Children's Services

Executive Director: Jo Fisher

Date: 12 November 2026

Dear Stakeholder,

Proposal to create a new one-form entry primary school from 1 September 2027 by amalgamating Mary Exton Primary School and Purwell Primary School, Hitchin.

We would like to hear your views on an exciting proposal to amalgamate Mary Exton Primary School and Purwell Primary School to establish a new one Form Entry (1fe) primary school, offering 210 primary places (30 places per class) and a nursery, to serve the local community.

If approved, it is proposed that the new primary school will open from **1 September 2027**. The new school will have one governing body and one leadership structure, along with a new name, a new ethos and a new uniform. In order to create a new school, both existing schools will need to be closed. All pupils on roll of both schools will be offered a place at the newly created school.

This is a pre-consultation in advance of any statutory consultation.

Why is this being proposed?

Across Hertfordshire, primary pupil numbers are falling. The proposal would establish a strong, new 1fe primary school to ensure sustainable school places are available to serve the local community into the future and better match local demand rather than maintaining two separate schools with declining pupil numbers and significant surplus capacity.

Schools with lower pupil numbers attract less Government funding risking their long-term future, making it more challenging to balance their budget while continuing to provide a broad and high-quality educational experience for pupils.

Managing a school and maintaining high-quality provision with quality teaching and learning can be difficult on a low budget. For every vacant place in a Hertfordshire primary school, the school is missing out on an average of £5,000 a year which has an impact on staffing and resources at the school. A school with vacancies must still

fund the same level of fixed costs as though it were full; including the maintenance and operation of school buildings.

Both Mary Exton and Purwell Primary Schools are facing a financial budget deficit. Both school buildings have capacity for 1 form of entry (210 places across Reception to Year 6). They serve neighbouring communities in Hitchin. In recent years, both schools have experienced a decline in pupil numbers, reflecting wider demographic changes and reduced demand for primary school places across the town.

The two schools combined are currently only half full, with 214 vacant spaces and between them have a total of 16 reception pupils on roll.

Mary Exton & Purwell NOR - September 2026

	R	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6	Total
Purwell	8	11	10	13	14	8	22	86
Mary Exton	8	4	21	18	27	22	20	120
Total numbers on roll	16	15	31	31	41	30	42	206

Prior to bringing forward this proposal, a range of alternative options were considered including

- Maintaining both schools separately with reduced admission numbers
- Closure of one school without creating a new school
- Federation or academisation

A full appraisal of all the options considered can be found here: Hitchin Schools Consultation | Hertfordshire County Council.

Following consideration, we believe the proposal to amalgamate the two schools is the best option and we are therefore consulting you to ensure your views help inform further decision making.

What are the benefits of the proposal?

The proposal to bring the two existing schools together would protect and strengthen the education provision for local children and bring together the skills and experience of staff from both schools.

The new school would create the opportunity to build on the strengths of both existing schools to create a shared vision for the future, fostering an inclusive and ambitious learning environment where all pupils are supported to thrive and achieve their potential.

Amalgamation would bring pupils together within a single primary school, creating a more sustainable school for years to come to serve the local community. This will

provide greater opportunities for staff development, support the delivery of a broad and enriching curriculum for all pupils as well as supporting financial sustainability through making the best use of resources and facilities.

The proposal would reduce the impact of falling rolls in the local area and create a better match with the number of children living locally, whilst retaining local primary education provision within the community.

What would this mean for pupils?

The proposal is intended to provide continued access to high-quality primary education within the local area while creating a stronger and more sustainable school for the future.

Subject to any final decision, all children currently attending either school would be able to continue their education within the newly merged school.

We recognise the importance of continuity for children and families and would work closely with school leaders throughout a transition process.

Detailed transition arrangements would be developed with both schools to ensure that any changes are carefully planned and managed, minimising disruption to pupils' education and wellbeing.

SEND

We recognise that some pupils attending the schools have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and that uncertainty and change can be unsettling for all affected families.

Supporting the wellbeing, progress and individual needs of every child would remain a key priority throughout any transition.

If the proposal were to proceed, the county council, school leaders and specialist SEND colleagues would work closely with families to ensure appropriate support remains in place and that children continue to receive the help they need. For children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the provision set out in their plan would continue to be delivered in line with statutory requirements. We are committed to working with families throughout the process to help ensure any changes are managed as smoothly as possible for pupils.

What about transport?

A place will be available for all existing pupils at the newly created primary school. The schools are within close proximity to one another and all current pupils live within the statutory walking distance.

Free transport will be provided to any child with a statutory entitlement. Statutory entitlement to free transport is provided if a child:

- attends their nearest school with a vacancy (inside or outside Hertfordshire) if that school is more than statutory walking distance from their home address (2 miles for a child under 8 years, 3 miles for a child aged 8 or over)
- attends their nearest school under statutory walking distance, but there is no available safe walking route to that school and no other school within walking distance
- meets low-income criteria or has individual needs related to SEND requiring travel support

The site for the new school

Whilst preliminary work has identified a range of advantages and considerations associated with both sites, it is important that the location of the new school is informed by a full assessment of a range of factors, alongside the views and evidence gathered through the consultation process.

The location of the new school will ultimately be determined through consideration of the totality of the evidence, including site suitability, value for money, long-term sustainability and the extent to which each option meets the needs of current and future pupils and their families.

The two schools are 0.7miles apart (a 15-minute walk).

The change in travel distances for affected pupils would be very similar with no current pupil needing to travel more than an additional kilometre whichever site is chosen.

Should the proposal proceed, capital investment may be required on either site to enable all pupils to be accommodated in the new school following implementation, and a permanent nursery space would be required at the Mary Exton site.

We would welcome your views on which site you think would be most appropriate for the new school and why as part of this pre-consultation.

In parallel, we would consider the future of the remaining site for alternative use, which could be to support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

What would happen to staff?

If the proposal proceeds, the staffing structures of both schools would need to be reviewed to support the proposed single 1fe primary school. It is anticipated that this would require a restructure and a reduction in the overall number of staffing posts compared with the current combined arrangements across the two schools.

No decisions about the future staffing structure or individual staff posts have been made at this stage. Engagement with all staff is already underway and we and the governing bodies will continue to support staff through the process.

Staffing proposals would be subject to a separate formal consultation process with affected staff and recognised trade unions/professional associations, in accordance with relevant employment procedures and statutory requirements. We would aim to minimise compulsory redundancies wherever reasonably possible while ensuring that the newly merged school has a strong staffing structure that is educationally, operationally and financially sustainable.

School Uniform

If, following the statutory consultation process, the decision is taken to merge the two schools, all pupils on roll at the two schools who join the new school will be supported with uniform costs.

The legal framework for amalgamation

The proposed amalgamation of Mary Exton and Purwell Primary Schools is considered a discontinuance under DfE guidance. This proposal is being brought forward under S10 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 which allows for the establishment of certain new maintained schools to be published with the consent of the Secretary of State. The legislation requires appropriate consultation and a formal statutory decision-making process before a final decision on the proposal is made by the Schools Adjudicator.[1]

What has happened so far?

We have worked closely with both schools to understand the challenges and opportunities facing them and to explore options for securing high-quality and sustainable primary education provision in the area.

The Head Teachers and Governors of both schools are committed to making the newly merged school an exciting learning environment for all pupils.

Whilst no decisions have been made, leaders from both schools are already working with the local authority to explore how the proposal could be developed should it be approved. This reflects their professionalism and commitment to ensuring that, if the proposal proceeds, the strongest possible arrangements are in place from the outset. Drawing on expertise from both schools, alongside support from the local authority and specialist advisers, this work will help shape an ambitious curriculum and provision that delivers the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

No final decision has been made and this pre-consultation period is intended to gather the views of all interested parties before any decision on whether to proceed to a statutory consultation is taken.

Have your say

[1] The Schools Adjudicator is an independent public body in England that makes legally binding decisions from School Admissions Arrangements through to school organisation matters.

No decision has been made yet.

The purpose of this pre-consultation is to gather local views before the county council decides whether or not to formally consult on the proposal.

We are particularly interested in hearing your views on:

- whether you support the proposal to amalgamate the two schools;
- which school site you believe would be the most suitable location for the newly merged school and why
- what you would want to see in the new school and would like it to offer pupils, families and the local community so that, if the proposal goes ahead, your views can help shape the school that reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community.

How can you make your views known

This pre-consultation period runs from 12 November to 10 December 2026.

Please tell us whether you agree or disagree with the proposal and let us have your views. All responses received during this period will be considered before any decision is taken.

We will be holding an information meeting to explain the reasons why this proposal is being consulted on. This will be hosted by the county council and a number of officers will be present to answer any questions you may have.

The meeting will be held on Thursday 3rd December 2026 from 6pm at **The Priory School, Hitchin in the Sixth Form Centre.**

Details of how to respond, together with supporting consultation documents, the Member reports and the options considered, are available at: https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/consultations

The easiest way for you to let us know your views is to complete the online response form on our website at https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/consultations

If you do not have access to the internet, you can visit your local library where free access is available to all Hertfordshire residents.

Should you wish to have a paper response form, both schools have hard copies available. Please contact either Purwell School office on 01462 432950 or Mary Exton School Office on 01462 456997. Alternatively, you can request a hard copy and get help understanding this information by emailing education.planning@hertfordshire.gov.uk, or by calling us on 0300 123 4043. An interpreting service is available for those who need it.

Your response must be received by **10 December 2026**. We will not be able to acknowledge or respond individually to your comments, but they will be taken into account as explained below.

How the decision will be taken and when?

This is a pre-consultation and no final decision has been made yet.

All responses received during this 4-week period will be made available to elected members who will consider all information and feedback and decide whether or not to proceed to a statutory consultation on the proposal. All responses may be made available in public reports, although personal details will be removed to respect individual privacy.

The following timetable outlines the decision-making process. Please note that meetings marked with * will be open to the public. Although it will not be possible to inform everyone individually of the decisions made, you will be able to access this information throughout the process at: www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/committees.

Process	**Date**
Pre-consultation period (4 weeks)	12 November – 10 December 2026
Public meeting*	TBC
Education, SEND & Inclusion Cabinet Panel*	20 January 2027
Cabinet*	21 January 2027 or 11 February 2027
Should Cabinet decide to proceed, a 4-week statutory process would follow in February/March 2027	
The outcome of the statutory consultation would be considered by Cabinet and the Schools Adjudicator in March/April in order to make the final decision.	
Implementation of decision	31 August 2027

* Denotes meetings that are open to the public.

We would welcome views on this proposal which would protect and strengthen the education provision for all local children through the provision of a new 1 form entry primary school to serve the local community into the future.

Yours faithfully,



Jo Fisher,
Executive Director of Children's Services and Education