

Princess May Primary School

Hackney Council has made the very difficult decision to **consider consulting on merging the Princess May Primary School and the Colvestone Primary School onto the Princess May site in September 2024**. This is predominantly due to the significant decrease in pupil numbers in both schools, which is at no fault of the schools.

In May, the Council's Cabinet will make a decision on whether to consult on the proposed merger. If the decision is to proceed, an informal consultation will begin in June, potentially followed by formal consultation, in autumn 2023. The final decision to proceed or not with the proposed merger will be made in December 2023.

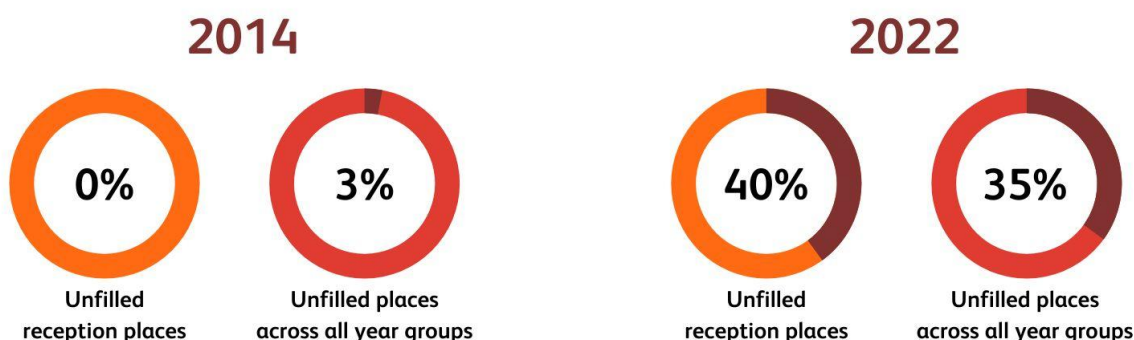
We know schools have very close - sometimes multigenerational - ties to the local area and its communities, and that this will be an upsetting process for many. This makes this proposal very difficult, and not one we would ever choose to make unless we had no other choice. The Council and the school leadership will work together to limit periods of anxiety and uncertainty for children, families, staff and communities, and provide support for the education, choices and wellbeing of all those affected.

Why is this being proposed?

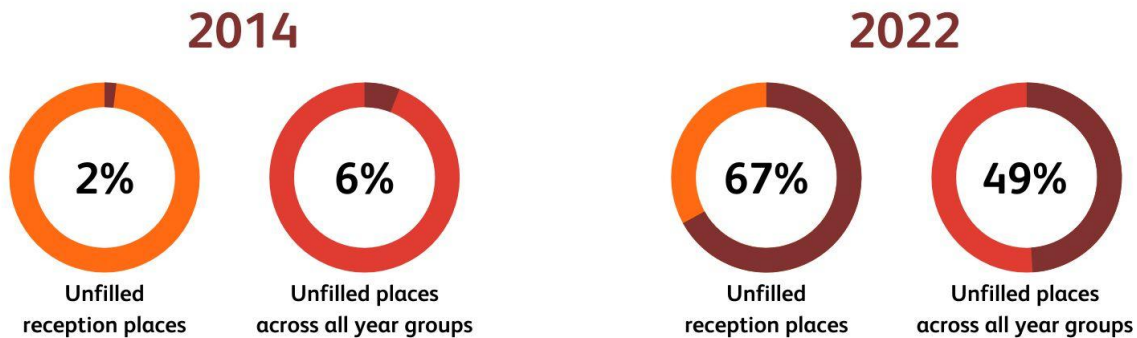
There are falling numbers of school-age children in many parts of London. The reasons behind this are thought to include falling birth rates, families relocating outside London (as a result of the pandemic and other factors including housing costs, the return to Europe of families as a result of Brexit), and competition from free schools.

Princess May Primary School and **Colvestone Primary School** have been severely affected by this trend.

At **Colvestone**, in 2014 Reception was full with no unfilled places and there were 3% unfilled places across all year groups (6 places out of 210). By 2022 there were 40% unfilled Reception places (12 places out of 30) and 35% unfilled places (73 places out of 210, or more than 2 classes) across all year groups.



At **Princess May**, in 2014 there were 2% unfilled Reception places (1 place out of 60) and 6% unfilled places across all year groups (24 places out of 420). By 2022 this had increased to 67% unfilled Reception places (40 places out of 60) and 49% unfilled places (205 places out of 420, or more than 6 classes) across all year groups. This downward trend is forecast to continue.



Significantly smaller class sizes might sound like good news, but the opposite is true, because this reduces the amount of money the school receives from central government.

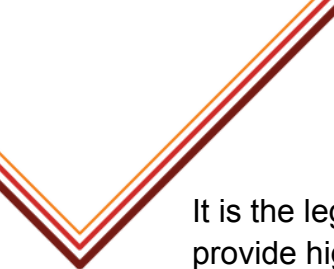
State-maintained schools, like **Princess May Primary School** and **Colvestone Primary School**, lose £6,484 for each empty school place this year. This school year alone, based on the latest census data, Colvestone is set to receive £470,000 less in funding compared to what it would be entitled to if running with all classrooms full, while Princess May is set to receive around £1.3m less.

A school with less funding will have:

- less money for staff;
- less money for resources and equipment;
- less money to pay bills and to carry out maintenance work;
- less money for extracurricular activities.

While our schools have achieved excellent results for their students, this income loss will make it increasingly challenging to maintain them in the long run. In time, a school affected by income loss will almost inevitably see performance and standards fall. It is our duty, as a Council, to ensure the quality of education for children, and stability for teaching and support staff, take priority.

School leaders and the Council have been doing everything they can to manage the situation, including by combining different year groups in some schools and reducing reception places. But this hasn't solved the problem as rolls have continued to fall.



It is the legal duty of the Council to manage school places and ensure that schools provide high quality places for the children. And more than that, we are ambitious for our children: we want to ensure our schools remain among the very best in the country.

We asked the government for help - by giving schools additional funding to manage the situation while numbers stabilise. We also asked for greater powers to manage school places in free schools and academies - which are independent of the Council - in order to combine how we plan places.

The government, in response, increased funding per pupil nationally - by around 2 per cent per pupil - but that is simply not enough to sustain schools with large vacancy rates, especially now, with the rising costs of energy and materials putting even more pressure on budgets.

The Council has been looking at which schools have been hardest-hit by falling pupil numbers and budget pressures, and which would benefit most from a merger with another school nearby.

Factors considered by the Council:

- Schools most financially at-risk
- Number of vacant places
- Physical size of schools and suitability of sites to host a merger
- Geographic partnership options
- Whether new neighbourhoods and new-build estates will create significantly more need for school places in the future
- Current Ofsted grading and projected outcomes of pupils
- Community impact.

What does a merger mean?

A merger (also known as amalgamation) brings together two or more schools to form one school - on one site and under a single leadership.

Merging schools that have seen large decreases in pupil numbers brings significant benefits, including:

- Creation of one new, stronger school community, maximising the funding available to it
- Increased specialist expertise from a wider teaching team
- Stronger finances
- Increased resources
- Increased potential for school improvement



Is my child guaranteed a place in the merged school on the Princess May site and how will that process be managed?

Yes, all children with places at Colvestone and Princess May schools will be transferred to the merged school on the Princess May site if that is what the families want. This means they will remain with their friends.

Hackney Education will support families who do not want their children to attend the merged school to explore other options.

There will be a range of actions taken to support the transition of pupils. These would be developed by the executive headteacher and the headteachers of both schools, considering issues raised during the consultation and asking parents what they would like to happen, as well as learning from what has been effective for other schools that have gone through this process.

If a child has SEND we will work with the family directly to ensure special transition arrangements that are needed to help the move go smoothly are in place.

How will you ensure standards of teaching are maintained between now and any potential merger?

The schools will receive regular support from our experienced school improvement team, all of whom are former or serving headteachers or school leaders as well including any additional support where needed. Staff will continue to access training and development in the same way.

What will happen to staff?

In the event of a merger, we will work with the leadership teams of the affected schools to assess the full impact on staff. Staff and all other relevant parties including trade unions would be consulted about any potential changes.

How was the Princess May site chosen?

The schools are 0.3 miles/6 minutes' walk from each other and there is sufficient capacity on the Princess May site to accommodate all the children from Colvestone.

Can you ensure siblings and friendship groups are kept together?

All children with places at Colvestone and Princess May schools will be transferred to the merged school on the Princess May site if that is what the families want. This means they will remain with their siblings and friends.



Will there be funding to pay for a new uniform and other costs?

We will provide more specific information and support ahead of any consultation.

What will happen next?

The Council will arrange meetings with the school community starting in April, to talk to you directly about the plans.

We will seek to engage with parents / carers, teaching and support staff, leaders, and governors, before any decision is made. We will also seek to speak to the children and young people affected by the potential changes.

Proposed timeline

NOTE: This timeline may be subject to changes.

Date	Event
January-May 2023	The Council talks to school leaders and governors to discuss plans and decide on next steps.
April 2023	Public meetings are held with the school communities.
May 2023	The Council's Cabinet will make a decision on whether to consult on the proposed merger.
June 2023	Informal consultation (subject to Cabinet decision) begins with parents, staff and governors, and those living and working in the area.
September-October 2023	Results of the informal consultation are considered by the Cabinet who will decide whether to progress to formal consultation. Formal consultation involves the Council publishing a statutory notice of their intention to merge the schools. There will be a 28-day 'objection period' for those who object to the proposal to send their objections to the council.
December 2023	The outcome of the statutory notice period and any objections are considered by the Cabinet, who makes the final decision to proceed or not.
January-August 2024	School merger arrangements are made (subject to Cabinet's decision in December 2023). Colvestone school officially closes.
September 2024	Children begin at the merged school on the Princess May site.