

Members of the Trust:

Angel Oak Academy
Applegarth Academy
Beddington Park Academy
Benedict Academy
Breakwater Academy

Burfield Academy
David Livingstone Academy
La Fontaine Academy
Gonville Academy
Hawkes Farm Academy

Heathfield Academy
High Cliff Academy
Park Academy
Peacehaven Heights Academy
Phoenix Academy

Telscombe Cliffs Academy
Tudor Academy
Turnham Academy
Westbridge Academy
White House Academy



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CEO: Mr P Glover
CFOO: Mr B March

29th April 2024

Dear Parent/Carer, Staff Member or other Stakeholder

PROPOSED AMALGAMATION OF PHOENIX ACADEMY AND BURFIELD ACADEMY.

In January 2023, we wrote to parents/carers and staff of Burfield and Phoenix to share that, due to building issues and the unsafe drop off/ pickup provision at Burfield's Oaklands Way site, pupils and staff would need to relocate to the Phoenix site from September 2023.

In our most recent letter in March 2024, we shared the decision by East Sussex County Council (ESCC) not to approve the planning application submitted by STEP, which sought to resolve the barriers to a return presented by the drop off/pick up arrangements. It has therefore been necessary to investigate a range of options which might enable Burfield to move back to the Oaklands Way site.

Sadly, as explained below, this is simply not possible, and so the only two viable options are for us to either; close Burfield, or amalgamate Burfield and Phoenix. The Trust are therefore proposing the amalgamation of Burfield and Phoenix and as such, we would like to give you the opportunity to share any concerns which you may have.

Why is this necessary?

Burfield's site in Oaklands Way is operationally unsuitable for use as a primary school.

As explained in the planning application submitted by STEP, the conditions to use the site are unworkable in practice. Worse than that, they pose an unreasonable risk to pupils, parents and staff.

This has been confirmed by an expert health and safety review of the scheme, which identified that:

- *"The design was suitable as a paper based exercise when created however, in practice it is impossible to carry out safely without putting members of staff, parents or children at risk."*
- *"The systems included within the plan do not in practice offer a safe solution for the drop off and collection of primary aged children."*
- *"Even with modification of the school site, access via the highway is regularly encumbered by parked vehicles, creating a bottleneck at the school gate, which puts cars, pupils and residents at risk."*
- *"There are no safe options for a safe on-site drop-off and collection process and STEP Academy Trust should work with East Sussex County Council to formally restrict access to the school premises, encouraging parents to park in surrounding residential roads."*

Clearly, STEP cannot, in good conscious and with the safety of pupils, parents and the public paramount, return to the site at Oaklands Way.

What options have been considered?

STEP has not rushed to the conclusion that Burfield and Phoenix should be amalgamated. This circumstance has arisen through situations entirely outside the control of STEP – the Trust inherited the site and had no part in any design specification for the building or indeed the ‘kiss and drop’ function. It was planned that Burfield would return to the site, however, as stated that is simply not possible.

Therefore, STEP has considered the following options:

	Option	Details
1	Relocate Burfield to an alternative site.	ESCC have confirmed that there are no plans at this stage to construct any further primary schools in Hailsham.
2	Continue to operate the two academies separately, at the Marshfoot Lane Site.	Co-location is a short-term solution. The two schools share facilities such as catering, hall, external play space and therefore a permanent separation is not possible.
3	Amalgamation of Burfield with another Hailsham school	There are no other sites within Hailsham in which all Burfield pupils could physically be accommodated.
4	Closure of Burfield Academy, with current pupil re-distributed to vacant school places across other Hailsham schools.	STEP are not in favour of this option, as it would result in significant disruption for families, including the possibilities of siblings attending different schools. ESCC have also advised that this option is not a viable option for September 2024.
5	Amalgamation of Burfield with Phoenix	This is the least disruptive option available, as all existing pupils can be accommodated within a single school.

What are the next steps?

It is fully appreciated that this news may naturally raise some concerns. Indeed, we are aware that some in the community may feel the works to the building were a ruse to move Burfield Academy. I can assure you that this is not the case.

We have endeavoured to respond to this latest challenge in the same way as we responded to the initial concerns around Burfield’s building, with children’s best interests at the heart. We are therefore confident that an amalgamation of Burfield and Phoenix is the best solution available.

It is important that you have an opportunity to share your concerns, and to that end we would like to invite you to complete the attached questionnaire and also attend an open meeting at Phoenix Academy on:

- **The parents/carers of Burfield pupils/ prospective pupils: 8th May at 4:30pm.**
- **The parents/carers of Phoenix pupils/ prospective pupils: 9th May at 4:30pm.**

In addition, attached to this letter are answers to some questions that we anticipate parents, carers and staff may have.

Yours sincerely



Dr Timothy Mills
Executive Director of Primary Education

Answers to Anticipated Questions

What does this mean if my child already attends Burfield or Phoenix?

There is sufficient space within the site at Marshfoot Lane to accommodate all the pupils from both academies. All existing pupils will be offered a place at the new amalgamated academy.

We have applied for a school place for Burfield or Phoenix for September 2024. What will happen to my admission?

All prospective pupils who have been offered a place at Burfield Academy or Phoenix Academy will be offered a place at the amalgamated academy.

Will all existing Burfield and Phoenix classes be mixed?

The new intake for year R in September 2024 will be admitted to the newly amalgamated academy, so applicants who originally applied for Burfield or Phoenix will form a single class from the outset.

Where there is a rationale for combining classes in the same year group, this will be considered by the Leadership Team. All pupils will have the opportunity to get to know their class for September 2024 during the Summer Term.

What about the nursery?

A nursery provision will continue to be offered.

What does this mean for staff at Burfield or Phoenix?

This change will not result in any redundancies.

Will there be a change to the uniform?

To ensure all pupils are treated fairly, the Trust will fund two jumpers and a book bag for pupils in readiness for September 2024.

Will access to the free breakfast club remain in place for qualifying Burfield pupils?

Free breakfast club places were offered to qualifying Burfield pupils by Kier whilst they were displaced from the Oaklands Way site during the construction works. This will cease when the academies are amalgamated from September 2024, however we will maintain staffing levels to ensure that we can continue to meet the current demand for spaces.

Is there an option for children to attend a different school?

We are confident that the newly amalgamated academy will continue to deliver an excellent standard of education. However, parents/carers have the freedom to apply to move their child at any time, to any school where there is a place available. Full details regarding this process can be found on the [ESCC website](#).

Will there be any changes to the admissions criteria as a result of this change?

The oversubscription criteria for the newly amalgamated academy will mirror the current [Burfield policy](#). These criteria are identical to Phoenix, other than the inclusion of an additional criteria relating to children who attend the nursery and are also eligible for Early Years Pupil Premium funding.

How can we provide input into this process?

We appreciate that you may have specific questions/ concerns around how an amalgamation might work in practice and are therefore commencing a four-week period of consultation, to gain an understanding of what your concerns may be.

Please complete the questionnaire and return to:

- By hand: To the school office.
- By email to: questions@stepacademytrust.org
- By post to: Burfield or Phoenix Academy, Marshfoot Lane, Hailsham, BN27 2PH

Hard copies of this letter and the enclosed Consultation Questionnaire can be requested from the school office.

We will also hold open events for each academy (please see dates below).

Only feedback received by 12 noon on Friday 24th May will be taken into account.

What will happen after consultation period?

Whilst the only alternative to the amalgamation is the unpalatable full closure of Burfield Academy, it is important that both we and the Department for Education understand how this change will be perceived by stakeholders.

When applying to the Department for Education to amalgamate Burfield and Phoenix, we will therefore share data around whether stakeholders are supportive of the merger.

The DfE will carefully consider the circumstances and then make the final decision about whether the academies can amalgamate ready for September.

Key Dates

Date	Action
29th April 2024	Consultation period begins.
8th May 2024 at 4:30pm	Consultation evening for the parents/carers of Burfield pupils/ prospective pupils. To be held at Phoenix Academy in Marshfoot Lane.
9th May 2024 at 4:30pm	Consultation evening for the parents/carers of Phoenix pupils/ prospective pupils. To be held at Phoenix Academy in Marshfoot Lane.
24th May 2024 at 12:00 noon	Consultation period ends.
WB 27th May 2024	Analysis of responses received during the consultation.
WB 3rd June 2024	Final recommendation from STEP Trustees communicated to Department for Education. Recommendation shared with community
End of June 2024	Decision from Department for Education. Final outcome shared with community.
1st September 2024	New amalgamated school opens.

Consultation Questionnaire

Proposal

Burfield Academy and Phoenix Academy will amalgamate with effect from 1st September 2024. The amalgamated academy will be located at the Marshfoot Lane address.

Please tell us in what capacity you are responding by ticking just one box:

	Please tick ✓
Parent/carer of a child currently attending Burfield Academy	
Parent/carer of a child currently attending Phoenix Academy	
Parent/carer of a child who has been offered a place at Burfield Academy for September 2024	
Parent/carer of a child who has been offered a place at Phoenix Academy for September 2024	
STEP employee based at Burfield Academy	
STEP employee based at Phoenix Academy	
Other (please state)	

Do you agree with the proposal?

	Please tick ✓
Agree	
Neither agree nor disagree	
Disagree	

Do you have any specific questions or concerns around how the amalgamation will work in practice?