

Informal Consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Old Church Nursery and Marion Richardson Primary Schools, creating a 3-11 Primary School from 1st September 2022.

September 17th 2021



The Proposal

The governing bodies of Old Church Nursery and Marion Richardson Primary Schools have asked the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to merge the two schools. This will form a primary school for 3-11 year-olds, with two-form entry (two classes per year) with the Foundation Stage on the Old Church site.

Why are we proposing the change?

We believe this is good for children's education because it makes the most of the expertise of the staff across both schools. By bringing the two schools together at the Foundation Stage, children will be given the benefit of outstanding Early Years practice underpinning a world-class primary experience.

Both schools already work closely together and engage in joint planning. They share resources and expertise and are continually developing their links. They worked particularly closely following the devastating Old Church fire, enabling provision to continue for the benefit of all children.

Changes to the way the Government has funded Early Years has made it very hard for Maintained Nursery Schools to make ends meet, and the governors of Old Church do not believe the school can continue as a standalone nursery school.

How does this affect our Headteachers?

The Headteachers at both schools are skilled, experienced leaders. If the two schools merge and become a single organization, there would only be one Headteacher. The Headteacher at Old Church, after many years successful and dedicated service, will be retiring in 2022, and due to the impending merger, she would not be replaced. The governing bodies of both schools agree that an Executive Headteacher arrangement, with the Headteacher from Marion Richardson serving as Executive Headteacher for both schools, is the best way forward, if the Nursery Headteacher retires before the possible amalgamation is agreed or completed.



A range of leadership structures has been considered by governors in both schools. Following amalgamation, we would become one school, with one Headteacher. We want to make it clear from the start that quality early years provision will continue to be a core value for the amalgamated school, and we will need a skilled, experienced early years leader to fulfill that ambition. We believe that creating a Senior Leadership post for Early Years as part of the amalgamated school leadership team will achieve this.

If the amalgamation progresses, there would be a single governing body to oversee the running of the primary school. A single 3-11 primary school would bring both schools together to become one community, which we believe will be the best for the children. In working towards the amalgamation, the governors have set up a joint steering group and are considering revised staffing structures, using joint posts where possible to maximise value for money.

What are the benefits of becoming a single primary school?

By joining together, we will create further opportunities to enhance the education offer:

- wider access to resources for all our children
- ensure top quality early years provision is embedded at the heart of children's educational experience
- continued access for pupils and their families to extended services and facilities, from entry till they move to secondary school
- greater transition support for all children (especially those who have been identified as

having an additional need) across the Early Years phase and into Key Stage 1

- greater opportunity for Early Years, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 phases to keep improving and moving forward
- greater financial stability to make certain we continue to offer world-class education
- more development opportunities for the staff, such as shared training and the chance to work more closely across the curriculum and gain experience and understanding of all key stages
- continued development of our strong community links

What will it mean for the children?

The whole purpose of the merger is to create an environment that will have a positive impact on the quality of education that children receive.

In the future, there would be the same policies and procedures, and the same dates for staff training days and school holidays.

There will also be increased access to school facilities, including outdoor areas, regardless of school phase.



What will it mean for my child being part of a larger school?

On a day-to-day basis, very little will change. The differing needs of each age group will continue to be met.

The care and importance given to each individual child, which is a strength of both schools, will always remain paramount.

Maintaining great quality early years education will be a core value for the newly established school.

What will it mean for the staff?

Each year, all schools review their staffing and budgets; both Old Church and Marion Richardson schools are reviewing their structures as part of their budget planning activities. There may need to be reductions in staffing due to budgetary constraints before amalgamation.

The amalgamation will probably create some new opportunities and changes for staff. As plans develop, a new budget and staffing structure will be needed. Where posts are duplicated, creative solutions will be sought to retain the excellent staff at both schools. The agreed Tower Hamlets organisational change process will be followed to support staff through these changes.

Job descriptions may change but all staff whose contracts for the new 3-11 primary school are changed would preserve their existing employment rights.

Staff have been briefed about the proposal before this document was sent out.

Would there be any changes to the school building?

In the event of the merger, the school would remain largely the same with all the existing premises being used in the most appropriate and effective way.

There would be an exciting opportunity to bring together integrated nursery and reception provision by creating an Early Years Foundation Stage on the Old Church site. This would protect the special nature of the excellent Nursery provision at Old Church and enhance the reception experience for our children.

The Reception classes may move from their current location to the Old Church site, giving the children in Reception access to an improved outside learning space, and creating more space in the Marion Richardson building.

Procedure to achieve the merger

It is proposed that Marion Richardson Primary School will open on 1 September 2022 catering for pupils from age 3 to 11.

The Old Church building will continue to be used and will preserve and celebrate its name as the Old Church site.

The aim would be to keep the day-to-day running of the nursery as close as possible to its current way of working.

Our two schools have always worked together but from September 2021 we will strengthen the partnership to help us prepare for the possible merger.

Admissions

If the proposal is agreed the enlarged Primary School would be created on 1 September 2022 and the following would apply:

- All children currently attending Old Church Nursery School or Marion Richardson Primary School, or already offered places at either school, will have a right to join Marion Richardson Primary School from September 2022, unless they are moving into the Reception year group in September 2022, when they will have to apply for a Primary School place, as usual.
- First admissions: Children who have applied for places at Old Church Nursery School or Marion Richardson Primary School for September 2022 will be offered places through the standard admissions process. From September 2023 distance priority will be decided using the Marion Richardson entrance in Senrab Street.
- The current range of day-to-day entrances will continue to be used, depending on coronavirus and other issues. The options for future entrances will be evaluated and agreed by governors.

What will happen if the merger doesn't go ahead?

There would be no change to Marion Richardson. The governors of Old Church have concluded, reluctantly, that the school is not financially viable as a standalone school, so unfortunately Old Church School would have to close.

Why are we consulting you?

We want to consult you to gather your views because you are part of the school community. The governing bodies of the schools and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets cannot simply decide to make changes to schools without first seeking the views of parents and others. There is a legal process which must be followed before changes can be made, and it is important that the governing bodies and the council hear your views before deciding whether to proceed.

We have organised the following opportunities for parents and carers to share views. Because of coronavirus these must be social-distancing compliant, but we have tried to ensure that everyone has a full opportunity to feed into the consultation.

The following meetings will be arranged to collect feedback on the proposal.

1. Consultation meeting opportunities for Old Church parents:
 - 2.15 Wednesday 29th September by ZOOM
 - 9.30 Monday 4th October by ZOOM
 - 6.30 Tuesday 5th October – consultation with parents of OC and MR by ZOOM
2. Consultation meeting opportunities for Marion Richardson parents:
 - 2.15 Thursday 30th September by ZOOM
 - 9.30 Tuesday 5th October by Zoom
 - 6.30 Tuesday 5th October – consultation with parents of OC and MR by ZOOM

3. Consultation/briefing meeting opportunities with staff and unions:
 - 3.45 Monday 4th October for Old Church
 - 3.45 Thursday 7th October for Marion Richardson
4. Consultation meeting opportunity for all staff/parents/governors/stakeholders from either school:
 - 6.30 pm 5th October by ZOOM

Links for zoom meetings will be sent closer to the meetings.

Other ways to contribute your views

- You can use the response form (or any other written format) at the end of this document to record your views. It can be posted to the schools, or emailed to:

Consultation email address Old Church Nursery:

consultation@oldchurch.towerhamlets.sch.uk

- There is a box in the reception of each school where you can leave your comments, response forms and any questions.
- If you would like someone to phone you so you can discuss your views, please let your school office know and provide some times that would suit you and your phone number.

What happens next?

The informal consultation period starts on 24th September and ends on 22nd October at 3pm. The last page of this document can be used for you to feedback your view to governors. It should be returned to the school office. Following the consultation process, the governors will review your feedback and use it to make a response to the council, on recommending proceeding to the next consultation stage for the school amalgamation proposal, or not.

The decision to amalgamate schools has to be taken by the Local Authority, but they will always take consultation responses, and school governors' recommendations, into account.

In November 2021, the Council Cabinet (or the Mayor's Decision Panel) will decide whether to post statutory notices proposing the amalgamation. Once these notices are posted, at the start of December, everyone has four weeks where they can make representations to the Council if they wish, regarding the proposal.

The final decision to amalgamate the schools will be taken by the Local Authority at its Council Cabinet meeting, probably in February 2022.

The schools would become one school from September 1st 2022.



How can I get more information on the proposal?

The local authority will publish the feedback from the consultation on the council's website during the summer term.

If permission is granted to publish a public notice, further details of this proposal will also be available in the Consultation sections of the Council's website.

This document is also available on both school websites:

<http://www.oldchurch.towerhamlets.sch.uk>

<https://www.marionrichardson.towerhamlets.sch.uk>

Thank you for taking the time to consider our proposal, we look forward to hearing your views.

Proposal to Amalgamate Old Church and Marion Richardson Schools – Response Form

Our proposal is to bring together Old Church and Marion Richardson Schools.

This would create Marion Richardson 3-11 Primary School from 1 September 2022. We welcome your views on this proposal. Please fill in this response form and return it to the address below no later than **22nd October 2021**

1) Do you agree with the proposal to amalgamate our two schools to become one school?
Please tick as applicable

Yes		No	
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2) If you like the proposal, please say why you think it is a good idea?

3) If you dislike the proposal, please tell us why you are concerned?

4) Any other comments?

	Old Church Nursery School	Marion Richardson Primary School
I have child/ren attending	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a staff member at	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I am a governor at	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other (please describe)		

Your Name (Optional) _____

Please return this form to the relevant school by 22nd October 2021. Feedback from question one will be summarised numerically. Comments will be typed-up and anonymised. This information will be made available to the public (via the school website), but all respondents' comments and information will be anonymised.