

Proposal to merge Weasenham Church of England Primary Academy with Brisley Church of England Primary Academy from 1 January 2024; by ceasing to maintain the Weasenham site, stopping the pre-school provision and by changing the age range from 2-11 to 4-11.

Further, and separately, the Local Authority (LA) are consulting on changing the catchment area of the parish of Weasenham so that Massingham becomes the catchment school from 1 January 2024.

This document is designed to:

- Notify you of the Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust's (DNEAT) proposal to merge Weasenham CE Primary Academy and Brisley CE Primary Academy into a single primary school (within the Hope Federation) and to change its age range
- Explain why this is being proposed
- Give you additional information in relation to pre-school provision
- To give you some information regarding, and a link to, the LA's proposal to change the catchment area of the Parish of Weasenham
- Invite your comments on this proposal
- Inform you of and invite you to, a consultation meeting to be held at Weasenham CE Primary Academy on 13 September 2023 at 5pm

The Statutory Process

The Department for Education (DFE) has set out the requirements and processes for making changes to an academy in the guidance 'Making significant changes to an open academy' and through reference to other guidance documents. This consultation period is the first stage in that process.

The Proposal Part 1: Why are we proposing to merge Weasenham CE Primary Academy with Brisley CE Primary Academy?

Weasenham CE Primary Academy and Brisley CE Primary Academy are both members of the Hope Federation within the Diocese of Norwich Education Academy Trust (DNEAT). There is a third school in the federation which is Rudham CE Primary Academy. The federation has a shared Local Governing Body and executive headteacher, but they are separate schools. Weasenham CE Primary Academy takes children from 2 to 11 years old with capacity for 52 pupils and a published admission number (PAN) of 7. Brisley CE Primary Academy admits pupils from 4 to 11 years with a capacity of 105 pupils and a PAN of 15. Brisley currently has 69 pupils on roll. A merger combines two or more separate organisations into one single and distinct legal entity.

DNEAT has an agreed 'small schools strategy' which outlines certain criteria that, if met, would result in the Trust considering significant change, such as closure, merger or amalgamation. The strategy supports the view that sustainable schools should usually be for 50 or more pupils, with three class bases and financed accordingly. Where numbers are below this there should be some reasonable prospect of them increasing in the future. Weasenham now meets several of the criteria in some way, including:

School size - currently Weasenham has 28 pupils on roll. The published admission number (PAN) is 7 and it has capacity for 52 pupils. The current number of pupils does not generate sufficient finances to allow for the three-class structure required by DNEAT. Further it puts the school in the size category that routinely does less well in terms of the outcomes that suggest children are getting a good education.

Pupil forecasts – Weasenham has seen 3 years of decreasing number on roll and all Local Authority projections show that pupil numbers will continue to decline. This is linked to a lack of planned housing development in the local area. To date the school has taken action to improve numbers, including taking on the pre-school. Although this provision is full it is an additional drain on resources and not enough children are transferring to the school to have a significant impact on overall numbers. An additional issue is that the pre-school building will require extensive refurbishment in order to ensure a safe and effective learning environment.

Finance - Weasenham increasingly becomes a disproportionate draw on federation resources as pupil numbers continue to decline. This would be compounded if a three-class structure were put in place.

The view of the Trust is that Weasenham is too small to be successful for its pupils and community and that there is no realistic chance of this changing. Children would be better served attending another larger local school, preferably within the Trust at Brisley CE Primary Academy, which has space to accommodate all of the displaced pupils between the ages of 4-11 and would retain its good Ofsted rating.

What would change and what would not change?

Staffing

DNEAT is the employer of all staff across the federation. There is a potential impact on staff employed at Weasenham CE Primary Academy. Work will be undertaken by Human Resources to identify staff who would be displaced by the implementation of this proposal and support will be given in seeking redeployment, initially within DNEAT in line with the Code of Practice. We will not fully know this impact until we know how many children would wish to transfer to Brisley or to other schools.

Governing Body

The Hope Federation is governed by a single Local Governing Body. There would be no change of governance.

School Uniform

Currently each school has its own school uniform and logo; there would be no expectation that the uniform changes unless parents wish to do so. Weasenham parents, who decide to move their children to Brisley, will be able to request a voucher to the value of £30 to spend on branded uniform (jumpers/cardigans or t-shirts). The cost would be covered by the Federation.

Denominational choice for parents

DNEAT is very proud to be a Diocesan Trust. The choice for future parents wishing to send their children to a denominational school will not be reduced by these proposals as both schools in the catchment change proposal are DNEAT Church of England academies. The Diocesan Board of Education also supports the merger of Weasenham CE Primary Academy with Brisley.

Travel to school

The Trust would provide transport for children currently attending Weasenham, and who wish to attend the merged school on the Brisley site, free of charge. This would be tailored to the needs of, and number of, children wishing to attend. As a minimum it would include picking up children from the closed Weasenham site and returning them each day, leaving in time to allow attendance at Brisley from 8.45am and returning after the end of the school day which is at 3.15pm. Currently, we could only offer this transport to children who currently attend Weasenham. This would last until their time at the merged school, on the Brisley site, came to an end. We could not offer the transport to children, including younger siblings, who do not yet attend the school.

Buildings

If Weasenham CE Primary Academy were to merge, all buildings and land comprising the Weasenham site will return to its original ownership, either Norfolk County Council or Diocese of Norwich.

The merger proposal and process

The process to merge is made up of four legal changes:

- The merger of Weasenham with Brisley school
- The change of age range of the merged school from 2-11 to 4-11(reflecting the ending of pre-school provision that Weasenham currently offers)
- The change of catchment school for the parish of Weasenham. This is a Local Authority process and they have determined that this would change to Massingham Primary School
- The technical closure of the Weasenham CE Primary Academy site

The Proposal Part 2: Change of catchment area

The proposal to change the catchment area, or catchment school, for Weasenham is outlined in full here: <https://norfolk.citizenspace.com/childrens-services/gt-massingham>

The Parish of Weasenham becoming part of the catchment area of Massingham Primary, as the LA is proposing, does not stop parents from exercising choice and deciding their children should attend another school.

Additional information regarding pre-school places

DNEAT is aware of the position locally in regards to pre-school places which is, as in many areas, tight. We have been working with the Local Authority on this issue and attempting to find solutions.

This issue has, unfortunately, been compounded by the fact that the pre-school provision at Weasenham is currently closed due to concerns around the fabric of the building.

As part of the consultation, we will be proactively seeking information from pre-school parents as to what they would like to happen and where provision would be helpful. Once we know what this is we can better support an increase in places locally for pre-school children.

The next stage

This consultation period provides you with an opportunity to express your views and ask questions regarding the proposal to merge Weasenham CE Primary Academy with Brisley CE Primary Academy.

The 4-week consultation period starts on Monday 11 September 2023 and will close on 6 October 2023.

A consultation meeting on the proposal will be held at Weasenham CE Primary Academy on 13 September 2023 at 5pm.

Who will make the final decision and when could the change happen?

After this consultation ends on **6 October 2023**, DNEAT will review the comments received and use the findings to inform their full business case to the Secretary of State who will decide whether to proceed with the proposal.

How can I learn more about this proposal and have my say?

Tell us your views by:

- Attending the public consultation event at Weasenham CE Primary Academy at 5pm on 13 September 2023.
- Emailing us: info@dneat.org (please quote Weasenham as the subject in your response)
- Writing to Weasenham Church of England Primary Academy Consultation, DNEAT, Orchard House, Hall Lane, East Tuddenham near Mattishall, Norfolk, NR20 3LR

We need all responses by 5pm on 6 October 2023