescribed alterations) to maintained schools', March 2025 and 'Opening and closing maintained schools', October 2024.</p> <p>The response rate is 11%.</p>
Resource implications	<p>The pupil numbers remain low at Cantley, no applications have been received for the school for the reception intake in 2025.</p>

	<p>From September, 17 pupils would be accommodated in one class across all year groups. It is anticipated that the arrangement will be unpopular with families and could lead to further children moving out of the school.</p> <p>As school funding is directly linked to pupil numbers, the continued decline in role presents a significant financial risk. If unaddressed, the school is likely to enter a budget deficit, making it increasingly challenging to sustain staffing levels and maintain the learning environment.</p>
Recommendation	<p>It is clear from the responses from local residents, parents and other stakeholders that there is a lot of support for Cantley Primary School. It holds a special place in people's hearts within the community.</p> <p>While we are grateful to families and community members for the thoughtful suggestions shared during the consultation, we have not identified any proposals that would substantially improve the school's long-term viability.</p> <p>Despite the passion and commitment shown, unfortunately no new evidence has emerged through the process that would indicate a sustainable future for the school.</p> <p>It is therefore recommended that the Executive Director of Children's Services proceed to the statutory public notice stage of the school organisation process.</p>

The proposed amalgamation of Cantley Primary School, School Lane, Cantley, Norfolk, NR13 3SA, and Freethorpe Community Primary School, School Road, Freethorpe, Norfolk, NR13 3NZ

and

Change of Catchment Area of Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School

From September 2025

I agree to proceed to Public Notice for the proposed amalgamation of Cantley Primary School, School Lane, Cantley, Norfolk, NR13 3SA, and Freethorpe Community Primary School, School Road, Freethorpe, Norfolk, NR13 3NZ. Cantley Primary School will be discontinued from 31 August 2025. Furthermore, to change of catchment area of Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School from September 2025.

Signed Sara Tough OBE



(Executive Director of Children's Services)

Dated 16.06.2025



Consultation on the Proposed Amalgamation of Cantley Primary School, School Lane, Cantley, Norfolk, NR13 3SA, and Freethorpe Community Primary School, School Road, Freethorpe, Norfolk, NR13 3NZ

and

Change of Catchment Area of Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School

From September 2025

We're inviting feedback from those who may be affected by these proposals.

The consultation is open from **Tuesday, 13 May 2025** until **12 noon on Monday 16 June 2025**

Introduction

Norfolk County Council and the Governing Body of the AIM Federation propose to formally amalgamate Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School. This means the two schools would come together to become one single school from September 2025, on the Freethorpe Primary School site. If this proposal is agreed, we will also adjust the catchment areas to reflect the change.

The proposed amalgamation also includes the Cantley nursery currently operated under Section 27 arrangements by the school's governing body. In the event that the amalgamation does not proceed, the governors intend to close the Cantley nursery due to sustained low demand at the end of the 2024/2025 academic year. The Freethorpe Nursery will remain as it is regardless of the outcome of the proposal.

The priority for the council and governors is to ensure that children in the community can have access to the very best education. With the steady decline in the number of children attending Cantley we are concerned about how the school can continue to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum, and remain financially viable, in its current form. Current modelling suggests there will be 17 children on roll at Cantley in September.

A final decision on the proposal has not been made and your feedback will play a vital role in shaping what happens next. We are committed to listening carefully to all perspectives before any final decisions are taken.

We understand that members of the community have become increasingly aware of the decline in pupil numbers, and we know that this has understandably caused anxiety and concern for many.

Families have rightly requested that clear and timely decisions are made to enable them to make the best choices for their children's future. We are committed to working with the community, so the best interests of the current and future children remain at the heart of any future decisions.

We understand that this proposal may be unsettling for the school community. We have not reached this proposal lightly, it follows careful joint consideration by the Governing Board of AIM Federation and Norfolk County Council around the long-term sustainability of education in the area, and an awareness of the significance that Cantley Primary School holds for so many people in the community.

This document is intended to explain the reasons behind the proposals, answer common questions in the FAQ, and outline how you can share your views.

Context

Cantley Primary School is a 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. 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. The school offers wrap-around-care with before and after-school clubs.

Freethorpe Community Primary School is a 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. 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.

Travelling by road, the schools are 3.2 miles apart via the B1140, both schools are part of AIM Federation, which are feeder schools for Acle Academy.

The AIM Federation is a group of seven schools that work closely together under one shared leadership team and governing body. This partnership enables the schools to work together, improving teaching and learning, sharing skilled staff and resources and reducing costs through joint services. While each school keeps its own unique identity and community feel, being part of the federation means it can offer children more opportunities, better support, and a more consistent, high-quality education.

What is being proposed?

There are two parts to this proposal:

- **A. Amalgamation:** Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School amalgamate from September 2025. All pupils attending Cantley Primary School will be offered a place at Freethorpe Community Primary School.

If the amalgamation proceeds, we further intend to:

- **B. Catchment change:** 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. (Further details and maps can be located on page 10)

What is an amalgamation?

A school amalgamation, sometimes called a 'merger', is when two schools join together to become one. This often happens when schools already have a close working relationship, such as through a federation. As part of the amalgamation, one of the school sites will no longer be used, and all pupils displaced by the amalgamation can be accommodated on the single remaining site.

What is a catchment area?

A catchment area is a specific geographical zone that gives children living in the area higher priority to get into their local school. Norfolk County Council sets up these areas so parents can expect a better chance for their children to get a place at the school. Even though catchment areas help decide who gets in priority for placements, families can still apply to any school, no matter where they live. Not all schools give a priority to children living within the catchment area it serves.

A. Amalgamation

Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School amalgamate from September 2025. All pupils attending Cantley Primary School will be offered a place at Freethorpe Community Primary School.

Why Is this being proposed?

We fully understand that an amalgamation is a significant step and not one we propose lightly.

This proposal has been carefully considered in response to:

- **Falling pupil numbers;** Schools across the county and country are experiencing an unprecedented fall in pupil numbers, due to low birth rates, and unfortunately the situation faced by Cantley Primary School is not unique. 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 surplus of places in the wider area. For the reception class of 2025, the school has received no applications.

Year	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
2011	12	17	10	18	13	9	9	88
2012	8	12	18	15	19	18	8	98
2013	10	6	13	19	10	19	16	93
2014	13	12	6	13	18	10	17	89
2015	11	11	13	6	13	16	12	82
2016	18	11	12	16	6	16	16	95
2017	12	17	11	11	18	7	16	92
2018	21	15	20	12	14	19	5	106
2019	7	15	11	17	8	14	17	89
2020	11	6	12	12	15	8	11	75
2021	6	11	6	12	12	11	8	66
2022	8	6	10	4	10	14	7	59
2023	7	6	5	9	2	10	14	53
2024	3	7	7	5	8	2	9	41

Table showing pupil numbers over the previous 14 years

- **Future demand:** There are no new housing developments planned for the Cantley Primary School area in the local authority's 10-year plan, so we do not predict future demand for school places.
- **Financial pressures:** All schools receive a lump sum as part of their annual funding budget from the Department for Education, which is added to, with funding based on the number of pupils on roll. The predicted pupil numbers for the next few years at Cantley Primary School are very low, 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. This can also impact investment in classroom resources, experiences, enrichment opportunities and staff development. Cantley Primary School is becoming financially unsustainable.
- **Education outcomes:** With fewer resources and reduced staffing, it becomes increasingly difficult to provide tailored support for pupils, particularly when teaching a wider range of age groups within class structure. The ability to run small intervention groups, differentiate effectively, or offer meaningful experiences is significantly limited, impacting the overall quality of learning and support across the school.
- **Peer groups:** Friendships are a key part of school life, having a broader peer group helps children form different kinds of relationships. In very small classes, children may find it harder to make or sustain friendships with children of a similar age.
- **Extracurricular opportunities:** With fewer pupils, it can be challenging to run clubs, teams, performances, or trips that rely on larger group participation.

Why is Freethorpe Community Primary School the proposed school for amalgamation?

- Freethorpe Community Primary School and Cantley Primary School are both part of the same federation, already sharing many similar characteristics such as school leadership, staff, ethos, values, and curriculum.
- The schools are close to each other at 3.2 miles. Eligible pupils will be able to access free Home to School Transport ([find out more about transport eligibility by following this link](#)).
- There are sufficient places to accommodate all pupils from Cantley nursery in Freethorpe Preschool and continue to serve the catchment area in the future.
- There are sufficient places to accommodate all pupils from Cantley Primary School in the Freethorpe Community Primary School building and continue to serve the catchment area in the future.
- A range of other factors were also considered, including building condition.

Bringing the schools together would enable:

- Sustainable pupil numbers as Freethorpe Community Primary School would be served by an increased catchment area
- Improved financial sustainability with greater pupil numbers
- Improved curriculum, extracurricular and social opportunities for all children

What else has been considered?

Amalgamation is being proposed as the most balanced and positive way forward. Amalgamation keeps pupils within the federation community, protects staff and offers pupil continuity of their education with shared curriculum and values. As part of the amalgamation process, some funding will move from Cantley Primary School to Freethorpe Community Primary School to help support pupils as they settle into their new school. Before reaching this proposal, the governing board have been monitoring the situation, meeting with the Local Authority on a number of occasions and considered these options:

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, preferring bigger schools.

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.

Extended school services: The building is not suitable to be used by multiple services co-located on site.

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.

Amalgamation Frequently asked questions

What would this mean for my child and our family?

We know this is a big change and want to be clear about what it would (and wouldn't) mean with some frequently asked questions:

Why is the amalgamation being proposed so late in the academic year?

The proposal is happening now as a result 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. Parents are understandably seeking clarity, and we want to avoid prolonged uncertainty that could lead to further pupils leaving the school.

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

My child has an Education Health and Care Plan, what will happen if the proposal goes ahead?

For children with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan, Norfolk County Council will undertake a review to determine the appropriate new placement in conjunction with the family. Every child with an EHC Plan has an allocated EHC Plan Co-ordinator who is responsible for this.

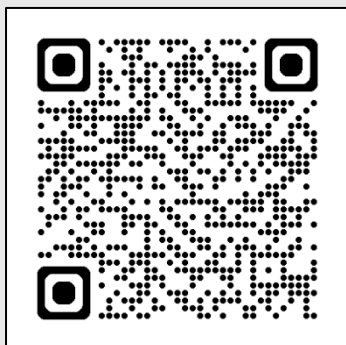
Will my child have to move school?

Yes, if they attend Cantley Primary School. If the proposal is agreed and goes ahead Cantley Primary School site will close on 31st August 2025. We know this is a significant change, and we are committed to making the transition as smooth and supportive as possible for every child and family. If your child attends Freethorpe Community Primary School, they will not be required to move.

What if my child attends Cantley Primary School, can I still choose where I would like my child to go?

Parents are entitled to make an application for any school at any time, this does not have to be Freethorpe Community Primary School. We will process an application in line with the published admissions timetable or inform parents when the application will be considered. The Norfolk County Council Admissions Service will be here to help you through the process, but you can:

- Apply online at www.norfolk.gov.uk/education-and-learning/schools/school-admissions/moving-schools. (or scan the QR Code)
- Complete an application form which you can collect from the school office or if you telephone 0344 800 8020, one can be sent to you in the post.



You are entitled to state up to four preferences on your application. If you do not express any preference, or if the Local Authority is unable to offer a place at a preferred school, a place will be offered at the nearest school to your home address with a place available.

Please note; If you have already applied for a change of schools, and your application has been acknowledged by the Admissions Team, there is no need to re-apply.

How will the move be managed for children?

If agreed, the school will plan transition activities carefully, including visits so children get to know the new site and staff. We want every child to feel confident and secure before and after the move.

Will school start/finish times or routines change?

Core routines are likely to stay the same. Any necessary changes will be clearly communicated in advance, with time to prepare.

What will happen to staff from Cantley school?

Staff are going to be consulted as part of the process.

Would the school name/uniform/logo change?

Freethorpe's name will remain unchanged. To minimise costs to parents at both schools, the proposal is to use Freethorpe's uniform and logo. Cantley pupils moving to Freethorpe will be offered two items of logoed uniform at no cost.

Would the culture of Cantley Primary School be lost?

We want to carry forward the values, traditions and community spirit of both schools into the Freethorpe Community Primary School site, maintaining our tight-knit community.

What will happen to Cantley Primary School building and playing field if the proposal goes ahead?

We recognise the community significance of the school building, and that it represents more than just the change of an educational facility. For many, the school is a place of shared memories, identity, local heritage and a community hub and this has been a strong consideration throughout our process.

The process for education land initially is to test whether it is required for any other education purpose. If not, it is offered to other Norfolk County Council departments for reuse against strategic aims. Whatever the outcome, if it is not education use, Secretary of State approval will be sought for disposal. Before being offered on the open market, this requires Norfolk County Council Cabinet approval.

How will pupils get to school?

We understand that travel is a key concern for families when schools are proposed for amalgamation. 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), as set out in the [School Transport Policy](#).

How will parking and traffic be managed at Freethorpe Community Primary School if more pupils will be attending?

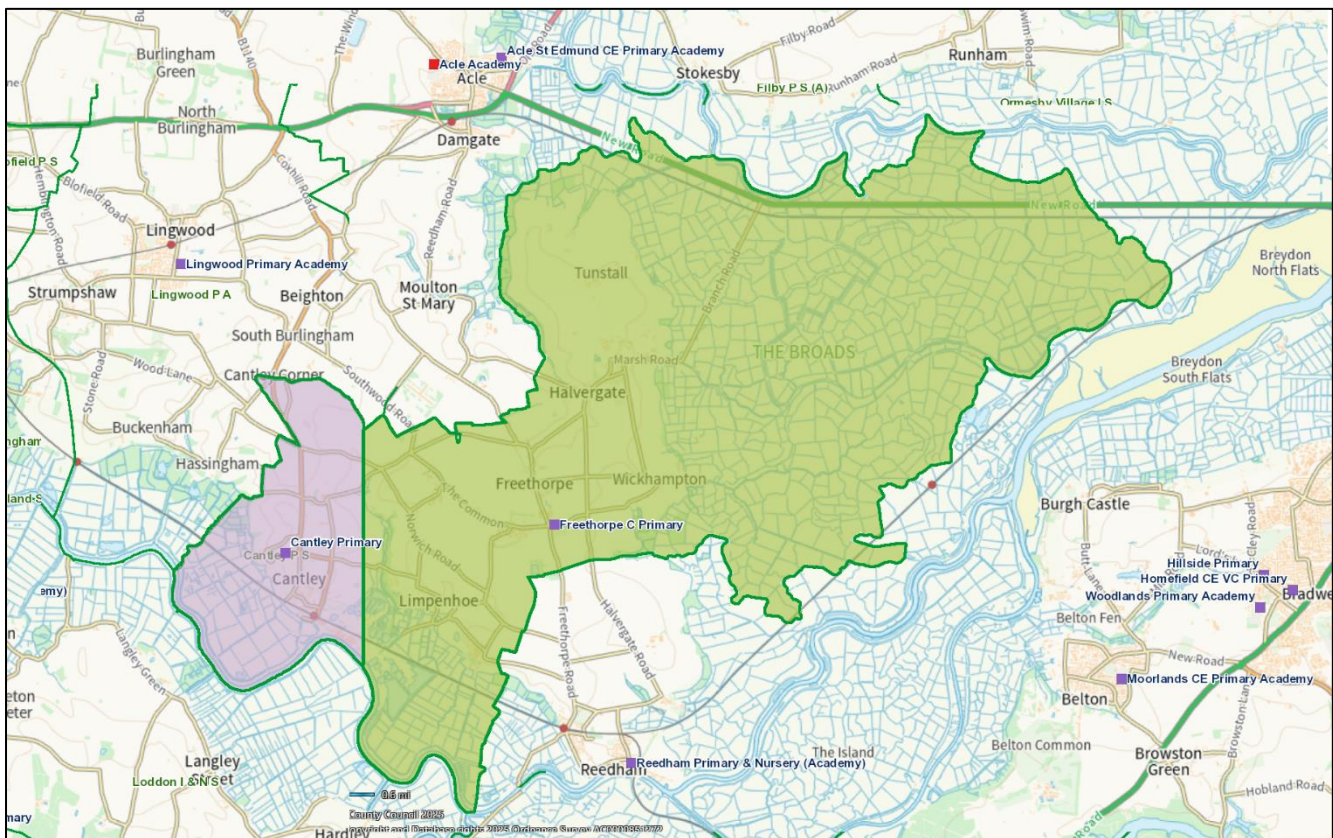
We do not anticipate any additional issues with traffic or parking at the Freethorpe Community Primary School. The site is considered able to accommodate the expected number of additional pupils without significant impact on local traffic or parking availability, we will keep this under review.

B. Catchment change

If the proposal to amalgamate Cantley Primary School proceeds, this means that current catchment area for Freethorpe Community Primary School will need to change to reflect the merger.

We don't usually make changes to catchment areas at this point in the academic year. However, in this case, Admission authorities can suggest changes if there has been a significant change in the circumstances and they think the alterations are needed. This proposal must be sent to the Schools Adjudicator for approval of variations on admissions.

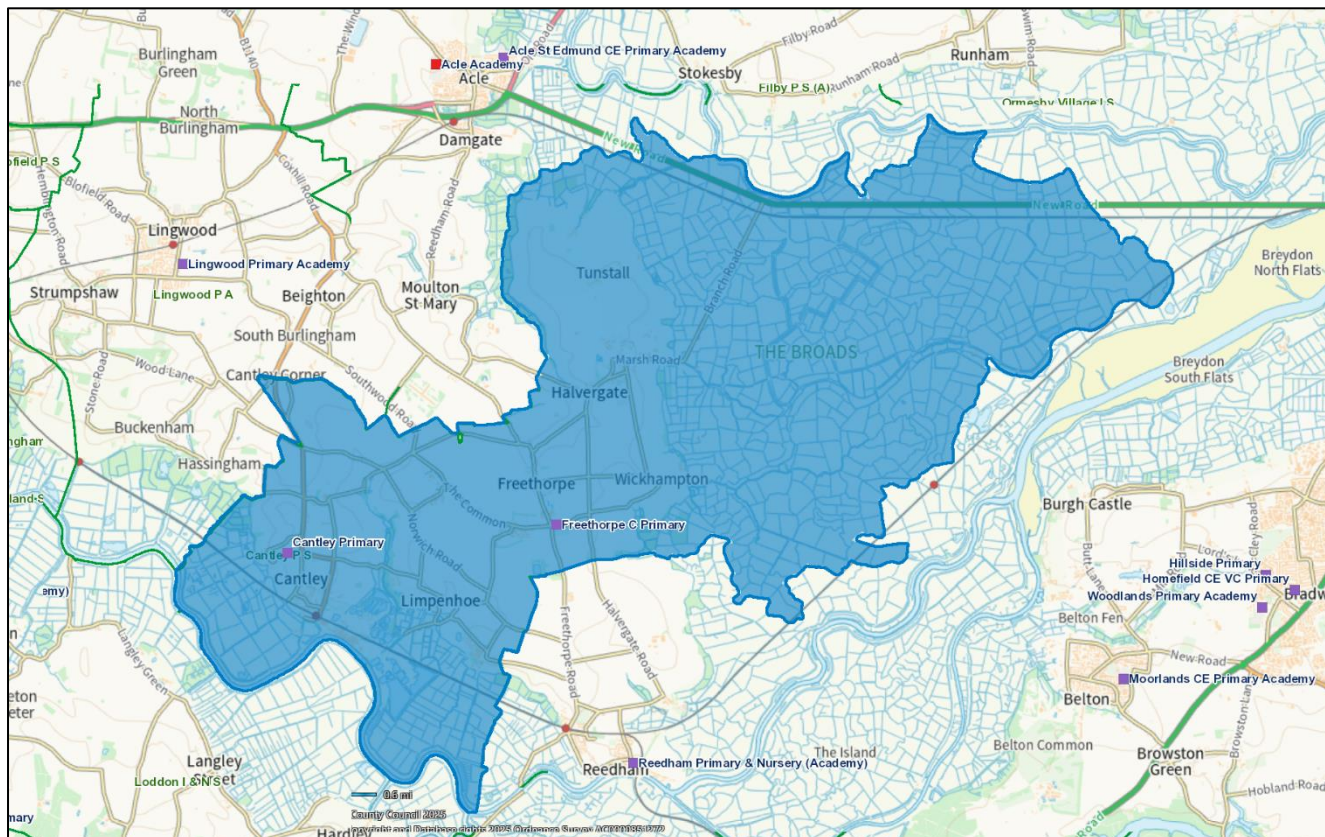
Current catchment areas



 *Purple = Cantley Primary School*

 *Green = Freethorpe Community Primary School*

Proposed new merged catchment area



Blue= Proposed catchment area for Freethorpe Community Primary School from September 2025

If the proposal to amalgamate Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School does not go ahead, changes to the catchment area will also not proceed.

How can you learn more about these proposals and share your views?

We want to hear from you. This consultation is open from Tuesday 13 May 2025 until 12 noon on Monday 16 June 2025. You can give your feedback by:



- Talking to us: There will be drop-in sessions for parents/carers and other interested members of the community. These events are open to everyone and not specific to any one school:

2.15 – 3.15pm, Monday 19 May 2025 at Cantley Primary School

And

2.15 – 3.15pm, Tuesday 20 May 2025 at Freethorpe Community Primary School.

- Completing the online consultation form by following this link or scanning the QR code:
<https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/cantleyfreethorpecatchment>
- Emailing your views to: schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk
- Submitting written comments to the school office using the form below

What happens next?

After the consultation closes, all feedback will be carefully reviewed and summarised and a decision will be made whether to proceed with the amalgamation of Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School and the catchment merger of Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School.

If we decide to go ahead, by law we have to publish a statutory notice to amalgamate Cantley Primary School and change the catchment areas. People would then have four weeks to write to Norfolk County Council either supporting or opposing the proposal. The final decision is made by the Executive Director of Children's Services, Norfolk County Council as the Local Authority Decision-Maker.

It is anticipated the final decision on amalgamation will be known before the end of the academic year. If agreed following a determination, the decision to change the catchment areas will be referred to the Department of Education School's Adjudicator to review.

If at the end of the consultation process, the proposal does not go forward, then the schools and the catchment areas would remain as they are.

We will keep pupils and families updated throughout the process via Pupil Asset.

Consultation on the Proposed Amalgamation of Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School

and

Change of catchment area of Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School

What you think of the proposals? Please provide answer to the two areas of the proposal

A. How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to amalgamate Cantley Primary School with Freethorpe Community Primary School from September 2025?

Please tick one box

☐

Strongly Agree

☐

Agree

☐

Neither agree or disagree

☐

Disagree

☐

Strongly Disagree

☐

Don't know

B. How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to change of catchment area of Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School from September 2025?

Please tick one box.

☐

Strongly Agree

☐

Agree

☐

Neither agree or disagree

☐

Disagree

☐

Strongly Disagree

☐

Don't know

Please give your main reasons for your answers.

Are there any other comments or suggestions you would like to make to help us with this decision and in planning for the future provision of the children?

Please write in the box below.

We would like to hear from many different people as your views help us to decide whether or not we make these changes.

We will process your personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations, which means that we will not give your personal data to any third parties.

Your comments will be anonymous - your name or anything that could identify you will not be included in any report. However, we cannot guarantee that this information will be withheld if it is requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

Please tell us who you are:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pupil | <input type="checkbox"/> School governor |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parent / Guardian | <input type="checkbox"/> Local resident |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Member of the Parent Teacher Association | <input type="checkbox"/> Local business |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Member of staff | <input type="checkbox"/> Local sports group |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Local community group |

Other (please specify): _____

Which school are you linked to? _____

What is your postcode? _____

The earliest this change could take place would be September 2025.

You can tell us your views by returning your completed form to the school office.

Alternatively, you can:



- Talk to us: There will be drop-in sessions for parents/carers and other interested members of the community. These events are open to everyone and not specific to any one school:

2.15 – 3.15pm, Monday 19 May 2025 at Cantley Primary School

And

2.15 – 3.15pm, Tuesday 20 May 2025 at Freethorpe Community Primary School

- Complete the online consultation form by following this link or scanning the QR code:
<https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/cantleyfreethorpecatchment>
- Email your views to: schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk

This consultation ends on Monday 16 June 2025 at 12 noon

Appendix B Stakeholder List (49)

Acle Academy
AIM Federation
DNEAT
The Wensum Trust
Acle St Edmund C of E Primary Academy
St Benets MAT
Fairhaven CE VA Primary School
The Neatishead, Salhouse and Fleggburgh C of E VC School Federation
Fleggburgh C of E Primary School
Unity Schools Partnership
Lingwood Primary Academy
Reedham Primary and Nursery
Consortium MAT
Councillor Andrew Proctor
Councillor Lana Hemsall
Broadland District Council
Cantley Parish Council
Councillor Jan Davis
Councillor Eleanor Laming
Sara Tough- Executive Director Children's Services
Freethorpe Parish Council
Jerome Mayhew MP
Councillor Grant Nurden
Thurton and Ashby St Mary Pre School
Thurton Nursery
Loddon Nursery School
Snowys Nursery and Pre school
Loddon Infant and Nursery
Rockland St Mary Primary pre school
Blofield Day Nursery
Surlingham Community Primary School
Acle Pre School
Thurlton Pre school
Moorlands Primary Academy
National Education Union Norfolk
NEU joint Secretary
Diocesan Director of Education
Diocese of Ely
Diocese of East Anglia
Educate Norfolk – Primary
Educate Norfolk – Secondary
Unison
NAHT
NASUWT,
NEU (ATL section)
Voice Community Trade Union
GMB
ASCL
Suffolk CC (sch org)

Appendix C- Online Survey responses- CitizenSpace (platform generated).

Please note these figures do not include responses received via other methods such as email and hand delivered response forms.

Consultation on the Proposed Amalgamation and change of catchment area of Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School

<https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/cantleyfreethorpecatchment>

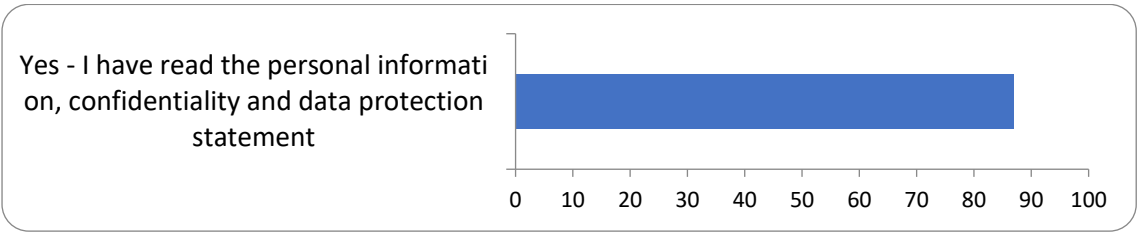
This report was created on Monday 16 June 2025 at 13:53

Responses to this survey: **87**

1: Please tick to confirm that you have read the Personal information, confidentiality and data protection statement above.

Data protection agreement

There were 87 responses to this part of the question.



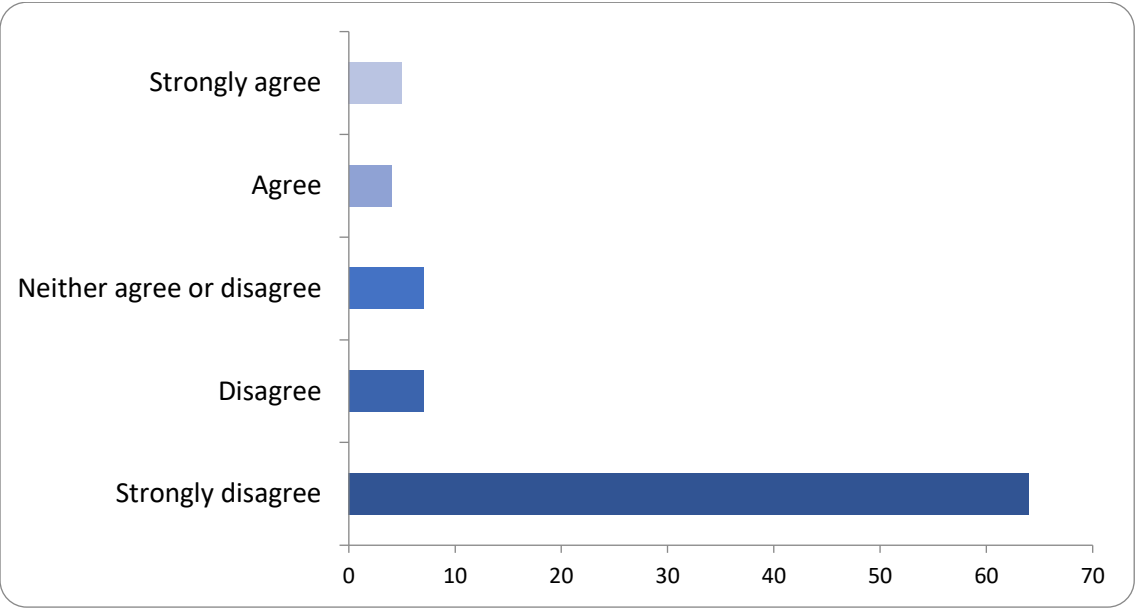
Option	Total	Percent
Yes - I have read the personal information, confidentiality and data protection statement	87	100.00%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

2: How far do you agree or disagree with our proposal to amalgamate Cantley Primary School with Freethorpe Community Primary School from September 2025?

Please select only one item.

agree disagree

There were 87 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	5	5.75%
Agree	4	4.60%
Neither agree or disagree	7	8.05%

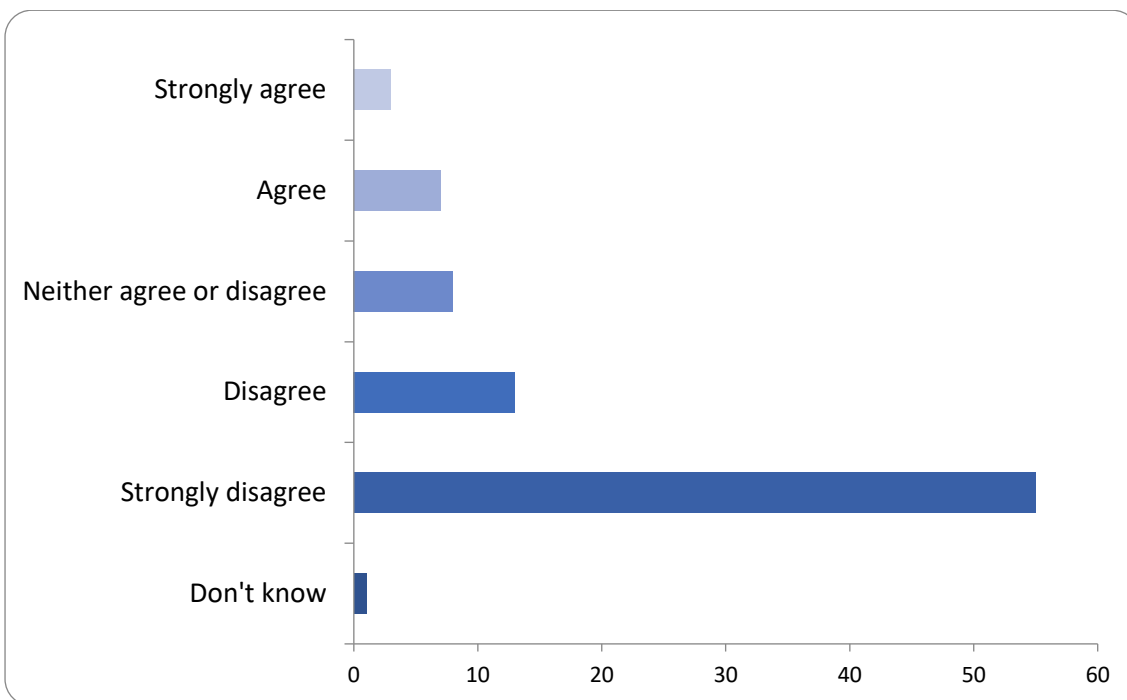
Disagree	7	8.05%
Strongly disagree	64	73.56%
Don't know	0	0.00%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

3: How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to change the catchment area of Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School?

Please select only one item

agree disagree

There were 87 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	3	3.45%
Agree	7	8.05%
Neither agree or disagree	8	9.20%
Disagree	13	14.94%
Strongly disagree	55	63.22%
Don't know	1	1.15%
Not Answered	0	0.00%

4: Please give the main reasons for your answers.

Please write in the box below:

tell us why

There were 81 responses to this part of the question.

5: Are there any other comments or suggestions you would like to make to help us with this decision and in planning for the future provision of the children. Please write in the box below.

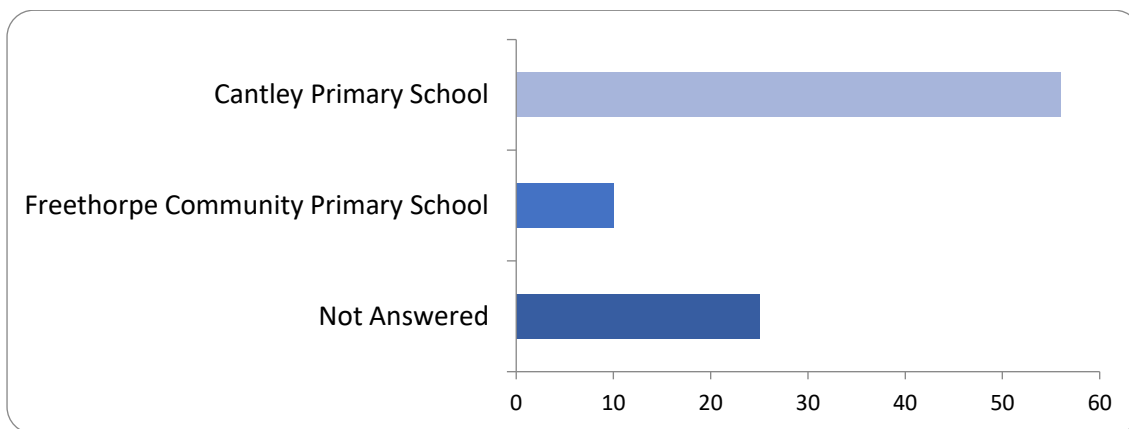
Please write in below:

There were 49 responses to this part of the question.

6: Please tell us the school you are linked to, if applicable.

which school

There were 62 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Cantley Primary School	56	64.37%
Freethorpe Community Primary School	10	11.49%
Not Answered	25	28.74%

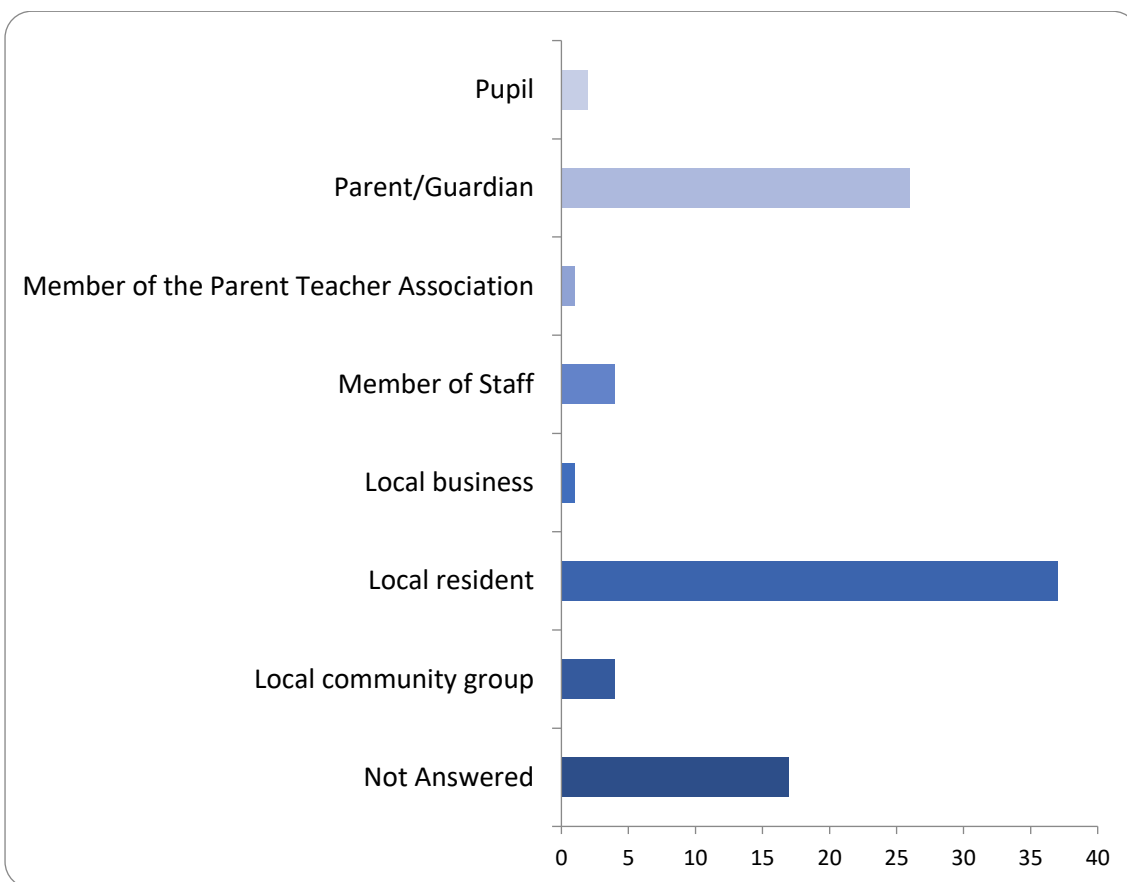
which school

There were 5 responses to this part of the question.

7: Please tell us who you are, (tick all that apply):

who are you

There were 70 responses to this part of the question.



Option	Total	Percent
Pupil	2	2.30%
Parent/Guardian	26	29.89%
Member of the Parent Teacher Association	1	1.15%
Member of Staff	4	4.60%
School Governor	0	0.00%
Local business	1	1.15%
Local resident	37	42.53%
Local sports group	0	0.00%

Local community group	4	4.60%
Not Answered	17	19.54%

Other, please specify

There were 22 responses to this part of the question.

8: What is your postcode?

postcode

There were 84 responses to this part of the question.

Consultation comments

Please note, names have been redacted from the comments.

Online survey responses:

Amalgamation	Catchment	Please give the main reasons for your answers.	Are there any other comments or suggestions
Strongly agree	Agree	Continuing with the untenable current situation would serve to disadvantage the whole federation. It is essential for the group to seek the most efficient and cost effective ways to deliver schooling to as many local children as possible. The suggested amalgamation is a sensible decision. I support this proposal.	
Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Too many schools in such a small area. With Cantley numbers in decline, it makes sense to amalgamate the two schools.	
Agree	Agree	The intake numbers are too low to warrant running two schools.	
Agree	Agree	I do feel desperately sad at the thought of losing Cantley school which has been such a vibrant part of our community for the 30 years I have lived in the village but do understand that with rapidly declining pupil numbers it has become financially unviable. It has been such a joy seeing the children & staff at events in The Village Hall & Church - they will be missed.	<p>I know you will do your very best to ensure our children will receive a good “all round” education & the transition will be handled as sensitively as possible for all concerned.</p> <p>I would like to think that NCC will very carefully consider any future use for the school building & land, which hold such a significant place in the memories of every generation in Cantley.</p>
Agree	Agree	My daughter went to the preschool and it was a lovely placement however regular staff changes and the low numbers began to concern me so she has now left to go to a bigger preschool. I know small settings are perfect for some children but not for all. If the proposal goes ahead I hope for all	The school buildings are nice and given the size I wonder if a special educational needs provision could be delivered at the cantley school site in the future. Most SEN provision thrives on offering small class sizes so this seems an ideal way to address the high demand for SEN places. I don't believe there's much

		future students the nurturing aspects of the provision will continue to be in place in the new setup. We were regularly told there would be a forest school provision being opened and delivered and it's unfortunate that did not happen.	difference in size compared to the SEN school in Lingwood.
Strongly agree	Don't know		The staff at cantley school haven't worked with parents in the past to keep children at the school being very rigid in there approach
Strongly agree	Agree	With a significant over supply of school places due to a large drop in the birth-rate it is inevitable some schools will need to close. Whilst this is sad it is an inevitable consequence of the current situation.	
Strongly agree	Strongly agree	<p>I think it is essential that young families have close access to schools and are able to benefit from the early reassurance of belonging to a community. Identity is known to be formed in the first seven years and built on through our young lives when we feel confident among people who know us and guide us. Young families, especially those who work, should not need to deal with the added pressure of driving children on busy, dangerous roads to drop children off. The number of school age children will undoubtedly fluctuate but these schools can serve secondary purposes in their locality.</p> <p>Access to a local school is a gift we ought to be able provide. Schools shape our outlook on life and our ability to perform and interact with others. These small institutions perform a vital role. It should be policy to help people with children join these schools. There is a need for low cost housing and regulated rents in villages. Building strong communities are the foundation of confident, cohesive society. We need this.</p>	I believe small schools are able to support parents and integrate carers better since they will recognise the needs of the household arrangements. Our young populations show high levels of stress and alienation which arise from very real current stressors. Our local government could be creative in using these nurturing spaces to encourage confidence building and possible extend access to struggling families who are not coping with school attendance. A small school can maybe offer opportunities for early years practitioners in training,

Agree	Agree	<p>We are saddened to see the loss of a village school in Cantley and the impact this has on the wider community. But the academy and the local education authority have assessed the situation and applied their professional judgment to the viability of the options. We understand that the numbers for Cantley are too small to be practical and viable. We also understand that there is sufficient capacity for children to be accommodated at other schools including Freethorpe.</p> <p>There are obviously pros and cons for the children. Disadvantages are more travel, larger classes and less one-to-one attention. Advantages are year group-based classes, and opportunities from larger school activities.</p>	<p>We would like to be assured that there are no redundancies as a result of this amalgamation, and that there are sufficient support staff to care for extra children at their new school.</p>
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Amalgamation	Catchment	Please give the main reasons for your answers.	Are there any other comments or suggestions
Neither agree or disagree	Neither agree or disagree	<p>I have 2 concerns, with the class numbers at Freethorpe at the moment I don't understand how we can take more pupils? The class numbers seem large as it is and I can't see how we can add to that, I would worry how large class numbers would effect my child's education, also with extra pupils attending parking is already not the best and it will then add to this problem.</p>	
Neither agree or disagree	Neither agree or disagree	<p>It is hard to give an answer on this. My concern is class sizes, my daughter's class was oversubscribed this year (32 children) so it is hard to even understand how you are going to fit any further children into that class. The split classes are currently quite unsettling for my daughter as it is; we are approaching the month where she finds out if</p>	

		she has been put with her friends or not. So I can imagine adding further children into that mix will complicate things even further. I am not in a position to comment on this until I know what your plans are with split classes next year.	
Neither agree or disagree	Neither agree or disagree	None applicable, only person impact if the school closes over future use of the site	No
Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	I can see the reasons behind this needing to be considered but without any reassurance over class sizes / the practicalities around it, it is hard to say. If you can guarantee no disruption or disadvantage to the teaching of the pupils / access to teaching time etc then I'd be happier. Some class sizes already seem to be bursting at the seams so would hope additional students coming in would mean classes child be split / sized appropriately still? My main question would be if Freethorpe could have taken the extra children on if they had chosen Freethorpe instead of Cantley originally?	Changing the catchment area might mean families within walking distance of Freethorpe school miss out which would be such a shame, and a key reason why a lot of families chose to live in the village.
Neither agree or disagree	Disagree	Cantley is a small village that needs a school in the village for mums and dad's who don't drive so they can still get there children to school on time and be able to be part off there children educations and see there children work and not have to worry how they will get the children to school or that mums and dad will miss out on seeing important advent there children are part off	My daughter leaves the school this year to start high school and she was very nervous about it but the school has been putting in the work to help reassure her for when she leaves my niece also goes to this school and it doing very well there they helped her to get her diagnosed with adhd and help with supporting her mum and dad with all the support they need to get her in to school happy and ready to learn closing the school will be a shame as so many children can't handle big school and need the small school to feel safe and happy my daughter been there since nursery to year 6 it will be very sad to see the school that made my daughter believe in her self with her learning and dealing with her fears and struggles over the years close me and my step dad picked this school over

			lingwood we used to travel from hemblington to cantley for the nursery and then moved to Beighton and was offered transport to lingwood school but because cantley was a much better school and my daughter loved it we made it work at getting her to school everyday on time
Neither agree or disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Freethorpe is already a relatively larger school. Wouldn't it be preferable to merge Cantley with Reedham, which is small. That way Reedham wouldn't be in danger of low numbers in the future	See above comment
Neither agree or disagree	Neither agree or disagree	The attendance figures are compelling. But I endorse the Parish Council's view that closure of the Cantley site would have a negative future effect on the village and its children - particularly detracting from their sense of being rooted in their local community. As an example I would cite the school's use of the parish church - e.g. on Armistice Day, remembering the fallen of the parish.	

Amalgamation	Catchment	Please give the main reasons for your answers.	Are there any other comments or suggestions
Disagree	Disagree	Ny daughter is very settled at cantley all her family attended school here	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	I know many parents and children using Cantly school and they travel by car to use this. It's a vital part of the community.	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	We live in south burlingham a 4 minute drive from Cantley school and had planned to send our son there to the nursery and then to primary school. My son is not a confident child and I feel in a larger school he will become overwhelmed and would not see his full potential	Take into consideration those that live just outside of Cantley who will send their children to the school and those children who would not thrive in larger settings but smaller ones like Cantley. Schools like this are so important to give the opportunity to those types of children and support the local community
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Freethorpe school is oversubscribed from children outside the village. Why should Freethorpe school	Invest in Cantley school instead of closing it. Make it more efficient.

		have to be the school to amalgamate with, why not Reedham, Lingwood? Roads in Freethorpe are busy enough with school traffic, this will only add to it.	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>Local schools are incredibly important to young children and their families. They help build community and are a nurturing environment for children close to home. At a time when new housing is being built at such a fast rate, it beggars belief that local services are being considered for closure, when more are in fact needed desperately.</p> <p>In rural settings where public transport is scarce, children use the experience of walking or cycling to school to build important life skills. Being forced to travel by car or bus to school is far from ideal for very young children. This has an environmental impact and places extra strain on parents to commute their children miles away. Whilst provisions will no doubt be made for the children to be transported to and from Freethorpe school, what about parents' attendance for events such as school plays, sports day and parents' evening?</p>	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Closing schools is not the answer to the current issue. Keeping more schools open and increasing funding to them is how the success of primary education moves forward.	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>I believe the two schools should remain separate and keep the classes smaller providing a better education for the children, Rather than make the school bigger , the catchment area bigger, the classroom sizes bigger resulting in a poorer education for the children.</p> <p>These early years set the foundation for their future years at school so it's very important to ensure that</p>	Consider the children's educational needs rather than cost cutting

		each infant child gets the best start, and I don't believe that comes from expansion	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	We need to keep smaller schools and nurseries open now more grandparents have to work instead of provide free childcare.	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree		
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	The area needs more schools not less and Cantley school serves the village and surrounds extremely well. It's a nurturing school with lots of outdoor space and opportunities for children to really thrive as individuals. Promote the school and what it has to offer rather than close it.	
Strongly disagree	Disagree	We have fought for Cantley Primary School twice before and kept it open. Our children all went to the school, we were very involved with the school and my husband was on the governors. The children thrived in the small school and the individual attention. I would not have liked to have my 4 or 5 year olds being put on a bus to another village. The school has been part of village life for over 100 years and I would hate to lose that now. Being able to walk your children to school and be involved should be every parents wish for their children	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	My children attended cantley school as part of a vibrant village. If we were to have any further children we would have to move from the village should these proposals go ahead as my wife doesn't drive and would not realistically be able to get the children to Freethorpe. The paths are unlit and muddy in winter and this would also require walking along unsafe narrow roads with no footpaths. Having a school is vital to the prosperity of a vibrant village and losing it will mean that the families can	No safe walking route to Freethorpe Loss of community asset Families will no longer feel welcome in the village and be able to stay Look to how successful the school has been in the past and put a plan in place to return to that level

		not stay here any longer leading to an inevitable decline and lack of community in the village. My children (now at secondary school) Had a wonderful experience at the school and despite some recent difficulties I feel that the school should continue and regain some of its high standards	
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Cantley School Nursery has increased its numbers, and the school has previously been at the heart of the community. Thousands of pounds have been spent on the recent steps leading up to the playing field, if Cantley disappears this has been a total waste of taxpayers money. Cantley School has been dragged down by poor leadership mismanagement and scandals of SATs cheating. Moving to the Coastal Federation was a shocking move which ultimately ripped the heart out of the village and much loved school community. It was used as a pawn to feather the nests of self serving individuals and to give money to a Federation that ultimately had no interest in its success. With more foresight, better management, and a goal of achieving a small school individuality that attracts out of catchment pupils, Cantley School can survive. The school needs to embrace the community more and nurture its family environment and re-establish its unique selling points. As a former member of staff and parent, I support the maintaining of Cantley School. The school should learn from Reedham School, which has made huge steps to secure its previously precarious position. It took a former dedicated Head and a group of hardworking governors to turn around its fortunes. Cantley could and SHOULD do the same.	See above,

Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>Other mergers in the county have affected the quality of education severely, especially in more remote areas such as Cantley. There is no "one size fits all" when it comes to education and schools!</p> <p>The school has been appointed a new head teacher who has turned it around, and needs more time to prove this.</p>	
Disagree	Disagree		
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	The school is an important part of the local community. The federation and LA should promote and invest in the school rather than closing it.	
Strongly disagree	Neither agree or disagree	<p>Small schools are precious for community stability. Not all children thrive in a larger environment and like the nurture of a small school.</p> <p>This will have an impact on so many people. We need to work to save our small schools.</p>	<p>We are too quick to turn the other way and not look for every possible solution. People need to hear positive feedback about our schools not see that we will walk away at the first problem. The net of catchment is far wider than just Cantley. There is a multi-million pound bypass being constructed which will make accessibility even easier. Let's look wider and sell our nurturing countryside embedded site.</p>
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>You're attempting to get rid of a small village school which is in the heart of the community.</p> <p>Where children are happy and settled and have a dedicated head teacher to get it to where it needs to be.</p>	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>Small schools provide distinctive educational experiences, often fostering close-knit communities and individualised learning environments.</p> <p>Cantley Primary are well-positioned to meet a broad range of pupil needs, including those requiring support for social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH), as well as diverse learning needs.</p>	<p>Although there are no proposed building developments at Cantley over the next decade, more than half of the current pupil cohort comes from outside the designated catchment area, drawn by the school's distinct offerings. With targeted and proactive marketing that highlights its strengths, the school could attract increased interest from prospective families.</p> <p>In comparison to other schools within the federation,</p>

		<p>The school will benefit from improved accessibility due to the A47 dualling project, which is scheduled for completion in 2026.</p> <p>Its current catchment area extends beyond the immediate village, serving a wider community.</p> <p>The village of Cantley has secured funding for a new village hall. This funding was contingent on the continued use of the facility by Cantley Primary School.</p> <p>According to publicly available information on the federation's website, Cantley currently has no dedicated school governors. There has been no formal consultation with families or staff specific to Cantley School. Additionally, one of the key governors involved in the decision-making process also serves as a governor at Freethorpe, which may present a perceived conflict of interest in relation to the proposed amalgamation.</p>	<p>Cantley has received significantly less attention in terms of marketing and promotional efforts. For example, there has been only one social media post promoting Reception intake, which featured images not taken on the Cantley site. By contrast, other schools in the federation have employed virtual tours, short promotional videos, and regularly updated websites showcasing current pupils—some of which have garnered over 3,000 views.</p> <p>The Head of School, appointed in September 2024, demonstrated clear passion and vision, working diligently to improve the site in preparation for future marketing events. These events, however, were ultimately postponed. In collaboration with the parent association, the Head also initiated fundraising efforts to develop a forest school area—an increasingly popular feature among families. Unfortunately, the Head of School began maternity leave in October 2024, and since then, progress has stalled. There has been limited support from the federation and frequent changes in interim leadership, leading to a noticeable decline in stability. This lack of continuity contributed to a loss of confidence among families and prompted several to move their children to other local schools.</p> <p>Meanwhile, significant investment has been made at Freethorpe Primary School, particularly in enhancing its Early Years provision. To some families, this may have signalled a longer-term plan by the federation to deprioritise or potentially close the Cantley site.</p>
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>Cantley is the only school that can provide my son and others who thrive in smaller settings to give them a chance in a mainstream educational setting. It is difficult to find space in specialist resource</p>	

		<p>bases in the area and cantley school is the only one who can provide a setting for mine (and others) children to have that chance. The nearest SRB is in north walsham with only 3 spaces this year and a very specific requirements to be selected. My son would have to take a taxi for 40 minutes to attend a setting that will provide for his needs where as cantley met this to a degree. The larger class sizes and bigger school will cause dysregulation to my son and I fear that he will miss out on an education because the new environment will not be suited to his needs.</p>	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>Having a school in the village is beneficial to the education of the children. Ferrying young children to another village is not positive for them or the environment. Freethorpe school is already congested and dangerous at start and end of school with insufficient safe parking. Children from Cantley arriving in cars will have no safe option for drop off and collection.</p>	Both villages are increasing in size so this is a misguided short term proposal which will cause problems in the future.
Strongly disagree	Disagree	<p>This school has been the heart of this community for 150 years and it is a great resource for learning, just last week at cantley village hall we hosted a VE Day celebration that was attended by pupils from the school were they meet with Veterans and older members of the parish, they walked from the school to the village hall . And that's not the first time , the kings Coronation, D Day celebrations the list goes on, all attended by the pupils from the school they couldn't do that from freethorpe.</p> <p>Children at cantley school come from the wider community already so it's nonsense to say that no new house will be built in the area for at least 10 year.</p>	

		The village needs this school and this school needs the village.	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Cantley needs a school in the village. It's children need somewhere local and joining to other schools will make the commute in the winter a nightmare, especially when the roads are too icy or snowy. The children flourish at Cantley Primary. The village thrives with its events.	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>Cantley school is currently the heart of the village community, This means a lot of the young parents see and get to know other people like them in the village. Without this school, parents wouldn't meet each other and so mutual support would be a lot less prevalent in the village - children just getting on a bus rather than their being school events and parents chatting before and after school.</p> <p>Freethorpe always has been a much worse school as it's larger and impersonal.</p>	Consider the current plans to massively expand the village hall - could this huge amount of money be used to save the school which is more important than replacing the existing perfectly fine village hall building with another one?
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Cantley school has been an outstanding school for a great many years. The appointment of incompetent Head Teachers and lacklustre Governors has seen the School suffer as a result. It's also clear that there has been a deliberate series of inactions by Management and Governors that have caused the closure of the School to look more attractive. Those people know who they are, as do many people associated with the School.	Appoint more decisive and effective Teaching and Governing people. Take better control of those disruptive pupils, thus causing less parents to take their children away.
Disagree	Disagree	The region is growing in population and as new housing developments are approved close to Cantley it is important for local children to have school availability without overcrowded classes. It is better to promote Cantley moreso and maybe increase its catchment area rather than close it.	

Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	The school is a local community asset which has gone through many changes and can still thrive again with the correct leadership. The nursery is also a strong asset to the local area.	The new head needs time to promote new ideas - the school was thriving just a few years ago and people travelled to the area. I believe this school is the right setting for children that need extra support and space rather than just being a number in a busy full school.
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	I live in cantley village, we moved here from a large city school for our daughter to have more of a intimate setting. We're able to bike to our school daily, with a change of school this wouldn't now be possible. I think being able to take my daughter to school bonding on our bike ride as a privilege. It's completely changing the routine of 17 families lives.	Could you change the school so it accommodates up to year 4. Could you ask neighbouring villages if any of their children would want to move to cantley, if the catchment areas were changed. With the expansion of Blofield, surrounding areas in the upcoming future would then determine more spaces needed for children.
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	I strongly disagree with the decision to combine schools I do however somewhat agree with the expanding of the catchment area if this was done in favour of cantley school. Could the catchment area be expanded bring more numbers to the school in the new academic year? With neighbouring villages expanding , Lingwood, blofield, brundall Could this not help increase the numbers in the near future? And reduce pressure on nearby villages by increasing cantley numbers and expanding the catchment area Could the school leaving age be reduced to year 4 ? The number of staff and children be reduced open up the catchment area and see if the numbers increase due to expansion in the nearby villages .	As above strongly disagree with the closure of cantley school the Lost to the community would be irreversible and a disappointment to many residents including myself and my family. I think we all agree that in life the closure of any school let alone such a pivotal part of this already small community ,cantley, would be a heartbreaking, generational lost.

Disagree	Disagree		
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't see why Cantley should close, it is ideal for local children and has been chosen by so many parents because it is a small school and is local. If parents had wanted a bigger school then they would have chosen Freethorpe in the first place. It also adds to travel time for both pupils and parents. It has come as quite a shock to parents (and staff?) and seems to have been hurried through at the last minute. Why haven't those that are now making these decisions (i.e. the Federation Group, not the staff) done more about increasing numbers of pupils? There has been little, if any, marketing that I can see to encourage parents to choose Cantley - and with all the new builds there must be a huge explosion of children wanting a primary school place.	I think there should be a longer period of Consultation and a greater effort made to increase pupil numbers. I read in today's EDP about "the amalgamation"... sounds a done deal to me. Where did they dig up that awful old photo - the school is made to look, and portrayed as, long past its sell by date. Not fair on pupils or staff. There has been no "consultation" and no marketing. They are ticking boxes to make it sound good! We live in Brundall, so many new houses being built, has any effort been made to contact parents of primary pupils? Or nursery? The local schools at Brundall and Blofield are either full or filling up fast. On Facebook pages there are often enquiries as to good local schools, and less busy schools. Why hasn't the federation looked at and tapped into this resource? I usually recommend Cantley, and others have too.
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Fabulous school I've worked in the nursery for 10 years and my 4 children attended the school, our village needs it so crazy considering so many houses are being built, the community can't take the loss , we always had children attending the school from neighbouring villages and even as far as Great Yarmouth.	So many houses being built in Brundall I can't believe the schools can accommodate the extra demand.
Disagree	Disagree	I am a parent at freethorpe primary school. Whilst I like to welcome change and opportunities, my biggest concern is the size of the year group, specifically the current year 2 class (year 3 from September 2025) which is already a large year group. The year group is already split which causes anxiety for parents and children who are worried about being split from friends. Adding additional children to this really worries me,	I understand that this is selfish and that other children have already been split from friendship groups in the class move last year, however as an already standing concern of mine and my child, it really worries me that additional children in the year group could cause further anxiety when classrooms are moved in September. I find it difficult enough to get my child to school in the morning anyway, if my child were to be split from an

		<p>my child can be very anxious at change and whilst would welcome a new teacher/ classroom, a Change in peers is already a devastating thought for her.</p> <p>My concern is how this will be managed, when the year group is already split.</p> <p>I don't anticipate difficulty with integration of new students but the disruption that we already face of being moved from a friendship group which has been established for 3 years now is a real concern anyway, prior to additional children joining the year group.</p>	<p>established peer group, I am really concerned for her wellbeing.</p>
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>Removing a vital village school from their community and displacing staff who are focussed and committed the children.</p>	
Strongly disagree	Agree	<p>I believe some child thrive better in a smaller environment. My son has been at Cantley since nursery and has autism and adha for him big crowds is a definite no no. I have a boy nursery age he thrives better in a bigger setting so goes to lingwood. The children at Cantley are lovely and the staff I have know for years and have always done brilliantly with my older son. He will be off to high school this year and it's such a shame for this to happened when there are children out there struggling it such a big setting when Cantley would be perfect for them. This needs advertising more.</p>	<p>Advertisings that the school is available with spaces and that the small setting do children that need a little more quiet then others would help. I haven't seen the school put themselves out there in years! Such a shame.</p>
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>This school has been in the community of Cantley for decades (more than one century), if the federation had advertised in a way they seem to say they have then people would have had the chance to view the school and make other choices.</p>	<p>Leave the school as it is with its nursery. Closing the nursery, irrespective of school closure will never allow its growth. A school of this nature will need to entice parents at a very young age so that they can see the benefits of</p>

		<p>As it is, Cantley school has not had the best chance of recovery since the last episode where they were linked with SATs fraud or a neighbouring school in their cluster.</p> <p>A school of this nature needs a lot of work both as a single site and within its community. Can the Federation confidently say they advertised at every opportunity? As a local I can say I have seen no such advertisements.</p> <p>Did they advertise far and wide? Cantley itself is a small community but with the ease of road networks, can and do, attract families from out of the area.</p> <p>Can the federation say they fought for stability? Head changes and staff changes don't promote stability to the parents or wider community.</p> <p>It would seem Cantley's fate had long been decided and that is not an advertisement for progress, or prosperity.</p> <p>I believe this school should be given a chance to recover. No doubt this recent negative publicity will have damaged its integrity even further but it could also be a chance to renew and refresh a nurturing and community centred school.</p> <p>I hope you all think very carefully before making a destructive decision.</p> <p>Not all families want to send their children to a</p>	<p>staying after school age.</p> <p>There are very few preschools in the area and with the government initiatives to use pre schools as a means of child care for working parents every community needs one.</p> <p>Numerous nursery's and preschools are full to capacity and yet here we are closing one. Publicise it far and wide Give Cantley a chance. Don't let it be another statistic.</p>
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		<p>massive school. Some children need small community based schools.</p> <p>All the neighbouring schools are large and not as appealing to families who want that personal touch.</p>	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>I wonder who this decision will benefit because it certainly won't be the children, families and community of Cantley.</p> <p>It might be a way to balance the accounts of the federation schools but what is the local councils benefit? To see another small school under their remit fall to the way side.</p> <p>Norfolk is made up of small community schools yet Cantley is not worth saving or that is what it seems.</p> <p>Cantley is not in an academy or trust but a federation which is still linked to the LA. Academies seem to do far more to keep their schools open so that parents have the best choices. This federation just lie down and take it without fighting.</p> <p>The implications are tenfold. It is not just the children, who lose their nurturing school but families lose their life line, staff lose their jobs and a community lose their beating heart.</p> <p>Let there be a campaign for more children, open viewings and incentives to choose this lively school (Cantley) not to save a school destined for the rubbish heap.</p>	<p>You might need to consider the affects this will have on the other schools of this federation. This may well be the first of many school closures. Nobody wants to see this as a legacy.</p> <p>Do something to make it more appealing Publicise it outside the local area The nursery and preschool is where you need to be focussing. Work from the bottom up and give hope to the people of Cantley and beyond</p>

		<p>It amazes me how only the negative news is published far and wide.</p> <p>The nursery and preschool could attract families who want that special something for their children. It comes into play in September that parents can have hours of childcare for their 9 month old children. They is so they can return to work and save on childcare costs.</p> <p>The county of Norfolk has few nurseries with open countryside sites. This could be a huge selling point for the school. Surely the LA would want to support such a promising school but no they would rather fast track its closure.</p>	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>The proposal does not give a clear rational for the closure.</p> <p>What is the cost difference between keeping both schools open vs closing Cantly.</p> <p>Traffic and school time is already very busy at Freethorpe school, this proposal will significantly increase this.</p> <p>It's not clear what alterations will be made to accommodate the increased number of pupils or if teacher to pupil ration will be affected.</p>	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree		
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>As a prospective parent, who was looking to place my child in Cantley nursery in 12 month's time, I am saddened to hear that the school is looking to amalgamate; which is quite short-sighted in it's approach.</p>	<p>With investment and advertising on a par to other schools within the AIM federation I believe that Cantley can be made a success, especially with dedicated staff.</p>

		<p>My key objections are on the following basis:</p> <p>1) The consultation has limited itself in regards to future demand, by only focusing on immediate developments in the local catchment of Cantley and ignoring any impacts from the Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP), pertaining to developments in Acle, Brundall, and Blofield; or the resulting developments which will be unlocked by the completion of the A47 Blofield to North Burlingham dualling.</p> <p>The GNLP has a particular focus on providing housing developments in Acle, Blofield, and Brundall, as 'Key Service Centres'. Brundall primary school in particular is at capacity with no further room to expand, likewise with Acle. Whilst these parishes are outside of the Cantley catchment, the overspill requirements from the GNLP housing targets in these areas should not be dismissed when considering the capacities of existing schools or for parents who wish for their children to be in smaller school settings. This is further supported by the improved access and journey times to Cantley Primary School from these parishes (or even further out i.e. Postwick) following completion of the A47 Blofield to North Burlingham dualling, which is estimated for completion in 2026.</p> <p>By keeping the school open this further satisfies the requirements of the County Councils focus area 3 of addressing Norfolk's county-wide emissions pertaining to buildings and planning. It is clear that</p>	
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		<p>from the GNLP that housing targets are going to be progressed rapidly, and with those housing targets comes a requirement for additional infrastructure i.e. schools. Cantley is situated well between several 'Key Service Centres', and Norfolk County Council should be championing keeping schools open from an embodied carbon perspective; as opposed to construction of new schools on greenfield sites (see Blofield Primary school).</p> <p>2) The consultation has failed to consider the positive impact of STEM resulting from the close proximity of the Cantley Sugarbeat Factory, which will be lost if the school is to amalgamate. Very few schools in the county have such a direct link with local industry, and with the emerging skills shortage sector-wide, this should be a consideration for keeping Cantley open.</p> <p>3) The consultation has stated that promotion of the school has been tried, which I believe is false. I am aware of Cantley Primary school through word of mouth of existing staff, however prior to this there was no advertisement of Cantley Primary School Nursery intake. Whilst looking at the AIM federation websites, it is quite clear that greater focus has been provided to all schools but Cantley. Swanton Abbott, for instance, has a virtual tour of the school whereby Cantley does not. Social media (Facebook) emphasis is also greater on other schools. Horning, for example, has wonderful drone fly throughs, and this raises the question of why Cantley has not been given similar treatment, should there be concerns of</p>	
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		falling numbers and statements about 'trying' to promote the school.	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>I strongly disagree with the proposal to amalgamate Cantley Primary School with Freethorpe Community Primary School and to change the catchment areas from September 2025, for the following reasons:</p> <p>Educational Environment and Well-being We had specifically planned to enrol our child at Cantley Primary due to its nurturing, intimate, and supportive environment, ideally suited to younger children or those who benefit from smaller class sizes. Despite not living in Cantley, we are willing to commute to ensure our child receives the personalized educational attention and close-knit community feel that Cantley currently provides. Had we known about Cantley Primary as an option earlier, we would have seriously considered enrolling our child there from the outset.</p> <p>Accessibility and Transportation Concerns The amalgamation would increase travel distances and times, negatively affecting families who prefer shorter commutes and local schooling options. While transport may be provided, longer journeys can adversely affect young children's well-being, daily routines, and family logistics.</p> <p>Alternatives and Promotion It appears there has been insufficient exploration of alternative solutions. Greater promotion, innovative community partnerships, or specialized programs might increase pupil numbers at Cantley. There is value in maintaining smaller rural schools, and</p>	<p>I would suggest thoroughly exploring and implementing proactive strategies aimed at increasing awareness and visibility of Cantley Primary School to families living beyond the immediate area. Given our own experience of discovering the school relatively late, it seems there may be a broader pool of interested families who are simply unaware of Cantley's unique educational offering. Initiatives such as targeted outreach programs, open days specifically promoted to surrounding communities, or highlighting Cantley's nurturing environment and small-class advantages could significantly bolster enrolment numbers.</p> <p>Additionally, considering specialized programs or partnerships, perhaps emphasizing outdoor learning, environmental education, or community-focused projects, could also enhance Cantley's appeal and viability. It would be beneficial to actively engage current parents, staff, and local organisations who may have a personal connection/stake in the school's future, in identifying unique selling points and developing practical promotional strategies that reflect the school's existing strengths and reputation. Such actions could provide a sustainable solution, preserving the valuable educational environment Cantley Primary currently offers.</p>

		<p>further engagement with potential families outside the immediate area, like ours, could potentially reverse trends in pupil numbers.</p> <p>Long-term Strategic Planning The decision appears to prioritize short-term financial considerations over longer-term educational values. Cantley School is rated 'Good' by Ofsted, indicating strong educational outcomes despite lower pupil numbers. Investment and strategic initiatives could sustain the school's viability and enrich the educational landscape, rather than closing a successful school due to temporary demographic changes.</p> <p>In summary, amalgamation would negatively impact children's educational experiences, accessibility, and family life, and insufficient consideration has been given to alternative solutions that could sustain Cantley Primary School as a thriving educational resource.</p>	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>Not that long ago Cantley was an extremely popular and thriving school and can be again. Since our amazing long term headteacher retired in 2011, Cantley has been unfortunately been mismanaged by subsequent leaderships and scandal over the ensuing years causing long standing valued staff to leave along with many many pupils as parents became unhappy with these situations at the school. None of this was ever ever addressed by NCC.</p>	
Disagree	Disagree	<p>Cantley Primary School provides a nurturing local facility for nursery age and primary school age children in the vicinity. It provides a good standard of education and outdoor facilities. Admittedly, the</p>	<p>There is considerable local community support for retention of the school.</p>

		class sizes are small, but this is particularly suitable for certain children. The loss of the school will have implications for the village. Schools are often at the centre of community life and when they are removed villages tend to be left with a predominantly ageing demographic and reduction of other facilities. There is new housing planned in Acle and Cantley is retained, parents moving in could choose to have their children attend Cantley school if it was suitably promoted.	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Cantley Primary has been prominent in our family life since my daughter attended there as a five year-old in 1998 when it was a First school. In Year 4, she moved to Freethorpe Primary where she had great difficulty settling in because of the larger size school, despite having her best friend there as well (for a time). When my daughter, in turn, chose to send her first son to Cantley for nursery I was delighted that she had chosen this lovely small school for the same reason I did. Namely, for a quiet, sensitive child coming from a small family and playschool/nursery environment to be plunged into a 150-plus pupil establishment would be totally daunting. My grandson is now in Year 2 and thriving in the small, caring environment which has been the hallmark of Cantley school since its inception. His younger brother is in the nursery class and both boys cannot wait to get into school in the mornings.	I feel very strongly that this decision has been rushed through without any prior warning of the Council's intentions and without allowing sufficient time for the governors, staff, parents and supporters of Cantley Primary School to mount a defence. To spring it on everyone with little more than half a term to prepare for a seismic change to children's lives smacks of a "done deal". The School has had no promotion from the relevant bodies to encourage new parents to send their children to Cantley. One of the reasons for the proposed merger is the lack of planned development in the village; true, but with Acle due for further housing developments and another in the pipeline, the academy primary is already bursting at the seams. Reedham too is due for further house building and Freethorpe has just expanded their dwellings (with possibly more to come); the nearby schools could soon be struggling for places without Cantley Primary available to take up any over-demand.
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Cantley Primary School has been in the village for 150 years. Many generations of the same family have attended the school and it should continue as a school for the children of Cantley (and surrounding villages). The children in Cantley can walk to school (as many have done before them) but if they have to	

		go to Freethorpe they will have to be transported there and not every parent has access to a car to take their children to school.	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	This school is important to the village of Cantley and surrounding villages for children's educational needs, with out the need for parents to transport their children a longer distance to a different school. We are all being told to cut our reliance on cars, which if this school closes is against that principle.	At this moment in time the main residents in the surrounding area may be older, but in the near future this will change with a younger population with more children needing a school close by.
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Children should have the opportunity of adapting to school life in their own village school. Parents do not have the same contact with the school, attended by their children, if out of the village and interest becomes lost	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Local, rural villages need their own schools to continue communities. We have recently moved to the catchment area and in part drawn by the facilities offered at Cantley Nursery and Primary School. What will the local catchment do when Freethorpe is full up? Once schools - and land - are gone, there is no way of getting it back.	Children require community cohesion more than ever in the increasing digital world. Losing a village school means losing touch with the community they live in.
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	There has been no warning of this closure until now! I have been a local resident of Cantley for over 40 years. My children went to Cantley School and along with other parents and residents we fought to keep the school from closure 30 years ago. We were aware of falling numbers but with persistent advertising the school remained open as a First School then to a Primary. Since the AIM Federation took over the school in 2021 pupil numbers started to drop. This has continued and nothing has been done about it.	Look at the financial implications and justification of having an Executive Head and so many Deputy Executive Heads. Consider why are so many are required when each school has a Headteacher. AIM should be given another year to see if they can encourage more children and families to join Cantley Primary School. They have done nothing at all, no advertising etc. other schools in the locality frequently advertised their schools even when they have an excellent intake.

	<p>Surely they have someone looking at the numbers and could have advertised the excellent school with nurturing, small classes. But NOTHING was done. I feel they have been planning to slowly shut Cantley Primary down.</p> <p>When Horning Primary and Stanton Abbot Schhols had low intake the schools were advertised so why not Cantley?</p> <p>Some surrounding villages don't even know Cantley Primary is still open!</p> <p>How many Deputy Executive Headteachers are required to efficiently run schools alongside a Headteacher in each school? This is where the costs are going!</p> <p>AIMS motto is Small Schools, Big Opportunities! [REDACTED] says he is 'Deeply Passionate about small schools' I have seen no evidence of passion for saving the small Cantley School.</p> <p>Will Freethorpe be classed as a small school? Currently it has 24.5 pupils per teacher. This will increase if children move from Cantley to Freethorpe. A class of 30 children is not small.</p> <p>Children at Cantley School have had 4 headteachers this academic year, that is not good for building trust and relationships.</p> <p>AIM have made last minute changes with Teaching Assistants moving them between Freethorpe and Cantley Schools. No thought was made for the children who had made those important relationships with these TAs.</p> <p>Sadly AIM has not improved the education of Cantley Schools. It has been down to the excellent</p>	<p>If they don't succeed then another Trust should be encouraged to replace AIM, one who really values small schools and knows their children and staff.</p> <p>It seems that Cantley Primary will only have 17 children in next academic year and all in one class. Again why has AIM allowed for these numbers to drop so drastically?</p> <p>How can this be an attraction to encourage new children? It's seems there is no NO future for the school which is extremely sad for the community.</p>
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		<p>teachers and Teaching Assistants who make such a wonderful learning experience for the children. Cantley and the other schools need a Trust who care about the schools and not one who has no heart and run it like a business. These children are our future.</p> <p>I am concerned about the building of the school, what will happen to it if it closes?</p> <p>I am also very concerned about parents who don't drive so would not be able to drive children to Freethorpe School. If transport is provided, as a parent I would not be happy with a 5 year old starting school and being transported by taxi or minibus.</p> <p>The whole village community would change drastically with no children to take part in village events. No participation in the Cantley Fun Day, Flower Show, Harvest Festival, Christmas in the Church. That's to name just a few. Families may no longer want to live in this beautiful countryside with no school.</p>	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	I think if the area was extended and the school was advertised. This wonderful school would be able to offer it to more children from other areas. Increasing the amount of children at cantley	Could a community teaching be suggested. Whilst there is so little children. Offering fun curriculum activities to invite other children to the school
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree		<p>This proposal raises a number of significant concerns that I believe would negatively impact the children, families, and wider community of Cantley.</p> <p>1. Loss of Local Educational Provision in Cantley</p>

			<p>Cantley Primary School is a vital and irreplaceable asset to the local community. The school provides easily accessible education for families in Cantley and surrounding villages. Its closure or loss of distinct status would force families to travel further afield, placing additional logistical and financial burdens on parents and carers. For those without reliable transport, this could mean reduced access to school or even the risk of children being withdrawn from their local area's educational environment altogether.</p> <p>A village without a functioning school quickly loses its heart and becomes far less attractive to young families. This proposal would have long-term consequences for the demographic and socio-economic vitality of Cantley.</p> <p>2. Negative Impact on Children's Educational and Emotional Wellbeing</p> <p>Children benefit greatly from being educated in smaller, community-based settings where they are known and supported as individuals. Cantley Primary offers a nurturing environment where pupils feel safe, valued, and included. Removing this provision in favour of a merged or centralised model risks disrupting established support networks, weakening the close-knit school community, and undermining the children's sense of belonging.</p> <p>Continuity and familiarity are especially important for younger pupils and those with additional needs. Amalgamation would likely result in increased class sizes, more transitions, and less personalised attention—all of which have been shown to impact attainment and wellbeing.</p>
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			<p>3. Strain on Infrastructure and Capacity Elsewhere It is unclear whether Freethorpe Primary School has the capacity—either in terms of physical space, staffing, or resources—to absorb a potentially significant number of additional pupils. Rather than consolidating, investment should be directed towards strengthening both schools to meet the needs of their respective catchment areas.</p> <p>The proposed amalgamation also risks overburdening existing staff and leadership, increasing travel times, and disrupting routines for both schools, not just Cantley.</p> <p>4. Erosion of Community Identity and Engagement Schools are far more than places of learning—they are community anchors. Cantley Primary School plays a vital role in village life, supporting intergenerational connections, local events, and parental engagement. Its loss would sever an important link in the social fabric of the village.</p> <p>Amalgamation would also weaken local governance and parental voice, making it harder for Cantley residents to influence decisions that affect their children and their community.</p> <p>5. Lack of Transparency and Genuine Community Involvement There is considerable concern about the lack of transparent data justifying this proposal. What evidence has been provided to demonstrate that amalgamation is necessary, viable, or in the best interest of either community? The process appears rushed, with insufficient opportunity for full community consultation and meaningful alternatives being overlooked.</p>
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			<p>Conclusion</p> <p>For all of the above reasons, I urge the decision-makers to reconsider this proposal and explore alternative options that will protect and enhance local educational provision in both Cantley and Freethorpe.</p> <p>Rather than amalgamating, there should be an open dialogue about how to retain and strengthen both schools, possibly through increased collaboration, resource-sharing, or federation models that preserve each school's identity while enhancing their resilience.</p> <p>Cantley deserves to retain its school. Its children, families, and future depend on it.</p>
Strongly disagree	Disagree	<p>Cantley Primary School has been a significant and positive part of my children's educational journey.</p> <p>All three of my children have attended Cantley Primary, with two still currently enrolled. My daughter is in her final year of primary school, (in september) and the uncertainty surrounding the future of Cantley has already begun to have a profound impact on her well-being and education. Knowing that the school might close and she may need to move to a different setting is causing her a great deal of anxiety, especially at such a crucial stage of her academic and social development.</p> <p>My youngest child, who has multiple health issues and special educational needs (SEND), has particularly benefitted from the smaller, nurturing environment Cantley provides. A change to a larger school would be extremely detrimental to his well-</p>	

		<p>being and progress, and I am deeply concerned that the support he currently receives may not be adequately replicated in a merged or alternative setting.</p> <p>As parents, we feel that we were not given sufficient notice or information about this potential merger, and the decision-making process has felt rushed and lacking in meaningful consultation with the families and community who will be most affected. This is not just about a building; it's about the stability, care, and tailored support that Cantley Primary offers, which is vital for children like mine.</p>	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Making the catchment area larger could cause Freethorpe to become full meaning waiting lists and potentially full capacity classes	Cantley is a lovely rural small school and is excellent for children that thrive in small schools. To take that away could mean more children out of school unable to cope in large mainstream schools.
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>Smaller schools like Cantley simply must be protected, not eradicated.</p> <p>In a world where the population is growing and schools are becoming busier and busier, to have the option of smaller schools like Cantley is such an important option to parents and children that simply cannot cope in busier, noisier schools.</p> <p>In particular, SEN children that struggle with the sensory overload a busy mainstream primary school unavoidably causes need to have another option of a calmer, quieter mainstream setting, especially when there are such large backlogs of children waiting for places in either SRB units or special needs schools.</p>	

Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>We, the Trustees of Cantley Village Hall Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), would like to express our deep concern at the proposed closure of Cantley Primary School and to strongly object to the cessation of its operation as part of this consultation.</p> <p>Cantley Village Hall has served the community continuously since its establishment nearly a century ago and is interwoven into the fabric of our village's daily life. Central to that purpose has been a strong, enduring relationship with Cantley Primary School. Over generations, the hall and the school have supported each other in delivering vital educational, social, and cultural opportunities for the current and past children and families of this isolated community.</p> <p>Indeed, the hall was originally established in close coordination with the school and has consistently provided space and support for school functions, assemblies, performances, sports, after-school activities, and community events that include school participation. This included the use of the village hall for physical education lessons. This partnership has not only fostered community cohesion but also contributed to a rich, supportive learning environment for local children.</p> <p>Only recently we have held two inter-generational events to mark the anniversaries of DDay in 2024 and VE day this year with advanced plans for VJ day in August.</p>	
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		<p>At present, the Trustees are undertaking ambitious plans for the redevelopment of the hall. The new facility will be a modern, sustainable community asset designed to meet the long-term needs of Cantley's residents—particularly its young people including pupils at the school.</p> <p>Our plans have been developed with the future of the school in mind. We envisage even stronger collaboration with Cantley Primary School, with opportunities for shared space, enrichment activities, outdoor learning, and more intergenerational projects with other community members.</p> <p>The loss of the school would be a devastating blow not only to education in Cantley but also to the community infrastructure that sustains village life. Cantley is a close-knit Broads village, and the presence of a local school is a cornerstone of our identity.</p> <p>The removal of this vital service risks irreversible social and economic decline, further detaching rural children from accessible, community-rooted education. It would also discourage new families coming into the community adding to the current feeling of decline as larger urban growth areas attract all the inward investment at the detriment of the rural communities.</p> <p>We ask that Norfolk County Council recognises the unique role Cantley Primary plays in maintaining a vibrant, resilient rural community. We urge decision-makers to work with stakeholders, including our</p>	
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		<p>charity and parents (current and future ones) to explore ways in which investment, innovation, and collaboration can protect and grow the school, rather than close it.</p> <p>The Trustees remain ready to work proactively with the school, the AIM Federation, Norfolk County Council, Cantley, Limpenhoe and Southwood Parish Council, and other community partners to ensure that Cantley continues to be a place where families thrive and young people are nurtured within their own village.</p> <p>██████, Chair of Trustee Board</p>	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>Cantley Primary could be a flourishing school if it was supported and advertised as a Primary school with vacancies. It has been abandoned by the Federation over the last few years.</p> <p>Parents have been confused by the lack of stability and publicity. Small classes are life savers for some children who are overwhelmed and they blossom. In classes as big as 30 children these children would disappear. Young children should be able to attend a school of their choice and close to home.</p> <p>In recent months some children have moved house through no fault of their own and, although their parents wanted to keep them at Cantley Primary, the closure of some roads off the A47 has made it difficult to get across the dual carriageway and they have had to change schools and move away from friends due to travel times. This is a temporary problem and will soon be fixed but the children have had to move.</p>	<p>My suggestion is to listen to the parents, children and residents and give them the small school they want. Advertise and share its availability.</p> <p>As a resident I have seen the pupils & staff at community events and seen their delight at being included. The events were enhanced by their attendance.</p>

		Cantley Primary School parents can see what could be done, they just need help.	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>I like not having many people in my class. I get to learn from the older children and I can help smaller children.</p> <p>I love having my brother in nursery.</p> <p>We get to play on the big field, we have the forest area and I love the library and getting Cantley Coins to spend in the shop. I like it when we visit the village hall, church and sugar beet factory.</p> <p>I don't want to go to Freethorpe or any other school.</p> <p>I just want to stay at Cantley with my friends.</p>	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>Although amalgamation/merger process is being used, with shorter, term-time timescales, this is effectively a closure of Cantley School. Cantley is designated a rural school and so there is a presumption against closure other than in exceptional circumstances, which recognises the wider social cost for communities when schools close. Funding formulae reflect this.</p> <p>(https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/revitalising-rural/rural-schools-community-facilities.pdf)</p> <p>I understand that 2025-26 funding, based on October 2024 pupil numbers, would be sufficient to run the school in 2025-26.</p> <p>The consultation period has not been long, appeared sudden, and fell outside the normal meeting dates for Cantley parish council, which had to arrange an extraordinary meeting.</p> <p>I realise times have changed but my experience on Cantley's governing body from 1995-2006 was that, despite tiny budgets, there was a 'can-do' attitude by staff, governors and other volunteers which was embraced by the wider community and the LA</p>	<p>I have read 'Questions raised in the consultation so far' and appreciate the arguments. However similar arguments have been raised in previous closure proposals (eg 1988 and 1995) and a rejuvenated commitment to the school has overcome these.</p> <p>What I have not seen are any references to the Equality Act of 2010 and the duties on public bodies (2011). This includes having diversity of provision in the local area, where a smaller school such as Cantley with particular characteristics may indeed "advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it" etc.</p>

		(whose support was excellent), resulting in significant building work in 1998 (partly funded by the community and local businesses), designation as a primary school, nursery provision, increased pupil numbers and good OFSTED reports. A future capital cost, namely a hall, is contained within the plans for Cantley's new village hall, therefore would not come from the education budget. Therefore the main arguments appear to be pupil attainment and running costs.	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	Numbers have been low before at Cantley School but they pick up again. There is no information of evidence to support the long term proposal other than the next intake of 17 being unviable. How many pre-school children for example live within the existing catchment area.	
Strongly disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Cantley school have to make up for mistakes from past poor leadership, low reputation and minimum advertising	
Strongly disagree	Disagree	The proposed closure of Cantley School is a direct result of years of mismanagement and a lack of forward-thinking by the Federation and Norfolk County Council. Catchment areas are no longer the sole factor attracting families to a school. Many parents prefer smaller class sizes or micro-environments like Cantley, where their children can thrive. While declining birth rates are a concern, this situation could have been avoided by dynamically adjusting catchment areas and responding to enrollment trends. Some schools have exceeded their Published Admission Number (PAN), yet Cantley has been overlooked. Many parents chose Cantley specifically for its small size, believing it better suits their children's needs. Removing this	<p>We flexi-school our child, and many parents in the area are in a similar situation, searching for solutions to the challenges their children face at school. If Cantley had been able to promote itself beyond its catchment area, parents would have been aware of it and could have made an informed choice. However, the school was never effectively promoted. As a result, many local residents believe Cantley closed years ago. If this closure proceeds, please ensure this mistake is not repeated.</p> <p>With only 25 pupils and a shared budget with Cantley, I'm concerned that Horning will be the next school on the Federation's hit list.</p>

		<p>option may create challenges for some students later in their schooling. Our child, for example, thrives at Cantley but would struggle socially in a larger, conventional setting.</p> <p>Over the past six years, enrollment has declined since the SATs scandal, and neither the school nor the Federation has adequately addressed the issue. They failed to publicly resolve the matter, bring in a fresh leadership team, or promote Cantley's unique benefits to attract families. The school has been left to languish without dynamic leadership or effective engagement with parents to understand why they chose Cantley and how to attract more pupils, including those from outside the catchment area. This neglect suggests an intent to close the school. The appointment of a new headteacher brought renewed energy, but her impending maternity leave raises questions about the timing of such a decision for a school in need of stability and a reboot.</p> <p>The Federation and its governors bear significant responsibility. Without a dedicated governor for Cantley—one visible to parents and the community—the school has been left defenseless, lacking a voice within the Federation. This situation could have been avoided with sensible leadership and a stable headteacher, rather than a revolving door of leadership. The Federation claims to share resources and budgets across its schools, but it feels as though they have been trying to eliminate Cantley for some time. Cantley is a destination school, chosen by parents for its specific offerings, and cannot rely on an outdated catchment system,</p>	
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		<p>especially when 70% of local residents are over 60. As these residents pass away and new families move in, the absence of a local school will be felt due to this short-sighted mismanagement. Cantley has unique features that could attract families from farther afield, and with the right leadership and support, it could thrive. Unlike other local schools that proactively promote their unique selling points, Cantley's governors and Federation have chosen inaction, allowing the school's potential to go unrealized.</p>	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>It would be sad for this local school to be closed, as its both a feature and selling point of the village, both for us living here and anyone moving here to have a school and nursery within walking distance.</p>	<p>Improved advertising of spaces and availability of the school would have increased the uptake of pupils attending, along with the possibility of an increased catchment area when compared to Freethorpe.</p>
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>It would be such a shame for this beautiful school to close. Small village schools are an important asset to any area and offer such a unique learning environment that just simply doesn't happen at larger schools. I'm in the process of starting a family and it's very sad to think that my children may not get to benefit from this wonderful school that is right on our doorstep.</p>	<p>The low uptake of places this year could have been foreseen. Ensuring the wider area was aware of this school and all it has to offer.</p>
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>Larger schools do not suit all children. Smaller schools are brilliant as the Headteacher is able to know all the children. Some children will have to travel a lot further to get to primary school.</p>	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>We strongly do not believe it is in the best interests of the current (and any future) pupils and the village community to close the focal point of the village. The school itself provides a safe learning space for children where smaller class sizes are essential to their learning and wellbeing. We selected Cantley</p>	<p>We believe the main cause of the continuously decreasing numbers is the clear reluctance of the AIM Federation to actively promote & support Cantley School since the 2019 incident. Numbers have been declining year or year and this has been the topic of conversation inside & outside the school. If this was clear for parents</p>

		<p>School (& nursery) for both our children (we travel from outside the catchment area) and do not believe that just because there is another AIM Federation school in close proximity that Cantley should suffer & close, nor that Freethorpe is an equally suitable school for our child. If we had wanted our children to go to Freethorpe we would have opted for that school originally. Changing of the catchment area is a moot point as the school has always had several (and at times the majority of) children travelling from outside the catchment area.</p>	<p>to see then there is a clear dereliction of duty by the Federation to the children who need this school to thrive and for the Federation to actively turn the schools fortunes around. It was only a few weeks ago that we were reassured that the school was not in danger of closing. The school (& local businesses) have recently invested considerable money & time in improving the school's facilities. It is not just the children who live in Cantley that will suffer, a small village without a school is at a disadvantage when it comes to attracting people to move to the area and as a result the village will become more and more isolated. The village hall is regularly used by the school as an additional indoor learning space and for school productions. We are aware of the current fundraising and plans to build a new village hall which would provide the school with an excellent facility to assist with their learning which is turn also benefits the village hall. There are several special celebratory events held at both the village hall and the church where the school children actively engage with local residents which is mutually beneficial. Also, the current situation of the pupils not knowing the outcome of this consultation until the very last days of term is hugely unsettling and frankly inexcusable. Ultimately, it appears that the decision by the Federation to close Cantley School was made several years ago and by allowing the natural attrition to occur without doing anything to increase numbers, the current situation becomes inevitable and provides a convenient excuse to hide behind.</p>
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>I'm saying I strongly disagree to both of the questions above purely because I don't want Cantley Primary to close. Please don't shut Cantley Primary School, at one point it was the best school in the area (I still think so!) and we were travelling</p>	<p>I'm saying I strongly disagree to both of the questions above purely because I don't want Cantley Primary to close. Please don't shut Cantley Primary School, at one point it was the best school in the area (I still think so!) and we</p>

		<p>just to get to this school, even when living outside the catchment area, first living in Lingwood and we sent my daughter to Cantley Nursery and then again when living in Strumpshaw, she still went to Cantley school, having looked around other schools in the area, Cantley has and will always be the preference/first choice for us. It's like a home away from home for the children. We then moved to Cantley just to be closer to the school so that in itself has a detrimental effect on us, as I don't drive! The smaller school setting at Cantley always appealed to us and even more so as time has gone by and my daughter has grown up, having recently been diagnosed with combined ADHD. She has always suffered immensely with sensory processing issues and separation anxiety and along with her autistic traits, I can't even begin to imagine how a bigger school could impact her negatively, especially as it took her a little while to finally settle at Cantley and feel comfortable and confident with going in happily as opposed to her clinging to me at the classroom door!! It has a beautiful, intimate and nurturing environment, where everyone knows everyone and the teachers easily know the kids names and who the parents are etc no mix up whatsoever and no other child with the same name! This school has been my daughters whole life! She has flourished there! And was my nieces whole school life too who will soon be leaving for high school - they too travelled out of catchment in order to secure a place at Cantley because most people have!! With the right promotion strategies in place and a supportive collaboration within the community and other schools across the federation, there is no reason we</p>	<p>were travelling just to get to this school, even when living outside the catchment area, first living in Lingwood and we sent my daughter to Cantley Nursery and then again when living in Strumpshaw, she still went to Cantley school, having looked around other schools in the area, Cantley has and will always be the preference/first choice for us. It's like a home away from home for the children. We then moved to Cantley just to be closer to the school so that in itself has a detrimental effect on us, as I don't drive! The smaller school setting at Cantley always appealed to us and even more so as time has gone by and my daughter has grown up, having recently been diagnosed with combined ADHD. She has always suffered immensely with sensory processing issues and separation anxiety and along with her autistic traits, I can't even begin to imagine how a bigger school could impact her negatively, especially as it took her a little while to finally settle at Cantley and feel comfortable and confident with going in happily as opposed to her clinging to me at the classroom door!! It has a beautiful, intimate and nurturing environment, where everyone knows everyone and the teachers easily know the kids names and who the parents are etc no mix up whatsoever and no other child with the same name! This school has been my daughters whole life! She has flourished there! And was my nieces whole school life too who will soon be leaving for high school - they too travelled out of catchment in order to secure a place at Cantley because most people have!! With the right promotion strategies in place and a supportive collaboration within the community and other schools across the federation, there is no reason we can't get this school back to where it was pre-2019 when my daughter first attended! No more neglect! No more overlooking! As the heartbeat of the</p>
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		<p>can't get this school back to where it was pre-2019 when my daughter first attended! No more neglect! No more overlooking! As the heartbeat of the village this school deserves its place to stay and thrive! Without the school even, I should imagine there won't be much of Cantley itself anymore! Since living here, I have found that there is nothing else here apart from the school! The only reason I stay living here! There is just too much potential to waste, and would have a complete profound effect on the children's stability and wellbeing and more! It has created close intimate life long friendships and memories that surely must be worth more than the closing or amalgamation of the school?? Taking even the likes of people's mental health into account!? All it'll do is create more stress, uncertainty, instability, regret, anxiety and a whole lot of sadness within the children, the parents and the community as a whole! My daughter has thrived since coming to this school, thrived - not just survived and that's exactly how in this day and age especially children should be/feel in a school setting!!! It's a perfect environment for children like my daughter who gets the chance to have that 1-2-1 that they won't get when they go to a bigger primary school or high school unfortunately. Easily getting overlooked and/or forgotten about or just not prioritised. These years are vital for children's development and you will hinder that by closing the school! At the end of the day, all the higher authority care about is money or education and yes these things are important but I'll always be a strong advocate for wellbeing, security, happiness and creating lasting friendships and life skills! They are</p>	<p>village this school deserves its place to stay and thrive! Without the school even, I should imagine there won't be much of Cantley itself anymore! Since living here, I have found that there is nothing else here apart from the school! The only reason I stay living here! There is just too much potential to waste, and would have a complete profound effect on the children's stability and wellbeing and more! It has created close intimate life long friendships and memories that surely must be worth more than the closing or amalgamation of the school?? Taking even the likes of people's mental health into account!? All it'll do is create more stress, uncertainty, instability, regret, anxiety and a whole lot of sadness within the children, the parents and the community as a whole! My daughter has thrived since coming to this school, thrived - not just survived and that's exactly how in this day and age especially children should be/feel in a school setting!!! It's a perfect environment for children like my daughter who gets the chance to have that 1-2-1 that they won't get when they go to a bigger primary school or high school unfortunately. Easily getting overlooked and/or forgotten about or just not prioritised. These years are vital for children's development and you will hinder that by closing the school! At the end of the day, all the higher authority care about is money or education and yes these things are important but I'll always be a strong advocate for wellbeing, security, happiness and creating lasting friendships and life skills! They are</p>
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		<p>taught in school, they are taught at home, they are taught when they go on holiday, they are taught in each and every aspect of their lives?! My daughter is smart as anything! Having a smaller school setting and/or a single class structure won't necessarily change that? If anything, especially for the likes of my child and her struggles, this would suit her comfortably and I feel she would get the same out of a class like that as she would a bigger class elsewhere.. especially since her voice could be heard a little bit louder in such an intimate setting and she wouldn't have that anxiety being around too many children or starting again with children she doesn't know.. she is happy, confident and settled and I want to keep her that way!!! I was also hoping/expecting to put her twin sisters in the nursery too as they turn 2 this year and then along to the primary school after that as it being very convenient for me since I live in Cantley and can't drive. I won't even be able to get them anywhere else because of that reason too, even to Freethorpe so they will have to miss out on Nursery which is obviously no good at all! So that's 2 disappointments in one! You don't understand what it's doing to my daughter, or me or any of her classmates and their parents, all this stress of the prospect of having this wonderful school close when it's what we/the kids need! So.. PLEASE KEEP CANTLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL OPEN!!!!</p>	<p>would suit her comfortably and I feel she would get the same out of a class like that as she would a bigger class elsewhere.. especially since her voice could be heard a little bit louder in such an intimate setting and she wouldn't have that anxiety being around too many children or starting again with children she doesn't know.. she is happy, confident and settled and I want to keep her that way!!! I was also hoping/expecting to put her twin sisters in the nursery too as they turn 2 this year and then along to the primary school after that as it being very convenient for me since I live in Cantley and can't drive. I won't even be able to get them anywhere else because of that reason too, even to Freethorpe so they will have to miss out on Nursery which is obviously no good at all! So that's 2 disappointments in one! You don't understand what it's doing to my daughter, or me or any of her classmates and their parents, all this stress of the prospect of having this wonderful school close when it's what we/the kids need! So.. PLEASE KEEP CANTLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL OPEN!!!!</p>
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>I think Cantley School should not shut because my friends might move to a different school and I wouldn't be able to see them anymore. I love going to Cantley school and all the fun learning I do with the teachers.</p>	

Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>I am responding to the proposed merger, effective closure, of Cantley School, primarily in the context of the importance of maintaining a wider sustainable community. It appears that many small, rural villages are being abandoned as viable communities, except as commuter or retirement villages. When we first moved to Cantley, there was a post office, a village shop, a hairdresser, a railway station, local employment, along with sports clubs and, crucially for us as new parents, a village school within walking distance of our home. Soon after we arrived in the early 1990s, a proposal was made to close the school. This was devastating, and we enthusiastically campaigned with other parents and villagers to demonstrate why it was important to retain the school. Working together with the Local Authority, a plan was devised to save the school. The school not only survived but thrived under professional and energetic leadership with the support of parents, residents, and local businesses.</p> <p>Unfortunately, as time moved on, we lost local services and clubs, the post office, and the village shop. They were all significant community hubs, leaving the school and the village hall as the remaining focal points for community connections. The connections were made not only through parents but members of the community who worked or volunteered at the school, and supported school initiatives, from listening to children read to model making and sports. Those important connections are retained through the generations.</p>	<p>It is disheartening to know that the closure of a school, and the parameters by which such decisions are taken, is seen in isolation from the wider community benefit, but it seems such integrated, long-term planning is so very difficult under current decision-making processes. It is vital we retain and support community-focussed services, including this school, for the benefit of a future stable and flourishing society.</p> <p>There is clearly energetic parental and community support as evidenced at the Cantley School public meeting. The trustees of Cantley Village Hall are actively planning and fundraising to build a new village hall which will provide safe, modern, facilities to be shared with the school for school events such as the school nativity play at Christmas, and a hall for gym activities. There is a community resource of willing volunteers and a PTA who seem to have been almost ignored by the Federation in recent times.</p> <p>The impression of there having been a long-term plan to close the school is supported by the lack of effort to promote the school in the last couple of years. Why, for example, was Cantley not included in the promotional videos of other schools within the AIM Federation? Posts by parents on Facebook advertising places available at Cantley immediately attracted interest, demonstrating the positive impact of simple marketing.</p> <p>Since 1998, there has been a 'presumption against closure' status of rural schools in England. It appears the mechanism of "amalgamation" with Freethorpe is being used to sidestep a 'period of grace' offered by the</p>
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		<p>The world may have moved on from those days where we now experience a more fluid, less stable, society but there is still the community support, enthusiasm and energy to make things happen and ensure we retain local centres of learning and community togetherness. We should be looking to retain and strengthen the means of sustaining local communities. Continuing the trend of closing down small, rural schools, and other local services, will simply undermine our ability to maintain sustainable communities in the future. The school should be supported to remain open.</p>	<p>'presumption against closure', which was designed to give schools some protection from sudden closure.</p> <p>It really is disingenuous to use this mechanism when, at the public meeting held on the 19th May, it was confirmed that funding for the 2025-26 academic year is sufficient to maintain the school for another year, even with reduced pupil numbers. More energetic marketing next year would provide an opportunity to attract more pupils to support the continuation of the school. If the school is unable to attract sufficient pupils, then at least it will provide a more reasonable transition period for the children who will need to find another school. Announcing a decision to close the school in the last week of the school year is unfair to children and parents.</p> <p>A small school like Cantley can provide a unique learning experience suited to many children. Our two children thrived at Cantley School, and I would like other children to have similar opportunities.</p>
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>The decline in children seen throughout this year has been caused by blatant mismanagement by the federation. A number of children had undiagnosed SEN issues ranging from autism to dyslexia which wasn't managed correctly and parents found better support at other schools.</p> <p>Those who wanted to leave have already left, and those wanting to remain at Cantley are pushing for better advertisement from the federation. Cantley has been left to crumble in the last couple of years with a disinterested head teacher and federation. A newly appointed head from September was taking on the challenges seen and raised by parents, but</p>	<p>Cantley has a budget of 41 pupils which will run until April 2026. Give parents, staff, pupils and the PTA the chance to work with the new head to get the school back to where it should be.</p> <p>There are loads of houses planned in the surrounding villages in the GNLP and parents will have the chance to choose this small school, a selling point for many. As you've highlighted, there is an aging population in Cantley but it won't remain like this. The older residents will pass, leaving spaces for younger families who will be drawn to the village by a well run primary school. This closure is only being proposed because of the federation mismanagement, it is not fair on children who are thriving in a small setting to be forced into a larger</p>

		<p>due to maternity she was only given 6 weeks to make a start in her role.</p> <p>There is no opportunity to appeal the decision because of the timing of the consultation. With the results expected on the last week of school, parents would have found other school spaces and the appeal process would take you past September and would therefore be redundant.</p>	<p>school, causing fear and anxiety. NCC want to keep children in a school setting, but many (my child included) are asking to be home schooled rather than going to a bigger school.</p> <p>If the federation can't balance their own books, it's their lack of incompetence in seeing what's been happening at Cantley and with no governor presence at the school, it should be the federation who now puts time and effort into making Cantley better, with the support of the community.</p>
Email submissions <i>(Please note, names have been redacted from the comments).</i>			
Strongly disagree	Neither agree or disagree	<p><i>Cantley, Limpenhoe and Southwood Parish Council</i></p> <p>"Consultation on the proposal to formally amalgamate Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School from 1 September 2025</p> <p>The proposed amalgamation of Cantley Primary School was discussed by the Parish Council at an Extraordinary meeting held on Thursday 6th June 2025. This followed attendance by some Councillors to the meeting at Cantley Primary School on 19th May 2025 where parents had the opportunity to express their feelings about the amalgamation and the impact it would have on their children. This is the context in which the Council discussed the proposal and the wider effects it would have on the community.</p> <p>It was unanimously agreed by Council members to oppose the proposal for the following reasons:</p>	

		<p>Primarily, without a school at the heart of the village, families with young children are unlikely to move into Cantley, thus skewing the demographics of the community and resulting in Cantley becoming nothing more than a retirement village.</p> <p>Where there are already children attending Cantley School, it will be detrimental to the Parish, that from the age of four they are taken out of Cantley on a daily basis, resulting in their no longer identifying with, nor being long term rooted, in their home community.</p> <p>The Council are not convinced that there has been sufficient effort made to promote Cantley Primary School (following a period where its reputation was more fragile) in terms of its benefits as a small rural school, able to manage children's needs in a positive nurturing way, often less possible where much larger class sizes are the norm. In this context, the Council are aware of the fact that some parents have already chosen to move children especially to Cantley Primary School from other areas for these very reasons.</p> <p>A school does not exist in isolation¹. It is not separate from the life of a village or parish. A school is an important and integral part of a sustainable community related to housing and local employment, and the health and social wellbeing of children, parents and resident.</p>	
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		<p>The Council would no longer be able to engage with pupils at the school in the way that is currently possible, for instance, when joining Parish Council and School in litter picking sessions, hedge and tree planting, and extremely enjoyable events, involving all ages in the community, such as VE Day and other National days of commemoration or celebration.</p> <p>Moving all of our children out of area for education also perpetuates the idea that cars are the only mode of transport in rural communities. Currently families can bike and /or walk their children to school which has to be better for them, and for the planet!</p> <p>The AIM Federation claims that it supports a group of rural schools with one of its aims being for 'each school to keep its own unique identity and community feel'. This is what Cantley Primary School can currently offer and is what, as a community, it will lose.</p> <p>The amalgamation, and effective closure, of Cantley Primary School and Nursery was sprung on parents, pupils and the community at very short notice with little time for effective consultation. The Council understands the final decision on the closure of the school, is to be made in the last week of the Summer term, just before pupils break for the summer holiday. This is grossly unfair on the children and</p>	
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		<p>parents who will have to find another school without a proper transition at what will be for many, a highly emotional period.</p> <p>There has been a 'presumption against closure' status to rural schools in England since 1998. The 'period of grace' offered by the 'presumption against closure' should give schools some protection from sudden closure.</p> <p>At the public meeting at Cantley Primary School held on the 19th May 2025, it was confirmed that funding for the 2025-26 academic year is secure and sufficient to maintain the school next year even with reduced pupil numbers. Another year would provide a reasonable transition period and offer the opportunity to attract more pupils to support the continuation of the school. The Council, therefore, request the decision to amalgamate the schools be delayed for a year to allow for a fairer transition and the opportunity to explore the possibility of attracting more pupils to a school that can offer a different kind of school setting which some pupils may find more acceptable and suitable.</p> <p>The Council are hopeful that genuinely the decision has not already been made, that the view of the village and parish will be heard, and that Cantley Primary School will be supported to continue to offer its opportunities and benefits to the children and families of Cantley and beyond.</p>	
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		¹ Dr Cath Gristy (2022), Small Schools Manifesto Briefing notes, University of Plymouth”	
Strongly disagree	Strongly disagree	<p>Email submission</p> <p>I have emailed schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk</p> <p>“To whom it may concern,</p> <p>As an ex parent and staff member I wanted to share my view on why Cantley School is worth saving and where it has gone wrong.</p> <p>I removed my child in 2024 but I wanted to from at least 2022, particularly when I left in 2023. It was difficult as at the time I was successfully managing the nursery, so for ease and friendship reasons, I felt I had to keep her there as my start time and her start time were the same so logistically us being at the same site was necessary.</p> <p>I felt I had to speak up when it was being stated that Cantley School was in danger of closing because of 'families wanting to send their children to bigger schools' and 'poor advertising', that is a false narrative. The truth is poor leadership and a care only for 'The Federation' lead to good staffing choosing to leave, poor teaching and progress, lack of opportunities and a stretched, ineffective 'federation SENDCO'</p> <p>The school my child now attends is a small rural school with four classes, a family feel and a great ethos. Exactly as Cantley was when I chose to apply there and why I chose to send my child to school</p>	I have emailed schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk as previous manager of Cantley nursery

		<p>there. I've made my views known on her final teacher and my choice to remove her so won't go in to that. Teaching had been slipping for a while, the mixed classes and lack of differentiation, meant covering the same topics over and over each year was ineffective, repetitive and dull.</p> <p>The Leadership Team, whilst worrying about logos and acrostic slogans, began losing sight of Cantley's charm and individuality. I hoped under the current head teacher, it would find itself again and I believe it could having had the privilege of working with [REDACTED]. However under the federation and it's micromanaging and want for all it's schools to be identical, and the reputation of previous leaders, I knew it would be a daunting task and difficult feat.</p> <p>Whilst nursery manager, I made posters promoting the nursery, shared them physically and digitally everywhere locally that I could, plus attending local baby groups to promote our nursery. I also posted on the nursery social media often. The aforementioned 'micromanaging' put a stop to that and it wasn't continued after I left. It was hard hearing that the nursery I worked so hard to build up, began losing children and parents who didn't want their children to attend the school, chose to put them in a different school based nursery, where they could complete their nursery and primary journey in one place.</p> <p>The local community of parents, carers and families, including myself and several friends, lost faith in the school and watched as troves of children were</p>	
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		<p>removed from the school by their parents and carers over concerns of low progress, school anxiety and loss of trust and respect of how the school was being run. They are the real reason families left. Poor behaviour management, being patronised and unsupported by the SLT when raising an issue and having 1 SENDCO failing to stretch between multiple schools with barely any observations or input with Cantley children. Latest government figures show 1 in 5 children have a Special Educational Need!</p> <p>If Cantley School was able to be a solo entity or move away from the Coastal Whatever Federation and receive support from schools locally, it could be great again. Some of the SLT 'jumped ship' over to Freethorpe, so to merge with them would just be a waiting game of how long until that ship sinks too.</p> <p>I hope the children of Cantley and surrounding areas will be able to access a great education from caring teachers at Cantley Primary School for many years to come. Thank you to Cantley Primary School's hardworking PTA for fighting for a once great school to get the opportunity to be great again."</p>	
		<i>Please see Appendix E for full response from the CSA/PTA. Response includes embedded images.</i>	
Hand delivered response forms:			
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Children should have the opportunity of adapting to school life in their own village school. Parents do not have the same contact with the school, attended by	

		their children, if out of the village and interest becomes lost	
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Appendix D

Questions raised in the consultation so far:

We have brought together the questions and comments raised at both recent consultation events held on Monday 19 May and Tuesday 20 May 2025, as well as the questions from the survey responses received so far. This document provides an overview of the key themes raised and responses.

This consultation remains open until **12 noon on 16 June 2025**. You can still [submit your responses and find out the latest regarding the progress of the proposal here](#).

Once the informal consultation closes, the responses will be reviewed, and the Executive Director of Children's Services will decide whether to proceed to the formal Public Notice period.

Governance:

Is there anyone on the governing body who advocates specifically for Cantley School? How long have the board known about the possible amalgamation? Why can't all governing board meeting minutes be shared with the public?

The governing body represents all schools within the federation and makes decisions in the best interest of all children. The decision to amalgamate was made in April by the governing board as numbers of pupils had dropped from 54 (for the same period last year), to just 32 fairly rapidly over the last two terms (as of 2 June 2025, this now 27). This left the board to urgently review the overall position mindful of educational outcomes and financial implications, and reluctantly, approach the Local Authority to consider launching a proposal on amalgamation.

While the board aims to be transparent, some matters discussed in meetings are confidential due to personal, legal, or sensitive information. Public versions of minutes are made available where possible.

Promotion of the school:

What has been done to promote the school and increase pupil numbers?

We heard concerns that Cantley School's strengths as a small school have not been sufficiently promoted, and matters have been addressed too late.

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. Many parents are not choosing Cantley School, preferring bigger schools. No applications have been made for Reception in 2025.

No change:

What is proposed for September if the amalgamation does not go ahead?

Following a rapid and significant drop in pupil numbers at Cantley Primary School, there are 17 children expected in September and no new reception 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 the preferences and some families may choose alternative settings, contributing to a further decline in pupil numbers, destabilising the school further.

What are the financial and staffing implications of not amalgamating?

The school is currently budgeting based on a single-class model for the next three years. This reflects current pupil numbers. This will mean that all pupils are taught in a single class structure on the Cantley site from September 2025 with a single teacher, Teaching assistant and High-Level Teaching Assistant. As school funding is linked to pupil numbers, it is forecast that the school will accrue a deficit if this continues unaddressed.

Pupil numbers:

Why has there been such a sharp drop in pupil numbers?

Over 20 pupils have left in the past two terms. At the same time last year, the school had approximately 50 pupils.

The UK is experiencing a declining birth rate, with fewer babies born each year. In 2022, the total fertility rate in England and Wales was 1.49 children per woman, well below the replacement level of 2.1. We are seeing this rate reflected in a decline in pupil numbers in Norfolk, leading to a surplus of school places. As a result, many areas are seeing falling pupil numbers, particularly in primary schools.

Many families are opting for schools outside their catchment areas, as the Admissions code of practice allows them to do. This sharp decline, combined with long-term demographic trends, led to the very recent decision to consider amalgamation. While parental preference is important, for small schools a small change in numbers, where there is significant excess capacity in the system, can unfortunately quickly affect the viability of a school.

What does this mean for new families moving into the village? We have seen pupil number rise again in the past after a decline.

We've heard concerns that school changes may make the village less attractive to new families and that changes to the local roads, including completion of the fly-over on the A47 would attract more pupils.

Decisions are never made lightly and always consider long-term sustainability. If there is a significant shift in population and pupil demand in future years, the local authority would reassess the provision. However, current trends and minimal housing plans in the local area indicate a continued decline in school-aged children in the area.

Can the decision be delayed to give the school another year to improve pupil numbers?

This suggestion has been raised by several families. We recognise that once a consultation is launched, families will respond in different ways. For some, this may include applying for alternative school places as a way of managing uncertainty. We have already seen some families take this step, which is entirely understandable. This is a key consideration when deciding whether and when to launch a consultation, as it can place further pressure on a school's viability. As pupil numbers fall even further, the setting becomes increasingly vulnerable.

Some families have suggested that allowing an additional year to attract more pupils might help. While we understand the intention behind this suggestion, our view is that it is unlikely families would choose to send their children to a school facing potential amalgamation in a year's time, particularly when there are sufficient surplus school places in the wider area.

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. This creates a compounding effect: each year of low intake widens the age gap between pupils, further reducing the school's appeal and making recovery of pupil numbers increasingly difficult.

Suggestions were raised requesting consideration if the school could co-host SEND provision; It can be very challenging to add Specialist Resource Bases (SRBs) to schools where the additional provision would significantly outnumber the existing pupil population. In all cases where amalgamation is being considered, the local authority assesses whether there is a need for additional SEND provision in the area. Unfortunately, at this time, establishing a specialist base is not considered a viable option to address the issue of declining pupil numbers.

What is the impact of small class sizes on attainment and pupil outcomes?

Many families shared their view that small classes can offer more individual attention, especially for pupils with additional needs.

In terms of academic outcomes, the national and local averages of end of key stage 2 test and teacher assessment data show that on average, the smallest schools, with fewer than 10 children in a cohort attain less well than larger cohorts. The smaller cohorts are, the more marked this difference becomes. Aggregating 2022-24 Norfolk data shows that pupils in cohorts of less than 5 pupils are half as likely to attain expected standards than in cohorts over 10. There is of course extreme variation within this average.

While small schools can be extremely effective, unfortunately, smaller numbers of pupils can mean that there are fewer opportunities for group work, collaboration, and social development. Reduced numbers of classes, means a wider age range in each class, meaning a teacher needs to plan and teach multiple year groups at once which can be very complex.

Could the catchment area be broadened to increase pupil numbers?

Catchment areas are set to ensure fairness and access to local schools, their design rooted in history to parish boundaries and other landmarks. While it is possible to review boundaries, this is a complex process and would be unlikely to offer a short-term or long-term solution. There is currently significant capacity within the local school system, meaning that most families are able to secure a place at their preferred school. Catchment areas primarily come into play when schools are oversubscribed. As a result, changing the catchment area is unlikely to influence parental choice or significantly increase the number of children attending the school.

How will class sizes be affected at Freethorpe School if the amalgamation goes ahead?

Some respondents are concerned that the amalgamation will lead to larger class sizes, negatively impacting the quality of education.

As part of the Local Authority due diligence before proposing the amalgamation, assessment was made around the capacity of Freethorpe to accommodate all pupils currently attending Cantley. All children can be offered a place, however we recognise that some families will choose to send their children to other schools in the area.

Freethorpe Community Primary School is a 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. Schools with under 210 pupils are classed as a small school by the Department for Education. The school operates a five-class structure and has classroom space to expand and change this structure if demand increases in the future.

These numbers are for September 2025 and assume all pupils will attend Freethorpe from Cantley, however we recognise this is unlikely to be the case, therefore these figures are subject to change. (Numbers are accurate as of 22 May 2025).

	Freethorpe	Cantley	Combined Freethorpe Cantley
Reception	14	0	14
Year 1	16	3	19
Year 2	25	4	29
Year 3	19	2	21
Year 4	17	4	21
Year 5	15	2	17
Year 6	23	2	25

Current Freethorpe 5 Class Structure May 2025	
R & Year 1	30
Year 2	25
Year 3 & Year 4	(19 + 6) 25
Year 4 & Year 5	(11 + 15) 26
Year 6	23

Amalgamated Freethorpe 5 Class Structure September 2025	
R & Year 1	14 + 11 = 25
Year 1 & Year 2	8 + 28 = 28
Year 2 & Year 3	9 + 21 = 30
Year 4 & Year 5	21 + 9 = 30

Year 5 & Year 6	8 + 25 = 33
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Transport:

Will families receive free transport if the school amalgamates?

We understand the importance of travel arrangements for families, with some families sharing that their children will need to travel further or change their mode of transport to attend an alternative school. Eligibility for free transport depends on factors such as distance, safe walking routes and catchment. The local authority will provide specific guidance to affected families if the amalgamation goes ahead. In the meantime, you can find more information in the [Home to School transport policy here](#), or speak to our team to review your individual circumstances. The Local Authority will be undertaking assessment to review if walking routes are suitable.

The proposal

Why was there so little notice given about the proposed amalgamation?

We understand how difficult sudden change can be. The pace of pupil decline meant that urgent discussions were necessary. We understand that the launch of a consultation can lead to a range of responses from families. In some cases, this may involve seeking places at other schools as a way to manage the uncertainty. We've already seen this happening, and we recognise that it's a natural reaction. This potential shift in pupil numbers is an important factor when deciding the timing of a consultation, as it can unintentionally add further strain to a school's sustainability. A continued drop in enrolment can make the school increasingly at risk.

There is no perfect time to launch a consultation. However, we recognise that changes for pupils which align with the start of the academic year are generally more favourable than those made mid-year, as they help reduce multiple disruptions within the same year.

While it is important to maintain momentum through the necessary stages of consultation, this must not come at the expense of a thorough process. It is essential that stakeholders have sufficient time for consideration and response.

Following informal consultation, the Executive Director of Children's Services will determine whether the proposal should proceed to formal consultation. If so, a public notice will be published, initiating a formal consultation period lasting four weeks. During this time, further responses can be submitted.

After the consultation period ends, all responses will be reviewed, and a final decision will be made. As soon as the outcome is known, it will be shared with families and communities at the earliest opportunity. If a formal consultation is required, the outcome is anticipated to be confirmed toward the end of the summer term.

How will pupils be supported through any school changes? What can be done before a final decision is made?

Supporting children through transition is a priority. Should changes go ahead, the school will provide support for pupils. Some families have expressed concern that children are confused by

what's happening and given the timing of the consultation if the amalgamation is agreed, will have insufficient time to prepare for the move with a supported transition.

Until a final decision is made, and the outcome of the consultation is known, it would not be appropriate for the school to begin any formal transition arrangements for pupils. We recognise that the formal timescales for the process are tight, and that the final outcome will not be known until the very end of the academic year. This does present challenges, as it may leave limited time for children, families, and staff to prepare adequately for any changes, should the proposal be approved.

We are aware that some families have expressed an interest in seeing joint activities between the schools explored, to familiarise children with peers, staff and a different school building.

Parental suggestions have included staff visiting both sites or holding shared events such as sports days. While these are not formal transition steps, we understand the value in building positive relationships and a sense of community, and the schools will consider how any informal opportunities can be approached sensitively and appropriately at this stage

The building and land:

What will happen to the school building and land if the amalgamation goes ahead?

At this stage we are unable to give a complete answer. The playing field, however, is leased for the school so does not belong to the council. As was stated in the consultation document, the process for education land and buildings initially is to test whether it is required for any other education purpose initially. If not, it is offered to other Norfolk County Council departments for reuse against strategic aims. If it is not used for education then the Secretary of State will need to agree to the disposal of the land. The council's Cabinet would then need to make a decision about whether to offer it on the open market.

Appendix E

Full response and embedded images received from Cantley School Association (CSA) (PTA) and Trustees by email 16/06/2025 *(Please note, names have been redacted from the comments).*

Cantley School Association (CSA) (PTA) Trustees Response to the Proposed Amalgamation of Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Community Primary School

Firstly, we wish to raise concerns about the time of this consultation. The announcement came to teachers on the first day of Y6 SATS, and to parents and pupils on the second day of SATS which left parents completely aghast at the poor timing to release this information, causing emotional and mental stress to pupils and families on top of an already worrying time for children sitting exams. While we appreciate the consultation needed to be launched, the timing of doing this over SATS week was inexcusable.

The CSA strongly objects to the proposed amalgamation of Cantley Primary School and Freethorpe Primary School due to a number of overlooked considerations in the consultation documents, and we urge the County Council to grant the school more time to fix the problems which led to pupil numbers declining this year.

The *Falling Pupil Numbers* referenced on Page 4 states 'Cantley Primary School has experienced a steady decline in pupil numbers, a trend that began before the COVID-19 pandemic... Many parents locally are not choosing to send their children to the school...' This fall in numbers started in the 2019 school year after the unfortunate news of the SATS results forgery in 2018. As expected, parents did not want their children to attend a school that received high levels of negative media coverage. Negative media coverage follows families and the community through school years (press articles released in July 2019 and May 2021) and can take up to 5 years after the last press coverage to stabilise before an improvement is seen. Breaking the pupil numbers down in the graph below and following year groups through their school journey, (Green – increase on previous year, Orange – same as previous year, Red – decrease on previous year) prior to the 2018 media announcement, pupil numbers against the previous year were steady and increasing at a greater rate than those decreasing. 2018 was the biggest intake in the last 14 years and had seen a positive increase that year for pupil numbers across the year groups. From 2019, numbers drastically dropped despite the school being taken on by AIM Federation (formerly Coastal Together) showing this initial and revisited negative media starting a snowball effect. Positively advertising the school during these challenging years should have been a priority for the federation.

Year	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
2011	12	17	10	18	13	9	9	88
2012	8	12	18	15	19	18	8	98
2013	10	6	13	19	10	19	16	93
2014	13	12	6	13	18	10	17	89
2015	11	11	13	6	13	16	12	82
2016	18	11	12	16	6	16	16	95
2017	12	17	11	11	18	7	16	92
2018	21	15	20	12	14	19	5	106
2019	7	15	11	17	8	14	17	89
2020	11	6	12	12	15	8	11	75
2021	6	11	6	12	12	11	8	66
2022	8	6	10	4	10	14	7	59
2023	7	6	5	9	2	10	14	53
2024	3	7	7	5	8	2	9	41

Page 4 of the consultation document also states that *‘there is a surplus of places in the wider area’*. While falling birth rates may mean there are reduced spaces in reception classes, several of the other year groups are full and nearing full. Considering all the local schools in a reasonable driving distance to Cantley, the following taken from Gov website shows spaces (inc nursery spaces) and Ofsted rating:

Acle – 25 spaces (4th June 2025) (Good)

Lingwood – 2 spaces (1st May 2025) (Good)

Reedham – 6 spaces (September 2024) (Good)

Freethorpe – 34 spaces (2nd May 2025) (Good)

Hemblington – 55 spaces (24th April 2025) (Good)

Fairhaven – Full (12th May 2025) (Good)

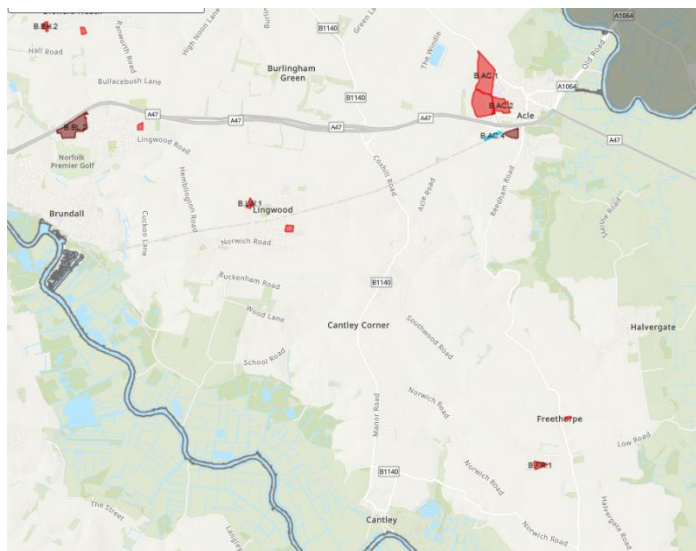
Brundall – Full (15th May 2025) (Good)

Blofield – Full (23rd April 2025) (Good)

Salhouse – 29 spaces (4th June 2025) (requires improvement)

Rackheath – Full (24th April 2025) (outstanding)

Cantley – 44 spaces (14th May 2025) (Good)



Page 5 of the consultation documents *Future Demand* states that there are no new houses planned in Cantley.

Gov website 'New Homes and School Places' fact sheet dated November 2023 estimates that typically, 100 new homes yield 25 primary school pupils. A more recent report for Norfolk states that number is estimated at 28 primary school pupils per 100 homes.

7. Evidence and Reasons for Decision

- 7.1** The 'Norfolk multiplier' for new homes is 28.1 primary age children per 100 homes (4 per year group) and 14.5 secondary age children per 100 homes (3 per year group). This is an average, with some parts of the County producing higher numbers and other parts lower. New developments can produce new patterns of place demand, and therefore an average can allow for variation. This 'multiplier' continues to be evaluated against the latest output from developments and this review may lead to an adjustment to these numbers as a result of changing demographics.

The Greater Norwich Local Plan (GNLP) has upwards of 950 new housing coming within a suitable travelling distance of Cantley School. 60 new homes are allocated to Lingwood, 30 Reedham, 50 Freethorpe, 340 + 200 predatory application in Acle, 45 South Walsham, 190 Blofield, 56 Blofield Health/Hemblington. Based on the above information, this estimates a minimum of 250 primary school spaces being needed for the current GNLP locations. Broadland doesn't have a 5 year housing supply and villages are starting to see the increase in predatory planning applications. This number will increase with local planning authorities needing to build an additional 2500 homes a year as part of the Governments overhall of planning laws. Ofsted ratings will also influence parents preference for schools, Cantley is due Ofsted over the next year, the school has already invested money into expanded its teaching opportunities in preparation to strive for Outstanding.

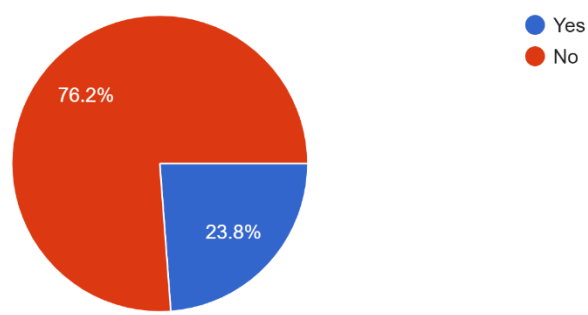
The 2021 census data shows that Cantley village actually has an increasing population between 2011-2021.

Name	County / District	Population Census 2001-04-29	Population Census 2011-03-27	Population Census 2021-03-21
Cantley	Norfolk	462	504	511

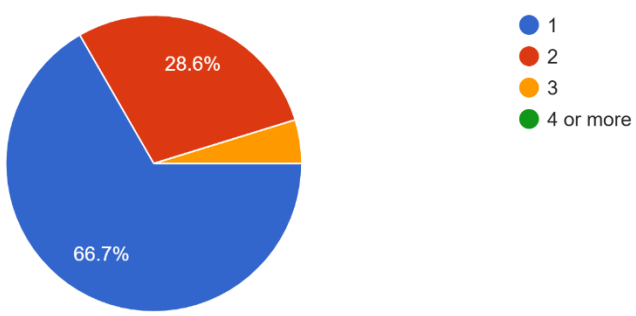
The PTA spoke with most parents to gather data on where they live in relation to Cantley, showing that from those who completed the survey, 76% of parents are outside the Cantley catchment area, and choosing to travel to send children to Cantley school and nursery for its unique set up.

We would like to argue that the lack of future housing in Cantley does not mean that there won't be a future need for the school.

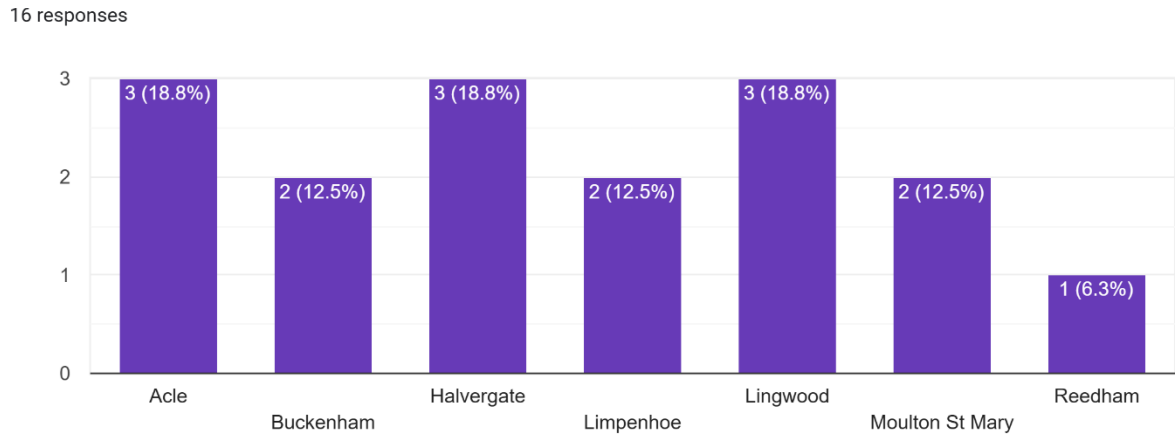
Do you live in Cantley?
21 responses



How many children do you have at the school/nursery?
21 responses



While in the short term, it may make financial sense for NCC and Aim Federation to



amalgamate Cantley and Freethorpe, in the long term with additional housing coming, the spaces at Cantley will be needed for parents moving into the catchment area of already full schools, and compared to the cost of building a new school, keeping the existing building active and improving the advertisement and community connections will make more financial sense. NCC news report

dated 1st February 2022 states that 'more than a dozen new primary schools could be needed in Norfolk in the next decade to cater for growing pupil numbers in areas of development'.

Lack of advertisement

Page 6 of the consultation document, talks about promoting the school to attract more pupils, saying that the promotion has been '*ineffective*'. In actual fact, the advertisement has been non-existent.

The lack of school advertisement for Cantley became apparent when Federation concerns over pupil numbers in 3 of its smallest rural schools started PR discussions and marketing strategies in early 2024.

In July 2024 Coastal Together announced their rebrand to AIM Federation, sending a letter to parents and confirming that there would be administrative changes to websites and letterheads to promote the slogan 'small schools, big opportunities'. The letter stated *'we are working hard to promote our smallest schools and most remote schools to ensure that parent's who don't currently know about us, do!'* This has not been the case with Cantley school.

In

The new name will be AIM - standing for 'Aspire, Improve and Master' - 'Small Schools, Big Opportunities' is our signifier which we feel describes us well - **we are a group of small schools working together, to create big opportunities for our children** - some examples are our rich federation curriculum offer and whole federation residential programs - something that small individual schools would struggle to do by themselves.

We are working hard to promote our smallest and most remote schools, to ensure that parents who don't currently know about us, do! To this end we are in the process of producing some fantastic video content which many of you will have already seen on Facebook - a couple of examples can be seen below; (and there is more to come). Please share the links with family and friends to help us reach further and let people know that we are here.....

[Swanton Abbott Primary School](#)

[Year 5 Campout](#)

I hope this explains a little about why we are changing our name but more importantly how we are continuing to value and support our small yet fantastic, rural village schools.

If this ends up being my final communication before the summer break, I hope that you have a lovely six week break with your children - we have lots of fantastic things going on before then, including the Isle of Wight residential with 61 children from across the federation, which I am looking forward to during the final week of the year - I might need six weeks to recover !!!

Regards

Simon Wakeman
Executive Head

Designate Executive Leadership Team [from January 2025](#)

David Hopkins
Executive Head

Abi Carter
Deputy Executive Head
Safeguarding and Inclusion

Emie Croft
Deputy Executive Head
Teaching, Learning and Standards

Jenny Wood
Business Director

Authority consulted with The Coastal Federation Governors about the two federations becoming one - to be known as 'Coastal Together'. Last year Swanton Abbott joined Coastal Together, following the retirement of their Headteacher. Hope you are following this so far?

The Governors of the federation have agreed that we need an identity that better reflects the ethos and geographical location of all of our schools, bearing in mind our mantra of each school being unique and rooted in its own village community - something that we are very proud of. Thus the name change. Apart from the overall name change of the federation, each school remains as they were. There will of course be some administrative changes - website, letterhead etc.



February 2024, the Chair of the PTA was invited to attend the initial PR meeting with Chameleon Training by then Head of School, [REDACTED]. The initial date had to be rescheduled, and unfortunately the Chair wasn't able to make the new date. After the meeting, the Chair was assured the meeting went well, and an advertisement company would be coming to create marketing materials at Cantley. There was no further communication in the 23/24 school year apart from a comment about promotion in the above letter.

In September 2024, letters went out to Cantley school parents, informing them of a confirmed date for PR team to film the media. Two days before the planned media date, a text went out to parents telling them the day was postponed due to high winds. This date was never rescheduled and still to this day, the executive head cannot give a reason why. Time and money have been spent in targeted advertisement through wonderfully created video footage in Swanton Abbott and Horning school, both of which can be seen on the home page of Aim Federation website. <https://www.aimfederation.org/>



Tuesday 17th September

Dear Parents and Carers,

I am writing to inform you about an important update regarding your child's school day on **Wednesday, 25th September**.

On this date, we will have photography and filming on-site for updated marketing purposes, including the school website and social media platforms. As a result, we kindly request that **all Reception to Year 6 children come to school in full school uniform**.

This will be a change from our usual procedure where children typically arrive in their PE kit for the day. Instead, please ensure that your child brings their **PE kit** with them to change into for their PE session.

We will send out a text message reminder the day before to help you remember this change.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation as we work to present our school at its very best!

Best regards,

Mrs Kathryn Andrews
Head of School

Due to the weather forecast, Wednesday's marketing day is postponed. Therefore, children can come to school in their PE kit as they would do normally.

Within the Federation, the following schools show the current state of updated websites and prospectus'

Bacton – Aim Federation with out of date prospectus

Cantley – Recently updated to Aim Federation but with out of date prospectus

Freethorpe – Aim Federation with out of date prospectus

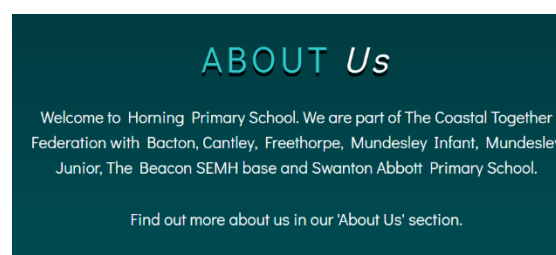
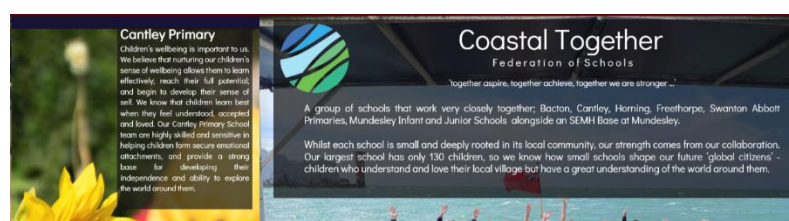
Horning – Costal Together with out of date contact information

Swanton Abbott – Aim Federation with out of date prospectus

Mundsley Infant School – Aim Federation with out of date prospectus

Mundsley Junior School – Aim Federation with out of date prospectus


This raised further concerns that the smallest rural schools in the Federation (Cantley & Horning) are not being actively promoted. Both these schools share a budget and it raised further concerns of how Horning school with manage if Cantley closes.



Cantley School Prospectus and Horning Website Page

Cantley Preschool website displays out of date information. 3 out of 4 staff members listed on the website have not worked at the school during the 24/25 school year. The 4th retired in December 2025.

The decision was made to put a qualified teacher into the nursery setting from September 2025 to support the EYFS and Reception classroom. This is a key selling point for the nursery and should be widely promoted but nowhere on the website is this advertised. The website also promotes the use of Tapestry Learning Journal to connect parents with the class. Tapestry hasn't been used since April 2024, providing out of date information to potential parents.



Federation About Us Policy & Procedures Parent Zone Gallery Contacts


Preschool Staff

All staff are DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) checked and have current first aid qualifications. They continue to train in different areas of the curriculum to support the children at preschool.

Charlotte Gower

Preschool Manager

For as long as I can remember I have always wanted to work with children and I can honestly say I love my job! I have worked in Schools and Early Years settings whilst completing my studies over the past 7 years. During this time I have become passionate about children exploring and learning through play with us as adults supporting them. I enjoy helping to nurture the learning and development of young children as part of a team. It's lovely seeing children blossom and progress as they move forward through their learning. In my spare time, I enjoy long walks with my dogs and weekends away, exploring new places.



We would love to give you a personal tour of Puffins preschool so you can see for yourself the special place that we have here. Get in touch today:

puffin-preschool@coastaltogether.co.uk
01493 700308

Angela Cheongvee

Nursery Nurse

I have worked in our preschool for around 20 years and enjoy watching our children learn, develop and grow. I believe in supporting children to learn through play, encouraging them to share and develop their ideas and skills.

I enjoy gardening and attending the theatre, as well as spending time with my family.

Emma Broom

Preschool Practitioner

I have worked in Early Years for around 5 years. I love listening to the stories the children tell me and seeing their confidence grow so quickly. I have 3 children and love family days out. I also love motorsports!

Julie Hey

Preschool Practitioner

I split my time working part time in the preschool and part time in the school supporting the older children's learning. I enjoy setting up exciting activities to spark the children's imagination and encourage learning opportunities. I love being a Nanna, I love singing and dancing and having lots of fun!

The Federation has not sent out requested session forms for September 2025/26 to the current parents of nursery children. The last form sent home was for Spring term meaning the Federation does not have an up to date information list for sessions in September. There are parents in the nursery who were looking to increase sessions as children move into their next year at the setting.

Banners on the school gate remain old and unchanged, promoting the Coastal Together and displaying old school logos and photos of children who left the school years ago.



Cantley has recently increases the number of posts it does on its social media page, but this is only effective if viewers algorithms show the posts. There was only 1 social media post advertising reception intake and nursery for 2025/26 school year. This is not an effective way to advertise, the posts weren't shared to local community pages, the Federation organised no open days and did not make use of local village books.

< Cantley Primary School 🔍

Posts About Photos More ▾

Cantley Primary School
5 Dec 2024 · 🌐

🌟 Is Your Little One Ready for Reception 2025?

At Cantley Primary School, we're a small school with big opportunities. Our small class sizes mean we can get to know your child really well, supporting them to reach their full potential.

We focus on creativity and exploration, with lots of outdoor learning and hands-on activities that inspire curiosity and confidence. Every child is valued and supported in our warm and welcoming environment.

 Admissions Information

Applications are open now and close on 15 January 2025. If your child was born between 1 September 2020 and 31 August 2021, it's time to apply for their Reception place.

< Cantley Primary School 🔍

Posts About Photos More ▾

Cantley Primary School
10 Mar · 🌐

We're very proud of our engaging learning environment at Puffin Preschool.

We have spaces for 2-4 year olds. Contact the school office to book a visit- 01493 700308



A parent's plea post onto local community Facebook group pages bought 3 families to the school to look around, the same week as the consultation was announced. One of the family's considering Cantley even came to the consultation meeting to express concerns of losing the school. The school isn't getting its name out there and can attract parents through better advertising methods.

All About Lingwood!
 Matt Lawson · 25 Apr · 🌐

👉 **Save Cantley Primary School!** 👉

Dear Broadland community, as a concerned parent with a child at Cantley Primary School, I'm reaching out to ask for your support. Our beloved Cantley Primary, which has nurtured young minds for over 100 years, is at risk of closing due to low student numbers. Despite a strong start to the year, a few families leaving has put the school in a critical position.

As a parent, I can't praise Cantley enough. The staff are understanding, the environment is welcoming, and they've been exceptional with my child, who thrives in smaller classes. If your child struggles in larger settings or could benefit from a more personalized approach, Cantley Primary could be the perfect fit. With a fantastic SENCO lead and openness to flexi-schooling, they truly cater to children who need extra support.

Many of you may know Cantley from its past challenges, but those have been resolved, and the school now boasts a great Ofsted review. It's a small school with a big heart, but its tiny voice needs amplifying. I'm posting today because I'm worried about my daughter in a class of 30—she wouldn't cope, and I know other parents share this concern.

Brundall & Blofield community page
 Matt Lawson · 25 Apr · 🌐

👉 **Save Cantley Primary School!** 👉

Dear Broadland community, as a concerned parent with a child at Cantley Primary School, I'm reaching out to ask for your support. Our beloved Cantley Primary, which has nurtured young minds for over 100 years, is at risk of closing due to low student numbers. Despite a strong start to the year, a few families leaving has put the school in a critical position.

As a parent, I can't praise Cantley enough. The staff are understanding, the environment is welcoming, and they've been exceptional with my child, who thrives in smaller classes. If your child struggles in larger settings or could benefit from a more personalized approach, Cantley Primary could be the perfect fit. With a fantastic SENCO lead and openness to flexi-schooling, they truly cater to children who need extra support.

Many of you may know Cantley from its past challenges, but those have been resolved, and the school now boasts a great Ofsted review. It's a small school with a big heart, but its tiny voice needs amplifying. I'm posting today because I'm worried about my daughter in a class of 30—she wouldn't cope, and I know other parents share this concern.

Matt's post

our community alive. Let's ensure every child has a chance to thrive in a school that feels like home.

📍 Cantley Primary School, 01493 700308
www.cantley.norfolk.sch.uk

cantley.norfolk.sch.uk
Cantley Primary School

👍 Like 💬 Comment 📧 Send

👍👍👍👍👍 20

Most relevant -

He'll thought that shut years ago along with halvergate n all went to freethorpe

📷 Write a comment... 🗨️ 🧐 😊

NCC report on Norfolk Population Overview August 2023, Key Findings states that Broadland has the highest percentage of pupils achieving a good level of development at early years foundations, the highest in Norfolk. Nurturing community nursery schools play a key role in supporting this figure, and a well integrated site such as Cantley Nursery will continue to feed into the main school and can be positively promoted.

Age Distribution (C 2021)	
80+ years	28
70-79 years	61
60-69 years	86
50-59 years	84
40-49 years	63
30-39 years	47
20-29 years	44
10-19 years	48
0-9 years	40

Cantley is being branded as being 'out of the way' yet other schools in the Federation are also located in remote areas. A shift in the Federation putting a stop to nursery managers attending community fetes has impacted the EYFS numbers.

2021 census data for Cantley show that there is a significant number of children between 0-9 years of age who could be and should be joining the school if advertised correctly. There is also an aging population. These properties will have the option to be filled by young families when the time comes.

Governors minutes from February 2025 discuss pan Numbers. Had NCC plan to reduced PAN numbers for Freethorpe, but this decision was appealed by the Federation, one assumes due to considerations to amalgamate Cantley and Freethorpe. Had the PAN numbers had been dropped, this could have directed new pupils towards Cantley School, better balancing pupil numbers in the area.

Pan Letter from Governors and NCC Response Cantley and Swanton

DH advises that following contact from NCC regarding proposed reduction in PANs, he contacted SL and MB and a letter was sent on behalf of Governors appealing the decision with the reasoning and objections why. NCC were proposing reducing the PAN at Freethorpe from 25 to 15, at Bacton from 15 to 10, Swanton Abbott 15 to 10 and Cantley 14 to 10. DH states we met with Paul Harker, Place Planning Manager from NCC and the PANs were discussed. NCC have agreed that Freethorpe and Bacton will remain unchanged but they want to reduce the PANs at Swanton Abbott and Cantley to 10. DH advises that Paul confirmed if the PAN is met, the schools will still be able to take children over the PAN if they have capacity. DH explains it's all about balancing the reducing number of children that there are across the whole county to try and keep schools functioning with enough children whilst maintaining the quality of education. The birth rate is reducing, so reducing the PAN allows schools to structure accordingly.

NCCs letters for Cantley and Swanton Abbott had been previously shared on GovernorHub and following discussion, the FGB agreed to accept the reduced PAN and not appeal the decision.

Unique selling points

Cantley Primary School has several USP's which are not widely promoted.

Small mixed year group classroom sizes enable children to work collaboratively across the different year groups, learning from both their peers and teachers. These small class sizes give a greater 1-2-1 classroom feel and ensures the children's emotional and mental wellbeing is better personalised. Changes to a child's demeanour is more easily recognisable in smaller schools, meaning there is a better chance of identifying safeguarding problems early on. Cantley School was part of an independent study in 1995, conducted by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], UEA Professors. Their finding pictures below still resonated in the small rural school ethos today.

Appendix 1

CANTLEY FIRST SCHOOL - An Independent Opinion

Presented below is the full text of a letter sent to Peter Glanville (Chair of Governors)

Thank you very much for your invitation to us to spend some time in Cantley First School; perhaps you will be kind enough also to extend our thanks to Mrs. Smith and her staff for making it so interesting and enjoyable occasion.

Jonathon Sher, the American professor who directed the OECD's international study of rural schooling, summed up his experience of very small schools in a paraphrase of that old nursery rhyme: "When they're good they're very very good; and when they're bad they're horrid." Our visits to many small schools, in this and other countries, allow us to testify without reservation to the truth of that statement. If one searches for the factors which make one small school very good and for those which make another very bad, one can virtually rule out the nature of the buildings - we have seen excellence in virtual hovels and its antithesis in brand new buildings. What counts above everything else is that the school is served by teachers with the right creative blend of skills, knowledge, competence and attitudes which allow them to capitalise on the advantages which smallness of scale confers. Two teachers, with those attributes can provide as fine an educational experience as any parent could wish for their young children. On that score, it seems to us that you and your fellow Governors at Cantley have every reason to feel pleased with your school staff.

Both classrooms possess many of the features which invariably characterise good schools. Space is imaginatively used and there is an extremely pleasant and productive working atmosphere in the classrooms which celebrate both order and freedom. (With regard to large school - small school differences, a simple test we often employ is to look dispassionately at the small school classroom and pose the question: How would you know that you are not in the (allegedly superior) classroom of a large school? The well-resourced Cantley classrooms easily pass that test.) Moreover, the sense of the school as a genuine community is self evident and the displays of childrens work have a vitality which is only present when pupils are committed to their learning. The emphasis placed upon the basic learning requirements of literacy and numeracy is readily apparent and is reflected not only in the childrens work, but also in part by the evidence of the school's reading test results, which are consistently above the averages for the area and the County as a whole.

A consistent charge levelled by educational administrators is that small schools cannot provide a broad curriculum. Across the past two decades, before and since the implementation of the National Curriculum, we have never found any significant evidence to support that view. Indeed the only consistency we have found across HMI and Ofsted reports, in terms of curriculum quality is that there is as much variation across large schools as there is across their smaller counterparts. That finding is substantiated by research undertaken in Northern Norway and by the DES sponsored inquiry undertaken by Leicester University.

What is impressive about the Cantley teachers is the way in which they have carefully identified the strengths and weaknesses in their curriculum expertise and then acted upon them. Skilful organisation means that all of their separate strengths are maximised in the service of the children whilst a scrutiny of the school's INSET log indicates how committed the teachers are to extending, reinforcing and upgrading their professional expertise.

In the best of the small rural schools which we have studied elsewhere, it has been invariably the case that the staff have sought to involve the community in the active work of the school.

Because of the smallness, it is possible for teachers, parents and other community members to know each other very well. From that circumstance springs a major small school advantage: it is possible to involve a range of community talents in the education of the children. Cantley School has clearly capitalised on that advantage, for it is not simply that the substantial financial and material support provided by the local community has enabled the provision of a wealth of additional resources, but that parents and other community members are actively working in the classrooms in a variety of ways including the enhancement of information technology and reading programmes. Looking at Cantley School in this way, it is possible to say that all those who are involved, parents, teachers, governors and community members, have achieved a small school environment in which young people can gain a sense that they valued by the whole adult community within which they are learning to live.

Thinking of the current review that your school is facing, we were struck by the thought that to close the school and so, to end wittingly what is such a manifestly fine little educational world, you really would need to be very sure indeed that the prospective alternative was going to be superior. We find it difficult to imagine what could provide anyone with that kind of certainty.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Adrian Bell & Alan Sigsworth
School of Education,
University of East Anglia

Biographical Note:

Adrian Bell and Alan Sigsworth have lectured and published papers on schooling in rural areas in the U.K., Ireland, Germany, Scandinavia and the USA. They have also evaluated support systems for small rural schools in several English counties and in Norway. Subsequent to the publication of their award winning book *The Small Rural Primary School; a matter of quality* (1987) they published *The Heart of the Community* (1992) which is based upon their research into the inter-relationship between small rural primary schools and their communities.

In 2022, Cantley school had a qualified forest school teacher who had ambitions to turn the underused secret garden into a unique outdoor learning environment. This teacher went to view GroWild Kindergarten in Sprowston to view their site and with the view to work collaboratively to set up the forest area at Cantley. Despite pushing for this, the previous Head of School did not take this opportunity forward. Despite this, parents and PTA have been fundraising for this for the last couple of school years, being successful in obtaining a forest school grant to further enhance the setting. GroWild Kindergarten have written the following in response to hearing about the proposed amalgamation:



To whom it may concern, please find below our thoughts surrounding the significant benefits of regular forest school provision within a Primary School setting.

The Forest School model has been widely adopted across the UK and internationally as a powerful, evidence-based approach to holistic education. It is particularly relevant to rural and semi-rural communities, where natural environments can be effectively leveraged to enhance learning and development.

What is Forest School?

Forest School is a learner-centred approach that offers children regular opportunities to achieve and develop confidence through hands-on experiences in a natural setting. Sessions are led by trained practitioners and focus on fostering curiosity, independence, and resilience through exploration, play, and meaningful outdoor activities.

Key Benefits of Forest School

1. Enhanced Emotional and Social Development

- **Self-Esteem and Confidence:** Children gain confidence through self-directed activities and overcoming challenges in a safe, supportive environment.
- **Resilience and Independence:** Activities promote risk-taking and problem-solving, which help children develop persistence and adaptability.
- **Improved Behaviour:** Evidence shows a decrease in behavioural issues as children engage more deeply with peers and develop empathy through team-based activities.

2. Improved Academic Engagement and Performance

- **Cross-Curricular Learning:** Forest School links with the national curriculum in subjects such as science, geography, mathematics, and literacy.
- **Motivation and Engagement:** Outdoor learning environments re-engage children who may struggle in traditional classroom settings.

- **Critical Thinking:** Children apply concepts in real-world contexts, improving comprehension and retention.

3. Physical Health and Wellbeing

- **Active Lifestyles:** Regular outdoor activity contributes to physical fitness, improved motor skills, and a reduction in sedentary behaviour.
- **Mental Health Benefits:** Time in nature is proven to reduce stress, anxiety, and symptoms of ADHD in children.
- **Immune System Boosting:** Exposure to a range of outdoor microbes supports stronger immune development.

4. Connection to Nature and Sustainability

- **Environmental Awareness:** Forest School instills a sense of responsibility and care for the environment.
- **Sustainable Thinking:** Children learn about ecosystems, biodiversity, and the impact of human behaviour on the planet.
- **Lifelong Stewardship:** Early positive experiences in nature foster lifelong attitudes of conservation and environmental respect.

5. Inclusivity and Accessibility

- **Support for All Learners:** Forest School is inclusive of children with SEND, behavioural challenges, and those who may not thrive in traditional classroom settings.
- **Community Integration:** Sessions can involve local volunteers and encourage community cohesion.

The Role of Primary Schools

Primary School's play a pivotal role in delivering Forest School to its students. It provides:

- A secure and familiar environment where children feel safe to explore.
- Continuity and consistency that are vital to the Forest School ethos.

Closure of the school would not only disrupt academic education but would also deprive children of an invaluable developmental resource that cannot easily be replaced or replicated elsewhere.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Forest School offers unparalleled benefits to primary school-aged children across emotional, physical, educational, and social dimensions. At a time when childhood wellbeing is of growing concern, preserving access to this provision should be considered a key community and educational priority.

We urge the local authority to consider the long-term impacts of school closure on children's development and wellbeing. Maintaining Cantley Primary School ensures the continued delivery of Forest School, helping to raise a generation that is resilient, confident, and deeply connected to their environment.

Regards
Carol Burtenshaw
Manager, GroWild Kindergarten

The federation invested in paying for access steps to the adjacent sports field in May 2024, after securing a £5000 donation from Cantley Sugar Factory to support the project. This separate large field offers a unique selling point to enhance greater outdoor PE sessions, and can also open up to the wider community to use.

CSA Fundraising

Page 5 of the consultation document points to *Extra Curricular Opportunities* being challenging to run clubs, teams or performances. The CSA has openly supported the financial implementation of running clubs, through funding sporting equipment, gardening club equipment, forest school equipment, funding entrance fees and paying for transport to trips and activity days, and will continue to do so. The Federation states that it can support small schools to have big opportunities by joining together with other schools, which expands on collaborative learning and developing cross school friendships, another point raised in the *Peer group* section.

Many children are naturally introverted, and do not fit into schools with large peer groups. Children with underlying SEN needs can settle better in small class sizes, and develop better friendships.

The paragraph *Education Outcomes* and *Financial Pressure* talks about small class sizes struggling for classroom resources and that the overall quality of learning is impacted. This point is incredibly subjective, it depends on other factors such as teacher enthusiasm and desire to make small classrooms work, the involvement of parent & community helpers and the support of a PTA team to purchase educational equipment. As an example, Horning school within the federation have low pupil numbers, and a classroom based system where the head teacher teaches KS2. This drive to make it work keeps children engaged. In contradiction to this point in the consultation, the PTA have funded the new library set up at Cantley school, and have contributed to 20% of the new phonics scheme in the 25/26 school year which otherwise would have wiped the remaining available budget for resources. The PTA have fully funded the cost of educational trips, visits, enrichment opportunities and have also agreed to fund the cost of a teacher going through Forest School training.

Community Links

A successful village school must have regular community links. Cantley Primary School has the opportunity to continue to build stronger links with the Village Hall, Sugar Factory and village Church, all of which are in walking distance of the school, and children visit throughout the year. The school also has the opportunity to get more engagement from the local community. Cantley used to have parents/grandparents to come and read with the children a couple of times a week. This voluntary resource support the teaching staff but stopped in 2022.

Head teacher

AIM Federation appointed a new head teacher, [REDACTED], to role in September 2024. [REDACTED]'s breath of fresh air, enthusiasm and proactive approach was seen during her transition period before the Summer holidays, and for her 6 weeks until her maternity leave started, she supported the creation of the new library, changed out the phonics scheme, introduced a new Cantley Coins reward scheme and Hot Chocolate reward days with the Head Teacher which had an immediate positive impact on children's personal engagement levels and desire to complete homework. [REDACTED]'s vision to set foundations for the future was seen by her clearing the forest area with volunteers at 37.5 weeks pregnant. Prior to her going on Maternity, she came to the PTA listing funding requests she would like us to fundraise for while she was away on Maternity. The PTA have not seen this level of drive or enthusiasm with [REDACTED]'s predecessor or with the other two Interim head teachers.

[REDACTED] clearly has a vision for Cantley school, having gone through interview and been appointed. We urge NCC to give [REDACTED] the chance to make the necessary changes Cantley needs.

Recommendations

If the decision is made to keep Cantley School open and to invest time in the setting to maximise, we would like to put forward the following recommendations for consideration.

1) Expansion of Catchment Area

Age Distribution (C 2021)	
80+ years	35
70-79 years	47
60-69 years	71
50-59 years	94
40-49 years	24
30-39 years	54
20-29 years	33
10-19 years	25
0-9 years	42

The Parish of Beighton with Moulton St Mary could become part of the Cantley catchment area. Currently Beighton and Moulton St Mary feeds into Acle Primary Academy. With the new housing set to come to Acle, moving the catchment boundaries could have a positive impact for not oversubscribing Acle and giving Cantley a wider area. The 2021 Census data shows that Beighton

with Moulton St Mary has similar number of primary school children as Cantley.

Beighton Census

2) Promote and Develop Unique Selling Points

The PTA have openly supported the school's vision to develop an onsite Forest Area which is crucial to child wellbeing and alternative learning opportunities for children who do not fit into full time classroom learning. Cantley has lost children over the last year because the changes to classroom structure had a negative impact on their emotional wellbeing. The PTA were successful in securing a grant to develop the forest area, and work has already begun, with parent volunteers, community members and local councillors giving their time to clearing the site. The PTA have also agreed to fund the forest school courses for a teacher to become forest school trained. There would be no additional cost to the federation for the setting up, and ongoing maintenance of the Forest Area.

The PTA have openly supported promoting Cantley School and will continue to help financially support the School's promotion through fundraising, press coverage and social media. If 1 child in each year group from each of the surrounding 7 full/nearly full schools came to Cantley, that would fill PAN numbers. This is done through visual positive advertising and word of mouth.

Update and promote the website showing how well integrated Cantley Nursery is with the main school. Lingwood nursery, a neighbouring school, does not take on 2 year olds, and Cantley draws parents from Lingwood village who otherwise wouldn't have the opportunity for a nursery setting.

3) Have Cantley properly represented on the Governors board.

There is a shortage of Governors from Cantley school and this situation over the last year could have been earlier identified back in October if the Federation had proper Cantley parent representation on the board.

4) Splitting Federation Offices

The Federation operates out of Horning Primary School and because of this, the other 6 schools in the Federation contribute to Horning's budget meaning they can successfully run the school under recommended numbers to balance the books. Could the Federation look to split offices with Cantley to support budgets?

5) Class room arrangements

The consultation meeting stated that Cantley's classroom structure would be 1 classroom due to predicted pupil numbers from September. Horning school, which also has low main school and nursery pupil numbers and (39 on roll inc nursery from Gov website) have split these into two classrooms KS1 and KS2 with the head of school taking on a teacher role for KS2. Cantley can follow the same classroom structure allowing the concerns brought forward about a 1 class system to be revised.

6) The Nursery building/ Library mobile

A nursery setting is crucial to keep EYFS connected to the main school for future intake and provides an easier transition period for the children. We urge the federation to consider keeping the nursery open, even on a part time basis until there are sufficient numbers to open full time. There are currently 12 children registered in nursery, with more government funding coming to two and three year olds in the next year, sessions will increase. To help with an additional revenue stream, the Federation could consider leasing one of the mobile buildings to a community group

(ie. Scouts) which will further help with the school site being promoted to the surrounding community. Stay and Play baby/toddler sessions could also be offered, as could an out of hours Adult Learning Centre.



The PTA have already taken proactive steps to speak with the Executive Head and parents to discuss what the school may look like if it stays open in September, and have a plan in place for how the PTA can support the federation and head teacher financially with a more hands-on approach to supporting school advertising, trips and employee wellbeing while numbers bounce back up. The PTA have already raised the awareness of the school through radio and

media coverage, social media posts, word of mouth and an online petition, having open 440 signatures backing this small rural school and nursery. <https://www.change.org/p/prevent-closure-of-cantley-school-and-nursery>

We hope you consider our consultation information and allow the new head teacher, PTA, parents and the community to prove that this small rural school can thrive once again.

Yours Faithfully

[Redacted Signature]

CSA Chair of Trustees

