

Proposal for our Federation to join a South Farnham Educational Trust

Frequently Asked Questions (updated 23.04.25)

As you may already be aware, the governing body of Wood Street Infant School & Worplesdon Primary School have applied to become an academy under the Academies Act 2010 and are proposing to join South Farnham Educational Trust. The governing body is now consulting on whether the school's conversion to academy status should take place.

Further information about what becoming an academy means, and how to comment on the proposals, is set out below. This document will be updated for any questions received as part of the consultation process.

Please note that any new Q & A's since previous FAQ document dated 28.02.25 are highlighted in red font.

Process of conversion

Has the decision to convert to an Academy already been made?

"No. Until the views of our parents, staff, the local community and other stakeholders of our school have been obtained, a final decision will not be made. The Governing Board has to weigh up both the pros and cons of Academy conversion.

Once an application has been submitted by the school, a period of due diligence will continue. The Regional Director will make the final decision.

Will The Federated Schools of Wood Street Infant School & Worplesdon Primary School definitely become an academies?

The governing body has submitted an application to convert to academy status and is working towards a conversion by summer 2025. However, the schools are not obligated to become academies until the contract between the multi academy trust and the Department for Education (known as the Funding Agreement) is signed.

The academy trust will not sign the Funding Agreement until parents and carers of pupils at the schools, staff at the schools, and pupils themselves have had the opportunity to comment on the proposals. Kareen O'Brien is writing to all parents and carers and will also invite them to a meeting (date to be confirmed) to learn more about the proposals to become an academy, or to comment on the proposals. We will also hold meetings with staff, and will be keeping pupils informed throughout the process.

Any comments or representations which are made about the proposals will be considered by the governing bodies before they take the final decision to convert to academy status.

The governing body will not vote to proceed with academy conversion unless they are content that conversion would be in the best interests of the schools, taking account of all of the legal and practical ramifications.

What is an academy?

An academy is essentially an independent school which is funded by the state. It is independent of the local authority and receives its funding direct from central government.

We are proposing to become two academies as part of the South Farnham Educational Trust (SFET). This means that we will be part of an academy group comprising South Farnham School, The Raleigh School, Highfield South Farnham, Wallace Fields Infant School and Nursery, Busbridge Infant School, Great Bookham School, Normandy Village School, Kings Furlong Infant School Nursery, Brighton Hill Community School and The Blue Coat School Basingstoke and any proposed new schools.

What are the benefits of being an academy?

In the school's opinion the benefits are numerous:

- academies are independent of local authority control – this means that academies have more freedom about how they conduct themselves
- academies receive their funding direct from central government
- academies have more freedom over the curriculum taught – this means that academies do not need to teach parts of the National Curriculum which they do not consider appropriate for their pupils
- academies can set their own pay and conditions of service for their staff – academies have the freedom to alter the pay and conditions of their staff (subject to normal employment law protections for staff) and so can provide staff with better pay and conditions than previously
- academies have more freedom to undertake innovative projects – academies are companies and so have more freedom to undertake innovative projects, such as setting up and utilising trading subsidiaries.

There is also more information about academies on the DfE website: <http://www.education.gov.uk/academies>

Are there any disadvantages to becoming an academy?

South Farnham Educational Trust will be directly liable for matters such as insurance, employment liabilities, pensions, health and safety, and, property maintenance. However, as mentioned above, academies receive more funding from central government to help them meet these additional costs, and in any event, the South Farnham Educational Trust already deals with these matters for the other academies it supports.

Once the school has converted, there is currently no route to revert back to being a maintained school under local authority control – academy conversion is a permanent change.

If the school was underperforming in the future, the Secretary of State may have the power to force the school (as an academy) to transfer to a different academy trust. However, in those circumstances, it is likely that the Secretary of State would have the power to intervene even if the school remained a local authority maintained school.

What is the proposed timescale?

The governing body and South Farnham Educational Trust are working towards a conversion by summer 2025, subject to the results of the consultations underway and a funding agreement being agreed.

The governing body will meet to consider the results of this consultation process.

What will the governance arrangements be?

The Local Authority retain responsibility for the school until any academy conversion is confirmed.

If conversion happens then responsibility for the school would move to South Farnham Educational Trust. The Board of Directors of the Trust have delegated certain functions to be locally managed and a Local Governing Body would have general responsibility for the effective management of the school.

Local management allows individual needs to be met effectively. Through the school budget governors are able to target resources and develop the nature and character of the school to meet the needs and wishes of parents, children and staff.

The Local Governing Body would continue to include parent representatives, staff representatives, school leaders, and co-opted governors.

What does the conversion process involve?

The key steps we must take are as follows:

- The Governing Body formally agrees to consult on becoming an academy and within which MAT
- Secure approval, in principle, from the Local Authority to convert to academy status
- Obtain the Secretary of State's initial consent by securing an "Academy Order"
- Carry out the necessary consultation and decide to proceed
- Agree a supplementary funding agreement with the DfE and SFET;
- Ensure that the school site is made available to the Academy Trust via leases and/or supplemental agreements
- Ensure that financial systems are in place to manage funding
- Transfer, renew or procure new contracts, service level agreements and licences and purchase insurance as appropriate
- Transfer under TUPE all contract arrangements for staff. This is a formal legal consultation process which is separate from the consultation with all stakeholders. This would not start until after the vote by the Governing Body to apply for academy status
- Agree and transfer surplus balances held by LA to the academy
- Ensure appropriate admissions policies are in place.

Staffing (including pay, conditions, pensions, training)

Will there be any staffing issues?

If the school converts to an academy, all staff currently employed by the school will automatically transfer to the new academy on their current pay and conditions.

As part of the academisation process all staff employed by the school will move from being employees of Surrey County Council to being employees of South Farnham Educational Trust. The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (known as TUPE) regulations protect the rights of all staff affected by the transfer.

A separate consultation will be held with staff, led by Surrey County Council.

Can academies alter the pay and conditions of employees?

When a school converts to a new academy, employees are entitled to transfer under the same employment terms and conditions. There is a legal process to go through, which is called TUPE, whereby staff maintain existing pay, conditions and length of service. Any alterations can only be made as they would have been by the Council (for example, changes to pay and annual leave negotiated with employee's representatives). This position will continue unless the contract of employment is varied with the agreement of the employee.

It's important to note that there are no plans to alter the pay and conditions of staff. Any changes made nationally would apply.

How will union membership (NUT, NASUWT, Unison, etc) work?

As now, all employees are entitled to be part of a union.

How high are staff retention and turnover in the trust?

There is a high retention rate across South Farnham Educational Trust. The teaching school serves SCITTs and ECTs therefore the trust is actively involved in the training and recruitment of the new generation of teachers.

Do staff in the trust feel supported and valued?

During the governors working group who carried out due diligence during the autumn term, Governors were able to evidence through discussions with staff at schools within the trust, that staff feel highly valued and remain within the trust in many cases.

Does the trust have a central staff wellbeing policy and/or staff wellbeing action plan?

What evidence can the trust provide that it has put this policy into practice?

At SFET, we are committed to supporting the positive mental health and wellbeing for every member of our school community (children, staff, parents and carers). South Farnham Educational Trust has a Staff Wellbeing Policy which is intended to outline the ways in which senior leaders and employees can work together to enhance staff health and wellbeing, ensuring that the school is a safe, caring and positive place to work (see the School Policies section of the website). We are committed to promoting the positive mental, physical and emotional wellbeing of our staff and recognise that enhancing individual wellbeing offers benefits not just to our staff but also our pupils and the wider community.

What measures does the trust have in place to reduce discrimination and support staff members with protected characteristics?

As reflected in the South Farnham Educational Trust Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy and Equal Opportunities in Employment Policy, government guidance, expectation and legislation governing a maintained school and/or an Academy Trust are identical with relation to the protected groups at both the Trust and the school, defined as: Age, Disability, Gender reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy & Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex, Sexual Orientation

What major contracts does the trust have with services/suppliers, e.g. cleaning, grounds maintenance, catering?

When are these due for renewal?

- Catering contract - trust currently using the company that Worplesdon was using, up for review for the trust in 18 months.
 - Managed ICT service contract - 18 months review.
 - Cleaning and grounds maintenance - varying end dates across the schools.
 - Central teams for HR/payroll, legal, estates, operations and this would support the school business manager.
 - Audits and monthly management accounts would be done centrally by the trust finance team.
- There would still be a requirement for a business manager in each school but they get the benefit of working with a team to support them.

Admissions & growth plans

Will the admissions arrangements change?

As a community school The Federated Schools of Wood Street Infant School & Worplesdon Primary School's admissions arrangements are set by the local authority, and the local authority also decides which pupils should be offered places at the school. As an academy, South Farnham Educational Trust will put in place admission arrangements, and decide which pupils should be offered places in accordance with those arrangements. The academy will still be bound by the national School Admissions Code, and School Admission Appeals Code.

The current admission arrangements will remain in place for the time being. If the academy wanted to change its admission arrangements consultation would be required.

Future school numbers

There are no plans to change the school numbers. Pupil numbers regularly vary across the County and the Trust will respond to future fluctuations appropriately.

What expansion plans, if any, does the trust have?

The trust waits for schools to approach them and value partnerships such as our SCITT and Teaching School Hub (and the natural growth that develops from strong foundations). Will continue to grow, however, business model with Teaching School Hub status is

lucrative therefore don't need to be aggressive with growth. Their aim is to work with schools whose expertise will benefit the trust whilst also seeking to support schools, as capacity allows. This is an important balance.

Teaching, Learning, Curriculum, Standards

a. What changes are proposed to the curriculum? b. Will the trust expect us to academically test in line with other trust schools? c. Does the trust value the wider curriculum? d. Does the trust expect the federation to adopt the MAT's homework policy?

- Academies do have the power to vary their curriculums and vary the length of the school day, however, it is not intended to take any such steps at this stage and we would engage with parents/carers, staff and students if we did ever intend to make such changes in the future. The government has plans to review the curriculum in the near future and we are hopeful that staff from WWFS would be part of a working group to develop planning for our trust schools.
- In order for trustees to monitor performance across the schools in the trust, every school is expected to monitor pupil progress, which is already in place at WWFS however, the tests used will be NFER instead of NTS which is currently used at WWFS.
- The trust values the wider curriculum as demonstrated in recent OFSTED reports in SFET schools.
- There is no desire for WWFS to adopt the same homework policy unless it is helpful to the school.

Does the trust have a central marking and/or report-writing policy?

There is no central marking or report writing policy however, leaders enjoy collaborating, sharing ideas and at times decide to adopt the same practices if it benefits the children in their school.

What evidence is there of attempts to reduce unnecessary staff workload?

Centralised planning at South Farnham reduces the workload and assessments are also centralised. Staff are encouraged not to take work home.

Which groups of pupils receive significant support from the trust? Is this effective in improving these groups' attainment?

Consistency in planning ensures consistency of teaching and learning within every classroom. Children are assessed early on through timely assessments and targeted interventions built around accelerating progress are implemented. Those not on track to meet ARE at South Farnham benefit from a focus group approach to accelerate support. At South Farnham these children have a parallel teacher delivering the curriculum. This has proved effective in ensuring that pupils make ARE progress.

Will the school be able to set its own curriculum?

Academies can offer a more flexible curriculum, providing it is a 'balanced and broadly-based curriculum'. We believe that WWFS has already significantly invested in the design and implementation of an exciting curriculum that meets the needs of our children. We will continue to review and adapt this curriculum annually. SFET have also been involved in the national curriculum review (to be announced and rolled out later in the year) so this will enable us to work with a school that is at the forefront of this important change in education.

What evidence can the trust show of raising performance in its academies?

The majority of schools within SFET are Good or Outstanding. The new schools that joined through an 'Academy Order' (due to underperformance/OFSTED failure) will be inspected within three years of joining SFET and we look forward to evidencing the improvements that have been made within these settings.

Recent inspections include:

South Farnham SCITT (July 2023) - Outstanding in all areas

Highfield South Farnham School (2024) - Outstanding retained in all areas

The Raleigh School (2024) - Outstanding retained in all areas

South Farnham School (2024) - Outstanding in all areas

Great Bookham School (2025) - Report awaiting publication (we are 'very pleased' and 'look forward to the publication of this report')

Great Bookham school moved from 53% RWM combined to 88% RWM combined in one year (now rated 9th highest performing school in Surrey).

What training, CPD, and networking opportunities does the trust offer for its staff?

Through close co-operation children, parents and teachers will share professional expertise, training opportunities and facilities to ensure that the whole is greater than the part. CPD and training opportunities include: access to school effectiveness, teaching and learning expertise; opportunities for outstanding CPD through our Teaching School Hub (participation and facilitation opportunities); executive lead meetings for Headteachers to share practice and collaborate on a variety of projects; opportunity to contribute to the national educational agenda; joint INSET training; opportunities for curriculum leads to network across schools.

The Trust have a head who takes on the role of SIP but Wood Street Infants and Worplesdon Primary School could continue with their current SIP arrangements.

What would happen to SEN provision?

Becoming part of a larger family of schools has the potential to offer a more diverse community offering opportunities for the protected groups at Wood Street Infant School and Worplesdon Primary School to benefit from enhanced support, and also to enhance the support of these groups within South Farnham Educational Trust. We would continue to provide the same support for pupils with an EHCP and indeed the funding for this element continues to be provided by the Local Authority. The Local Authority retains its responsibility for statutory duties, obligations and procedures remain in place when a school converts to academy status. We know how challenging the SEND funding arrangements are and by making this strategic decision, we want to be able to proactive in ensuring that we can ensure that pupils who come to our school and Haven provision will thrive in the provision we offer and we can meet their needs.

Will PPA timetables change? EG will we continue to have protected 2.5hrs a week with our teams or will this go to half an hour a day?

The head teacher will continue to be responsible for deciding how to organise the PPA arrangements across the federation.

Will we keep our values based education?

Yes, the head teacher will continue to lead the school's vision.

Will the school adopt 'The continual pursuit of excellence' as the school tag line?

This is the overarching vision of the trust with each school within the trust having their own unique vision which contributes to the trust's vision. The federation's vision 'developing a love for learning and life' aligns well with the trust's vision.

Will continuous provision in Year One be protected?

The headteacher will continue to make decisions on teaching approaches across the federation.

Will Year One/Two begin formal termly assessments (NFERs or such like)?

Currently, teachers use their ongoing assessments to inform their summative assessments each term. In years 2, 3, 4 & 5 these assessments are supplemented by formalised tests annually and in years 6 these are termly. In SFET schools, standardised assessments are carried out in years 1-6 termly.

Will the school's behaviour policy change?

There will be a trust template for the Headteacher to work from and adapt to meet the needs to the school(s). The headteacher will ensure that the federation's policy is effective and meets the schools needs.

Will the phonics scheme need to change?

No, the headteacher will ensure that the phonics scheme meets the needs of the children well.

Will there be more observations?

No. The federation already have well established monitoring systems which reflect the trusts own systems. The difference will be that instead of the federation's School Improvement Partner & the Local Authorities advisors visiting across the year, SFET colleagues will carry out these duties along with the head teacher and senior leaders.

OFSTED

Will academies be free from Ofsted inspections?

No, academies remain fully under Ofsted's inspection arrangements.

School executive leadership has identified that for WWFS to continue to drive further improvement in outcomes, the school needs to engage in authentic collaboration with other schools and leverage the benefits that drives to higher quality teaching and learning. Working with a wider group offers staff further opportunities and aids retention and growth. WWFS has invested significantly in teacher and staff development in recent years and the capacity exists now to support wider development.

What (if any) support will/does the academy offer during an OFSTED inspection? Either for future inspections or is there evidence already?

SFET is a family of schools who support each other in a variety of ways including during an OFSTED inspection.

Finance & building

What is the financial impact of becoming an academy?

Academies receive the same level of per-pupil funding as they would receive from the Local Authority as a maintained school. Most school funding will come directly to the multi-academy trust (MAT) from central government and is then passed on the academy after a proportion is retained – the amount retained and how that is managed differs from MAT to MAT. Most of the funding is received in monthly instalments, and so managing cashflow is a new and important responsibility for both MATs and their academies. SEN and Early Years funding still comes to the academy directly from the local authority.

All MATs must retain some proportion of its academies funding to pay for the staff and resources they need to provide services and support to their academies – this is often referred to as a service charge, retention or top slice. The amount retained will vary from MAT to MAT as will the level of service provision."

Have any schools in the trust had to set a budget deficit in the past 5 years?

This has happened where schools have been in a deficit before becoming part of the MAT and the trust has demonstrated an ability to support with financial decision making to ensure that the financial outcomes improve.

Have any academies in the trust had to make staff reductions in the past 5 years to balance the budget?

No

Does the trust have financial planning and budget forecasts for at least the next 3 years?

Yes. There is a centralised financial planning team which supports the school business manager.

Do any academies in the trust have a private finance initiative (PFI) agreement on the buildings/assets of the school/academy? If so: What are they?

No there are none.

Is there an efficient and centralised procurement process across the trust? How does the trust identify opportunities for tendering at scale?

There is an efficient procurement process across the Trust which comprises a mixture of centralised process and local arrangements depending on the type of contract, the overall value and duration of the contract. As contracts come up for renewal the central team will negotiate MAT discounts wherever possible.

Do any academies in the trust have additional income streams (such as lettings, foundations etc) which enable the trust to balance the budget?

Academies in the Trust do have additional income streams and these vary from school to school. These include: lettings, pre-school/nursery settings, before and after school care, PTA and other fundraising. Some school receive an income through assessment, facilitation or tutoring work with the SCITT and Teaching School Hub. The nationally recognised teaching school hub, SCITT and DfE validated Phonics Scheme support further initiatives throughout the trust.

Will there be a capital fund or a specific grant for insurance to cover for emergencies in academies?

Academies are required to cover insurance at specified minimum levels of cover. SFET will ensure that the necessary insurance is in place through the Government's approved insurance scheme (Risk Protection Arrangement).

Who would own the land and buildings?

The freehold land and buildings remain in their current ownership but are made available to the Academy via a 125-year lease and/or a supplemental agreement.

What about the financial impact? I've heard that you need to pay a % of budget to the Trust

This is true and currently, the LA retains a proportion of funding for the same reason. All MATs must retain some proportion of its academies funding to pay for the staff and resources they need to provide services and support to their academies – this is often referred to as a service charge, retention or top slice. The amount retained will vary from MAT to MAT as will the level of service provision. The potential does exist to capitalise on shared services models over time and through sharing the costs of external consultancy, training and continuing professional development."

Governance & Leadership



The Federated Schools of Wood Street Infant School and Worplesdon Primary School



Will The Federated Schools of Wood Street Infant School & Worplesdon Primary School change?

We do not intend to change The Federated Schools of Wood Street Infant School & Worplesdon Primary School except in ways which we think will improve the school even more. Examples of potential changes are improvement in IT facilities and networks, improvement in building maintenance etc. Any such changes would be for the local governing board for the schools and South Farnham Educational Trust to discuss in future – in the same way as currently the governors will discuss with Surrey County Council.

For pupils, it is unlikely that they will see much, if any, change in their day to day school lives.

This consultation process is the opportunity for parents to obtain details on the academisation process.

Will the name of the school change?

We do not intend to make any changes to the schools names.

What will happen to school uniform?

We do not intend to change the school uniform.

What are the expected changes to the Governing Body?

On the day of conversion, our Governing Body would cease to operate and a new Local Governing Body (LGB) will be established in its place, as a committee of the Board of Trustees. With the consent of the existing Governors, they are transitioned to the new LGB, who will be responsible, as per the scheme of delegation (on SFET's website).

Will the change to academy status change the demands on Governors, and how will we find the right governors with the necessary skills, experience and time?

Being part of SFET means that the Board of Trustees will have the necessary range of skills required at a strategic level in line with the requirements under the Companies Act and the roles and responsibilities of the LGB will not be any more demanding. Recruiting and retaining governors with key skills and experience remains a key task for all schools and SFET are committed to supporting governors in their role through training and advice.

How much freedom, for example in terms of decision-making, will our school have in the trust?

Headteachers run their own schools and these responsibilities are laid out in SFET's scheme of delegation (on SFET website). They are accountable to the CEO. Additional support is provided by leadership at SFET.

How does the trust handle conflict?

Decision making is guided by ensuring schools deliver excellence for all pupils. Professional dialogue and discussion is part of rigour in all our schools. Support is provided from Trust leaders if needed. Clear policies and procedures are in place for any HR concerns.

Can academies in the trust show evidence of strong governance from its trustees, such as: Challenge? Support? Involvement?

Governors have a similar role to now and are expected to challenge, support, monitor. A data set is provided so governors can compare across schools. In order to ensure equity and equality, should a vacancy on the Trust Board arise, a local governor with the required skillset could apply and be considered to become a trustee.

How does the structure of the trust: Support academies academically? Support academies financially? Support academies with pastoral/safeguarding issues?

Academic support: There is a strong focus on outcomes with assessments every 10 weeks (NFER). Also complete CAT4 in y 3 to identify potential. Comparison of data across schools enables improvements of outcomes for all.

The trust believes in providing teachers with planning so that they can focus on the delivery. The federation will have access to these materials but there is no expectation for the schools to use them (unless performance standards dropped considerably). The trust has been involved with the development of the new curriculum which is currently at the consultation phase. SFET consider "tools" to do the job as necessities that should never be barriers.

Strong focus on professional development of staff .

Financial support: is given for example most recently a secondary school entered with deficit, support provided now in a positive

Pastoral / safeguarding: The trust benefits from the addition of central services e.g. ACE payroll, HR team of 3, legal advice. Furthermore, there are various networking groups including DSL teams, SENDCOs, faculty leads, attendance champions to provide support to each team working within each school.

The trust would want to support with vision to set up own nursery. SFET uses it's trading subsidiary, South Farnham Enterprises, to run pre-school and nursery settings.

How far away are the trust's existing academies?

Current schools within the trust include:

Primary:

- Busbridge Infant School - Godalming
- Great Bookham School - Bookham
- Highfield South Farnham School - Farnham
- Kings Furlong Infant and Nursery School - Basingstoke
- Normandy Village School - Normandy
- South Farnham School - Farnham
- The Raleigh School - East Horsley
- Wallace Fields Infant and Nursery School – Epsom

Secondary

- Brighton Hill Community School - Basingstoke
- Blue Coat School Basingstoke

Does the distance allow for shared support, resources and CPD?

Yes. Good use is made of various networking groups across SFET schools with a good balance between face to face meetings and those run virtually.

How does the trust communicate change and decisions to its academies and local governing bodies?

Annual INSET at the start of the academic year

Monthly HT meetings

Feedback from previous head in trust is that changes is done with not to.

What evidence can the trust show of raising performance in its academies?

SFET has a very strong track record in improving outcomes for pupils. Published Ofsted reports and statutory assessment outcomes demonstrate rapid improvements and outstanding progress. Full set of data available.

As the Trust has grown we have demonstrated no drop in outcomes or pupil progress. To illustrate this, our KS2 (combined expected) outcomes are consistently around 30% above national over 7 years. At KS1, they are averaging 55% above national over the same period.

Will staff be offered leadership opportunities across the trust and teaching school?

SFET offer opportunities across their schools and this would be extended to staff in the federation as appropriate.

Will our leadership change at all with academisation?

There are no plans from SFET to change leadership structure. Any changes will be led by the school's leadership.

If the senior leadership team is reduced how is this decided?

There are no plans from SFET to change leadership structure. Any changes will be led by the school's leadership.

Have any academies in the trust moved Ofsted grades in the past 5 years?

Yes. The Raleigh School moved from Good to Outstanding and has recently retained 'Outstanding'. Great Bookham School has been inspected this year and moved from 'Requires Improvement' to Outstanding in four areas and Good in one area.

Are the vision and values of the trust compatible with those of the school?

Yes, there is clear alignment with Sir Andrew Carter stating "We are not a money-making operation we are a school making operation."

Are there any potential reputational issues that the trust is aware of?

None that we are aware of

Are there any complaints/appeals currently pending: From academies? From headteachers or other senior staff? From governors/trustees?

No.

Are there any current partnerships or legal agreements the trust has, which might be affected by this partnership, such as a faith status or association with another trust?

No

Where can I get further information or raise further questions?

Oak Hill,
Guildford
Surrey
GU3 3DA



The Federated Schools of Wood Street Infant School and Worplesdon Primary School



Envis Way
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Surrey
GU3 3NL

If you can't find the answer to your question here, or on the DfE website, please email your question(s) to the Chair of Governors dphilpot@worplesdon.surrey.sch.uk or kglossop@worplesdon.surrey.sch.uk or representations can be made in writing to The Federated Schools of Wood Street Infant School & Worplesdon Primary School (handed to the school office).

The closing date for representations to be made is 29th April 2025.