

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL: PROPOSED AMALGAMATION OF MERROW C OF E CONTROLLED INFANT SCHOOL AND MERROW JUNIOR SCHOOL

Response from Humanists UK, April 2026



ABOUT HUMANISTS UK

At Humanists UK, we want a tolerant world where rational thinking and kindness prevail. We work to support lasting change for a better society, championing ideas for the one life we have. Our work helps people be happier and more fulfilled, and by bringing non-religious people together we help them develop their own views and an understanding of the world around them. Founded in 1896, we are trusted to promote humanism by 150,000 members and supporters and around 120 members of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group. Through our ceremonies, pastoral support, education services, and campaigning work, we advance free thinking and freedom of choice so everyone can live in a fair and equal society.

Do you support the proposal to amalgamate Merrow CofE Controlled Infant School and Merrow Junior School?

Our main concern is the assertion within the consultation document that establishing the new school as a Church of England primary school is 'the only viable option'. This is a significant claim, yet the consultation document does not set out:

- what alternative options were considered, and why these were considered unviable,
- whether a community primary school model was explored, and
- what criteria were used to assess viability.

This lack of evidence behind its conclusion is concerning. A decision such as this, that is one that could result in a publicly funded school with a religious character, should be supported by a clear and open options appraisal, including an assessment of how different models would serve the whole community.

While we recognise that the existing Merrow Federation operates with a Christian ethos, and that this is an established part of the school community, it is important to distinguish between a general ethos and a formal religious designation, which brings with it specific legal implications. Moving to a single, formally designated Church of England primary school risks strengthening and extending the role of religious character in the school's governance, identity, and decision-making structures across the full age range.

This is especially important in light of the local demographics. Census 2021 data shows that 36.6% of Surrey residents identify as having no religion, a figure that has increased significantly over the past decade. Publicly funded schools should reflect this reality by being fully inclusive and representative of all families, regardless of belief.

Establishing a new all-through primary school with a religious designation risks entrenching or extending religious influence in areas such as admissions. Even where formal religious selection is limited, the presence of a religious character can still shape access, culture, and parental choice. A move to a single Church of England primary school increases the risk that a single religious ethos



will shape provision across all age groups, without sufficient safeguards to ensure inclusivity and balance. More broadly, the case for amalgamation itself is not compelling. While falling pupil numbers are cited, projections are uncertain, and the schools already operate within a federated model that enables collaboration.

While it is clear that Surrey County Council, like many other local authorities across the country, have to consider how it approaches falling roll numbers in schools, it should not be the default position to close the school with no religious character. We therefore oppose the proposed amalgamation.

To help with our analysis of responses, please tell us whether you are:

Other relationship - we have been approached by parents concerned about the proposals.

For more details, information, and evidence, contact Humanists UK:

Karen Wright
Director of Human Rights and Advocacy
020 7324 3009
karen@humanists.uk
humanists.uk

