

Brighton & Hove City Council

Council

Agenda Item 77

Subject: Proposals for the future of Stanford Infant and Stanford Junior Schools

Date of meeting: 29 January 2026

Report of: Corporate Director – Families, Children & Wellbeing

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Ward(s) affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

- 1.1 This report requests Full Council approval to implement the proposed closure of Stanford Junior School and the change of age range at Stanford Infant School from 4-7 years to 4-11 years, creating a single all-through primary school operating across two sites from September 2026.
- 1.2 Following a public consultation (29 September to 16 November 2025), the publication of a Statutory Notice and a representation period (24 November to 21 December 2025), the Council is now required to make a decision on the proposal.
- 1.3 The proposal is part of steps being taken to address the combined budget deficit of £466,000 held by both schools (Infants £278k, Juniors £188k) and provide a more seamless educational journey for children. The Governing Bodies have determined that merger represents the best long-term solution for both schools.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Full Council agrees to the discontinuation of Stanford Junior School from 1 September 2026 and the prescribed alteration to Stanford Infant School to extend its age range from 4-7 years to 4-11 years, with effect from 1 September 2026, creating Stanford Primary School as an all-through primary school operating across both existing sites (Highcroft Villas, Brighton BN1 5PS and Stanford Road, Brighton BN1 5PR).

3. Context and background information

- 3.1 Stanford Infant School (Highcroft Villas, Brighton, BN1 5PS) and Stanford Junior School (Stanford Road, Brighton, BN1 5PR) are community primary schools serving the local area. Both schools are currently facing significant financial challenges with a combined deficit of £466,000 as of the end of the 2023/24 financial year.
- 3.2 In recent years approximately 90% of pupils transition from Stanford Infant School to Stanford Junior School, demonstrating the existing strong

relationship between the two schools. The proposed merger would create an all-through primary school with:

- Age range: 4 to 11 years (Reception to Year 6)
- Capacity: 564 pupils
- Published Admission Number: 60
- Two sites: Highcroft Villas (BN1 5PS) and Stanford Road (BN1 5PR)

3.3 Pupils attending Stanford Junior School at the time of closure will be offered places at the new Stanford Primary School. Offers of places on National Offer Day (16 April 2026) for those pupils moving to the Junior School will remain in place for the new school. Neither site has space for all Reception to Year 6 pupils, necessitating the continuation of the two-site model.

3.4 In order to achieve an amalgamation of the two schools a statutory process must be followed as set out in Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013. This has five stages:

- Stage 1: Consultation – when proposals are launched
- Stage 2: Publication of Statutory Notices
- Stage 3: Representation period of 4 weeks for further submission of comments on the proposals
- Stage 4: Decision – the Council must decide on the proposal within 2 months of the end of the representation period
- Stage 5: Implementation

3.5 The technical legal process of achieving an amalgamation involves the closure of one school and expanding the age range of the other. The decision to propose the closure of the Junior School is not a reflection of the quality of education or staff at the school, but balances the need to mitigate impacts upon the council's own finances. There are no concerns about educational provision at either school and both schools currently have interim leadership arrangements.

3.6 On 11 September 2025 the Corporate Director, Families, Children & Wellbeing, in consultation with the Lead Member for Children, Families and Youth Services authorised a consultation to be undertaken on a proposal to amalgamate Stanford Infant and Stanford Junior Schools with effect from 1 September 2026. A consultation was carried out between 29 September and 16 November 2025. There were 2 public meetings and 1 online meeting held to discuss the proposals.

3.7 On 11 November 2025, following consideration of the response to the consultation, the Corporate Director, Families, Children & Wellbeing, in consultation with the Lead Member agreed to publish a Statutory Notice to progress the proposal. This was followed by a four week representation period between 24 November 2025 and 21 December 2025. Notices were displayed at school entrances and gates, on both school websites, Council website, Your Voice portal and in The Argus. Copies of the full proposal were sent to the Governing Boards of both schools, the Anglican and Catholic dioceses, local ward members, the Member of Parliament for

Brighton Pavillion and the Department for Education (DfE). Copies of the complete proposal have been made available to anyone who requested a copy during the publication period.

- 3.8 The Council is the decision maker on the proposals and is now asked to make a decision on the proposed amalgamation of the two schools.

4. Analysis and consideration of alternative options

- 4.1 The Governing Boards of both schools conducted extensive analysis and considered several alternative options before seeking the support of the council to undertake a formal consultation on the proposed merger of the two schools.

- 4.2 **Option 1 – Merger (recommended)**
A merger would address the combined £466,000 deficit with estimated annual savings of £120,000 through the elimination of duplicate leadership positions, consolidation of administrative functions, reduction in governance costs, and economies of scale in purchasing and resource allocation. A single Headteacher and senior leadership team would replace the current dual structure and shared administrative support across both sites could be implemented.

- 4.3 From an educational perspective, the merger would eliminate the Year 3 transition, providing educational continuity for children from Reception through to Year 6. This would enable consistent tracking of children's progress across all primary years and better curriculum alignment.

- 4.4 A merger would enable pooling of educational resources and learning platform subscriptions. Staff would benefit from varied career pathways with opportunities to develop expertise across Reception to Year 6 and there could be more leadership progression opportunities and cross-phase working.

- 4.5 However, the merger proposal presents challenges. Staff have expressed deep concerns about job security and the inevitability of some redundancies. There is substantial anxiety about the emotional toll on staff wellbeing and the risk of losing passionate, dedicated staff who are irreplaceable to the school communities. The Council acknowledges these concerns and recognises the uncertainty this process creates for staff. Should the merger be agreed, the Council will work closely with school leaders and governors to ensure staff are properly supported throughout the transition, including access to HR support, clear communication about timescales and processes, and wherever possible, redeployment opportunities within the merged school or wider Council services.

- 4.6 The two schools have developed different cultures over time, and this diversity is valued by their respective communities. There is particular concern about losing the nurturing, intimate atmosphere of the Infant School and the risk that priorities might shift towards Key Stage 2 and Year 6 testing at the expense of developmentally appropriate practice for younger pupils.

Stakeholders pointed to the Davigdor merger as a cautionary example, where an outstanding infant school merged and lost its distinctive culture.

4.7 Option 2: Federation

Under a federation model, the two schools would remain as separate legal entities with their own individual budgets and separate Ofsted inspections, but would share a single Governing Board and could share a Headteacher and other staff. This option was considered but not recommended by the Governing Boards.

4.8 The primary limitation of federation is that it would not achieve the same level of financial savings as a full merger. While a federation could share some leadership costs, the schools would maintain separate budgets and remain as distinct legal entities. This significantly limits opportunities for true consolidation of administrative roles and functions. The combined deficit of £466,000 would largely remain unresolved, as the structural financial pressures would continue.

4.9 Additionally, federation creates a more complex governance and operational structure. Schools would need to maintain separate systems for finance, HR, and pupil data while trying to co-ordinate across both sites. This can create inefficiencies and additional administrative burden compared to a full merger. Some staff support federation as a lower risk first step that would allow strengthened collaboration and leadership development without the irreversibility of a full merger.

4.10 Option 3: Status Quo/Not Approving the Merger

Maintaining the current separate school structure was considered but was not considered viable due to the combined deficit of £466,000. Both schools face ongoing declining pupil numbers due to demographic changes and surplus primary places across the city. Without intervention, the financial situation would continue to deteriorate, potentially requiring more disruptive interventions in future. The status quo does not address the fundamental structural and financial challenges facing both schools.

5. Community engagement and consultation

5.1 During the consultation period (29 September to 16 November 2025) 224 portal responses plus 11 email submissions were received. Responses to the proposal were narrowly divided (45.5% oppose, 42.9% support, 11.6% unsure). The representation period following the publication of a Statutory Notice (24 November to 21 December 2025) received 12 portal responses and 14 email submissions. Of these, 85% of the responses expressed concern at the proposal for a merger of the two schools.

5.2 Both Governing Bodies submitted responses that reinforced their view that a merger of the two schools represented the best way forward educationally and financially for both schools and other responses did recognise the need for change.

- 5.3 Those raising concerns or objections to the proposals during the representation period highlighted in their responses concerns about the timescale of change, the lack of detailed information to support the proposal, especially in relation to financial modeling and staffing structures, the potential negative impact on Early Years education from a shift in focus to Key Stage 2, the impact on staff and a broad sense that federation would be a more appropriate first step for both schools.
- 5.4 The staff of Stanford Infant School submitted a formal response to the Statutory Notice in which they expressed concern that the proposed timeline of completing the merger for September 2026, is unrealistic and would “significantly increase workloads for staff at one of the busiest times of the school year leading to a risk to the quality of the education experience of the children currently attending the schools”. The staff were clear to explain that the response being submitted was not a refusal to engage in a change to the schools’ organisation but to challenge the reasonings outlined in favour of a merger.
- 5.5 Some responses referenced the potential loss of distinctive school cultures and there were concerns about the emotional toll on staff wellbeing and the risk of losing passionate, dedicated staff. It was noted that the lack of clarity about which roles would be retained created significant stress.
- 5.6 Many respondents questioned the forecast of financial savings, arguing that the £120,000 annual saving had not been substantiated with detailed financial modelling through the consultation period, despite efforts by the Governing Boards to respond to questions in public meetings and supply information through the consultation period.
- 5.7 The short recruitment window for a new Headteacher raised concerns that the school may not attract the outstanding leader needed for such a complex transition.
- 5.8 Additional concerns included the absence of clear leadership structure despite this being the main source of projected savings, uncertainty about SEND provision continuity and support, and concerns that neither school currently has a substantive Headteacher to lead such a complex transition. Several respondents felt that only the benefits had been emphasised while risks and challenges were downplayed.
- 5.9 During both the consultation period and the representation period it was explained that it was not possible to share a detailed leadership and staffing structure although it was recognised that the appointment of a Headteacher to the proposed primary school across two sites needed to come first so that they could bring their knowledge and expertise into the development of the staffing structure across both sites. Both Governing Bodies and the council remain confident that it will be possible to attract a strong list of candidates for the role and there is sufficient time to secure an appointment for the start of the new academic year.
- 5.10 A targeted summary from the initial consultation period is provided in

Appendix 1 and a summary of the themes raised during the representation period is provided in Appendix 5.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 In proposing to amalgamate Stanford Infant School and Stanford Junior School to an all through primary school there are certain arrangements regarding the calculation of the future years' budgets, particularly the lump sum element of funding that need to be considered.
- 6.2 In terms of the forward calculation of a merged school budget (assuming a full amalgamation) after 1 April in any given year, the new school will receive funding equivalent to the formula funding of the closing 2 schools for the appropriate portion of the year (i.e. 7/12ths if an amalgamation takes effect from September). This means the new school will receive the full combined lump sum allocation for the 2 predecessor schools for the remainder of that financial year. From the start of the next financial year the new school will receive 85% of the total of the predecessor schools' lump sums for one financial year. This would then reduce to one lump sum allocation the year after.
- 6.3 Assuming the school continues to operate across the existing sites following an amalgamation it is likely that the school would qualify for a split site allocation within its annual budget. Across the 2 areas of lump sum and split site funding it is estimated that there would be a reduction in funding to the school of c. £70k per annum in the longer term.
- 6.4 In the event of an amalgamation that results in a school closing with a deficit budget, the expectation is that this will be a cost to the council's general fund.

Name of finance officer consulted: Steve Williams Date consulted 12/01/26

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 The Education and Inspections Act 2006 provides that the Local Authority is the decision maker on proposals to close or make prescribed changes to maintained community schools. A decision to amalgamate the schools must be made within 2 months of the end of the representation period, i.e. by 21 February 2026. The process by which the decision maker completes their decision making is not prescribed; however, it must have regard to the "Opening and closing maintained schools" (October 2024) and "Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools" (August 2025) Statutory Guidance documents, published by the DfE.
- 7.2 The proposals are related, so the proposal to close Stanford Junior School must be considered and determined at the same time as the proposal to expand the age range of Stanford Infant School across both existing school sites. The Statutory Guidance sets out guidance for decision makers, and states that the decision maker should be satisfied that the proposer has carried out the requirements of the statutory process satisfactorily and

should have due regard to the responses received during the representation period. The decision maker should not simply take account of the numbers of people expressing a particular view. Instead, they should give the greatest weight to responses from those stakeholders likely to be most affected by a proposal – especially parents of children at the affected school(s).

- 7.3 When issuing a decision the decision-maker can:
- reject the proposal;
 - approve the proposal without modification;
 - approve the proposal with modifications, having consulted the LA;
- approve the proposal-with or without modification- subject to certain prescribed conditions being met

Name of lawyer consulted: Bethane Harland Date consulted 14/01/26

8. Equalities implications

- 8.1 No Equality Impact Assessment is required at this stage as there is no disproportionate impact on pupils or families arising from the proposals, given that both schools will remain operating on both existing sites.
- 8.2 Should the merger proceed, an Equality Impact Assessment will be completed in relation to any HR proposals at the point that staff are formally consulted, in accordance with the Council's usual processes.

9. Sustainability implications

- 9.1 The merger proposals have limited direct environmental impact. The two-site model means that the school will continue to operate from the existing buildings without additional construction or major refurbishment.

10. Other Implications

- 10.1 **Crime & disorder implications:** The proposals are not expected to have significant crime and disorder implications. Both school sites will remain operational and the merger will not impact the schools' approach to safeguarding or their relationship with local police and community safety partners.
- 10.2 **Public health implications:** The proposals support public health and wellbeing by maintaining local access to primary education across two sites and supporting children's emotional wellbeing through elimination of the Year 3 transition. Careful attention will be needed during implementation to support staff wellbeing given concerns about job security and workload.

11. Conclusion

- 11.1 The proposal to merge Stanford Infant and Stanford Junior Schools

represents a difficult but necessary decision to address the combined deficit of £466,000 whilst ensuring educational provision for local children is able to robustly face the challenges facing the sector at this time.

- 11.2 The required statutory process has been completed, including public consultation and a four week Statutory Notice period. While community opinion shared during the consultation has raised concerns about the proposed option and the potential impact of the changes, the Governing Boards of both schools remain of the opinion that merger represents the best long-term solution educationally and financially for both schools.
- 11.3 Should the proposals be agreed, pupils offered a place at the Junior School on National Offer Day 16 April 2026 will maintain the offer of a place at the newly formed primary school.
- 11.4 The concerns raised during consultation and Statutory Notice periods represent implementation challenges rather than reasons to reject the proposal, and mitigation strategies have been identified to address these. The alternative options (federation and status quo) have been assessed and are not adequate to resolve the financial challenges facing both schools.
- 11.5 The proposal aligns with the Council's commitment to ensuring all children have access to good quality, financially sustainable education. Approval will enable implementation from September 2026.

Supporting Documentation

Appendices

- Appendix 1: Summary of Consultation Phase responses
- Appendix 2: Statutory Notice – Stanford Infant and Stanford Junior Schools
- Appendix 3: Locations for Statutory Notice Publication
- Appendix 4: Full Proposal Information
- Appendix 5: Summary of Statutory Notice Period Representations
- Appendix 6: Joint Governing Board Consultation Response from Governing Boards of Stanford Infant and Stanford Junior Schools
- Appendix 7: Stanford Infant School staff response to Statutory Notice
- Appendix 8: School Merger Consultation FAQs (produced by the Governing Boards of Stanford Infant and Stanford Junior Schools)