

School Organisation

Frequently Asked Questions

School organisation

Proposed school amalgamation or closure

Frequently asked questions (FAQ)

This guide explains why the local authority is looking to make changes to a number of infant, junior and primary schools across the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames, and answers common questions from parents and carers, staff, governors, and the local community.

It is intended to provide clear information for parents, carers, staff, governors and community stakeholders about proposals to amalgamate or close a small number of schools within the Richmond borough.

It explains the reasons, process, impact, and support available during this period of organisational change.

This document supplements the information provided in the consultation information leaflets that are published in relation to specific school organisation proposals.

1. What is the role of the local authority?

The local authority has a statutory duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places to meet the needs of its resident pupil population. This duty extends to all state funded schools including community schools, voluntary aided schools, free schools and academies.

This means that the local authority must ensure that additional places are provided when required, but that action is also taken to remove places where there are too many.

The local authority's statutory powers to make changes to a school are limited to community and voluntary aided schools. It must work with partners including academy trusts and Diocesan boards to ensure that all schools play a role in ensuring a strong and sustainable school system.

Achieving for Children is a not for profit organisation that is commissioned by the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames to deliver children's services, and is therefore responsible for developing and implementing the school organisation strategy on behalf of the council.

2. Why is the local authority proposing to make changes to schools?

Over the last few years, the number of children starting school in Richmond borough has dropped significantly. This matches a trend we are seeing across London and the country, mostly because birth rates have fallen.

Since schools get their funding based on how many pupils they have, fewer pupils means less money. This makes it very hard for schools to cover their basic running costs.

If the number of places isn't adjusted to match demand, the available funding will be spread more thinly and schools won't have the resources to provide the high-quality education that parents expect.

3. What is the process for making changes to a school?

The government has published guidance that outlines the statutory procedure for closing a maintained school or making significant changes to maintained schools. [Closing maintained schools](#) and [Making significant changes \('prescribed alterations'\) to maintained schools - GOV.UK](#).

The statutory process and timeline for the changes currently being proposed are as follows.

- **Now – October 2026:** pre-statutory consultation phase, providing an opportunity to share views and suggest alternatives.
- **November 2026:** the Education and Children's Services Committee reviews feedback from the pre-statutory consultation to decide whether to proceed to formal consultation.
- **January to March 2027:** the formal, legal process, which includes a four-week window for submitting formal objections or comments.
- **April 2027:** the Education and Children's Services Committee reviews feedback from the formal consultation and makes a final decision on whether to approve the proposal.
- **September 1, 2027:** implementation of changes, if approved.

4. How far have pupil numbers fallen?

Primary pupil numbers across Richmond have fallen by 8.7% since their 2018/19 peak, dropping from 16,380 to 14,956 by 2025/26.

This compares with an admission capacity of 18,132 places resulting in 3,176 surplus places, representing a 17% vacancy rate across all year groups.

The Department for Education (DfE) guidance suggests that local authorities should be looking to maintain between 5% and 10% surplus capacity to provide flexibility and meet in-year changes. Beyond this, local authorities should be looking to remove places to ensure ongoing, efficient use of resources.

Over the next five years, pupil numbers are expected to drop still further, to 12,865 resulting in 5,267 surplus places. Without action, this would equate to a vacancy rate of 29%.

5. Why are falling pupil numbers a problem for a school?

When pupil numbers drop, this directly impacts a school's budget. With less funding each school will often experience a range of challenges in endeavouring to balance their budgets.

6. How are schools funded?

The government provides funding to all state-funded schools, including academy, voluntary aided, and community schools, using a consistent method. It is important to note that schools are not funded by the local authority.

The majority of a school's budget is based on pupil numbers, with a small number of additional grants that reflect the specific context of the school.

7. How do empty places affect a school's budget?

Primary schools receive roughly £4,200 in funding for every child on roll. When there are thousands of empty places across the borough this adds up to millions of pounds in lost funding across all schools. It impacts on all schools, but more so on those that experience the greatest decline in pupil numbers.

Because staff salaries make up over 85% of a school's budget, the only way to make significant savings is to reduce the number of staff. Often, it's hard to do this because schools still need a certain number of teachers to keep all their classes running.

Additionally, even when pupil numbers drop, schools still have fixed costs in relation to premises which leaves less money for teaching staff, resources, and after-school activities.

A number of schools are now unable to produce a balanced budget, with costs outweighing the money they get. Within the next three years, over 75% of primary schools across the Richmond borough are expected to have a deficit budget.

8. How were schools chosen for these proposals?

We developed a fair and objective sufficiency assessment which enabled us to consider every primary school in the borough, regardless of type. This assessment was developed based on best practice from other local authorities and available guidance, and was shared and discussed with our primary school heads.

It considered:

- current and predicted pupil numbers, and levels of parental preference
- financial health, including budget forecasts, and existing or projected deficits
- school building space and constraints

This identified a number of schools that were particularly vulnerable because of the current and forecast drop in demand for places. A more detailed analysis, looking specifically at these specific schools enabled a range of measures to be identified to support the long-term sustainability of all our schools including reductions in capacity, amalgamation and closure.

9. What is the difference between amalgamation and closure?

- **Amalgamation:** this is where two or more schools are combined to form one single, stronger, and more sustainable primary school. This process is designed to streamline leadership, staffing, and resources so the schools can stay open and viable. The goal is to keep the community and education provision running effectively, just under a new, unified structure.

The regulations that govern how changes are made to schools describe the legal process by which this is achieved. This involves making changes to one of the schools, and the closure of the other school.

- **School closure:** this is considered a 'last resort'. It means a specific school site stops operating as a school. This only happens when other alternatives, such as reducing the number of places or amalgamating, cannot provide a long-term solution. If a school closes, children will be provided places at other nearby schools, and the local authority will support families through that transition process.

10. Can intake numbers at other schools be capped to boost intakes at schools most affected by falling rolls?

Published Admission Numbers (PAN) have already been reduced at several schools, encouraging some families to consider alternative local options. However, due to the substantial overall decline in pupil numbers, surplus places remain widespread across the borough, leaving parents with a wide range of choices.

Under school admissions legislation, the local authority cannot restrict parental choice. Parents have a legal right to express a preference for any school, and places must be allocated if available.

Lowering admission numbers at popular schools does not guarantee that families will choose schools with falling rolls. Furthermore, if the local authority attempted to arbitrarily reduce places at popular, oversubscribed schools to direct intake elsewhere, those decisions would be subject to challenge and would likely be overturned by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) on the grounds of parental preference.

11. Individual schools have taken steps to reduce costs whilst maintaining standards. Why can't they be allowed to continue managing the situation?

The approach being taken by the local authority is to build on the measures we have taken to date, removing operational capacity through reductions to PAN at a number of schools, and only propose structural changes where it is unavoidable. This enables the majority of schools to plan with confidence for a class organisation based on a capped manageable number, reduce staffing levels accordingly, and reduce costs in line with their declining budget.

For a small number of schools this approach of reducing admission capacity is insufficient to ensure sustainability and, for this reason school organisation changes are proposed.

12. When would changes be implemented if the proposal is approved?

The proposed implementation date is 31 August 2027/1 September 2027.

13. Has a final decision been made?

No. These are proposals, not decisions. We are consulting with parents, staff, and the community to get feedback before any final decisions are made. Further information about the consultation process and decision making is shown below.

14. How will decisions be made?

Decisions regarding the proposal will be guided by a structured process, ensuring that all strategic and community factors are thoroughly evaluated.

The decision-making process will be informed by the following key elements.

- **Pupil number data and sustainability:** analysis of current and forecast pupil data to assess future demand and ensure that the resulting primary school remains financially sustainable and able to deliver a broad curriculum while balancing its budget.
- **Financial data:** the current financial positions of both schools, including projected deficits, are critical to the decision. The financial analysis will consider a range of factors, for example, the impact of operating on a single versus split-site, the loss of separate lump-sum funding, and the implications of transferring or retaining deficits.
- **Guidance from the DfE:** the process strictly follows DfE guidance regarding school organisation, including:
- **Faith provision:** carefully considering the effect on the balance of denominational provision in the area if a school with a religious character is closed or merged, especially where one school has a religious character and the other does not.
- **Role of the Diocese:** as a key strategic stakeholder, the London Diocesan Board for Schools is involved in discussions to ensure a strategic approach to pupil place planning and is a partner in the principle of bringing the schools together.
- **Consultation feedback:** all views and comments received during the pre-statutory consultation from parents, staff, governors, and local residents will be reported transparently to the Education and Children's Services Committee. This feedback helps shape the final proposals.

15. What would be the impact on pupils and families?

Our top priority is your child's education. If these proposals go ahead, we are committed to making the transition as smooth and stress-free as possible.

- **Your child's place:** in the event of amalgamation, all pupils on roll at the two schools will remain on the roll of the new school. In the event of a school closure, every child affected will be offered a place at a nearby school. We will also make sure siblings are able to stay together.
- **Support for children with SEND:** we will provide dedicated transition support, with extra care for children with special educational needs and disabilities. Support will be prioritised for those with education, health and care plans (EHCP).
- **Transition:** we want to keep things as normal as possible for your child. We will work closely with teachers to protect friendship groups, learning groups, and existing support structures.
- **Personalised plans:** every child will have a transition plan, and any extra support your child currently receives will stay in place.
- **Communication:** we will keep you in the loop with regular updates on the timeline and your options.
- **Transport:** we will identify alternative schools as close to your home as possible. Any transport requirements will be reviewed as part of our detailed planning.

16. Would my child not be better served by a smaller school, with smaller classes?

Changes are not being proposed due to concerns about the current quality of education at individual schools. We are fortunate that all pupils in the borough receive an excellent education in schools of various sizes.

However, with fewer families seeking a school place, action is required to prevent schools becoming financially unsustainable. Inevitably, if schools continue to operate with less funding due to fewer pupils, the quality of education will be impacted due to the pressure on staffing and resources.

17. Will my child automatically get a place at the receiving school?

In an amalgamation, all pupils from the closing school are guaranteed a place at the new school.

Where a single school is closing, a suitable alternative school will be named and a place is guaranteed. Parents are free to apply for places at any other school if they choose.

18. What will the admission arrangements be?

Families seeking admission to a school that is subject to pre-statutory consultation on proposed school organisation changes can still apply for a place at the school and be admitted.

Arrangements for the new school will follow the community schools admissions policy regardless of the designation of the primary school (community or voluntary aided).

19. What is the difference between a community school and a voluntary aided school?

The difference between community and voluntary aided schools primarily concerns their governance, religious character, and the autonomy held by the governing body.

- **Community schools** are maintained directly by the local authority. The local authority owns the land and buildings, is the employer of the staff, and sets the admissions policy.
- **Voluntary aided schools** are maintained by the local authority, but are established with a distinct religious character (eg, Church of England or Catholic). In these schools, the governing body (which usually includes Diocesan representatives) is the employer of staff, holds responsibility for the land and buildings (and typically contributes to their capital costs), and sets its own admissions policy.

20. How will pupils with SEND be supported?

The local authority will work with the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCo) of the closing and receiving schools, and with the SEND Team to ensure:

- transition planning.
- updated EHCP where necessary.
- specialist support.

21. Will there be support for children who find change difficult, even if they don't have an EHCP?

Yes. While dedicated transition support is prioritised for children with an EHCP, we recognise that any significant change can be challenging for many children. Schools, in partnership with the local authority, will put in place transition support strategies for all pupils. This may include 'meet the teacher' sessions, familiarisation visits to the new school site, and pastoral support groups to help children navigate the change in a supportive environment.

22. What will happen to the school sites when they are no longer required for a school?

Typically, school buildings and sites are in the ownership of the local authority or relevant Diocesan authority. When surplus to requirements because a school no longer requires it, consideration will be given to alternative uses. For local authority owned sites, an

assessment will be undertaken to determine potential repurposing for educational or community use if possible.

23. What will happen with the staff of the schools affected?

Supporting staff is a priority. If a proposal proceeds, schools will enter a formal staffing consultation.

At this stage the local authority is carrying out informal, pre-statutory consultation with stakeholders to inform decisions on whether to progress proposals. No decisions have yet been taken. As proposals are developed through the stages set out later in this document, more detailed consultation will be planned.

24. How will you ensure standards of teaching are maintained between now and any potential merger or closure?

The local authority remains committed to high-quality education. Throughout any period of change, support remains in place to protect learning environments, keep support structures stable, and ensure that leadership and teaching staff continue to focus on pupil outcomes.

25. What if the number of children increases and there is more need for school places in the future?

The local authority constantly monitors demographic trends and birth rates. School place planning is an ongoing, long-term process. Should demand rise in the future, the local authority retains the flexibility to review and adjust capacity, including the potential repurposing of school sites or facilities if required.

26. Will any further school organisation changes be necessary?

The local authority has used an objective sufficiency assessment to assess every primary school's long-term sustainability. This assessment considers current and projected pupil numbers, financial health, and building constraints. While we cannot predict future trends with 100% certainty, these assessments are designed to create a sustainable and robust school system to minimise the need for future structural changes.

27. Will secondary schools be affected later on?

The current focus is on primary schools, where the impact of falling birth rates is being felt first. Secondary school places are managed as part of a separate, ongoing pupil place planning process and are not part of this specific review.

28. Are there any housing development plans in the areas impacted that would affect the demand for school places?

Pupil place planning consistently integrates local housing development data and projected population growth. However, the current decline in primary school numbers is driven by a combination of lower birth rates and families leaving London, which currently outweighs the impact of local housing developments in most planning areas.

29. Will families have enough time to choose an alternative place for their children if the local authority decides in April 2027 to close their school?

Yes. If the decision is made in April 2027, the implementation timeline is designed to ensure a smooth transition. Families will be fully supported through the admissions process, with dedicated guidance, transition planning, and guaranteed places at named alternative schools before the September start date.

Details of the consultation process

Who will be consulted?

The local authority intends to consult with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the process is transparent and inclusive.

The consultation includes, but is not limited to, the following groups:

- parents and carers
- school staff and governing bodies
- children and young people
- academy trusts, diocesan authorities, and early years providers
- councillors, MPs, unions, and professional associations.
- wider community members, residents, and local partners, such as SEND and transport services

How will stakeholders be consulted?

Feedback will be gathered through several accessible channels to ensure all voices can be heard.

- **Online surveys:** completion of questionnaires via a dedicated consultation portal.
- **Engagement events:** face-to-face or virtual meetings to discuss proposals directly.
- **Written feedback:** submissions accepted via email or post.
- **Direct communications:** regular briefings for stakeholders and updates shared through schools and dedicated web pages.

What happens if I disagree with the proposal?

We understand that proposals involving schools can cause significant concern. Your feedback is a vital part of this process. You can make your views known during the pre-statutory consultation phase by completing the online questionnaire or attending the consultation event.

If you still disagree with a proposal, the formal consultation period (January to February 2027) is when you have an opportunity to submit your objections.

All feedback received during both the pre-statutory and statutory phases is anonymised and reported to the Education and Children's Services Committee before any final decisions are reached. We want to hear your views, as they help the Committee understand the full impact of any potential change on our school communities.

How can I be kept informed of updates throughout this process?

We are committed to full transparency as these proposals progress. We will provide updates through the following channels:

- **Dedicated Webpage:** All consultation materials, timeline updates, and FAQ amendments will be published on:
 - The local authority website:
www.richmond.gov.uk/school_organisation_consultations
 - The AfC Info website:
<https://kr.afcinfo.org.uk/pages/community-information/information-and-advice/education-and-education-services/richmond-school-organisation>
- **School Communications:** Your school will continue to share updates via newsletters and email.

What is the timeline?

- **Now – October 2026:** pre-statutory consultation. This is your chance to share your views and suggest alternatives.
- **November 2026:** the Education and Children's Services Committee will receive feedback from the pre-statutory consultation and decide if to proceed to formal consultation.
- **January to February 2027:** the **formal**, legal process. There will be a four-week window to submit formal objections or comments.
- **April 2027:** the Education and Children's Services Committee will receive feedback from the formal consultation and be asked to make a decision on whether to approve the proposal.
- **1 September 2027:** if approved, changes would take effect.

How can I have my say?

You can share your thoughts through:

- online surveys and our consultation portal (link to the survey available via the Richmond Council website and AfC Info website - details above)
- face-to-face or virtual engagement events (dates confirmed via the letters sent from schools subject to change proposals)
- sending in written feedback (to: schoolorganisation@achievingforchildren.org.uk)

All feedback will be reported openly to the Education and Children's Services Committee before any final decisions are made.

Where can I find more information?

More information about the proposals can be found on the Richmond Council website and the AfC Info website, details set out above.

Do you have specific concerns?

If you have questions about your child's current education plan, SEND support, or specific individual needs that you aren't sure how to raise and that relate to the school organisation proposals, please contact our team at: schoolorganisation@achievingforchildren.org.uk.