Norfolk County Council

Frequently Asked Questions

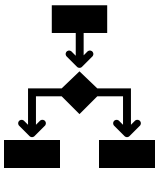
Consultation on the proposed amalgamation of Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School with St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary School from September 2027

We understand that families, pupils, staff and local residents may have questions about what these proposals could mean for them. We do not have all the answers at this stage, but we are committed to listening, being open about the process, and sharing information as it becomes available.

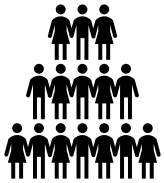
Here are some frequently asked questions around school closure by amalgamation that you may find useful.

1. The Amalgamation Proposal

	**Why are we only hearing about this now?** We understand that some people may feel disappointed that they are only hearing about these proposals now. Before a consultation can begin, the governing body, the Diocese of Norwich and the Council need time to understand the challenges facing the schools, look at possible options and decide whether a proposal should be considered. We wanted to make sure there was enough information available before asking people for their views.
	**Has a decision already been made? Could the decision be changed if people disagree?** That Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School will need to close (discontinue) at the end of the academic year. A final decision has not been made around the possible amalgamation as a way forward. We are consulting because the proposals on amalgamation are still being developed, and we want to hear people's views before any decision is

	taken. This is your opportunity to tell us what you think, share local knowledge, and suggest ideas or alternatives. All responses will be carefully considered. What you tell us can help decision-makers understand the issues that matter most to pupils, families, staff and the wider community, and may influence the final outcome. No decision about next stages will be made until the consultation has ended and all feedback has been reviewed.
	**Why is St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary School being considered as the school to remain open through the amalgamation process?** The school is being considered because: • **The schools already operate as part of the same federation**, sharing a Christian ethos, curriculum, leadership and governance arrangements, with existing working relationships between pupils, staff and governors already established. • **It has sufficient capacity** to accommodate all pupils currently attending Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School. • **Every child could be offered a place** at St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary School, helping to ensure continuity of education. • **The schools are located close together**, approximately 3.6 miles apart. • **Bringing pupils together on one site** would support the efficient use of staffing, resources and school funding.
	**What alternatives have been explored?** Before considering closure by amalgamation, we look carefully at a range of alternatives. However, as Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School has been subject to a withdrawn academy order, this limits what options can be realistically explored: • As a church school, policy by the Diocese of Norwich Board of Education means the school can only join a church trust.

	• The trust has considered the school and have shared concerns about the number of pupils attending the school and its long-term vitality. • In line with statutory guidance, 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. When this happens, the local authority is expected to consider proposals to close the school. In these circumstances, the local authority considers amalgamation to be a preferable option to a standalone closure because it would allow all pupils to remain within the existing federation at a nearby school, providing continuity for pupils, families and staff while supporting a more sustainable future for St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary School.
£	**Is this proposal just about saving money?** No. We understand why people might feel concerned about this, but money is only one factor. The Council and governing body must also consider pupil numbers, future demand for places, educational outcomes and whether the school and federation can remain viable in the future. The aim is to ensure that children continue to have access to a high-quality education for many years to come.
	**Have housing developments been taken into account?** Yes. When planning future school places, the Council considers housing developments, birth rates, population changes and other local information. These forecasts help us understand how many school places may be needed in the future.



What about the other schools in the federation?

A closure proposal is also being considered for Northrepps Primary School.

As the schools are part of the same federation, the proposals are linked and have been developed together to help secure a sustainable future for education in the area.

You can find out more about the proposals for Northrepps Primary School here: https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/pathfindersnr

You are welcome to comment on any or all of the proposals as part of this consultation.

2. The Consultation Process



How will my views be used?

Every response will be read and carefully considered.

Your feedback may highlight concerns, ideas or local knowledge that we were not aware of. This is one of the many reasons we carry out consultations.

The information gathered during the consultation will be considered alongside other evidence before any decision is made.

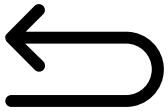


Will children be asked what they think?

Yes. We believe it is important to listen to children and understand their views.

We will consider ways for pupils to share their thoughts and feelings in an age-appropriate way. Their views will be taken into account alongside other feedback received during the consultation and will help us understand the impact the proposal may have on children, any questions they may have or where they may need support.

	We know that some children may find it easier to share their views than others. School staff know your child well and can help support children to express their thoughts and feelings.
	**Tell us what you think** We know this proposal may affect people in different ways, and we would like to hear your views. Your feedback will help us understand local concerns, experiences and ideas before any decision is made. You can feedback using this link and QR code below. https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/pathfinderserp-smps
	**When will I hear more? How will I know what is happening and when?** A school closure by amalgamation proposal must follow a set process, which means decisions cannot be made straight away. The main stages are: 1. **Consultation** – We ask for views. 2. **Review of Responses** – We consider the feedback received. 3. **Decision on Whether to Proceed** – We decide whether to move forward. 4. **Public Notice and Representation Period** – A formal proposal is published and stakeholders can further share their views. 5. **Final Decision** – Decision-makers consider all the information. 6. **Implementation** – If approved, support and transition arrangements are put in place. We will keep stakeholders updated throughout this process.
	**What will happen to the catchment area?**

	If the school closes by amalgamation, its catchment area will need to change. This will be considered as a separate process.
	**What happens if the schools do not amalgamate?** If a final decision is made not to amalgamate the schools, Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School would be required to close. St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary School would remain as it is now.
	**How will equality impacts be considered?** We recognise that changes like this may affect people in different ways. An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out to help us understand whether the proposal may have a greater impact on certain groups of people and whether any support or actions may be needed. This information will be considered before any final decision is made.
	**Who will make the final decision?** If the proposal progresses to the next stage, there will be a further opportunity for people to make formal representations before a final decision is taken. The final decision will be made by the Executive Director of Children's Services at Norfolk County Council. They will consider all of the available information, including consultation responses, before deciding whether to proceed with the proposal. They may also ask for changes to be considered or for other options to be explored before reaching a final decision. Families, staff and the wider community will be kept informed throughout the process. Updates on each stage of the proposal and information about what happens next will be shared through the school and other communication channels as appropriate. This aims to ensure that everyone understands where the proposal has reached, what decisions have been made, and what opportunities remain to share their views.

What do the terms mean?

Closure (or Discontinuance)
When a school permanently closes and stops operating. "Discontinuance" is the formal term for a school closure.

Amalgamation
When two or more schools come together to form one school.

Merger
A general term often used to describe schools joining together.

Catchment Area
The local area served by a school. Children who live in the catchment area may receive priority for places.

Academisation
When a school becomes an academy and joins a multi-academy trust.

Academy Order
A decision made by the Secretary of State for Education that requires a school to become an academy and join an academy trust.

Revoking an Academy Order
The academy order is removed

Consultation
A period when people can share their views, concerns, and ideas before a decision is made.

Statutory Process
The steps that must be followed before certain school changes can take place.

Public Notice and Representation Period
A formal notice published to explain a proposal and tell people how they can have their say before a decision is made. Anyone can make comments, objections, or support the proposal

Decision-Maker
The person or organisation responsible for making the final decision after considering all the evidence and feedback received.

Governing body
A group of people who are volunteers who help oversee the school and federation and plan for its future.

Multi-Academy Trust (MAT)
A group of academies that work together under one trust.

	Pupil Admission Number (PAN) The number of children a school normally admits into a year group each year. **Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)** A review that helps decision-makers understand how a proposal might affect different groups of people and whether any support or changes are needed.

3. What Happens if the School Closes?

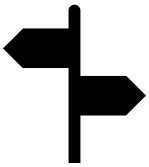


What will happen to my child?

If Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School closes by amalgamation, we will work closely with families to help children move to St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary School. Information, advice and support will be provided throughout the process.

Schools will also work together to help children settle into their new environment. This might include

- School visits.
- Opportunities to meet new staff and classmates
- Activities to help children settle.
- Information sharing between schools.
- Support for vulnerable pupils

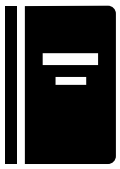
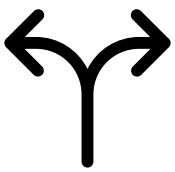


Can I choose which school my child attends?

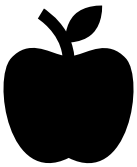
Yes. Your child does not have to attend St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary School

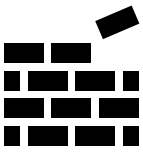
Parents can apply for any school. There are enough places available at nearby schools for all pupils from Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School if the proposal goes ahead.

You can find out more about applying for school places here: School admissions - Norfolk County Council

	**What about my child's friendship groups?** When applying for a new school place, families can consider where their child's friends may be going. Schools will work to support children as they settle into their new school and build friendships with other pupils.
	**What if my child is anxious or upset about the proposal?** We recognise that some children may find uncertainty difficult. School staff know their pupils well and will continue to provide support during the process. If the proposal is approved, transition arrangements will be designed to help children feel confident and settled.
	**How will my child's learning be affected?** While the consultation and decision-making process is taking place, Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School and St. Michael's Church of England VA Primary School will continue to operate as normal. Children will continue attending lessons, taking part in clubs, school trips, assessments, special events and other activities wherever possible. The school will continue to focus on providing the best possible education and support for its pupils. We encourage children and families to continue enjoying all aspects of school life during this time. If the proposal is approved, schools will work together to support a smooth transition and minimise disruption to children's learning.
	**Do I have to wait until a decision has been made before I move my child?** No. You do not have to wait for a final decision before applying to move your child to another school. Parents and carers can apply for a place at another school at any time if they feel that this is the right decision for their child and family.

	Some families may prefer to wait until the outcome of the proposal is known, while others may decide to make alternative arrangements sooner. This is a personal decision. If the proposal is approved, schools and the local authority would work together to provide transition support for affected pupils. This may include visits, opportunities to meet staff and pupils, and activities to help children prepare for the move.
	**Will transport be provided?** This will depend on your child's individual circumstances and the Council's home-to-school transport policy. Information and advice about transport will be provided to affected families. You can find out more here: Transport for 5 to 16-year-olds - Norfolk County Council about eligibility for transport
	**My child has an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan. What happens?** Children with EHC Plans will continue to receive the support they are entitled to. The Council will work closely with families and schools to make sure any transition is carefully planned and that appropriate support remains in place.
	**My child has Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). How will they be supported?** We will work closely with families, schools and relevant professionals to help plan and support each child's transition. We recognise that some children may need extra preparation, reassurance or support when moving to a new school.

	**Will families have enough time to choose another school?** Yes. If the proposal is approved, families will be given time to consider their options and apply for another school if needed. The Council will provide guidance and support throughout the process to help make any transition as smooth as possible.
	**Would the school name, logo or uniform change?** If schools come together as a single school, some changes may be needed. We would want children, families and staff to have opportunities to help shape the school's future identity while recognising the history and achievements of the closing school.
	**What will happen to breakfast clubs, after-school clubs and childcare?** We know that many families rely on these services. If the proposal is approved, further information will be provided about the childcare, clubs and activities available at other schools and any arrangements that may support families during the transition.
	**Will my child still receive free school meals?** If your child is currently eligible for free school meals, this entitlement would continue in line with the relevant eligibility criteria. Further information would be provided if any changes were needed as part of a transition.
	**What happens if my child is in Year 6?**

	Year 6 pupils will continue their education at the school as normal, including taking their SATs in May and participating in all planned activities during their final year of primary education. As Year 6 pupils are due to move to secondary school at the end of the summer term, they are likely to be less affected by the proposal than younger pupils. They will continue with the normal secondary school transition process and move to their secondary school as planned. The school will continue to support pupils throughout their final year, helping to ensure they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
	**What will happen to staff?** We know that many children and families have strong relationships with school staff and may want to know what this means for them. At this stage, we cannot discuss individual staff arrangements. Any staffing matters would be handled separately, confidentially and through the appropriate employment processes.
	**Will my child and the community be able to say goodbye to Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School?** We know that schools are about much more than buildings. They are places where children learn, make friends and create important memories. Schools can also play an important role in the wider community and the history of a village. If the proposal is approved, schools will work together to consider how pupils can celebrate their time at the school and recognise its history and achievements.
	**What happens to the school building?** No decision has been made about the future of the building. When Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School closes, decisions about the site would be considered separately.

	**What we do and don't know yet** **What we know now** • That Erpingham VC Church of England Primary School will need to close at the end of the academic year. • Why the amalgamation proposal is being considered; as an alternative to closure. • The consultation timetable and decision-making process **What we do not know yet** • If the amalgamation proposal will definitely go ahead • Final transport arrangements • Detailed transition plans • Future use of the site • Final staffing arrangements
	**Can't find the answer to your question here?** Contact schoolreview@norfolk.gov.uk