

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

**Date:** 9 December 2024

**By:** Director of Children's Services

**Title of report:** Proposed amalgamation of West Rise Community Infant School and West Rise Junior School

**Purpose of report:** To seek Lead Member approval to amalgamate West Rise Community Infant School and West Rise Junior School and lower the new school's age range to 2 to 11.

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

**The Lead Member is recommended to approve the closure of West Rise Junior School on 30 April 2025 and to alter the age range of West Rise Community Infant School from 4 to 7 to 2 to 11 with effect from 1 May 2025 in order to create an all-through primary school with nursery provision.**

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## **1. Background**

1.1 In agreement with the governors of West Rise Community Infant School and West Rise Junior School, East Sussex County Council (the Local Authority) consulted between 15 April and 24 May 2024 on a proposal to amalgamate the two schools to form a new all-through primary school. Linked to this, the Local Authority also proposes to change the new school's age range to 2 to 11 to enable it to take on the management of West Rise Nursery which currently operates as a governor-led nursery under a separate Ofsted registration.

1.2 On 10 September 2024, the Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability considered a report on the outcome of the consultation and approved the publication of a statutory proposal to amalgamate the two schools and alter the new school's age range to 2 to 11. The report can be viewed at: [Decision - Proposed amalgamation of West Rise Community Infant School and West Rise Junior School | East Sussex County Council.](#)

## **2. Supporting Information**

### Statutory process

2.1 In accordance with sections 15 and 19(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (as amended by the Education Act 2011), the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 and the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013, a statutory notice and full proposal were published on the Local Authority's website on 11 October 2024 and sent to stakeholders. The statutory notice, which contained the website address of the full proposal and details on how interested parties could object to, or comment on, the proposal, was published in the Eastbourne Herald and posted on the gates to the school's premises. By the end of the representation period on 7 November 2024, no responses had been received.

2.2 In accordance with the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the Regulations, the local authority, as the responsible body, is required to determine the statutory proposal within two months of the end of the representation period. In doing so, the Lead Member, as decision maker, must give due regard to the factors set out in the following sections.

### Pupil numbers and admissions

2.3 All children attending the infant and junior schools on the date of amalgamation would automatically have a place at the all-through primary school. No children would be displaced by the

proposals. The most recent published School Census data from May 2024, shows that West Rise Community Infant School had 267 children on roll and West Rise Junior School had 356 children on roll.

2.4 The primary school's pupil capacity would be 630 which is equivalent to the places currently available at the separate infant and junior schools.

2.5 As a primary school, families of children in Year 2 would no longer have to apply for a place in the junior school from Year 3.

#### Impact on staff

2.6 Staff would continue in their roles as the two schools become one all-through primary school. The proposed changes may present opportunities for staff who would have more opportunities for professional development and would be able to gain greater understanding and experience of working in a primary school environment. The employer would remain East Sussex County Council, so there would be no need for a transfer of employment to take place under the Transfer of Undertaking and Protection of Employment Regulations 2006 (as amended in 2014) (TUPE).

2.7 No existing member of staff would be required to change their contract of employment by working across both schools. The proposed change would not constitute a break in service or affect staff terms and conditions in any way. The Local Authority knows the process of bringing two schools together as one can be unsettling for staff. As with any process of change, the interests of staff must be considered carefully, and all staff, and their unions would be consulted in accordance with the Council's Managing Change policies. The Local Authority's Human Resources team would work closely with school staff throughout the transition.

#### Impact on the community

2.8 It is anticipated that the proposal would have a positive impact on the school community as amalgamation would bring about the following benefits:

- There would no longer be a need for families of children in Year 2 to have to apply for a place in the junior school from Year 3, thereby removing any uncertainty about transfer to a 'new' school at the end of Key Stage 1.
- A shared vision and ethos across the school.
- Continuity of experience for children - in teaching and learning, pupil care and development – under a single headteacher and staff.
- Greater ability to track progress between key stages.
- A more coherent delivery of the National Curriculum from Foundation Stage through to the end of Key Stage 2.
- Easier sharing of good practice across the whole school.
- Expertise within the whole school could be better targeted across the full age range.
- Professional development opportunities for staff within an all-through primary school environment.
- Greater flexibility in organising classes, deploying teaching and support staff, and using curriculum resources more effectively.
- Greater opportunities for staff recruitment.
- Consistent engagement with families across the school.

#### Rural schools and the presumption against closure

2.9 Neither school is designated as a rural school under the Designation of Rural Primary Schools (England) Order 2023. Therefore, the presumption against the closure of rural primary schools does not apply in this instance.

#### Balance of denominational provision

2.10 West Rise Community Infant School and West Rise Junior School are both community schools. The balance of denominational provision in the area would not change as the proposed all-through primary school would be a community school.

### Maintained nursery schools

2.11 Currently, West Rise Nursery is run by the governors of West Rise Community Infant School under a different Ofsted registration, meaning it is run as a separate legal entity to the school. By changing its age range, the new all-through primary school would be able to formally take on the management of the nursery under the same Ofsted registration as the school.

### Sixth form provision

2.12 Neither school has a sixth form.

### Special educational needs (SEN) provision

2.13 At the May 2024 School Census, the percentage of SEN pupils (including those with an Education Health and Care Plan [EHCP]) on roll at West Rise Community Infant School was 27.7% (74 out of 267), and West Rise Junior School 22.5% (80 out of 356). This is higher than the East Sussex average of 18.6% and the Eastbourne average of 18.7%. There were 12 pupils (1.9%) with an EHCP across both schools. This compares to the East Sussex average of 2% and Eastbourne average of 1.7%.

2.14 Unless a child has an EHCP, the determination of whether a child has SEN is down to individual schools in consultation with parents and the threshold varies between schools. All schools have the same duties under the Equality Act 2010 and the Children and Families Act 2014 to identify and provide for children with SEN. Unless there are specific provisions named in a statutory plan which would make admission incompatible with the requirement for reasonable adjustments, it is a legal requirement for all schools to comply. As the barriers to learning, that a child with SEN might experience, change over time, the Local Authority would expect provision to adapt and change alongside these developments. In some cases, children may cease to be identified as having SEN if appropriate adjustments are put in place to enable them to overcome barriers and to make progress in line with their peers.

### Travel

2.15 As all children currently on roll at the infant and junior schools would automatically have a place at the all-through primary school following amalgamation, the Local Authority does not envisage any change to current travel arrangements.

### The effect on other educational institutions within the area

2.16 The Local Authority does not believe that the proposals would have an effect on other educational institutions within the area as there would be no increase or loss of provision as a result of the proposals.

### Project costs

2.17 No capital expenditure is required to implement the proposals.

### Equality Impact Assessment

2.18 The Lead Member is required to have 'due regard' to the duties set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (the Public Sector Equality Duty) in determining the proposal. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been undertaken to identify any equality implications of the proposal and to address any concerns through appropriate mitigations. The local authority does not consider that any groups who share the protected characteristics, including any parents and carers or members of the local community who use the school, should be more affected by the proposal than any other. All potential impacts have been assessed and appropriate mitigations set out in the EqIA. The EqIA is available to view in the Cabinet and Members' rooms at County Hall.

### Establishing the amalgamated school

2.19 To establish one 'all-through' primary school with nursery provision, the Local Authority proposes to close West Rise Junior School on 30 April 2025 (this is known as a technical closure) and change the age range at West Rise Community Infant School from 4 to 7 to 2 to 11 from 1 May 2025. In doing so, the school would likely change its name to West Rise Primary School and would continue to operate across the existing site and premises.

### **3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendation**

3.1 The proposal to amalgamate West Rise Community Infant School and West Rise Junior School builds on the improvements being made through the partnership working between the two schools and aligns with one of the guiding principles to school organisation in East Sussex.

3.2 The Regulations set out the options the decision-maker has when making a decision on a closure proposal. The decision-maker can:

- reject the proposal;
- approve the proposal without modification;
- approve the proposal with modifications; or
- approve the proposal, with or without modification, subject to certain conditions being met.

3.3 The Local Authority believes that the longer-term future for education in the local area can best be achieved through amalgamating the two schools into one all-through primary school, operating on the same site. For that reason, the Lead Member is recommended to approve, without modification, the closure of West Rise Junior School on 30 April 2025 and to alter the age range of West Rise Community Infant School from 4 to 7 to 2 to 11 with effect from 1 May 2025 in order to create an all-through primary school with nursery provision.

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#### LOCAL MEMBERS

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