

Consultation Phase Representation from members of staff at Stanford Infant School

Members of staff at Stanford Infant School are writing to formally respond to the proposed merger with Stanford Junior School. Whilst we acknowledge the intention behind the proposal and understand the potential benefits being considered, we have significant concerns and unanswered questions regarding its implications for staff, children and the broader school community. This letter outlines our collective reflections, key areas of concern, and specific areas that we believe must be addressed before any further steps are taken.

It is important to emphasise that this letter, contributed to by experienced and dedicated members of staff at the infant school, acts not as a refusal to engage in the proposed changes or with our colleagues at the junior school, but to challenge the reasonings outlined in favour of a merger, rather than federation or the exploration of other options. We feel strongly that closer collaboration is important, we value and welcome the opportunity to work with our colleagues at Stanford Juniors and know that things cannot continue as they are due to budget constraints.

The following response outlines the main concerns;

- The current timeline and clarity of proposed changes
- The impact of a merger on current workload
- Lack of financial clarity around the benefits and savings achieved by a merger in comparison with federation
- Strategic decisions being made without full consideration of operational impact on the educational experience of the children and their families
- Justification of merger over federation

A Seamless Education Journey for Children

A merged school would provide a single, coherent pathway from Reception to Year 6, reducing disruption at the transition from Year 2 to Year 3.

It is unlikely that the merger will reduce the disruption at the transition from Year 2 to Year 3 as suggested. Currently, the natural break at the end of Year 2 offers families the flexibility to move children to a junior school of their choice, with the vast majority opting for Stanford Junior School (in 2025, 78 children out of a possible 81 attended Stanford Junior School). This break often means that families who may have moved out of the area during their child's time at Stanford Infant School, choose to keep their child at the infants until Year 2 ends, avoiding the need for an in-year transfer. If the schools were merged, this natural break would be lost and these children could potentially leave earlier, leading to increased turnover and lower student numbers.

Additionally, it is unclear what specific disruption exists between Year 2 and Year 3 and how this would be alleviated by a merger. While some children may find the transition between Infants and Juniors (building to building) difficult, this will remain the case as long as the schools remain on separate sites. There are already frequent visits during the transition time and this could be extended to earlier in the year as has historically been the case.

Families would not have to apply for a place in Year 3, avoiding uncertainty and anxiety and a critical stage.

Families are currently only required to fill in a single application form (approximately two pages) via Brighton and Hove School Admissions to apply for a Year 3 place. All children in Year 2 at Stanford Infants are guaranteed a place at Stanford Juniors as we have a formal link between both schools.

Unfortunately, the slides shared at the public consultation meetings state that children moving from Year 2 to Year 3 are not currently guaranteed a place at Stanford Juniors - this is incorrect as the only reason for children not getting a place is if parents do not apply. We feel this is misinformation and should be clarified. There is no uncertainty amongst families once they have completed the form and the infant school ensures that all families are aware of the application process. For example, regular notices in the Newsletter, separate School Ping communication to Year 2 families, discussions with our EAL (English as an Additional Language) families at Coffee Morning events hosted by the Deputy Head and representatives from EALTs (English as an Additional Language and Traveller Service).

Curriculum and pedagogy could be aligned across all year groups, ensuring continuity in teaching and learning

This could be achieved through a range of scenarios; a merger would not achieve this on its own. There are some subjects that would benefit from following the same scheme throughout EYFS and Key Stage 1 into Key Stage 2; however decisions need to be made thoughtfully. Some schemes that we follow are embedded into the age-specific pedagogy of the infants and there is a deep worry that these may be lost. Subject leaders from both schools have met in the past to discuss progression and alignment, this is not reliant on a merger and will continue regardless.

Merging the schools is also likely to bring other linked risks to curriculum provision. As an example, due to the current allocation of PE and Sport funding being a lump sum with additional funds being allocated for children in Years 1 to 6, the removal of one of the lump sums (currently £16,000) would significantly reduce the funding available and this will have a direct effect on attainment and resources. This includes things like Forest School which may not be able to continue in the same way.

Vulnerable children and children with SEND and other additional needs would receive more consistent support through their primary school education.

An enhanced transition support programme already takes place to ensure a smooth transition for vulnerable children and children with SEND from one school to another. Both SENDCos work together alongside SLT, teaching staff in Year 2 and Year 3 as well as children and families to ensure a detailed handover of information and individual bespoke preparation with children. INAs from both schools already undertake visits to both sites prior to transitions; visits from

INAs and teachers then continue into the Autumn term to further support settling. At the public consultation meetings the possible staffing arrangements of the SENDCo role has been discussed and governors have stated that they don't expect this to change too much from the structure currently in place. If this is the case, then how will the support in a merged school become *more* consistent? Yes, support staff could move with individual children under merger but this could also happen under federation. Equally, it should be noted that it is not always beneficial for the same member of staff to support a child for the entirety of their primary education, changes in staffing will happen for a variety of reasons and changes are already and would be supported.

But, has the increase in the number of children on the SEND register if the schools merge been taken into consideration with regards to the workload and therefore, the impact this may have on the support offered to the children and families? More children, less staff/capacity and a split site could mean increased workload and ultimately, a failure to meet the needs of the children.

Unified Leadership

A merged school would have one Head Teacher, one Senior Leadership Team and one Governing Body. This provides clarity of accountability and direction, enabling more effective strategic planning and operational delivery.

The scope of hard-federation and merger seem to be fairly similar for leadership; therefore, this could be achieved through either federation or merger. Use of the same policies, training being given etc. It is very unclear what is meant by 'unified leadership' as no models have been put forward. Federating the schools first would allow different models to be explored and a best fit established for the school. During public and staff consultation meetings, the governors have stated that they don't expect the leadership structure below the head teacher to be that different to what is currently in place. If this is the case, then the only change will be having one head teacher, however we know from the Governor FAQs document that there will most likely be other job losses and changes. The uncertainty that this is causing among staff is proving heavy and morale is already suffering. While there is an understanding that a merged school could offer more progression opportunities, real evidence shows that mergers also perpetuate stress, low morale and high staff turnover.

Leadership could focus on long-term school improvement across all year groups, rather than navigating the complexities of two separate institutions.

This is difficult to fully comment on without seeing versions of staffing structures under both Hard-Federation and Merger. It was our understanding from earlier discussions that there were a wide range of things which could be achieved through federation; whilst we fully appreciate that 'one school' would have one set of policies and procedures, is this not possible under federation? In previous discussions, it was mentioned that an executive head teacher could lead across federated schools as other schools in Brighton and Hove have done with shared policies and procedures. Incidentally, the possibility of sharing leadership across schools was also discussed at a council wide meeting in 2024; where it was

mentioned that this would decrease workload by increasing shared practice. Local models of successfully merged Primary Schools have followed a period of federation where schools began on separate sites.

Professional development opportunities for staff would be broadened across a larger single organisation, helping with recruitment, retention and career progression.

Both schools are successful schools with highly committed and dedicated staff; at the Infants we have historically had a low staff turnover — this has developed a highly committed staff who work well together towards shared goals.

Long-standing members of staff are experts in their fields with an incredible passion for their roles and achieving the very best outcomes for the children they teach. While we agree that a merged school could provide some opportunities for career progression, our current expertise could be impacted by the possibility of being asked to move around sites etc.

Unified School Community

Parents, carers and staff would be part of one school community, reducing the sense of two separate schools, strengthening collaboration and creating shared purpose.

It is unclear how this could be achieved differently to what we are doing now and could do under federation. Seeing as we will still be on two sites, there will be various things which will always lend themselves to being concentrated for either the 'Infants' or the 'Juniors'.

Some events are targeted more towards younger children (film nights which are suitable for Early Years may not appeal to Key Stage 2) so the divide will inevitably continue to an extent. Other elements of unification could be explored through federation, this option would allow us to ascertain which things our school community (children, families, staff, governors) feel are important and to then work through these, instead of it being a blanket decision. One size does not fit all and is not always appropriate for all.

Children would identify as part of one larger school, fostering a stronger sense of belonging and continuity.

Federating could also foster this feeling however, in both scenarios it is likely that the children will still see themselves as being part of the 'infant' school and 'junior' school all the while the sites remain separate. Questions continue to arise from an operational point of view about day-to-day activities in school such as assemblies, golden choices/ reward time etc.

Currently, the infant school offers a broad selection of enrichment activities on a Friday morning (Golden Choices) and it is an opportunity for all of the children to mix in groups across the school with different members of staff. How would this work across two sites? Whilst these things may seem minor in the grand scheme of things, it is just one small example of the operational matters that staff feel uncertain about.

Unified policies and practices would simplify matters, from communication to uniform, for families.

Both schools use the same school-to-parent systems (School Ping and Classlist) which ensures families have continuity. As well as the same Management Information System (MIS).

School policies, uniforms and other means of communication such as websites, letters etc. could all be unified as part of a federation, a merger would not be necessary in order to implement things like a joint newsletter, as an example, as we could work in closer collaboration across the schools to ensure the success.

Both schools had the same uniform logo and supplier until a few years ago, this could easily be revisited.

Opportunities for Enriched Curriculum and Wider Opportunities

With one staff body, there is greater flexibility to share expertise across year groups, develop subject specialisms and expand enrichment opportunities.

Closer working is already beginning to take place with staff collaborating at joint staff meetings, this would continue to happen if the two schools were federated. There is nothing more that could be gained from the merger that couldn't be gained from federating. As a staff team we look forward to the prospect of closer working with our colleagues at the junior school.

Extracurricular activities and clubs could be better coordinated and accessible across the full primary age range.

There are questions about the logistics of this, with there being two sites, limited space etc. A merger does not better coordinate activity clubs and there would be various Health and Safety issues regarding the suitability of clubs which are accessible across the Primary range. Capacity of the after school activities would remain the same due to ratios.

It should be noted that there is only one opportunity offered to single schools to be part of events such as the children's parade and Let's Dance at the Dome.

This means that under merger, children will only get one chance to take part in these amazing events instead of the two opportunities they receive now.

Support staff can work more effectively across sites to meet children's needs.

Many of the team are concerned about what this would mean for their roles within the school. We expect that new job descriptions would be issued, perhaps even new contracts but there is a lot of uncertainty. We feel there is a lack of recognition of the need for job stability and the potential anxiety that could be caused if staff members are expected to arrive at school in the morning essentially not knowing where they will be working/ who they will be working with. This is then likely to lead to less impactful support as staff will be less aware of individuals and needs (at the moment, support staff have a detailed knowledge of the children they support and this in turn means they have a meaningful impact on their education and well-being).

During public and staff consultation meetings, it has been stated that this is tied in with job cuts linked to 'the path of stability' and that £40,000 is expected to be saved through cutting roles such as HLTAAs. As such, it seems that this is more a case of our hugely stretched support staff team being stretched more thinly across two sites, to cover the job roles that have been cut. We fail to see how this will benefit the children in any form.

A Clear Path to financial stability and sustainability

Brighton & Hove is experiencing declining school enrolment across the city, which has created significant challenges for schools of primary aged pupils. Both Stanford Infant School and Stanford Junior School face structural budget deficits that are not sustainable.

School funding is directly linked to pupil numbers rather than providing a set amount per school. This and largely unfunded government driven staff pay rises have resulted in increasing budgetary pressures for both schools. Stanford Infant School's PAN has been reduced from 90 to 60 from September 2025 and this reduction in pupil numbers will further impact both schools in the coming years.

Merger would enable the school's leadership to reduce unnecessary costs by cutting out duplication and taking advantage of economies of scale. A merged school would have one governing body, one staff team, one set of policies, one relationship with BHCC, one admissions process, one inspection programme with Ofsted.

It is likely that the projected reductions in senior leadership and other areas could increase demands on teaching staff. There are concerns about the increased workload for teaching staff if they are expected to oversee a curriculum area over Early Years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. It has been stated that the senior leadership workload will be reduced but the implications of the reduction of staff has not been explored for the rest of the staff. If staff are reduced the work still has to be done by those who remain, staff who are already overworked, overwhelmed and overstretched. Teaching staff work many hours over those that they are paid to work.

Merging could lead to increased bureaucracy and slower decision-making.

With this in mind, has the 'clear path' been properly mapped, including all expenses that will not change (utilities for both buildings, resources, repairs etc) as well as the potential cost of staff redundancies? It feels very short-sighted to say that merging the schools will decrease the workload. When this has been discussed at consultation meetings, the governors have admitted that this is mainly less work for leadership and administration. However, both of these areas will be experiencing substantial cuts - from two head teachers to one, and a predicted £40,000 in administration staff cuts. The workload in these areas does not halve; the people do. It feels mis-informed to say that workload will not increase for the whole staff team when the necessary work will be displaced downwards. It is not possible to comment on future workload as no operational detail has been considered.

In relation to this, the time frame of the merger seems unusually compressed, and the governors have admitted in their FAQ document and in public consultation meetings that there would be a lot of work to do in a short space of time to prepare for the change, should the Local Authority decide to proceed with the merger in February. This will most definitely increase the workload for staff, particularly leadership and admin as there will be a number of things that must be in place prior to September. This issue has been raised at consultation meetings and whilst we appreciate that there are things such as merging the two websites, policies etc. that can be done over a longer time frame, we don't believe this lends itself to a successful merger. For example, we must consider how this will look to prospective families in the Autumn term, when it is vital that the school is positively marketed.

Any unification of the schools should be done in a positive and impactful way; current parents and carers should be able to access their child's school information with ease. The merging of Management Information Systems, parent-to-school communication apps, learning resource apps etc. will be time consuming but necessary tasks. We are concerned that things such as remaining on two separate websites with re-direction, does not project a unified organisation. A lot of this will need to happen during the Summer term, arguably one of the busiest, with the new Reception intake, Year 2 to 3 transition and Year 6 to secondary school transition taking place, financial end of year close down and budgeting. Not to mention all of the extra curricular events and enrichments that enhance the children's learning experience.

The governors have referenced throughout their FAQ document that the only thing which will really save money is having less staff ('deeply uncomfortable cuts') which is understandably creating anxiety among the team who are also being impacted by a PAN reduction. Restructuring will only create a higher staff turnover in experienced members of staff; considering the issues which are faced daily with low staff numbers and high need in children, this does not really benefit anyone, including the children and families, who will be left with fewer, less experienced people available.

The governor FAQ document refers to a governor that was a Head Teacher at two Brighton and Hove schools that merged with their linked junior schools to create a primary school. At the penultimate consultation meeting, this particular governor was able to provide more context to this statement. They explained how they felt that the merger of Davigdor and Somerhill to Brunswick Primary did not go as hoped and there is a feeling among the governors that they can learn from those mistakes. If we are to reflect on this example of a merger locally, then it is worth noting that Davigdor was an outstanding infant school that received recognition for its pioneering early-years practice. Once merged, the distinctive culture that had been nurtured over decades was lost. Standards and morale declined and the Ofsted rating fell to 'Requires Improvement'. This is a genuine concern among infant school staff in relation to our own proposed merger. Within the other stakeholders of the schools there are people who have been through the process of federation and merger, and these experiences and expertise should also be fully explored.

In addition, it is worth noting that following the announcement of the proposed merger several days before our first Prospective Parents' open day, a number of families cancelled their visits and did not rebook. It raises questions as to how this is impacting prospective families considering us for September 2026. How can parents be expected to choose us when the future of the school is uncertain?

On 31st March the staff of both schools were asked to complete a survey created by the governors regarding 'closer working' between the schools, and were asked to comment on this, not on a merger. Therefore, the comment within the FAQ document that 83% of the community agreed to closer working means just that, it does not accurately reflect people's feelings about merging the schools. The staff were led to believe at a meeting in July that the governors were looking at federation as an option and were only told at the INSET day in September that this was now off the table and the only option being pursued was the merger. We feel that the risks of merger and the advantages of federation have not been fully explored and explained to stakeholders, despite continuous questioning at public meetings.

It is important to emphasise that this letter, contributed to by experienced and dedicated members of staff at the infant school, acts not as a refusal to engage in the proposed changes or with our colleagues at the junior school, but to challenge the reasonings outlined in favour of a merger, rather than federation or the exploration of other options. We feel strongly that closer collaboration is important, we value and welcome the opportunity to work with our colleagues at Stanford Juniors and know that things cannot continue as they are due to budget constraints.

Overall, we feel it is deeply concerning that staff, parents, and the wider community have not been provided with the full breadth of information needed to make a truly informed decision regarding the proposed merger. We know this has been expressed by staff and families alike at public consultation meetings. The communication so far appears to focus solely on the perceived benefits, while offering little to no detail about the potential risks or challenges of a merger. Without a balanced and transparent presentation of all relevant information, it is unreasonable to expect stakeholders to give meaningful feedback or support such a significant change.

Yours sincerely, staff at Stanford Infants

Statutory Notice Representation from members of staff at Stanford Infant School

For the attention of Brighton and Hove Council Cabinet members and the School Organisation Team,

Please accept the following as the formal response from members of staff at Stanford Infant School to the proposal to merge Stanford Infant and Junior Schools from September 2026.

We have serious concerns about the proposal and its timescales; whilst also fully understanding and appreciating the need for change to ensure the future of a strong educational provision for the Stanford community. We are concerned that the current proposal to merge the schools across the existing sites from September 2026 will negatively impact the outcomes and experiences of the children and families currently attending the school as the evidence for merger lacks clarity and feels rushed for a process that requires time and care in its planning and execution, given that merger is an irreversible change for the schools.

Below are the main concerns from members of staff at Stanford Infant School about the proposed merger of Stanford Infant and Junior Schools.

Concerns:

1. The **lack and clarity of any financial modelling** to show that merger is the 'best' option for future proofing a local school for the Stanford community. There have been vague figures shared of potential savings but we feel that these have not been clearly evidenced or substantiated. Beyond the savings achieved through a reduction in administration staff, the reduction of two headteacher salaries to one headteacher salary and combining payments for 'systems' (all of which there is scope to do under a federation model) there has been no other evidence of how the further savings needed will be achieved. The Infant School is already going through a PAN reduction period and cutting staffing each year.
2. Linked to this is also a concern that, as yet there is **no clear leadership structure** being proposed or shared with school staff and the community, despite this being the main source of financial savings achieved under merger. At the very least a strategic plan needs to be made so that its operational viability can be considered before irreversible decisions are made. In addition, we are yet to be convinced that staff workloads won't be impacted and increased in the lead up to and following the merger, as the main driver for the merger is to reduce financial costs; the bulk of which will by necessity come from reductions in staffing. And that these reductions will need to come from non-teaching roles – such as leadership and admin roles.
3. Both of the above concerns also lead to a further concern about the **lack of consideration of federation as an option**; particularly as the proposed merger is that the school will retain both sites. Other schools in the city who have been in similar positions have federated initially with some, but not all then going on to merge. There has been no clear justification or explanation to the community about why federation has not been considered an option. Where is the clear financial and., or other evidence that federation is less favourable than merger?

On 31st March 2025 the staff of both schools were asked to complete a survey created by the governors regarding 'closer working' between the schools, and were asked to comment on this, *not* on a merger. Therefore, the comment within the FAQ document, to support the initial consultation, that 83% of the community agreed to closer working means just that; it does not accurately reflect people's feelings about merging the schools. The staff were led to believe at a meeting in July 2025 that the governors were looking at federation as an option and were only told at the start of September 2025 that this was now off the table and the only option being pursued was a merger. We feel strongly, that the risks of merger and the advantages of federation have not been fully explored, evidenced and explained to stakeholders, despite continuous questioning at the public meetings.

4. The proposed **timeline of completing the merger for September 2026, is unrealistic** from an operational perspective as even at a very basic level it will 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 - financial end of year close down and budgeting, end of year report writing, end of year assessments, data collections, end of year celebrations and leavers' shows for Y2 and Y6, transition meetings for all year groups and transition support for incoming Reception children as well as Y6-Y7 transition work as well as all of the extracurricular events and enrichments that are important and essential enhancing aspects of a child's school journey and learning experience.
5. As the staff at the Infant School, who all share a passion and commitment to importance of **prioritising high quality Early Years provision** to ensure the best outcomes for children and their futures. We have significant concerns that this priority and the excellence currently provided **will be lost in a merged primary school that continues to operate on two sites**.
The governor FAQ document shared as part of the proposal to merge consultation, referred to a governor who had been a Head Teacher at two Brighton and Hove schools that merged with their linked junior schools to create primary schools. At the penultimate consultation meeting, this particular governor was able to provide more context to this statement. They explained how they felt that the merger of Davigdor Infant School and Somerhill Junior School into Brunswick Primary did not go as hoped and there was a feeling among the governors that they can learn from those mistakes. If we are to reflect on this example of a merger locally, then it is worth noting that Davigdor was an outstanding Infant school that received recognition for its pioneering early-years practice. Once merged, the distinctive culture that had been nurtured over decades was lost. Standards and morale declined and the Ofsted rating fell to 'Requires Improvement'. As highlighted above, this is a genuine concern our school staff in relation to our own proposed merger.

Overall, we feel it is deeply concerning that parents, staff and the wider community have not been provided with the full breadth of information needed to make a truly informed response regarding the proposed merger. This was expressed by staff and families alike at the public consultation meetings as part of the initial proposal to consult. However, the only communications shared focused solely on the perceived benefits, while offering little to no detail about the potential risks or challenges of a merger. Without a balanced and transparent presentation of all relevant information, it is unreasonable to expect stakeholders to be able to give meaningful feedback or trust in and support such a significant change.

Finally, we would like to, once again, emphasise that this response, as with the one to the initial consultation, has been contributed to by experienced and dedicated members of staff at the Infant school, acts not as a refusal to engage in a change to the schools' organisation or with our colleagues at the Junior school, but to challenge the reasonings outlined in favour of a merger, rather than federation or the exploration of other options. We feel strongly that closer collaboration is important, we value and welcome the opportunity to work with our colleagues at Stanford Junior School and know that things cannot continue as they are due to budget constraints. That said we also want the best educational experiences and outcomes for the children in our care and any changes proposed should not compromise this for the children currently attending the schools for the benefit of future children.

We would ask that the council cabinet seriously consider whether the proposed merger has been fully and robustly evidenced as the best option for the future of our community schools at this point in time. Alongside giving consideration, in light of the experiences of other schools within the city, whether other options should be explored further first. For example, whether a period of federation before a reconsideration of merger at a later date would be more robust in securing stronger financial stability for the schools whilst maintaining the quality of provision,

outcomes and education experience for the children, and families, attending the schools now as well as in the future.

