Norfolk County Council

Consultation on the proposed amalgamation of Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School with St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School from September 2027 and possible future academisation

Consultation period: **Wednesday 18 November 2026 to Monday 21 December 2026 at 12:00**

Published by Norfolk County Council, alongside the Diocese of Norwich and the Governing Body of the Pathfinders Federation

Quick Summary

Tell Us What You Think

Norfolk County Council alongside the Diocese of Norwich and the Governing Body of the Pathfinders Federation are asking for your views on a proposal to:

- Amalgamate Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School with St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School
- Academisation of St Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School in academic year 2027-2028

We want to understand your views before any decisions are taken. More information can be found in this document and in the Frequently Asked Questions which can be found at the bottom of the consultation webpage.

Please tell us what you think by Monday 21 December 2026 at 12:00

You can complete the survey, write to us, or come to a consultation event.

Your feedback will help inform the next steps.

If you need this document in large print, in audio, Braille, in an alternative format or in another language, please contact customer services on 0344 800 8020. Or for Text Relay, call 18001 0344 800 8020 (text phone) and we will do our best to help you.

IN TRAN
communication for all

About this consultation

Norfolk County Council, Diocese of Norwich and the Governing Body of the Pathfinders Federation are asking for views on the future of:

Erpingham VC Primary School
School Road, Erpingham, Norfolk, NR11 7QY

And

St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School
School House Lane, Blickling Road, Aylsham, Norwich, Norfolk, NR11 6EX

There are two parts to this public consultation:

- **Part A:** the possible amalgamation of Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School with St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School.
- **Part B:** The possible future academisation of St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School in academic year 2027-2028

This consultation forms the first stage of a statutory process that must be completed before any decisions are taken. **We are asking people what they think while the proposals remain under consideration and before any final decisions have been made**. All responses will be carefully reviewed, including any evidence, suggestions, concerns and alternative proposals put forward. Decision-makers will consider the themes emerging from the consultation and whether any changes to the proposals are required before reaching a decision to move to the next stage.

This document explains:

- what is being proposed;
- why the proposals are being considered;
- how other linked schools in the Pathfinders Federation may be affected;
- how you can share your views;
- what happens next;

Frequently Asked Questions can be found at the bottom of the consultation webpage.



Part A:

Amalgamation (closure/discontinuance) of Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School with St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School

What is a school amalgamation?

A school amalgamation is when two schools join together to become one school, on one school site. Children from the closing school move to the continuing school. The aim is to create a stronger single sustainable school for the future.

You may also hear an amalgamation being referred to as a 'merger' and a school closure being called a 'discontinuance'.

The proposal

Norfolk County Council, alongside the Diocese of Norwich and the Governing Body of the Pathfinders Federation are proposing to amalgamate Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School with St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School by 31 August 2027.

If this happens:

- Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School, including the pre-school would close permanently (be discontinued) at the end of August 2027; the last day for pupils would be in July 2027, on the last day of the school summer term;
- children at Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School would be supported to move to St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School

As Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School is a rural school, the Council must look carefully at the impact of closure via amalgamation.

The Executive Director of Children's Services at Norfolk County Council is the decision maker for Part A of the proposal.

Why is the amalgamation being considered?

Under this proposal, Erpingham would close and St Michael's would continue.

The amalgamation of Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School with St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School is being considered because:

Falling Pupil Numbers

- Both schools are church schools. The schools already work closely together as part of the same federation and share leadership, governance arrangements, curriculum and Christian values. This means there is already a strong relationship between the two schools. A merger would enable the Pathfinders family to remain together.

- Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School has capacity for 56 pupils. In November 2026, 16 children were on roll in Reception to Year 6, meaning 71% of school places are unfilled. For the same period, 13 children attend the pre-school.

- The number of pupils attending Erpingham has fallen from 60 in 2015/16. Current forecasts do not show enough growth in local demand to fill the available places over the coming years.

- Like many areas across the country, Norfolk has seen a significant decline in birth rates. Current forecasts suggest that pupil numbers are unlikely to increase in the foreseeable future, meaning fewer children may be available to attend both schools.

- Schools receive most of their funding based on the number of pupils who attend. When pupil numbers fall, the amount of funding available to the school also reduces, which can make it more difficult to maintain staffing, resources and educational opportunities over time.

- When planning school places, the Council looks at where children live, the number of places local schools have and how pupil numbers may change. It also considers travel routes, housing growth and whether schools can respond if demand changes.

- The aim is to have enough accessible school places while making good use of school buildings and public money. The Council has considered both the needs of current pupils and the future need for places across Erpingham, Aldborough and Aylsham.

- St. Michael’s Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School has enough space to accommodate all pupils currently attending Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School on a single site, with capacity for 150 pupils. As of November 2026, St. Michael’s has 113 children in Year R to 6, and 10 in the nursery.

- St Micheals was inspected by Ofsted in November 2023 and was rated to be ‘Good’ in all areas.

- The two schools are also located close to one another, approximately 3.6 miles apart

Academy Conversion

- Following an Ofsted inspection in March 2026, Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School was judged to require 'Special Measures'. As a result, the Secretary of State for Education issued an Academy Order. This meant that the school was required to become an academy and join an academy trust.

- As Erpingham VC Primary School is a church school, it can only join a church trust. This is because it is the policy of the Diocese of Norwich Board of Education. For Erpingham Primary this would be St. Benet's Multi-Academy Trust.

- Before schools become academies, trusts and the DfE consider information which would help them to understand the long-term future of a school. In line with statutory guidance, Support and intervention in schools, the Secretary of State, in exceptional circumstances can withdraw an academy order, if it is considered a school would not be viable as an academy. For example, when pupil numbers are very low. This is the case for Erpingham. When this happens, the local authority is expected to consider proposals to close the school.

As a result, Erpingham is unable to academise, and the future of the school is now being considered through a proposal to amalgamate with St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School.

Nursery provision

We recognise that Erpingham currently offers early years places from age 2, while St Michael's offers places from age 3. In bringing this proposal forward, we have considered this difference and looked at the early years provision available locally. There are a number of other places available for children aged 2 in the area. We therefore do not propose at this time to change the age range at St Michael's.

Future School Catchment

If the proposal proceeds, we will consider how the catchment area currently linked to Erpingham should be reallocated. As the local authority is not the admissions authority for all surrounding schools, the local authority will play a coordinating role and will work with other local admission authorities to consider the best way forward. This will be a separate process.

The benefits of bringing the schools together?

An amalgamation brings two schools together to create one stronger school. While change can feel unsettling at first, it can offer many benefits for children, families and staff.

Both schools have a Christian foundation and provide collective worship. They share the same vision, ethos governors and leaders. Erpingham is a voluntary-controlled school and St Michael's is a voluntary-aided school. Although this differs, their shared Christian values and existing partnership provide a strong basis for the proposed amalgamation. Bringing them together would will:

- **Preserve the Christian character for pupils:** It would allow collective worship, Christian values and strong links with the Church to continue for all pupils.
- **More resources for pupils**: A larger school can often provide wider facilities and a greater range of opportunities for children.
- **A stronger financial position**: Bringing schools together can reduce duplicated costs. This means more of the school's money can be spent directly on teaching and supporting pupils.
- **Greater stability for the future**: A school with healthy pupil numbers is often more financially secure and better placed to provide a high-quality education for years to come.
- **More opportunities for children**: Larger groups of pupils can create more opportunities for different needs and interests, as well as friendships, teamwork, clubs, sports and school events.
- **Longer term stability**: Having more pupils on one site could provide a stronger financial and staffing position.
- **Secondary schools**: Pupils from both schools already move on to the same secondary setting, Aylsham High School. This means that many children will continue their educational journey alongside friends and classmates they already know.

What alternatives have been considered?

We have sought to explore as wide a range of options as possible for Erpingham CE VC Primary School, while recognising that its circumstances limit the options available. The Academy Order, school size, and the school's Church of England status meant that the available options considered have been closure or amalgamation.

Amalgamation is not simply about joining with any nearby school. It works best when schools already have a strong relationship and shared values. In Erpingham's case, it is also important to preserve Christian education and collective worship for local families. This means that a Church school with an existing partnership would appear to be the most suitable.

As the schools already work closely together, amalgamation would build on those existing relationships. It would provide a more planned and supportive transition than closure alone, allowing children to move into a familiar environment with greater continuity for pupils, families and staff.

For these reasons, amalgamation is considered the better option. It helps preserve Christian education in the area while providing greater long-term stability for the school community.

What impacts could arise as a result of changes?

We have not brought this proposal forward lightly. We recognise that, while there may be long-term benefits, there may also be difficult consequences for some pupils, families, staff and members of the community.

The issues outlined below are some of the key impacts we have identified. However, consultation is an important part of the process because those affected by the proposal may identify additional impacts, concerns or local factors.

Feedback received through the consultation, together with the Equality Impact Assessment, will help ensure that these views are properly considered before any decision is made.

- **Impact on children and families:** Changes to schools can be unsettling for children and families. Some children may be worried about leaving familiar staff, friends and routines, while parents and carers may have concerns about what the changes could mean for their child.
- **Impact on staff and volunteers:** Proposals of this nature can create uncertainty for staff. School staff invest significant time, care and commitment into their schools and communities, and we understand that changes may have a personal and professional impact on those involved.
- **Travel and access considerations:** If the proposals proceed, some families may experience changes to travel arrangements, including longer journeys or different routes to school. This could affect travel times, daily routines and access to activities before or after the school day.
- **Loss of a local school and its role in the community:** Schools often play an important role within their communities and may be valued for reasons that extend beyond education. The closure of a school may be felt as a significant loss by pupils, families, former pupils, local residents and community groups, particularly where the school has been part of community life for many years.
- **Equality and inclusion considerations:** We recognise that changes may affect people in different ways. Some groups may experience particular challenges or require additional support during a period of change.

Although Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School and St Michael’s Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School would come together as one school, families would still have a choice. If they preferred, they could apply for a place at another school through the usual school admissions process.

How would these changes be managed?

- If the proposals go ahead, support would be provided to help children, families and staff through the transition.
- The aim would be to make any changes as smooth as possible and to minimise disruption to children's education.
- Children would have opportunities to visit, become familiar with staff and surroundings, and build confidence before any changes take place.
- Where possible, transition planning would also recognise the relationships, memories and sense of belonging connected with the school.
- Parents, carers and staff would be kept informed throughout the process and given opportunities to ask questions and provide feedback.



Part B:

Proposal by the Governing Body to academise St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School in academic year 2027/2028 and join St. Benet's Multi-Academy Trust

If the school organisation proposals for the amalgamation are approved, governors believe that the best long-term approach for St Michael's would be to academise. As St. Michael's is a church school, it would be expected that it joined a church trust, in this case St. Benet's.

As part of these longer-term plans for Pathfinders Federation, the Governing Body is therefore seeking views on St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School joining St Benet's Multi-Academy Trust.

What is academisation?

Academisation is when a school joins an academy trust. The trust takes responsibility for running and supporting the school instead of the local authority.

Children still go to school as normal, but the school's governance and management arrangements change. The aim is often to give schools access to additional support, expertise and opportunities through the trust.

Why is academisation being considered?

The Governing Body of Pathfinders Federation believes that joining a Trust could help provide long-term stability to St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School. Academy trusts often work with more than one school and can provide shared expertise, training, leadership support and opportunities for schools to work together. The Governing Body believes this could help strengthen education for pupils and support the future sustainability of the school.

To find out more about the proposed academisation and Frequently Asked Questions about academisation by St Benets Multi-Academy Trust at the bottom of the consultation webpage.

Linked proposals: Other schools in the Federation

This proposal forms part of a wider set of changes being considered across the Pathfinders Federation.

When considering proposals such as closure through amalgamation, it is important to recognise that schools within a federation do not operate in isolation. The schools are closely connected through shared leadership, staffing, resources, services, and financial arrangements. As a result, changes affecting one school can have implications for the others, and the long-term viability of each school is closely linked to the strength and sustainability of the federation as a whole.

Alongside this proposal, **a separate proposal is being consulted on for the closure of Northrepps Primary School from September 2027**. The proposals are therefore being consulted on at the same time to help families, staff, and other stakeholders understand the wider context and consider the full picture when responding.

While the proposals are linked, each proposal is subject to its own statutory process and will be considered on its own merits before any decisions are made.

Further information about the proposal relating to Northrepps Primary School can be found by following this link. https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/pathfindersnr

What we know and what we don't know yet

What we know: Proposals have been made and we are now asking for people's views. No final decision has been made.

What we don't know yet: We cannot answer every question at this stage. Some things, such as individual school places, transport arrangements, staffing and detailed transition plans, will depend on the outcome of the consultation and later decisions.

What happens next: We will share further information when it is available and will be clear about what has been decided and what is still being considered.

Stages and key dates

When schools are closed through an amalgamation or undergo significant change process, there are a number of stages that must be followed before any final decision can be made.

Part B may not go ahead if Part A is not agreed.

The timeline below provides an estimate of when each stage of the process may take place, some dates may vary.

Stage	Date	What this means
Consultation opens	Wednesday 18 November 2026	This is when people can start sharing their views.
Public meetings	**Tuesday 24 November 2026, 2pm to 3pm** at Erpingham with Calthorpe Village Hall Erpingham Norwich Norfolk NR11 7QD And **Tuesday 24 November 2026, 4:30pm to 5:30pm** at St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School School House Lane Aylsham Norwich Norfolk NR11 6EX	These two meetings are opportunities to ask questions, find out more about the proposals, and share your views with representatives from the Governing Body of the Pathfinders Federation and Norfolk County Council and the Diocese of Norwich.
Consultation closes	Monday 21 December 2026 at 12:00	This is the final day for comments and feedback to be received. After this date further responses unfortunately cannot be considered.

Responses reviewed	In late December and early in the new year	All of the feedback received during the consultation is read and carefully considered.
Decision on whether to publish a statutory notice	In late December and early in the new year	The Executive Director of Children's Services at Norfolk County Council will decide whether to move to the next stage. This is not the final decision on the proposals. It is a decision about whether the proposal should continue through to the next stage of the formal process.
Statutory notice published, if agreed	Early in the Spring Term	A formal notice is published to explain the proposal and invite further comments. This is a required step for school amalgamations.
Formal representation period	Early in the Spring Term	This starts when the representation Public Notice is issued. During this period, anyone can make comments. All comments received must be considered before a final decision is made.
Final decision	In the Spring Term	The Executive Director of Children's Services at Norfolk County Council is the decision-maker and will consider all the information, including consultation feedback and representations, before deciding whether the proposal should go ahead.
Proposed amalgamation date, if approved	31 August 2027	If the proposal is approved, this is the date Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School would formally amalgamate with St. Michael’s Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School. Children would officially start at St Michael’s at the beginning of the new academic year in September 2027.
Catchment change process, if needed	Once a final decision has been made in the Spring Term	If Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School closes, changes to local catchment areas may be needed in the future through a separate process.

Academisation process	From the consultation close, with further action in academic year 2027/2028	The governing board will review responses and decide if they wish to undertake formal processes in the longer-term future.

More information is available in the Frequently Asked Questions which can be found at the bottom of the consultation webpage.

How to have your say

We want to hear from you about these proposals. You can respond to this consultation in the following ways.

Online:
https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/pathfinderserp-smps

Email:
Please ensure that your email is marked with reference: **PATHFINDERS ERP/SMPS**

schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk

Post:
FREEPOST IH 2076, County Hall, Martineau Lane, Norwich, NR1 2DL.

Please mark your letter with reference: **PATHFINDERS ERP/SMPS** *You do not need a stamp.*

Public meetings:

Tuesday 24 November 2026, 2pm to 3pm at
Erpingham with Calthorpe Village Hall
Erpingham
Norwich
Norfolk
NR11 7QD
And

Tuesday 24 November 2026, 4:30pm to 5:30pm at

St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School
School House Lane
Aylsham
Norwich
Norfolk
NR11 6EX

If you need any arrangements made in order for this event to be accessible to you, please contact schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk or let the school office know.

Paper form: Completing the paper form attached and returning it to the school office

Please send your response by **Monday 21 December 2026 at 12:00**

You can comment on one or both parts of the consultation.

Responses received after the consultation closure cannot unfortunately be considered. Please submit your response by the deadline so it can be included in this consultation. If a statutory notice is subsequently published, there will be a separate opportunity to make formal representations.

Privacy statement

Norfolk County Council is the data controller for the personal information collected through this consultation. We would like to hear your views on the proposals. We will use the information you provide to:

- understand how the proposals may affect different people and communities;
- analyse the feedback received;
- understand the views of different stakeholder groups;
- prepare consultation summaries and reports; and
- inform the consultation and decision-making process.

The form collects your consultation response, comments, stakeholder category and school connection. It does not ask for your name, postcode, contact details or other information that directly identifies you.

Please only include information that is necessary and relevant to your response. Avoid including names, contact details or other information that could identify you or someone else, as well as sensitive personal information such as details about health, ethnicity or religion.

Our lawful basis for using your information is **public task under Article 6(1)(e) of the UK GDPR**, as the processing is necessary for Norfolk County Council to carry out its public functions relating to school organisation, education provision and consultation.

These functions are supported by the:

- **Education and Inspections Act 2006**;
- **Education Act 1996**;
- **School Admissions Code 2021;**
- **School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) (England) Regulations 2013**; and
- **School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013**.

Your response may be accessed by authorised Norfolk County Council officers, elected members and relevant governance or decision-making bodies where this is necessary for the consultation. Approved organisations providing IT or administrative support may process information on behalf of Norfolk County Council.

Consultation responses may be summarised in reports or discussed at relevant school meetings to help inform consideration of the proposals. We will take steps to remove or redact identifying information before responses are shared, discussed or published, so that individual respondents are not identified. However, information may be disclosed where Norfolk County Council is required or permitted to do so by law.

We will keep consultation responses and associated records for **five years**, after which they will be securely deleted or anonymised.

Returning your response

You can respond to the consultation online through Citizen Space, by returning a completed paper form through your school office, or by emailing your comments directly to us.

If you return a completed paper form through your school office, the school will scan the form and email it to Norfolk County Council's School Organisation Team. This enables us to receive and consider your response.

If you prefer, you can email your comments directly to us. Your email may include your name, email address and other personal information contained in your message, signature or attachments. Once we have recorded and processed your consultation response, we will securely delete the email and any personal information that is not needed for the consultation record.

- Paper forms and comments sent directly by email do not result in Citizen Space collecting technical information about you, such as your IP address or information about your browser or device.

For more information about how Norfolk County Council uses your information and your information rights, please read the Norfolk County Council general privacy notice.

If you need this document in large print, in audio, Braille, in an alternative format or in another language, please contact customer services on 0344 800 8020. Or for Text Relay, call 18001 0344 800 8020 (text phone) and we will do our best to help you.

IN TRAN
communication for all

Consultation Response Form

These pages can be detached and handed into your school office:

Consultation on the proposed amalgamation of Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School with St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School and possible academisation in academic year 2027/2028

Consultation period: **Wednesday 18 November 2026 to Monday 21 December 2026 at 12:00.** Let us know what you think of the proposals.

Part A:

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal to amalgamate Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School with St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School?

Please tick a box.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree or disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Don't know

Why do you say this? Please write in the box below.

**Please do not include personal information*

Part B:

How far do you agree or disagree with the proposal for St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School to join St Benet's Trust in academic year 2027/2028?

Please tick a box.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neither agree or disagree
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Don't know

Why do you say this? Please write in the box below.

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 for children? Please write in the box below.

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

- ☐ Pupil
- ☐ Parent / Carer
- ☐ Member of the Parent Teacher Association
- ☐ Member of staff
- ☐ School governor
- ☐ Local resident
- ☐ Local business
- ☐ Local sports group
- ☐ Local community group

Other (please specify):

At which school?

Your views will help us decide if these proposals go ahead. You can tell us your views by returning this completed form to:

- The school office at Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School and St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary & Nursery School
- Accessing our online survey; https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/pathfinderserp-smps

This consultation ends on Monday 21 December 2026 at 12:00