

Sir Thomas Abney Primary School

Hackney Council is **considering consulting on changes to Sir Thomas Abney Primary School that would apply on 31 August 2025**. This is because the significant fall in pupil numbers has caused its financial position to worsen to the point that it is no longer possible for the Council to maintain the school.

The Council is considering **two options** to respond to this difficult situation:

1. A merger with **Holmleigh Primary School**. In this case, Sir Thomas Abney Primary School would close, and its pupils would be offered a place at Holmleigh Primary School. Holmleigh would expand from one to two classes per year group and would relocate to the current site of Sir Thomas Abney School, as this site can fit all the children from both schools
- or**
2. Closure of Sir Thomas Abney Primary School.

What is a merger?

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 a large fall in pupil numbers can bring significant benefits, including:

- Establishing a stronger, more durable single school, that is better equipped to respond to the needs of children and staff and to continue to improve
- More specialist expertise from a wider teaching team
- Stronger finances
- More resources to provide extended services to local families, such as breakfast and afterschool clubs

Why are these options being proposed?

There are falling numbers of children in many parts of London. The reasons behind this are thought to include lower birth rates, the cap on housing benefits, and families leaving London (as a result of the housing crisis, the cost of living, Brexit, and the pandemic).

Similarly to other boroughs, there are not enough children in Hackney and neighbouring areas seeking places in our primary schools. This is expected to remain a problem in following years, despite Hackney building new homes, as the likely number of additional school-aged children will not be enough to solve these issues.

Schools receive money from the central government based on the number of pupils. This means that schools that have many empty places receive less funding, which in the long run negatively impacts the quality of education they can offer. They have less money for staff, resources, equipment, extracurricular activities, to pay bills and to carry out maintenance work.

Sir Thomas Abney Primary School is recognised as a high performing school, with excellent results for its pupils, but it has been seriously affected by falling rolls. This has increased the risk that in the long run it would be unable to maintain the high quality education for our community.

In October 2014 there were no unfilled reception places and 1% unfilled places across all year groups (4 out of 420). In May 2024, the school had 33% unfilled reception places (10 out of 30) and 52% unfilled places across all year groups (202 out of 390).



In April 2022, the school had reserves of £206,328. By April 2024, the school had a deficit balance of £408,384 - an overspend of £614,712 over the last two years.

Holmleigh Primary School doesn't currently have a high number of unfilled places, and is working towards reducing its deficit balance.

While our schools (including Sir Thomas Abney and Holmleigh) are recognised for their high performance and excellent results, they face significant challenges due to the reduced government funding caused by the falling rolls. Many schools have already told us that this is affecting their ability to fully support their pupils, especially those with the greatest needs.

Like many other local authorities, Hackney Council is facing enormous financial challenges, and needs to make substantial savings to be able to continue to protect the borough's most vulnerable residents. The Council cannot afford to financially support schools that are not sustainable, and must continue to make difficult decisions to make sure our schools are fit for the future, and to protect the high quality education that Hackney is known for.

A merger between Sir Thomas Abney Primary School and Holmleigh, with the merged school moving to the site of Sir Thomas Abney, could help the merged school become stronger and better prepared for the future. It could allow it to get access to more resources that would benefit the wider, diverse school community.

We know Sir Thomas Abney Primary School has close ties to the local area and community, sometimes over many generations. This makes these proposals very difficult, and not something we would choose if we felt there was a better option.

We will work together with school leaders to support children, families, staff and communities through the next steps. We will do all we can to protect the education and wellbeing of all those affected.

What will happen next?

The Council's Cabinet will meet on 30 September to decide whether to consult on these proposals. If the decision is to proceed, we will launch a consultation by mid-October to gather views on the proposals. No final decision will be made until April 2025.

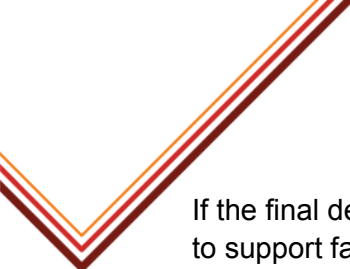
Proposed timeline

NOTE: This timeline may be subject to changes.

Date	Event
30 Sept 2024	The Council's Cabinet decides on whether to consult on the proposed changes that could affect Sir Thomas Abney Primary School and Holmleigh Primary School.
Oct-Nov 2024	Consultation (subject to Cabinet decision) takes place with families, staff and governors, and others affected by the proposals.
Jan 2025	Results of the consultation are analysed and specific recommendations are made to Cabinet, who decides on next steps. If the decision is to proceed, the Council publishes specific proposals.
Feb-Mar 2025	Specific proposals are published. A 28-day statutory representation period begins on the date of publication, during which any person can object to or make comments on proposals.
April 2025	The Cabinet considers all the views received during the statutory representation period and makes the final decision to proceed or not.
Starting May 2025	If the decision is to proceed, arrangements are made to implement the Cabinet's decision.
31 August 2025	If the decision is to proceed, the proposed changes take effect.

What would happen to my child if Sir Thomas Abney closes or merges with Holmleigh Primary School?

If the final decision is to merge with Holmleigh Primary School, all children at Sir Thomas Abney will be guaranteed a place at Holmleigh Primary School, which will be expanded to fit all children from both schools and will move on the site of Sir Thomas Abney. That means that children will continue to study in the same building that they are used to.



If the final decision is to close the school, the admissions team in Hackney will work closely to support families to make a planned transition to a new school for the start of the new academic year in September 2025. There are enough places at other schools within walking distance for all pupils currently on roll at Sir Thomas Abney. Hackney Council will work closely with affected families to ensure all children are offered a suitable alternative school place.

Families may also seek to secure a place at an alternative school via the in-year admissions process at any time. More information can be found by searching '[Hackney in year admissions](#)'.

Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), with or without an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), will receive additional support to ensure a smooth transition.

Sir Thomas Abney is a Language Resourced School (LRS), which means it provides extra support for pupils who have a diagnosis of developmental language disorder or severe speech disorder. This provision would be maintained, either at Holmleigh Primary School in case of a merger, or at another local primary school in case Sir Thomas Abney was to close, without reducing the borough's SEND offer.

When will I be able to find more information, and have my say?

More details about the proposals can be found in the Cabinet report, which will be published on 20 September on the [Hackney Council website](#).

If the Cabinet's decision is to go to the next step, a consultation should begin by mid-October. Consultation documents will then be shared with you through your school. Further information (including frequently asked questions and answers) will also be available on the [Hackney Education website](#). The Council and the school leaders will organise meetings with parents and carers as part of the consultation process.