

Proposal to amalgamate Horndale County Infant and Nursery School and St. Francis C of E (Aided) Junior School on 1 September 2025 into one all through C of E (Aided) Primary School

Consultation period:

9 September 2024 - 20 October 2024

1. Introduction

Durham County Council keeps under review the number of pupils attending each school and updates information each year about how many pupils are likely to be attending schools in the future. This is an important aspect of the County Council's function in planning school places across the county to ensure there are schools of a suitable size to meet local requirements and to provide the best possible education for the pupils they serve.

The Council realises that school reorganisation can be an area of concern as local communities often see a school as being at the heart of the community and sometimes cannot immediately agree with the need for change. Taking this into account, the council must continue to have a system of education that will bring about the highest possible standards of education for the children of County Durham for the short, medium, and long term and in some cases 'keeping things as they are' may not achieve that in this rapidly changing educational landscape.

In line with that strategic objective, the Council is consulting on a proposal to amalgamate Horndale County Infant and Nursery School and St. Francis C of E (Aided) Junior School into one all through C of E Primary School on 1 September 2025.

The consultation will commence on 9 September 2024 and end on 20 October 2024

You may have some questions to ask. This document attempts to answer some of those questions and explain how you can let the County Council know what you think about the proposal.

2. Background

Horndale County Infant and Nursery School is located in Newton Aycliffe, providing education for children aged between 3 and 7 years old. It is a community school maintained by the local authority. In October 2022, the school received a 'Good' rating from Ofsted. However, its numbers have been declining over a number of years and the school featured in the 12 July 2023 July Cabinet report - Maintained Schools Budget Plans and Permission to Set Deficit Budgets.

The school has needed over £45k in financial support to address the deficit issues from 2023/24 and to set the budget for 2024/25. This has been made possible through the DfE School Deficit Support Grant, a one-off payment received by DCC in January 2024. It is not sustainable to rely upon future grants to balance the school's budget.

St. Francis Church of England (Aided) Junior School is located adjacent to the Horndale building, sharing vehicular entrances and car parking spaces. The school provides education for children 7-11 years old. It was rated Good in its last Ofsted Inspection which took place on 18 June 2019.

The school is in a good physical condition with no immediate capital priorities, it currently has surplus places allowing some of the classes from Horndale school to be accommodated on the main school site should the proposal be agreed.

Newton Aycliffe is served by a number of primary schools which makes parental/carer choice very wide and strong. All of the nearby schools are 'Ofsted' Good and the majority have surplus places. They include RC Diocesan primary schools under Bishop Hogarth and seven other all through primary schools all within a 2 mile radius.

3. Why is the Council proposing to amalgamate Horndale County Infant and Nursery School and St. Francis C of E (Aided) Junior School into one all through C of E (Aided) Primary School?

Officers believe this proposal provides the best future option for the children, the school, and the community it serves based on educational outcomes, pupil numbers, site issues and sustainable finances.

The current predictions for both schools indicate no discernible pupil growth up to 2028/29.

Projected rolls:

School	Capacity	NOR 2023/24	NOR 2024/25	NOR 2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29
Horndale Infants School	216	57	61	56	62	63	66
St Francis C of E Junior School	164	99	85	82	71	72	76

The pupils who are currently taught at Horndale County Infant & Nursery School could be accommodated within the St Francis building with some modifications to facilities on the current site. The inclusion of the nursery children would add a resource requirement of an additional two classrooms.

The breadth of curriculum and the opportunity for social development of pupils at an all through Primary School will be enhanced by them being educated on the St Francis site which also has extensive outdoor learning and play space which can be developed. Consequently, the preferred option of Council officers is to amalgamate Horndale County Infant and Nursery School and St. Francis C of E (Aided) Junior School on 1 September 2025 into one all through C of E (Aided) Primary School.

4. What are the benefits of the proposal?

The council believes that the proposal will have many benefits for children, parents and staff. Some of these include:

- Continuity and progress of learning between Nursery, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 education;
- School ethos and aims and values shared in a single school in the same building;
- Access to a curriculum planned and assessed across the full primary range;
- A unified approach to early literacy and maths to allow accelerated learning;
- Increased opportunities for professional development of staff, which should lead to improved outcomes for children;

- School Inspectors will be able to make judgements more accurately about the education children receive when they can see 'the whole picture' within Nursery and Primary education being delivered in a single school.

5. Which options have been considered?

There are only two options that could be considered. From these two options, the preferred option, and the proposal on which we are consulting is option 2 – Consult on a proposal to remove the URN (Unique Reference Number) from Horndale County Infant & Nursery School, formally closing the school and extending the age range of St. Francis C of E (Aided) Junior School from 7 – 11 to 2 – 11 to create an all through C of E Primary School.

Option 1: Do Nothing

Retaining the current education arrangements in the hope that additional pupils enrol. This decision would pose a number of challenges around appropriate allocation of education resources and an effective curriculum delivery. Reputational damage could affect the success of a future amalgamation and it must be acknowledged that both governing bodies are aware of this. It is for this reason that they and the Diocese are prioritising a joint solution at the earliest possible opportunity.

Option 2: Amalgamate Horndale County Infant and Nursery School and St. Francis C of E (Aided) Junior School to create an all through C of E (Aided) Primary School

This option will enable children to be more effectively educated on one site in a larger, more viable establishment that can offer a broader curriculum and sustain educational standards. Consequently, this is the preferred option of the Council and the one on which we are consulting.

6. What do the Governing Bodies think about the proposal?

Both Governing Bodies have agreed to support the amalgamation of the schools to provide a more sustainable educational provision for the future of the community.

7. Will my child have to apply for a place in Year 3 when they transfer to Key Stage 2 as they do now when transferring from Horndale to St. Francis?

No, if the proposal to create an all through primary school is agreed, parents would only have to apply for a place in Reception as the child will be on roll at the same school for all of their primary education to the end of Year 6.

8. What will happen to the Horndale County Infant and Nursery School building?

The current Horndale County Infant & Nursery School site has had recent roof and window renovations which make the accommodation viable for other education purposes which could be matched to the changing needs of pupils both locally and County wide. The accommodation may be needed to support a transitional period to the St Francis site.

9. If the proposed amalgamation is agreed, what will happen to staff?

If the proposed amalgamation is agreed, the Governing Body will in due course, consider an organisational structure that will enable the primary school to effectively operate as one school rather than two separate schools. However, they are committed to maintaining the current workforce across both schools where possible. Staff at the current Horndale County Infant and Nursery School will transfer to the employment of the Governing Body of St. Francis C of E (Aided) Junior School.

10. What happens next?

Any proposal for school reorganisation has to be carried out in accordance with Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance. The Council cannot take a decision to amalgamate the two schools without having held a consultation on the proposal, which will include seeking the views of members of the public. The first stage of consultation will be informal and opens on 9 September 2024. During this period, Durham County Council will share its proposals with key stakeholders. This will include Governors of Horndale County Infant and Nursery School and St. Francis C of E (Aided) Junior School, Diocese, Newton Aycliffe Parish Council, trade unions, local residents, young people, and parents of pupils of both schools and of those other primary schools in Newton Aycliffe. The table below sets out the expected timescales for the process.

Date	Stage
9 September 2024 – 20 October 2024 (6 weeks)	Consultation All responses received by the closing date will be considered and included in a report for the council to consider and decide whether to take the proposal forward.
November – December 2024 (4 weeks)	Statutory Public Notice If the council decides to proceed with the proposal, statutory notices would be published in the local newspaper, posted on school gates and on the DCC website. These notices would provide an opportunity for comments or objections to be made.
January 2025	Decision Making Durham County Council's Cabinet would consider responses to the statutory notice and make the final decision on whether to agree the proposal or not.
1 September 2025	All through C of E (Aided) Primary School opens

11. How do you respond to this consultation?

We would like to hear what you think about this proposal. We will be hosting a live event remotely via Microsoft Teams to explain the proposal in more detail and outline the different stages of the consultation process **on Thursday 19 September 2024 at 6.00pm**. If you would like to attend this live event, please type the following address into your internet browser **from 5.45 p.m. on 19**

September 2024 <https://events.teams.microsoft.com/event/3529c24e-e407-4a25-bf88-f08d0d1673f8@47048404-f16d-4b21-8a55-8ac5d7e72196>

Although you will be unable to speak at the live Teams event, it will provide an opportunity for any questions you have to be submitted via the chat function and where possible, these will be answered by the officers present during the event. We will aim to answer as many questions as possible that you may have about the proposal.

In addition to, or alternatively to, attending the live Teams event, you can also respond in one of the following ways:

- (i) Write to: Leigh Fisher, School Places and Admissions Team, Children and Young People's Services, Business Reply Service, Licence No DU63 (Freepost), Durham County Council, County Hall, Durham, DH1 5BR by **20 October 2024**.
- (ii) Email your views to schoolorganisation@durham.gov.uk or complete the response form online via the following link: www.durham.gov.uk/consultation by **20 October 2024**.