

Notice of Non-Key Executive Decision

Subject Heading:	Publication of statutory notices on the proposed amalgamation of Squirrels Heath Infant and Squirrels Heath Junior Schools – whether to proceed
Decision Maker:	Tara Geere, Director of Children Services
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Oscar Ford – Cabinet Member for Children & Young People
ELT Lead:	Tara Geere, Director of Children Services
Report Author and contact details:	Pooneeta Mahadeo , School Organisation Manager pooneeta.mahadeo@havering.gov.uk Tel: 01708 431092
Policy context:	We believe all-through primary schools (infant and junior school aged children in one primary school), deliver better continuity of learning as the model for primary phase education in Havering. When the opportunity arises we will either amalgamate separate infant and junior schools into a single primary school or federate the schools.
Financial summary:	The administrative costs of publishing the statutory notice and proposal can be met from existing revenue budgets. Implementation of the notice has no capital funding implications.
Relevant Overview & Scrutiny Sub Committee:	People
Is this decision exempt from being called-in?	Yes

Non-key Executive Decision

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

People - Supporting our residents to stay safe and well **X**

Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy

Resources - Enabling a resident-focused and resilient Council

Place an X as appropriate

Part A – Report seeking decision

DETAIL OF THE DECISION REQUESTED AND RECOMMENDED ACTION

The decision is to publish, in accordance with DfE Guidance, a statutory notice and prescribed information setting out the Local Authority's formal proposal of

- The lowering of the age range and the enlargement of the premises at Squirrels Heath Junior School
- the technical closure of Squirrels Heath Infant School

The statutory notice is included as Appendix A

AUTHORITY UNDER WHICH DECISION IS MADE

In the Constitution Scheme 3.3.4 Specific powers of the Strategic Director of People paragraph 3.3, the Director of Children's Services has Delegation for "all child care and educational requirements, including but not limited to, children in care, school governors, care packages, fostering and care leavers, pupil welfare, child employment, school organisation, school funding, staffing & governance, health and safety in schools, student eligibility, collective worship, exclusions, special educational needs, transport and catering."

STATEMENT OF THE REASONS FOR THE DECISION

The London Borough of Havering's view is that 'all-through primary schools (infant and junior school aged children in one primary school), deliver better continuity of learning as the model for primary phase education in Havering. Therefore, 'when the opportunity arises and when the LA deems this appropriate, we will either amalgamate separate infant and junior schools into a single primary school or federate the schools.' *Children and Young People Education Place Planning Plan 2023-27*

As the Head Teacher of Squirrels Heath Infant School is relocating at the end of the summer term, this provides a natural opportunity to review the organisation of the school and to consider the needs of current and future pupils. Whatever the decision regarding the future of the school, there will be change in the school, which is inevitable when there is a change in leadership.

As the Head Teacher of Squirrels Heath Infant School is relocating, the Local Authority has decided to consult on a proposal to amalgamate Squirrels Heath Infant and Junior Schools into a single primary school (age 4 -11) from September 2025.

The Local Authority is aware of concerns regarding school reorganisation; as local communities see a school as being at the heart of the community and sometimes any proposed change may often be contentious. Taking this into account, the Local Authority will have regard to existing local arrangements and seek to avoid leaving

Non-key Executive Decision

existing schools without links on which they have previously depended, whilst ensuring that its vision for every child to reach their potential by having a good start with the highest possible standard in their education.

Squirrels Heath Infant School was inspected and judged to be 'Good' by Ofsted in December 2019. The inspection acknowledged that Leaders have developed a curriculum which supports pupils to become independent and inquisitive learners that pupils feel safe here and that parents said that they feel welcomed into the school and that staff are approachable.

Squirrels Heath Junior School was inspected and judged to be 'Good' by Ofsted in June 2024. The evidence gathered during the inspection suggested that the inspection grade might be outstanding if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

The judgement also recognised that teachers have strong subject knowledge and that the way the school develops pupils' character is exceptional, with behaviour a strength across the school.

The Local Authority believes that learning and progress will be improved if the two schools are amalgamated to become a single 'all through' primary school. The amalgamation will build on the positives already identified and would provide a base for a more collaborative approach towards delivering an outstanding standard of education for all children.

The LA is required to follow a statutory process to amalgamate the two schools.

Statutory Proposal Timeline

Key milestones	Date
Statutory Stage 1 – Publication of Statutory Notices	25 April 2025
Statutory Stage 2 – Representation Period (formal consultation)	25 April – 23 May 2025
Statutory Stage 3 - Decision on proposals The decision-maker (usually the LA) must decide proposals within 2 months of the end of the representation period or decision defaults to Schools Adjudicator (OSA). Any appeal to the adjudicator must be made within 4 weeks of the decision.	June 2025
Statutory Stage 4 – Implementation	1 September 2025

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Non-key Executive Decision

1. **No change** – the Infant Governing Body would seek to recruit a new head teacher – option rejected by the LA for the following reasons:
 - Staff recruitment to a single key stage school at all levels, including leadership, may prove problematic
 - Benefits of either a federation or amalgamation would not be achieved
 - No automatic admission to Junior School for pupils at end of KS1
 - Parents and pupils have to continue to adjust to two sets of procedures / school closures
 - No guarantee of continuous and logically progressed curriculum
 - Not Council policy
2. **Federation** – this is a change in governance arrangements only with one governing body over both schools and the schools remaining as separate institutions. This option is very expensive as there are higher leadership costs in federation as this involves the appointment of an executive head. The Squirrels Heath Infant School is facing a significant deficit. The most effective option for reducing the deficit at the Infant School is a combination of staffing adjustments and operational efficiency measures.
3. **Amalgamation** – closure of both schools and a new primary school opening on the same site.

There are reasons prescribed in the guidance for closing a school such as:

 - There are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium to long term;
 - It is to be merged or amalgamated with another school;
 - It has been judged inadequate by Ofsted and there is no sponsored academy solution;
 - It is to acquire, lose or change its religious character;
 - It is no longer considered viable.

Both Squirrels Heath Infant and Junior Schools are good and popular schools and therefore do not fall under any of the reasons above.

PRE-DECISION CONSULTATION

Although there is no longer a prescribed 'pre-publication' consultation period for prescribed alterations, there is a strong expectation on schools and LAs to consult interested parties in developing their proposal prior to publication as part of their duty under public law to act rationally and take into account all relevant considerations.

The consultation took place from the 24 February 2025 to the 24 March 2025. 83 responses were received, of which 58 were in favour. Some of the comments in favour were as follows:

- *Financially more viable - improved economies of scale...Increased flexibility and better use of estate...Provides improved continuity in education for pupils- easier to plan for progression*
- *I have always felt it disjointed having the two schools be totally separate. I have two children, one who has moved all the way through both schools and is now in*

Non-key Executive Decision

secondary, and the second who is currently in year 5. I think merging the schools would be very positive and logical. Indeed, the separation between the two has been my main issue over the years with the schools - they have always felt totally separate and, dare I say it, at odds with one another. Strangely competitive against each other, with quite different approaches. They do not communicate at all which has made it very difficult as a parent, particularly when I had one child in the infants and one in the juniors (school photograph day for example. I have never had a single photograph of my two children together, because they have always used different companies and had their photograph days on different dates).

- More consistency for pupils across the two key stages. Parents able to 'know' the school better rather than having different arrangements across the two key stages - especially if they have children in both schools. Certainty of admission to the KS2 phase without application removes another uncertainty and task for families. More opportunities for staff development. The benefits for pupils, parents and staff must be the main focus.*
- I support Primary model, but caveat this with a concern about any potential loss of teacher jobs, which the NASUWT would not support. I expect that the school and Havering Education Department will fully consult on any proposed restructure.*
- Consistency of leadership through the school year groups. Consistency of learning objectives and goals throughout the childrens' schooling, same ethos and administration through from Reception to Year 6.*

25 respondents were against the proposal. 96% of respondents against the proposal were from one of the affected Schools – 15 from parents/carers, 9 from staff- and 1 responder was from a Governor at another school.

The comments from those against the proposal raised the following:

- A current divide between the two Schools and lack of collaboration that they are worried will continue.*
- Staff turnover, staff being made redundant, undergoing a restructure or having to teach in key stages they don't want to.*
- The change in the Governing body.*
- The process of recruiting a Head teacher for the primary school.*
- There being a physical change to the site premises- closure of parts of the building and shortage of facilities leading to overcrowding.*
- Quality of Education for students, specifically SEND students.*
- Funding reduction plan.*
- Changes to the timings of Wraparound care/ breakfast clubs.*

All of the issues raised above are fully addressed in the consultation report which is included in Appendix B.

NAME AND JOB TITLE OF STAFF MEMBER ADVISING THE DECISION-MAKER

Name: Pooneeta Mahadeo

Designation: School Organisation Manager

Signature: *P.Mahadeo*

Date: 14/04/2025

Part B - Assessment of implications and risks

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

A non-statutory informal consultation has been carried out, the results of which are set out in appendix B. The decision maker should pay careful regard to the responses received before deciding whether to make the recommended decision to commence the statutory notice process.

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure sufficient primary and secondary education is available to meet the needs of the population of their area (Section 13 Education Act 1996).

Under Regulation 5 of the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013/3110 an enlargement of the school premises which increases capacity by either (a) more than 30 pupils; or (b) by 25% or 200 pupils (whichever is the lesser), needs to go through the statutory notice procedure. In this case the proposals require publication as Squirrels Heath Junior School will

- (a) Lower the age range of the school to 4 to 11 years, thereby becoming a primary school.
- (b) Enlarge its premises by taking over the infant school site.

It is proposed to discontinue Squirrels Heath Infant School. Likewise, the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013/31 09 require a statutory notice procedure which in the context of this amalgamation will be combined with the enlargement proposals.

Otherwise there are minimal legal risks in authorising the statutory notice period. Anybody aggrieved by the proposal will have the opportunity to make comments during this process which will have to be considered by the decision maker before a final determination is made.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial Implications to the Council

The administrative costs of publishing the statutory notice and proposal can be met from existing revenue budgets.

Implementation of the notice has no capital funding implications.

Financial implications for the school

School budgets are dependent on a number of factors, of which pupil numbers and characteristics are the key drivers in respect of the funding calculation.

As part of the amalgamation, the factor that is affected is the Lump Sum. Presently the Infant and Junior School, each receive a lump sum to support the costs for the structure for each school.

Non-key Executive Decision

Should the amalgamation proceed, then the Primary school will receive protection in respect of the lump sum for a three-year period as follows:

- In the 2025/26 financial year the newly amalgamated school would receive 100% of the two lump sums.
- In the 2026/27 financial year the school would receive 85% of the two lump sums
- In the 2027/28 financial year the school would receive 70% of the two lump sums.
- In the 2028/29 financial year the school would receive one lump sum.

The lump sum in the formula acknowledges the cost of the structure that is required to operate as separate Infant and Junior, e.g. Head teacher, deputy Head teacher, etc. The amalgamation of the two schools would lead to one larger budget across a single school and lead to cost savings in certain areas, whereby the structure will be aligned to a primary school leadership model, rather than two separate schools.

As noted in the report Squirrels Heath Infants school is in a position of financial deficit. Under DfE regulations and Statutory Guidance schools that are in this position are required to develop a recovery plan to come back into overall surplus within a short period of time, ideally within three years. There is therefore a need to find savings within the budget including within staffing costs since these represent the largest part of a schools costs.

The Junior school is not in deficit but has a surplus. Following an amalgamation the balances will be combined and there is a risk that the overall total could be a deficit so there will still be a need for recovery action. However the Local Authority will work with the governing body to agree a plan and may allow a revised timescale to ensure that the Junior school side is not unduly financially affected by the amalgamation.

HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS (AND ACCOMMODATION IMPLICATIONS WHERE RELEVANT)

The human resources implications for the schools to be proposed for amalgamation will be managed by the schools themselves supported when required by Education HR.

EQUALITIES AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires the Council, when exercising its functions, to have due regard to:

- (i) the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010;
- (ii) the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share protected characteristics and those who do not, and;
- (iii) foster good relations between those who have protected characteristics and those who do not.

Non-key Executive Decision

Note: 'Protected characteristics' are: age, sex, race, disability, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnerships, religion or belief, pregnancy and maternity and gender reassignment.

The Council is committed to all of the above in the provision, procurement and commissioning of its services, and the employment of its workforce. In addition, the Council is also committed to improving the quality of life and wellbeing for all Havering residents in respect of socio-economics and health determinants.

We have completed an EHIA this is attached in Appendix C.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

There aren't any environmental and climate change implications and risks associated with this project as there are not physical changes to the premises required.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

APPENDICES

Appendix A	Squirrels Heath Statutory Notice
Appendix B	Squirrels Heath Amalgamation Consultation Report
Appendix C	Squirrels Heath EHIA

Non-key Executive Decision

Part C – Record of decision

I have made this executive decision in accordance with authority delegated to me by the Leader of the Council and in compliance with the requirements of the Constitution.

Decision

Proposal agreed

Details of decision maker

Signed



Name: Tara Geere

Cabinet Portfolio held:

CMT Member title: Director of Starting Well

Head of Service title

Other manager title:

Date: 15/4/25

Lodging this notice

The signed decision notice must be delivered to Committee Services, in the Town Hall.

For use by Committee Administration

This notice was lodged with me on _____

Signed _____