

Please contact: Ian Sutherland  
Our ref: Proposals regarding Stoke and Allhallows merger  
Date: 6 June 2019

Mr N Willis  
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Director: Ian Sutherland

Dear Mr Willis,

We write to confirm Medway Council's response to the consultation regarding the proposal to merge Stoke and Allhallows primary schools.

We acknowledge the concerns regarding pupil numbers and the educational benefits of single age group classes, and also the case for financial sustainability. However, we have some significant concerns relating to the loss of Stoke Primary School.

Stoke Primary School was designated a rural school because of its importance as the only education provision local to the Stoke village area. We have the following concerns regarding how children living in the Stoke area and attending Stoke Primary School will have a safe and acceptable means of attending Allhallows;

- 1) There is no safe walking route for school children (statutory guidelines) between the villages. How do you propose to transport the pupils?
- 2) What consideration have you given towards the varying ages and needs of the children, particularly the younger ones and those with additional needs?
- 3) The council cannot accept the additional burden on the transport budget that would be created by the closure of the Stoke Primary School, either now or in the future. Therefore, how do you propose to fund the necessary transportation on a permanent basis?
- 4) Currently the majority of Stoke Primary School pupils (at least 58 pupils) have a safe walking route, which means they can walk or cycle safely to school. This aligns with the Council's policy of healthy and green journeys to school as promoted by our 'Safer Journeys' Team. How will depriving children and families of this option, whilst increasing traffic and pollution, be mitigated?

Furthermore, rural schools play an important role in village life and the impact of the closure of Stoke Primary School on the wider community should also be considered.

We would also like to point out that the paragraph headed **'Will this mean fewer places for local children?'** could be construed as misleading and should have been made clearer. It states that there will be 30 places in each year group, 'the same number of pupils as there are in the two current academies combined'. Currently there are 50 places available in each year group across the schools, and the merger would result in the loss of 20 available places per year group. So there will be fewer places for local children but your letter suggests that nothing changes when in fact it does.

It is accepted that existing forecasts indicate that 30 places per year group between the two schools should be sufficient for the next five years, however it is important to note there are proposals for more than 10,000 homes on the Hoo Peninsula, including some potential smaller schemes to be located in the eastern Peninsula area. As you know, the demand from these proposals cannot be included in official forecasts, but nonetheless it would be prudent to exercise caution with regard to decisions and actions that will have a long term impact on school place capacity in the area.

In light of the above concerns, and with no assurances provided, the position of Medway Council is one of objection. This letter has been copied to the Regional Schools Commissioner, the Member of Parliament for Rochester and Strood, and the Councillors for Peninsula ward.

Kind regards



Ian Sutherland  
Director of Children and Adult Services



Councillor Martin Potter  
Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools