



Leigh Academies Trust  
Carnation Road, Strood  
Rochester, Kent ME2 2SX  
t: 01634 412 200 f: 01634 412 201  
e: info@latrust.org.uk  
w: www.leighacademiestrust.org.uk

Chief Executive: Simon Beamish, BA (Hons) MSc PGCE NPQH NLE

7th June 2019

Ian Sutherland  
Director of Children and Adult Services  
Medway Council

Cllr Martin Potter  
Portfolio Holder for Education and Schools  
Medway Council

Dear Mr Sutherland and Cllr Potter

**RE: your letter dated 6th June 2019.**

Thank you for your letter which we received yesterday. As you know, we met with you a week ago to discuss the proposed merger of Stoke and Allhallows Primaries. This follows on from several productive meetings we have had already with other officers and politicians in Medway about the proposal this academic year.

At our recent meeting and in your letter you recognised the educational and financial justifications for this merger. At the end of our meeting, we agreed to take away some key actions, mainly relating to transport. We promised to get back to you as soon as possible. In light of that, we were rather surprised to receive your letter yesterday and at the extent to which it had been circulated to a range other individuals.

In respect of educational justifications for the merger, the case is clear. Stoke is currently judged to require improvement by Ofsted. In fact, since 2006, the school has never been judged good. Whilst the current Ofsted rating of Allhallows is better, both schools have been the source of considerable Department for Education (DfE) concern as a number of visits by improvement advisors over the last few years confirm.

As very small schools they face a number of challenges, the most difficult being mixed-age classes. In addition, the leadership team is forced to operate over both sites and teachers are relatively isolated, with just four in each school, and do not enjoy enough opportunities to collaborate and access best practice.

From a financial perspective, the case is equally compelling. The two schools combined have fewer pupils than a fully-enrolled one form-entry primary school. The DfE already recognises that such small schools are not economically viable. That is why they will not approve new primary provision any smaller than two forms of entry.

If the merger does not take place, the two schools will have a combined deficit next year of £140,000. The deficit will grow by a similar amount in every future year. This situation is simply not sustainable. In contrast, the merged primary will have a balanced budget.

Turning to the four specific points in your letter, as promised, we are now in a position to offer further feedback and reassurance.

**1. A safe walking route and proposal to transport pupils.**

The two schools are 1.3 miles apart. We recognise that there is no footpath connecting them. We raised this with Medway some months ago, but the council was not able to construct a suitable pedestrian walkway.

As part of the merger, Leigh Academies Trust commits to fund a return minibus service to transport children who live in Stoke from Stoke to Allhallows on a daily basis. This will be reviewed annually to ensure it meets the needs of the academy.

**2. Consideration of younger pupils and those with additional needs.**

All pupils will be accompanied during minibus transportation by appropriate adults. We will be using suitable car-seats and booster-seats where appropriate. This is a service we already offer successfully in at least one other primary academy.

**3. Burden on transport budget and proposal to fund additional transportation.**

As stated, the Trust commits to providing funding to operate the minibus service explained above.

**4. Safe walking and cycling route; mitigating the impact of increased car journeys.**


It is not within the Trust's gift to provide a footpath between both locations. The cycle route between the two schools is not unsafe. In your letter you state that 58 pupils who attend Stoke Primary live in Stoke village. Should the merger go ahead, these pupils will need to travel further to school, possibly by car. However, these journeys will be offset by the 55 pupils who attend Stoke Primary, but live outside of the village - often in Allhallows - and who will no longer need to travel to Stoke. It should be noted also that if parents of the 58 pupils who live in Stoke opt for minibus transportation as opposed to individual car journeys, the total number of vehicles on the road - and therefore pollution - will be much reduced.

Whilst it is unfortunate that under these proposals Stoke village will no longer have its own school, it is the quality of education and its sustainability that is of paramount importance.

In terms of school places, the merged primary will offer sufficient school places in the area according to the Medway school place planning document, published in September 2018. This same document explains that Hoo Peninsula East primaries are currently just 50% enrolled and this will not change until at least 2023.

We are seeking an urgent meeting with you to discuss these points once more. In the meantime, I have pleasure attaching the recent Ofsted inspection report for Allhallows Primary which catalogues the rapid impact that membership of Leigh Academies Trust is already having.

Yours sincerely,



**Simon Beamish**  
**Chief Executive**

cc. Jonathan Duff, Regional Schools' Commissioner's Office  
Deonne Rowland, Regional Schools' Commissioner's Office  
Matthew Morley, Regional Schools' Commissioner's Office  
Kelly Tolhurst, Member of Parliament  
Cllr Phil Filmer, Hoo Peninsula Ward  
Cllr Ron Sands, Hoo Peninsula Ward  
Cllr Michael Pendergast, Hoo Peninsula Ward  
Paul Clarke, Medway Council  
David Watkins, Medway Council