

Report to: Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability

Date: 23 May 2024

By: Director of Children’s Services

Title of report: Burfield Academy and Phoenix Academy

Purpose of report: To consider the local authority’s response to Step Academy Trust’s consultation on a proposal to amalgamate Burfield Academy and Phoenix Academy.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Lead Member is recommended to approve the local authority responding to Step Academy Trust’s consultation on the amalgamation of Burfield Academy and Phoenix Academy, confirming that it does not object to the proposal.

1. Background

1.1 Burfield Academy and Phoenix Academy are both located in Hailsham and are part of Step Academy Trust. Each school has a published admission number (PAN) of 30 and capacity for 210 children from Reception to Year 6. Burfield Academy also has nursery provision for three and four year olds.

1.2 Since September 2023, Burfield Academy has been co-located with Phoenix Academy on its site in Marshfoot Lane, Hailsham. This is to enable extensive remedial works to be carried out to the Burfield Academy building in Oaklands Way, Hailsham. The extensive nature of the works mean that Burfield Academy cannot remain on site while these works are undertaken.

1.3 In January 2024, Step Academy Trust submitted a planning application to the local authority to vary a condition of the original planning permission for the school, to remove all obligations concerning on-site parking provision for drop-off and pick-up (the “kiss and drop”) at Burfield Academy, citing health and safety reasons. On 13 March 2024, the local authority’s Planning Committee resolved to refuse planning permission to remove the kiss and drop obligations.

1.4 Step Academy Trust issued a press release on the same day as the planning meeting stating that without removal of the condition that the site is “*operationally unsuitable for use as a primary school*”. This was despite the possibility of further discussions with planning officers.

1.4 On 29 April 2024, a consultation on the proposed amalgamation of Burfield Academy and Phoenix Academy on the Marshfoot Lane site was launched by Step Academy Trust. The consultation is attached at Appendix 1. The consultation period runs until 24 May 2024.

1.5 As academy schools, the Trust is responsible for proposing this change and consulting with the local community and stakeholders, before applying to the Department for Education for approval. The Department for Education is the decision maker and will consider the response from the local authority before making a final decision. This report seeks Lead Member approval for the local authority’s response to Step Academy Trust’s proposal.

2. School places in Hailsham

2.1 At the January 2024 school census, Burfield Academy had 150 children on roll from Reception to Year 6 and Phoenix Academy had 93 children on roll. Based on the way classes are currently organised in the two academies, there were 147 surplus places, which equates to 38% of current operational capacity.

Table 1: Pupil numbers at Burfield Academy and Phoenix Academy

School	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
Burfield	14	21	27	20	17	22	29	150
Phoenix*	7	17	-	18	19	10	22	93
Total	21	38	27	38	36	32	51	243
Combined capacity	60	60	30	60	60	60	60	390
Surplus/shortfall (-)	39	22	3	22	24	28	9	147

Source: January 2024 school census

* Phoenix Academy did not have a Reception year intake in 2021/22 (now Year 2)

2.2 At the same time, there were 1,788 children on roll in the six other schools in Hailsham and surrounding area, with 57 surplus places (3%) based on current organisational capacity.

Table 2: Pupil numbers at the six other schools in Hailsham and surrounding area

School	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
Grovelands	90	90	93	92	92	92	93	642
Hailsham*	60	59	60	58	55	-	-	292
Hawkes Farm	46	60	30	51	59	59	60	365
Hellingly	29	30	29	22	28	31	30	199
Park Mead	12	14	16	13	14	17	15	101
White House	22	29	29	26	25	27	31	189
Total	259	282	257	262	273	226	229	1788
Combined capacity	285	285	255	285	285	225	225	1845
Surplus/shortfall (-)	26	3	-2	23	12	-1	-4	57

Source: January 2024 school census

* Hailsham opened in 2019/20 and is filling from Reception year up

2.3 Overall in Hailsham and surrounding area, there were 204 surplus places, or 9% of current organisational capacity. If measured against the physical capacity of schools in the area, the number of surplus places jumps to 384, or 16% of capacity. Both figures exceed the 5% recommended by the National Audit Office in its report on Capital Funding for new school places, published in 2013.

2.4 The local authority understands from Step Academy Trust that the new amalgamated school on the Marshfoot Lane site would be a one form entry school, with a PAN of 30, with nursery provision. The trust has confirmed that all existing children on roll at Burfield Academy and Phoenix Academy would be offered a place at the new amalgamated school. In the short term, this would require additional temporary capacity, which is already in place on the Marshfoot Lane site, due to the current co-location arrangement. As smaller reception cohorts began to replace existing larger cohorts, the temporary capacity would be removed until the new amalgamated school had capacity for 30 children in each year group and 210 overall.

2.5 Should the proposed amalgamation of Burfield Academy and Phoenix Academy be approved by the Department for Education, there would be a reduction of 210 primary places in Hailsham and surrounding area. Based on predicted reception intakes in the School Organisation Plan 2023 to 2027, the local authority believes there would be sufficient places to meet demand until at least the end of the School

Organisation Plan period and quite possibly to the end of the decade, although numbers in 2025/26 might be tight, as set out in the table below.

Table 3: Forecast reception numbers in Hailsham and surrounding area

Forecast reception numbers	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Reception numbers across all schools	295	319	294
Reduced PAN across all schools	315	315	315
Surplus/shortfall (-)	20	-4	21

Source: School Organisation Plan 2023 to 2027

2.6 In the medium to long term, it is possible that an upturn in the birth rate, coupled with further housing developments in the local area would start to put pressure on primary school places in Hailsham. In that event, the local authority would look to expand existing provision to create additional capacity. Several school sites in the area lend themselves to further expansion, should that be required in the future.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 The proposed amalgamation of the two schools, and the subsequent reduction in capacity in the area, would be unlikely to put pressure on school places in the short term. The proposal will mean that instead of two schools with low numbers there will be one school with pupil numbers close to their PAN. This is likely to provide educational benefits to pupils, due to the Trust being able to provide a greater breadth of curriculum, pupil support and extra curricula opportunities.

3.2 The planning issue with regard to the “Kiss and Drop” facility is seen by the local authority as a catalyst for the merger proposal and not a major reason in itself.

3.3 On the basis of the projected pupil numbers in Hailsham and surroundings areas the local authority does not object to the proposed merger.

CAROLYN FAIR
Director of Children’s Services

Contact Officer: Gary Langford
Tel: 07584262521
Email: gary.langford@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillor Gerard Fox
Councillor Steve Murphy