



Briefing paper for SHARE MAT board – July 2021

Preparing for the future at Royds Hall Community School; Securing the best system for our children’s future

1. Background

Further to the board decision to move to the consultation phase about de-amalgamating Royds Hall through-school and merging the two primary sites, the trust’s leadership team wrote to everybody potentially affected by the change. The correspondence included a copy of the consultation paper: “Preparing for the future at Royds Hall Community School: Securing the best system for our children’s future”. Papers were also made available on the trust and individual academy websites: [Share Multi Academy Trust - Royds Hall restructure \(sharemat.org\)](https://sharemat.org) and meetings were held with parents and local headteachers. Full details of the meetings, including times, are available by following the web link.

This paper summarises the matters raised by respondents, particularly the concerns of parents. The concerns have been grouped together under themes, to help manage discussions and decision making. However, every response submitted has been made available for board members to read in full.

2. Response summary

In all, we received 101 responses:

- 40 were submitted via our online survey
- 24 were sent via email (9 of which also attended a consultation meeting)
- None were received in the post
- 37 attended consultation meetings

NB: There is an overlap between these responses, e.g. some parents responded by email, in person and replied to the online questionnaire.

We have also received a paper petition and been made aware of a change.org petition.

Table 1 contains a breakdown of responses by groups:

	By email	By online survey	In person at a consultation meeting
Parents	14	23	31
Relatives	1	1	4
Staff	1	2	
Members of the local community	3	8	1
Organisation affected by the proposal	1	4	1
LA, Councillors & Members of Parliament	2		
Solicitor (on behalf of a parent)	1		
Not stated	1	2	

Table 2 contains a breakdown of responses from our online survey:

	total no. responses	Do you support our aims?		Are there any other aims we should consider?		Do you agree that our proposals will help achieve our 5 main aims?		Do you agree with our proposals for prioritising admissions? Will they help to avoid any negative impact on nearby schools?		Do you agree the process of de-amalgamation will support Royds Hall, the secondary school?	
		yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no	yes	no
parents	23	39%	61%	61%	39%	22%	78%	40%	60%	36%	64%
relative	1		100%		100%		100%	100%			100%
member of local community	8	50%	50%	75%	25%	87%	13%	57%	43%	62%	38%
part of an organisation	4	75%	25%		100%	25%	75%	75%	25%	75%	25%
member of staff	2	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%
other	2	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%	50%

NB: one parent also works for a local organisation affected by the proposal.



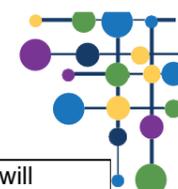
3. Themes, concerns and mitigation

The majority of themes raised below were raised by parents from Lily Park. We received very few responses from other parents. We have not attempted to answer every single question raised but we are confident that identifying themes and providing a response covers all the significant points raised.

Theme	Explanation / concerns raised	Response, including possible mitigation
The consultation process	<p>Some respondents complained that the consultation process was not run well. For example, they were concerned that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documents had not been translated in other languages. • The consultation was too short (in terms of time). • Parents and the community were not allowed to meet in a group, e.g. on the school field. • The online questionnaire was leading. • The consultation paper was too long and therefore confusing. 	<p>The language barrier was reported by others, rather than anybody directly affected. We did not observe any language barriers in face to face meetings or when reading responses. Government guidance states that documents should not be translated into other languages as a matter of course (see Translation into foreign languages - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)).</p> <p>We made every effort to listen to as many views as possible. Some of the formats suggested by some groups, such as a larger meeting on a field would not have allowed us to hear a full range of views. Such gatherings would not have been safe or responsible, given the relatively high rates of COVID in the area. We ran the consultation for six weeks, in line with the guidance set out.</p> <p>The consultation process met all the requirements laid out in the government's guidance for this type of change, as described in "Making significant changes to an open academy and closure by mutual agreement, November 2019."</p> <p>The online questionnaire provides plenty of opportunities for respondents to disagree or add free text. Respondents were also able to submit free text responses by email or in writing. Trust staff also made notes of all conversations during the consultation and those views are summarised in this document.</p> <p>We deliberately structured the online questionnaire, to help respondents focus on the main issues, e.g. improving the educational experience for children, ensuring good value for money is achieved by the changes and mitigating against any of the negative effects, particularly for disadvantaged or otherwise vulnerable children.</p> <p>In response to parents' concerns that the key message about the closure of Lily Park was obscured by the length of the consultation document, we wrote a shorter letter which highlighted this change more clearly. We offered four face to face meetings and spent a considerable length of time with groups of parents, explaining our proposals and listening to their concerns. We recorded these views and have summarised them in this document.</p>
The impact of COVID	<p>Respondents did give specific examples but said they thought the community found the timing of the proposals difficult because they were only just starting to recover from the impact of COVID.</p>	<p>We do not underestimate the toll COVID has taken on families. Our staff have worked incredibly hard over the last year to support families, making home visits, setting work online, providing free school meals and offering face to face learning for our most vulnerable children. We will continue to offer support for families experiencing difficulties, whether children attend Lily Park or Luck Lane.</p> <p>We delayed the start of the consultation for over a year, until most restrictions were over, so meaningful dialogue could take place.</p> <p>The news was always likely to prove difficult for some families, whenever we made the announcement.</p>
The proposal to close the Lily Park site (general comments)	<p>Responses in this category were wide-ranging, They included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not close Lily Park (without any alternative suggestion). • New housing in the area may increase pupil numbers in the future. • The re-branding of Lily Park has not been given time to have an impact, • We should use the Luck Lane site for secondary education and move all the primary children to Lily Park. 	<p>We consulted with local authority officers about the pupil population and the possible consequences of changes in the area, such as house building plans. After the birth rate peaked in 2011, the pupil population has fallen across Kirklees and there is no evidence it is set to increase in the future.</p> <p>Nearly half the pupils attending Lily Park travel from outside the priority admission area (PAA). The majority of pupils who live in the PAA travel to another school. There is, therefore, no evidence to suggest an increase in nearby housing will result in increased demand at Lily Park.</p> <p>The Lily Park site is not big enough to accommodate pupils from both Lily Park and Luck Lane. The Luck Lane site is a brand new, purpose built primary school. One of the reasons for proposing the change is to give all pupils equal access to the best possible resources available at the new site.</p> <p>It is impossible to know the impact of the re-branding exercise. However, the number of parents choosing Lily Park remains well below the published admission number. At no time in the last seven or more years has Lily Park been oversubscribed and there is no evidence to suggest this will change in the foreseeable future. Our meetings with local authority officers indicated that, overall, there is a surplus of places available in primary schools in Kirklees and this pattern is likely to continue.</p>



<p>The trust is putting financial interests before educational needs.</p>	<p>Comments in this category tended not specify what respondents thought the trust would do with the money. Some people thought the trust could sell the land, perhaps to property developers. Some respondents asked if we could save money in other ways, for example by cutting spending on electronic devices.</p>	<p>We want all our academies to be in a financially secure position. This enables us to employ the staff and provide the resources our pupils need to have the best possible education. Trust officers do not gain financially from the decision in any way, nor can the trust make a profit. Our reserves have to be used to educate children. The trust cannot sell the land and buildings. The Secretary of State will make a decision about the property. The government funded electronic devices for schools this year. Over 80% of the Lily Park budget is spent on staff. This is common in small schools but illustrates saving in other areas would not balance the budget. One of the reasons we are proposing the change is to give all pupils access to the best possible educational resources. The trust has subsidised Lily Park since it joined us. Our central services offer has actually saved the school money because we can offer the economies of scale achieved by being part of a bigger organisation.</p>
<p>Why can't the trust just subsidise Lily Park from its reserves?</p>	<p>Some correspondents noted SHARE MAT has financial reserves</p>	<p>Our only sources of income are government grants, which are chiefly calculated on the number of pupils attending each academy. In the interests of transparency, each academy maintains its own accounts. Some academies have reserves but also have spending plans for these funds. Keeping Lily Park open would mean we have to subsidise it. This means we would have to transfer money that is designated for pupils in one academy to another, which is unfair. If the current level of subsidy continues, our overall budget position would move to a deficit. The Education and Schools Funding Agency would then intervene, to ensure we returned to a balanced budget. Leaders in other trust academies responded to say they needed the money allocated to their schools, to ensure they could offer a good quality of education.</p>
<p>Are there other sources of funding available?</p>	<p>Some parents suggested we charge or raise money in some other way.</p>	<p>This is not a realistic option, nor an ethical one. We would have to raise well over £1000 per pupil at current rates. Small funding raising activities can raise a few hundred pounds but nothing like the figures required. We cannot ask parents to pay for their children's education.</p>
<p>Can we combine classes at Lily Park or reduce costs in other ways?</p>	<p>Lily Park parents asked if we had explored all the options in terms of combining classes.</p>	<p>We have already combined classes at Lily Park. We also checked whether classes could be combined to reduce costs. However, we are very keen to keep our classes below 30 children and the numbers in the groups that could be combined do not allow this to happen. For example, there will be 27 pupils in year 5 and 24 pupils in year 6 next academic year (2021-22). We cannot create one group of 51 pupils. Conversely, there are small numbers in other year groups but the national curriculum does not allow these groups to be combined easily. For example, we could have 29 pupils in a combined Year 2/3 class but this would cross two key stages. We think the educational benefits of having one class of around 30 pupils per national curriculum year group outweigh the disadvantages of the changes. Teachers will be able to plan lessons and activities that match pupils' age-related abilities and knowledge more carefully. They will also be able to create smaller groups, to tailor the learning activities to different groups of pupils more easily.</p>
<p>The small class sizes at Lily Park are an advantage</p>	<p>A number of parents from Lily Park said they were attracted to the school because of the small class sizes. They like the individual attention their children receive and talked about receiving one-to-one support.</p>	<p>This contradicts the suggestion made above about combining groups. Unfortunately, the funding model means very small group sizes are not financially viable for any organisation. We believe that good teachers, working with well-trained teaching assistants, can continue to give pupils individual attention in a class of 30 children. It is easier to plan activities to meet learners' needs when the whole class is at the same stage of education, i.e. year group.</p>
<p>Fears about children attending a larger primary school</p>	<p>Some Lily Park parents were worried about sending their child to a larger primary school.</p>	<p>Luck Lane was built to accommodate 420 pupils and there is enough space to accommodate all the Lily Park children. The building has wide corridors, plenty of outdoor space and a large hall. We will aim to maintain a maximum class size of 30. This should reduce any sense of the building feeling crowded. Primary schools of this size are quite common. Headteachers, senior leaders and other staff know each child as an individual and build positive relationships with families. We are confident we would achieve this at Luck Lane.</p>



Will we mix classes if the changes go ahead?	Parents were worried that children would be split from their friends if the move goes ahead.	We will try to reduce any unsettling changes as much as we can. In some cases, pupils will remain in their current teaching group but just move to another site. If groups are combined, we will ensure there are still plenty of familiar faces in the new classes. We will prepare children for any changes through transition activities.
Admissions to Luck Lane	We received queries about whether Lily Park pupils could start at Luck Lane, particularly children starting in reception in September.	Currently, children do not have a place at Lily Park because it is a site, not a school. They have a place at Royds Hall through school. Parents with children in Year 2 or above (from September) applied for a place at Royds Hall when the admissions policy stated the school had the right to educate their children at whichever site the school deemed most appropriate. We will be happy to discuss the choice of site with parents, within the restrictions of maintaining class sizes of under 30 children in early years and key stage 1.
Travelling to and from Luck Lane every day	<p>Respondents asked or commented upon:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How long the trust would provide transport for. • Whether there would be sufficient places on the bus. • What would happen if children were late for the bus. • Whether children, particularly the very youngest or those with SEND, would be safe on a bus. • What time the bus would leave at the start and end of the day. • The quantity of traffic at Luck Lane. • The difficulties in walking to Luck Lane from Lily Park. • Whether children would be able to attend extra-curricular activities after school. • How parents could meet school staff at the start or end of the school day 	<p>The trust will provide transport until at least September 2028, to support all children starting at Lily Park in September 2021 for the entire time they attend primary school. We will ensure there are sufficient places for every child who needs a place on the bus. We would collect children who were late for the bus, provided this was a rare occurrence. However, we would need to work with parents if this became a common event. The buses will be supervised. We will always have a member of staff on the bus, who will pay particular attention to the needs of younger children and those who might be vulnerable for other reasons. We welcome further views about the best time for the bus to leave in the morning. We think 8.20am would work well but are open to other suggestions. We will coordinate the start and end times of the day with the secondary school, to try to reduce traffic on Luck Lane at any given time. It is difficult to walk from Lily Park to Luck Lane. However, there are only 64 children living in the Lily Park priority admission area and the numbers wanting to walk should be low. Families will be able to walk to the Lily Park site, to catch the bus in the mornings. We acknowledge this system could present challenges with extra-curricular activities. We will provide additional transport when required. The staff accompanying children on the bus will make themselves available for discussions with parents at the start and end of the day. They will pass on any concerns or messages to teachers or school leaders as required.</p>
The safety of the Luck Lane site	<p>This was expressed as a concern about the security of the Luck Lane site, particularly at the start and end of the school day.</p> <p>Some parents were also worried their child would be able to leave the Luck Lane site during the day.</p> <p>Others were concerned about the proximity of Luck Lane to the Royds Hall secondary site.</p>	<p>Luck Lane is surrounded by a secure fence and locked gates. The school bus would drop children off at a designated zone and staff will be present to ensure every pupil gets into school safely. Parents wishing to drop their children off or pick up at the end of the day can do so, via the same drop-off zone. Teachers will only release children to known parents and carers. Secondary school pupils are not allowed near the Luck Lane site, unless there is an agreement they can pick up a younger brother or sister at the end of the school day. We are enhancing security around the Royds Hall site by building a new fence. This will help us control access to Luck Lane even more effectively before any transfer takes place.</p>
The timing of the changes	Parents were particularly concerned about significant changes being made in January. They thought the poor weather and poor light in the morning and evening would make the transfer harder.	We have some sympathy for this view and appreciate the timescales are tight. We chose January because we did not want there to be too long a period of uncertainty. However, the consultation and approval process will last well into the autumn term, so we could consider implementing the change at a later date, possibly after the Easter break. We would be happy to take further views on this matter.
How will we prepare children for the change?	Some families asked how we could settle pupils if the change goes ahead.	If we decide to proceed, we will share a transition plan with parents and staff. We will explain the changes carefully to the children and discuss any concerns they may have. We will give children plenty of opportunities to get to know the new site and make new friends before the change goes ahead.
Equality Impact, including the impact of the change on pupils with special educational needs and/or a disability (SEND).	A more detailed equality impact assessment statement can be found here . Respondents raised concerns that the change would have a more serious impact on pupils or families from financially disadvantaged households or those with a special educational need or disability.	The latter group have a protected characteristic, so we have separated these areas below.



The impact of the change on pupils with a special educational need and/or disability	<p>The concerns raised typically fell into the following categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils with SEND currently benefit from learning in small classes; • Pupils with SEND benefit from small group tuition, including 'one to one' support; • Some children will find the move emotionally unsettling. 	<p>If the proposal goes ahead, we will undertake a review for every child with an Educational Health Care Plan or other special educational need. The review will lead to a short-term and long-term plan, to ensure the child's needs are fully met both during the transition phase and after the changes have been made.</p> <p>We believe the changes will help pupils with SEND because the restructure will create a dedicated, well-trained SEND team at Luck Lane. They will be managed by a single SENDCo, which will allow us to implement more carefully targeted support.</p>
The impact of the change on parents and relatives with a disability	Some parents with a disability were concerned about how they could get into school.	<p>Luck Lane is a very accessible site because it was built to new regulations.</p> <p>It is difficult to answer this question fully without knowing a person's needs. Many parents already travel to Lily Park from outside the priority admissions area without difficulty already. Any parent or carer with a car will find access easier than at Lily Park. We would be happy to discuss needs and offer support to parents experiencing any difficulties.</p>
The change will have the greatest impact on disadvantaged families	<p>We did not receive many specific details about the types of problem disadvantaged families might experience but some respondents were concerned they would be adversely affected.</p> <p>There was a general feeling that some families would be unable to afford transport to attend events at school and parents' evenings, or to collect a child if they fall ill.</p>	<p>The bus and breakfast will be free. We would also cover the costs of any other change, such as uniform, if required.</p> <p>The larger cohort of children at Luck Lane should help us to run intervention and support activities more easily.</p> <p>Parents will still drop their children off at Lily Park to catch a bus.</p> <p>We would be happy to discuss specific support needs with individual families if help is required. We would manage this on a case by case basis.</p>
What will happen to staff?	Some parents wanted reassurances that staff would not lose their jobs and we would retain good people.	<p>We agree with parents that we want to retain the excellent staff at Lily Park and Luck Lane. A separate staff consultation is running alongside this public consultation. We are working hard with staff and unions to reduce job losses and retain our colleagues. We have already made significant progress.</p> <p>In the meantime, we are keeping vacancies available elsewhere in the trust by offering temporary contracts where there is a chance staff affected by these changes could take the position.</p>
What will happen to the nursery provision in the old 'Sure Start' centre	<p>The nursery provision is housed in a building next to Lily Park. It was formerly a Sure Start centre.</p> <p>Some respondents wanted to know what would happen to the nursery provision.</p>	The building in question is still owned by the local authority. There is no reason why the nursery cannot continue to run as it does now. This is outside the scope of the trust's consultation and decision making process.

4. Other meetings and responses

We met with local primary headteachers, who might be affected by the changes and local authority officers. One or two headteachers were concerned it would lead to an increase in applications to their full schools. We reiterated we did not want to destabilise the admissions process, which is why we would provide transport and continue to prioritise admissions from the Lily Park Priority Admission Area.

The local authority have stated they do not support the decision. This position is based on a number of concerns about the impact on the local community. We believe these concerns will be partially addressed in this paper but are also willing to meet with local authority officers and councillors to provide further reassurances if required.

We also received correspondence from a solicitor, claiming to represent a parent of the school. We treated this letter in the same way as all other comments and responses. We are unable to give one respondent any favourable treatment.

Headteachers from other schools in the trust responded to the consultation. They wanted to remind trust leaders that they needed the funds allocated to their budgets, to ensure they could offer a good quality of education for all pupils.

We received the results of two online petitions. However, it is impossible to verify where these responses came from and we cannot take these messages into account.



5. Summary and recommendations

Responses to the consultation largely came from around 30 parents with children at Lily Park. Understandably, there was some shock and upset about such significant proposals. Some comments reflect this upset. However, many of the opponents of the changes also told us they understood the challenges we faced, particularly in the meetings we held at the school.

We did not receive any responses that addressed alternative ways of achieving our aims, including balancing the budget.

The proposal to de-amalgamate of the primary and secondary phases into separate schools attracted very few comments.

Many of the points raised by parents related to making the transition as smooth as possible. We could address some of these concerns by planning a detailed transition plan, including a clear timeline for activities and changes. The transition plan will need to focus on the needs of vulnerable pupils in particular and it would be essential to meet regularly with families and children to offer support with the changes in routine.

The concerns raised by the local authority seem to reflect the concerns raised by parents and local groups. Most of those concerns are addressed in this document. Nonetheless, we think it would be helpful to undertake further discussions with elected members and local authority officers, to ensure we have minimised any negative effects of these proposals. We will seek to do so before submitting any final application.

Trust leaders therefore recommend that:

- The proposal to close the Lily Park site and transfer pupils goes ahead. This will mean submitting an application to the Secretary of State via the Regional Schools Commissioner.
- Before submitting any such application, we will engage with the local authority, to see if we can address their remaining concerns better.
- The board consider changing the timeline, so that the transfer takes place after the Easter 2022 break.
- A detailed transition plan is published.
- Meetings and transition plans are discussed with parents, pupils and other partners, to determine the best way of supporting those affected.
- The application includes a request to de-amalgamate Royds Hall, A SHARE Academy from Luck Lane, A SHARE Primary Academy.
- Funds are set aside to support vulnerable pupils and families through the changes.