

REDACTED

Feasibility Study on the Closure or Amalgamation of Duncombe Primary School and Montem Primary School

November 2023

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2. Executive Summary

- 2.1. This paper evaluates the impact of any proposed closure or amalgamation of Duncombe Primary School and Montem Primary School.
- 2.2. This proposal is being considered due to the very significant decline in pupil numbers in the Hornsey Planning Area, combined with issue of an academy order for Pooles Park Primary school preventing its closure.
- 2.3. In October 2022, there was a surplus capacity of 23% in reception in this planning area, and the October Census 2023 shows this has increased to a surplus capacity of 33%.
- 2.4. Duncombe and Montem Primary School have vacancy rates of 57% and 53% in Reception respectively. Although the Department for Education (DfE) recommends that local authorities maintain surplus capacity at approximately 5%, along with a number of other London boroughs, we are of the view that a vacancy rate of up to 10% is a reasonable assumption as it provides the flexibility to respond to sudden changes in the school age population. The vacancy rate in this area is considerably more than this.
- 2.5. The feasibility paper assesses many factors about both schools which we have summarised into four categories:
 - **Buildings and site condition** – both sites are suitable for an amalgamated school and can accommodate the required pupil numbers
 - **Financial position and running costs** – Both schools were in deficit. Duncombe is now projected to be in surplus this financial year. Duncombe is cheaper to run compared to Montem.
 - **Location** – more pupils from both schools live within 1km of the Duncombe site and there are more neighbouring schools near Montem
 - **Air quality and congestion** – air quality is better at Duncombe and congestion is less as the site is on a school street
- 2.6. Our recommendation is that we consult on a proposal to amalgamate Montem and Duncombe Primary on the Duncombe site and keep the Duncombe name and Ofsted number.
- 2.7. We do not recommend that either school be closed rather than “technically” closed for amalgamation purposes. Direct school closure only, and not amalgamation, would create a significant risk that the displaced pupils will not have a school place after the school has closed; or they would apply to schools out of borough further reducing pupils attending community schools; and staff would not have fair employment opportunities.

- 2.8. Amalgamation will mitigate these risks as we can automatically transfer all displaced pupils to the amalgamated school and support only those parents who chose to transfer to another school.
- 2.9. By amalgamating, we can also ring-fence all posts in the proposed enlarged amalgamated school's staffing structure to staff in both schools, presenting equal opportunity for staff from both schools.
- 2.10. Amalgamation will enable us to bring together and retain the strengths of both schools, including their good Ofsted ratings and pedagogical practices. Both schools are rated "good" by Ofsted and provide a good quality of education for their pupils.
- 2.11. Finally, amalgamation will better secure the long-term financial future of the schools as they will combine pupils, therefore reducing their overall surplus capacity whilst operating from one site will reduce their running costs.
- 2.12. We recommend that the amalgamated school be on the Duncombe site because:
 - 2.12.1. more existing pupils live closer to this school site.
 - 2.12.2. there are fewer schools nearby to Duncombe. If Duncombe school were to close, there would be less choice for parents in the local area with only one other school within 500m. There are four other schools within 500m of Montem.
 - 2.12.3. the Duncombe site is already on a school street whereas Montem's location means a school street is not possible and the air quality is better in the Duncombe area and has lower Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) levels.
- 2.13. We recommend that the amalgamated school keep the Duncombe name and Ofsted number because this would ensure the amalgamated school will not start with an enhanced deficit which would safeguard the financial position of the school and help secure the school's long-term future.
- 2.14. Keeping the same name on the same site also reduces confusion and maintains name recognition.
- 2.15. Montem is in a hard federation with Drayton Park primary school, which means this proposal will have an impact on the federation itself and shared functions and resources between Montem and Drayton Park. It will be important to ensure the many strengths of the federation benefit the amalgamated school should the proposal proceed. However, due to the very high financial deficit of Drayton Park primary school it is not recommended that the amalgamated school be federated with Drayton Park in order that the governors can focus on the leadership and governance of the amalgamated school only and not also be responsible for managing the significant financial issues of Drayton Park.

3. Context

- 3.1. In Islington, we are committed to driving educational excellence through inclusive and sustainable schools. However, like most of London, many Islington schools are impacted by falling rolls with vacancies in reception at primary at 24% in September 2023.
- 3.2. Our approach to tackling falling rolls supports our corporate objectives for a more equal borough. Where children and young people attend a school with ongoing reducing numbers, the quality of their educational experience is compromised.
- 3.3. Our corporate commitment set out in our Education Plan is that by 2030 every child, whatever their background, has the same opportunity and ambition to reach their educational potential in a good Islington school. The School Organisation Plan is a key pillar to achieving this.
- 3.4. Duncombe and Montem Primary Schools are in the Hornsey area and is the area with the highest vacancy rate in Islington. In October 2022, there was a surplus capacity of 23% in reception in this planning area, and the October 2023 Census shows this has increased to a surplus capacity of 33%.
- 3.5. We previously consulted on a proposal to close Pooles Park Primary School which is also in the Hornsey area. However, this school has recently received an academisation order following an inadequate Ofsted judgement and is therefore due to convert to an academy.
- 3.6. Duncombe and Montem Primary School both have a vacancy rate of over 50% in Reception. Schools operate most efficiently when full or nearly full and any surplus places should be kept to a minimum. Although the Department for Education (DfE) recommends that local authorities maintain surplus capacity at approximately 5%, along with a number of other London boroughs, we are of the view that a vacancy rate of up to 10% is a reasonable assumption as it provides the flexibility to respond to sudden changes in the school age population. Both schools are much higher than this.
- 3.7. Montem and Duncombe are both based in large Victorian school buildings designed for more pupils than they currently accommodate. Both schools have had deficit budgets for several years and both have experienced a significant fall in rolls in recent years. Montem and Duncombe are situated just over half a mile apart and within walking distance from each other.
- 3.8. This level of vacancies has implications on the long-term financial viability of both schools and the quality of the educational experience they can offer for children as the number of pupils at a school drives the level of funding received by a school.
- 3.9. Lower pupil numbers mean less funding which affects staffing that then impacts the diversity of the curriculum offer.
- 3.10. The School Organisation Plan sets out our strategy for managing school places over the next three years. Reducing the number of school places in a planned way will support schools to manage change within their funding.
- 3.11. The School Organisation Plan sets out various options to reduce surplus capacity at our schools:

- Reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN)
 - Maximise the pupil numbers
 - Make better use of spare building capacity
 - Including children with SEND
 - Collaboration and Federation to achieve economies of scale
- 3.12. After all these options have been considered and a school is still predicting surplus capacity and a financial deficit as a result, amalgamation of schools or closing an individual school is considered.
- 3.13. When amalgamating a school, we must follow [statutory guidelines](#) for when it is possible to close a school, which includes when it is no longer considered viable.
- 3.14. Duncombe and Montem schools are in danger of becoming not viable, as they both have surplus places and no predicted increase in demand in the medium to long-term.
- 3.15. We believe amalgamating Duncombe and Montem – in effect closing one and enlarging the other – will ensure their long-term viability.
- 3.16. Amalgamating the two schools would bring together the strengths of both and enable us to maximise the large Victorian site of one of the two schools.
- 3.17. The proposal would be for a single amalgamated two-form Entry school with capacity for three-forms of entry in higher year groups to ensure that every child currently attending both schools will be guaranteed a place in the amalgamated school.
- 3.18. This feasibility study will assess the best site for the amalgamated school and makes a recommendation accordingly.

4. Feedback from Schools and Stakeholders

- 4.1. The schools raised several areas of concern which we have summarised into themes to ensure we have a full and transparent view of the impact of any potential changes.
- 4.2. **Reliability of roll projection data** – data has been unreliable in the past, and inner-London numbers do fluctuate, and may not necessarily capture future policy housing policy changes or potential building developments. This could mean any closure or amalgamation is not the right decision for the long term as it limits local capacity to accommodate any potential pupil increases.
- 4.3. **Vacated school site being taken over by a new school** – if permission is sought from the Department for Education to dispose of a school site, it could then be taken over by an Academy Trust who can open a new school on the site.
- 4.4. **Complexity of one school being in a Federation with another school and the other not** – this means they have different governance and staffing structures and what impact this would have on any organisational staffing changes.
- 4.5. **Impact on the existing federation** – if the school in an existing federation is closed, what impact would this have.
- 4.6. **Managing larger pupil numbers in higher year groups** – from Year 2 upwards, a combined school would exceed two forms of entry.

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- 4.8. **Loss of pupils** – uncertainty caused by making any proposed change could lead to a further decrease in pupil numbers.
 - 4.9. **Impact on other provision** – one school has an ARP and a special school co-located on site which would be impacted by these changes.
 - 4.10. **Transparent decision-making process** – concern that the decision-making process may not be transparent.

5. Buildings and site condition

5.1. Buildings and Accommodation

5.1.1. Montem School

- 5.1.1.1. Montem school is a Victorian built school currently accommodating a 2 FE primary school with plans to operate as a 1.5FE school from September 2024. The school includes a nursery and 2-year-old classes.
- 5.1.1.2. The main school block also accommodates Samuel Rhodes Special Primary school (SRS) on the top floor who also have one SEN room on the ground floor for pupils who cannot easily access the top floor.
- 5.1.1.3. 
- 5.1.1.4. The school also accommodates on Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP) on the ground floor in the main block to support children with Autistic Spectrum Conditions. This is a borough-wide resource, and children are placed there by the Local Authority. Location of the ARP requires a whole school approach to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- 5.1.1.5. The school is situated directly off Hornsey Road (A103) and close by the junction with Seven Sisters Road (A503). The Andover Estate is close by. The building is Grade II listed.
- 5.1.1.6. The overall site area is 5,060 m² and this main school Gross Internal Floor Area (GIFA) is large at 4,162m². The building is configured over a ground and three upper floors with a basement and three mezzanine levels. There are two platform lifts in the building. The main lift covers to the fourth level with a further lift serving upward to Samuel Rhodes school on the top floor.
- 5.1.1.7. The ground floor houses the nursery, reception, and the ARP service all with direct access to the external play areas as well as a hall and admin space. The upper floors include classrooms, large specialist rooms (music, art, library), small and large group rooms and staff facilities, storage etc. There are two additional halls located on the first and second levels as well as the community hall in the smaller block. The dining room and kitchen are on the first floor though some pupils eat on the ground floor and the top floor necessitating transport of food using the lifts.
- 5.1.1.8. In total, there are 22 large classroom spaces excluding the art, music, library and 3 large group rooms. Assuming SRS school were to vacate the top floor, the building could comfortably accommodate the amalgamated school. Some changes of space

usage and minor building adaptations may be required during the initial years when there would be three-form entry requirement at the older year groups.

5.1.1.10. The external areas are a reasonable size and accommodate:

- Traditional discrete playground areas and rubberised soft play areas
- A small roof terrace play area
- a fenced in artificial grass football pitch area to the front of the school
- Small-planted areas and some trees

5.1.1.11. It is likely some investment in the external areas would be required to support the amalgamation, but this would not be extensive.

5.1.2. Duncombe School

5.1.2.1. Duncombe school is also a Victorian built school accommodating a 2FE primary school with two nursery classes and a 2-year-old class. There are several smaller ancillary single-storey blocks on the site.

5.1.2.2. The school is situated off Sussex Way, part of the block between Sussex Way and the Hornsey Road (A103). Directly adjacent is the small Sussex Way Gardens and close by is Elthorne Park. The Elthorne Estate is a short walk away.

5.1.2.3. Adjacent to the school and accessible from the school grounds is a large four-storey Victorian end of terrace house with potential for five bedrooms. This was previously the premises managers accommodation, and it is now used by the school as classrooms and meeting rooms including a confidential meeting room shared with partner agencies. The school has previously indicated that the house is no longer required. Alternative uses are being investigated

Amalgamation of the schools onto the Duncombe site may require a review of this to determine the potential to continue to use the house as a school resource.

5.1.2.4. The overall site area is circa 4,000m² and the main school Gross Internal Floor Area (GIFA) is large at 3,016m². The building is configured over a ground and two upper floors with a basement and two mezzanine levels. There is currently no lift in the building.

- 5.1.2.5. The ground floor has six large class spaces and a large nursery space that could be partitioned further. The two upper floors have each six full size classrooms; two currently configured as an Art room and ICT room plus a library and large learning space. The mezzanine levels can also accommodate a further three learning spaces. There are three hall spaces one on each main floor with the kitchen and dining room (hall) on the ground floor. Staff facilities and administration and storage spaces are dispersed throughout the building.
- 5.1.2.6. In total there are 20 large class spaces excluding the library and learning spaces, the premises manager's house and the potential to partition the large nursery area further. The building and site could accommodate the amalgamated school with adjustments to facilitate the 3FE in the higher year groups.
- 5.1.2.7. The external areas are a good size and accommodate:
- A large KS1 playground to the front recently modernised
 - Separate EYS spaces for two-year-olds, nursery and reception
 - Two KS2 play areas; one currently for yrs 5 and 6 including an all weather football pitch and a yr 3 and 4 playground to the back.
 - Soft landscaping and trees on-site and pond area
- 5.1.2.8. The school has invested in improvements to the KS1 and reception playgrounds and have plans for further investment in the KS2 and early years play areas. It is likely some investment in the external areas would be required to support the amalgamation but this would not be extensive.

5.1.3. Summary

- 5.1.4. Both schools are large 2FE Victorian buildings and both have the potential to accommodate the amalgamated school. Some change of use of spaces and potential adaptations to spaces may be required, particularly to support the 3FE's in the older year groups on amalgamation. It is worth noting that were a new 2FE primary school with 2 nursery classes to be built on either site then the DfE area guidelines for primary schools would specify and fund a school with an internal GIFA of order of 2,677m². Although configured differently to a modern build, both buildings exceed this space, and Montem has a significantly larger GIFA.
- 5.1.5. Duncombe is situated on a quieter street with better configured external spaces, an adjacent garden space and a short distance from a park. Montem is on a busy main route, the Hornsey Road with less attractive external spaces and further from any park facilities. Montem has lift access to main floors ensuring the school is accessible to all, Duncombe does not have lift access.

5.2. Suitability to deliver existing and likely expansion of ARP provision

- 5.2.1. **Montem school building** already incorporates an ARP on the ground floor. This ARP could immediately expand into the adjacent vacated SRS SEN space. Further expansion would be possible in future years as the 3FE year groups leave the school or by utilising the ground floor community space and/or the premises managers flat once this became vacant.
- 5.2.2. The **Duncombe school building** has potential for a SEND facility/ARP on the ground floor with access to an outside courtyard area and there is also a sensory room located in the infant playground area. Once the 3FE's year groups gradually leave the school additional options for further expansion of the ARP would be available.

5.3. Building condition and maintenance

- 5.3.1. Table 1 shows the level of investment required to maintain the schools over a one- to five-year timescale following recent assessments of the condition of both schools:

Table 1: level of investment required

Maintenance	Priority 1 (Y1)	Priority 2 (Y2)	Priority 3 (Yrs 3 - 5)	Total Years 1 - 5
Duncombe	£64,567.67	£68,894.51	£357,586.58	£491,048.76
Montem	£ -	£292,533.00	£140,457.00	£432,990.00

- 5.3.2. The figures have been obtained from condition reports carried out by external building surveyors. The latest condition report for Montem was received in 2022, while the latest available report for Duncombe is 2018.
- 5.3.3. In recent years, Islington Council has completed several capital projects at Montem Primary school including:
- Replacement of the two old platform lifts with new models during the Summer of 2023
 - Works to the heating systems in advance of final commissioning of a connection to the adjacent National Grid substation to facilitate the delivery of waste heat from the substation to the school - 2022/23

- Repairs and refurbishment to the Northwest elevation windows/brickwork and the enclosed canopy windows 2020/21
- Upgrades to ventilation systems in the kitchen - 2020/21
- Boiler Replacement- 2016/17

5.3.4. Works will be required to refurbish and repair the remaining window elevations at Montem. These works were put on hold pending confirmation of Islington's school's decarbonisation programme and scope of works. Double glazing of windows will be a requirement to support the introduction of heat pumps at the school and the original planned window works included refurbishment and repairs but not double glazing. The windows are being assessed to identify the urgency to progress with this work. Were Montem to be the site of the amalgamated school this supporting capital investment would be required which would increase the capital costs.

5.3.5. In recent years, Islington Council completed these capital works at Duncombe:

- Upgrades to ventilation systems in the kitchen in - 2022/23
- Funding of roof repair works following leaks – 2022/23
- Boiler Replacement - 2018/19
- Duncombe school already has double glazing in the main building

5.3.6. Maintenance and repair works are delegated to schools and so additional repairs and maintenance tasks will have been undertaken at both schools.

5.3.7. In summary, the capital and maintenance investment required at both schools over a five-year horizon is similar with higher amounts in the initial years at Montem and later years at Duncombe. It should be noted that the Duncombe costs relate to maintenance of the existing facilities and would not cover the significant capital investment that would be required to install a lift in the school. Likewise, double-glazing costs for windows at Montem are not included.

5.4. Energy and Decarbonisation

5.4.1. Energy Rating and Use

5.4.2. The current energy performance operational rating (DEC) for both sites is:

- Montem School: D
- Duncombe School: C

5.5. Decarbonisation and Local Heat Network

5.5.1. Decarbonisation of the council's schools forms a key element of the overall net zero carbon programme. Islington Council is working towards decarbonising schools by 2030 in line with the council's net zero carbon strategy.

5.5.2. Since 2022, LBI has completed decarbonisation feasibility studies for community schools and funding has been received for two implementation projects to-date; the installation of an Air Source Heat Pump (ASHP) at one primary school and the installation of a Ground Source Heat Pump at a special school site where major redevelopment works are underway.

5.5.3. The decarbonisation studies in general recommend changing from gas boiler heating to ASHPs with required supporting building fabric improvements such as double glazing, roof and wall insulation and the provision of energy efficiency measures such as solar panels and LED lighting. The phasing of the programme across schools is primarily driven by the age of the main boiler and as both Montem (~7yrs) and Duncombe (~5yrs) have relatively newer boilers we would anticipate both schools would be to the back end of the programme, later this decade.

5.5.4. The approach to decarbonising older Victorian buildings, such as Montem and Duncombe, will be complex as significant building fabric improvements will be required to ensure the ASHPs operate efficiently. In particular, double-glazing is advised. Duncombe school currently has window double glazing in the main block and two smaller blocks. However, the condition and robustness of the windows will need to be reviewed closer to the timescale for decarbonisation. Montem school does not have double glazing and as a Grade 2 listed building there may be planning issues around achieving this, which may impact on the decarbonisation solution.

5.5.5. It should be noted that the S106 commitments of a National Grid (NG) station development project close to Montem school required that a connection be provided between the substation and school networks to supply waste heat to the school. Infrastructure works were undertaken in previous years at the school to support this, but due to delays in the completion of the substation and the adjacent housing development project, followed by further COVID delays, this connection is not yet operational. Work has been ongoing this past year to carry out necessary upgrades

to commission the connection as well as to put a legal heat supply agreement in place between the parties.

- 5.5.6. The terms of the S106 require waste heat to be delivered free for the first five years and at 10% below the agreed market rate thereafter. This will not provide all the heat required by the school but should assist in reducing the school's energy bills in future years. It should be noted that this connection has now been delayed further due to maintenance issues at the NG substation. However, in principle, this heat source should be available to Montem school going forward.

5.6. Potential alternatives for site use

5.7. Educational Usage

- 5.7.1. Our intention would be to utilise the vacated site for other educational related purposes. There would be implications in terms of school land disposal were this not to be the case.
- 5.7.2. The longer-term usage of the vacated school following the Phase 1 school reorganisation (the Half-Moon crescent education site) may impact on the determination of the usage of the Phase 2 vacated site. With two sites in consideration for longer term occupancy from September 2024 careful analysis of the optimum location for known education requirements will be necessary.
- 5.7.3. Both Montem and Duncombe school buildings are large meaning the vacated school would potentially need to accommodate multiple user groups leading to significant works to reconfigure the spaces, improve accessibility, segregate access and implement any necessary safeguarding controls between the different groups.
- 5.7.4. The types of education usage that could be envisaged at the vacated school site include:
- Additional capacity for SEND provision, where pupil numbers are growing though this may be limited somewhat due to the planned nearby special academy
 - Additional provision for the New River College Pupil Referral Unit. The New River College provision for pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs is currently decanted at the Half-moon crescent education site while their permanent base is being redeveloped. The NRC will be trialling new services and expanding services at this site in line with the LBI SEND Strategy and national SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan. The longer term site for these expanded services is to be determined but the vacated phase 2 reorganisation site could be an option for these services.
 - Nursery/ early years provision

- Other education and children's related council services
- Education related companies or charities
- Provision of decant space for other schools where developments are occurring including during the decarbonisation work's programme

5.7.5. While both school sites could be used for alternative educational usage the Montem site has DDA access and is also potentially better served in terms of transport links.

5.8. Other Development Potential

- 5.8.1. In the longer term should all or part of the vacated site be surplus to educational requirements then the site may offer alternative development opportunities; subject to school land disposal requirements.
- 5.8.2. In this regard Duncombe is close by the Elthorne Estate and Montem is close by the Andover Estate therefore both sites could offer potential to contribute to the council's priority of providing good quality affordable housing for residents in the borough.
- 5.8.3. However, both schools are Victorian builds so obtaining planning permission to demolish either in order to develop housing may present challenges. In this regard Montem, a Grade 2 listed building would require listed building consent for any proposed changes. The sale of the building/site to accommodate private residences may be the most likely scenario were this site to be freed for development.

6. Financial position and running costs

6.1. Current financial position

6.1.1. Duncombe

6.1.1.1. Duncombe closed 2022-23 financial year in a cumulative deficit of -£276k. The ratified budget submitted in May 2023 for the three financial years ending in 2025-26 indicated the school would end 2023-24 with a reduced cumulative deficit of -£130k; an in-year surplus of £146k.

6.1.1.2. Furthermore, based on the submitted ratified budget, the position was set to worsen by the end of 2025-26 with a cumulative deficit of -£447k

6.1.1.3. The current financial position of the school has considerably improved with the projected outturn for 2023-24 reporting a cumulative surplus of £39k; meaning the school is reporting generated in-year savings equivalent to £169k.

6.1.1.4. It should be noted that the current Headteacher inherited an unknown deficit during 2019-20 where the school has undergone several staffing organisational changes and reduced spend to control and reduce the deficit in accordance with the regulations set out within the Scheme for Financing Schools.

6.1.1.5. Despite the improved financial position, based on the ratified budgets and current government funding, it is likely that the school will return to a cumulative deficit by the end of the third year, 2025-26.

6.1.2. Montem

6.1.2.1. Montem closed 2022-23 financial year in a cumulative deficit of -£111k. The ratified budget submitted in May 2023 for the three financial years ending in 2025-26 indicated the school would end 2023-24 with an increased cumulative deficit of -£167k; an in-year deficit of -£56k.

6.1.2.2. Furthermore, based on the submitted ratified budget, the position was set to worsen by the end of 2025-26 with a cumulative deficit of -£446k

6.1.2.3. The current financial position of the school has remained static with the projected outturn for 2023-24 reporting a cumulative deficit of -£169k; a movement of -£2k when compared to the budget and indicating no significant change across the three financial years.

6.2. Site running costs

6.2.1. Using the latest benchmarking data available which shows data up to and including 2021-22, both schools have been measured against the preceding three-year average (2019-2022). The following indicators have been taken into consideration; gas; electricity and water; and national non-domestic rates (NNDR).

6.2.2. Duncombe

- Gas; electricity and water: The three-year average equates to £36k a year
- NNDR: equates to £63.6k a year

6.2.3. Montem

- Gas; electricity and water: The three-year average equates to £52k a year
- NNDR: equates to £63.7k a year

6.3. Financial improvement plan

6.3.1. Duncombe

6.3.1.1. Despite the improved financial position, based on the ratified budgets and current government funding, it is likely that the school will return to a cumulative deficit by the end of the third year, 2025-26.

6.3.2. Montem

6.3.2.1. The school is currently unable to demonstrate a balanced budget by the end of the financial planning period, 2025-26. The school are developing budget scenarios in which to reduce the deficit.

6.3.2.2. In accordance with the Scheme for Financing Schools regulations, all Islington schools are required to submit budget reforecasts for financial years 2024-25 and 2025-26. This process will determine the latest position schools are anticipating to be at the end of the financial planning period. This will include updated Deficit Recovery plans to demonstrate each school's financial viability.

6.4. Financial outcome from delivery of the programme

The proposal provides an opportunity to create an amalgamated school with a balanced budget.

7. Location

7.1. Geographical location with nearest schools by distance

- 7.1.1. Based on the official reference points for each school, as used by School Admissions, there is only one primary school within 500m of Duncombe Primary School, as the crow flies – St Mark's.
- 7.1.2. Eight other Islington primary schools are located more than 500m but within 1km of Duncombe. Apart from Montem, these are: Christ the King, Ashmount, St John's Upper Holloway, Yerbury, Pooles Park, Whitehall Park and Grafton.
- 7.1.3. There are four primary schools within 500m of Montem Primary School – Pakeman, Grafton, Pooles Park and St Mark's.
- 7.1.4. There are another three primary schools located more than 500m but within 1km of Montem – Christ the King, Duncombe and Ambler.

7.2. Mapping of pupil home addresses

- 7.2.1. According to the Autumn 2023 census, more than 80 per cent of pupils at Duncombe and Montem Primary Schools attend the school that is closest to their home address.
- 7.2.2. More of the existing pupils at Montem and Duncombe live closer to the Duncombe site than Montem, with over 70 per cent within 1km of Duncombe school, compared to 61 per cent within 1km of Montem.
- 7.2.3. See Appendix 1 for maps plotting the location of each pupil.

7.3. Transport links

- 7.3.1. There are several bus stops very close to Duncombe school on Hornsey Road for the 91 (Crouch End – Trafalgar Square) and 210 (Finsbury Park – Brent Cross) bus routes. Bus stops for the 41 bus (Archway – Tottenham Hale) can be found a couple of hundred metres to the north along Hornsey Road. Slightly further away, Holloway Road is serviced by several other bus routes – the 17 (Archway – London Bridge), 43 (Friern Barnet – London Bridge) and 263 (Barnet Hospital – Highbury Barn).
- 7.3.2. The nearest train station to Duncombe is Upper Holloway, an eight minute walk away. Upper Holloway is on the London Overground network.
- 7.3.3. The nearest London Underground station to Duncombe is Archway, on the Northern line, which is about a 15-minute walk from the school.

- 7.3.4. Montem is situated close to a number of bus stops along Hornsey Road and Seven Sisters Road. These cover the following bus routes: 4 (Archway - Blackfriars), 29 (Lordship Lane – Trafalgar Square), 91 (Tottenham – Trafalgar Square), 153 (Finsbury Park – Liverpool Street), 253 (Hackney Central - Euston), 254 (Aldgate – Caledonian Road), and 259 (Edmonton Green – Pentonville Road).
- 7.3.5. The nearest London Underground station to Montem as the crow flies is Arsenal station on the Piccadilly line. However, due to the layout of the roads, it would take 22 minutes to walk to Arsenal. Finsbury Park is quicker to walk to, taking just 12 minutes. Finsbury Park is on the Victoria and Piccadilly lines and is part of the Thameslink and Great Northern rail networks. Montem is also within a mile of Holloway Road on the Piccadilly line and Upper Holloway station on the Overground.
- 7.3.6. All the walking times in the section above are based on estimates from Google Maps, with half a mile taking 12 minutes to walk.

7.4. Housing plan roadmap

- 7.4.1. Islington commission the GLA to produce our School Roll Projections. These are updated annually to meet the requirements of the DfE's statutory School Capacity Survey data collection. The GLA produce an overarching population model, which we then have the option of adjusting using the latest data on housing developments each year. Islington takes up this option each year, supplying the GLA with updates on the number of new properties that are due to be developed each year in the future, and confirming the number that have been completed in previous years. This information is provided at ward level. Therefore, our School Roll Projections always considers the latest housing development plans.

8. Air quality and congestion

8.1. Pollution

- 8.1.1. Since 2018, Islington Council has been measuring air pollution using diffusion tubes at all of the schools in the borough. The latest results available are for 2021. Across all schools, the average air pollution level for Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) was 22µg/m³. The average result for Duncombe in 2021 was lower than the average at 19µg/m³, a fall from 29µg/m³ in 2018. In 2018, Montem had one of the highest levels of NO₂ at 40 µg/m³. However, since 2018 the average for Montem has fallen by a third to 26 µg/m³ in 2021.
- 8.1.2. From March 2019, Duncombe has been part of the School Street Scheme. This is where a road with a school temporarily closes to become a pedestrian and cycle zone during the school's opening and closing times. By temporarily closing roads outside schools this will help to reduce congestion and pollution at the school gates as well as make it easier and safer for children to get to and from school.
- 8.1.3. Due to the location of Montem, it is not possible to introduce traditional School Street measures. In early 2023, a public consultation was held to deliver improvements to the environment outside Montem and Samuel Rhodes Primary Schools on Hornsey Road. Improvements were planned because of this consultation, including new trees and low-level planting beds, installing cycle parking, and widening the pavement outside the school. A new cycleway from the junction of Seven Sisters Road to the pedestrian crossing outside Montem and Samuel Rhodes Primary Schools was also proposed. Works began at the end of July and at the time of writing are ongoing.

8.2. Congestion

- 8.2.1. The School Street Scheme in place at Duncombe closes the road outside the school during the school's opening and closing times to reduce congestion.
- 8.2.2. The improvements being put in place outside Montem school also aim to reduce congestion by encouraging alternative methods of getting to the school.

9. Equality Impact Assessment

9.1. Summary findings from Equality Impact Assessment

- 9.1.1. Both schools have a high-level of free school meal eligibility at around 55% which is higher than the borough average of 41%.
- 9.1.2. Both schools have a significantly high-level of children with English as an Additional Language (over 65%) which is much higher than the borough average.
- 9.1.3. White-Turkish/Turkish-Cypriot, Asian-Bangladeshi, Black-Caribbean, Black-African and Other Ethnic Groups are statistically significantly over-represented at Duncombe.
- 9.1.4. White-Turkish/Turkish-Cypriot, Asian-Bangladeshi, Black-African and Other Ethnic Groups are statistically significantly over-represented at Montem.
- 9.1.5. There is a significant risk of disproportional impact on disadvantaged groups following any closure or amalgamation. This will need to be carefully assessed for the two school communities to ensure that the proposal does not disadvantage communities further and provides a strong viable school for the future of the communities impacted. Close working with both schools will be critical to mitigate and monitor this risk. Both schools have great strengths and expertise in bringing communities together and delivering strong outcomes for children that will be essential in this process.
- 9.1.6. An amalgamation would better mitigate the risk of disproportional impact because all pupils will be guaranteed a place in the amalgamated school, and parents will not need to take any actions to continue their children's education in a good community school. An amalgamation secures the school places for all and families will be supported throughout the process. Further, amalgamation provides the opportunity for pupils to stay with their friends and familiar staff.
- 9.1.7. As set out in section in section 7, there are another four community schools within 500m of Montem primary school. It would therefore be possible to further support those pupils and families who live to the South of Montem to attend an alternative good community school, should the Duncombe site be too far for any families who do not want to travel.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

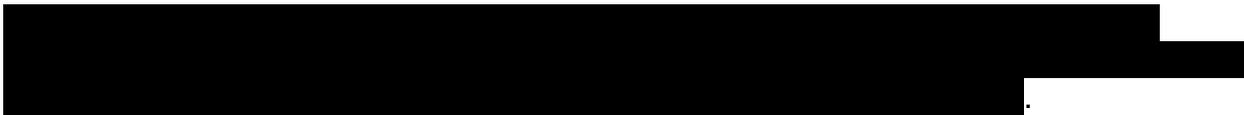
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

11. Risks and concerns

- 11.1. The schools themselves have identified some risks and concerns and there are others that we must consider before proposing an amalgamation or closure.
- 11.2. **Reliability of roll projection data** – the schools are concerned that data has been unreliable in the past, and inner-London numbers do fluctuate, and may not necessarily capture future policy housing policy changes or potential building developments. Whilst this is a real risk, existing pupil numbers are falling and are already not high enough. Our School Roll Projections always consider the latest housing development plans, and all analysis indicates that pupil numbers will continue to fall. Nevertheless, should pupil numbers unexpectedly increase, these could be accommodated in the amalgamated school, or in one of the other schools in the planning area, which all have surplus capacity.
- 11.3. **The future location of Samuel Rhodes Special Primary school.** If Montem school was to close following amalgamation with Duncombe Primary school, Samuel Rhodes would need to move to a new location, and this needs to be considered alongside any timetable for the amalgamation.
- 11.4. **Vacated school site being taken over by a new school** – schools are concerned that if Islington seeks permission from the Department for Education to dispose of a school site, it could then be taken over by an Academy Trust who can open a new school on the site. Our intention would be to utilise the vacated site for other educational related purposes and would not seek to dispose of the site.
- 11.5. **Complexity of one school being in a Federation with another school and the other not** – the schools have raised this concern as the schools have different governance and staffing structures and it is not clear what impact this would have on any organisational staffing changes. Should the proposal to amalgamate proceed as proposed staff at both Montem and Duncombe would then be subject to the same staffing consultation related to any organisational change and have equal opportunity in the process.
- 11.6. **Impact on the existing federation** – should the proposal to amalgamate proceed as recommended, the Edventure Federation would be dissolved as it would only have one school left within it.
- 11.7. **Managing larger pupil numbers in higher year groups** – from Year 2 upwards, a combined school would exceed two forms of entry and the amalgamated school would need a plan to manage this. Based on current pupil numbers, the amalgamated school would need to have 19 classrooms to accommodate all existing pupils. Both schools have sufficient classrooms and capacity to accommodate this. Both schools have leadership and teaching expertise to run a curriculum across 3 going to 2 Form Entry school.

11.8.



- 11.9. **Loss of pupils** – there is a real concern that the uncertainty caused by making any proposed change could lead to a further decrease in pupil numbers. This is a real risk and needs to be considered. We will ensure that all interested parties are aware that no changes will happen in the current academic year.
- 11.10. **Impact on staff** – the schools are very concerned about the impact on staff well-being and mental health and the risk of losing good teachers during a period of uncertainty. The Local Authority will work on a plan with the leadership of the two schools to ensure a good level of support that works in each school's context is provided to both staff groups.
- 11.11. **How will a structure and design be developed for the proposed amalgamated school without a clear leadership structure** – it will be challenging to deliver a school design and organisational structure and manage the organisational change process without a defined and established leadership for the proposed school. There is no single overarching body or posts across both schools.
- 11.12. **Impact on other provision** – one school has an ARP and a special school co-located on site which would be impacted by these changes.
- 11.13. **Transparent decision-making process** – the schools raised concerns that the decision-making process may not be transparent. Each stage of the process can only proceed with approval from Islington's Executive and following an informal consultation and a representation period after any formal proposal is made. All parents, staff, pupils and any other interested party will have the opportunity to input into the consultation and representation period and we will arrange parent and community meetings where residents can question senior staff and Councillors.
- 11.14. A full risk analysis will be conducted should the proposal move forward.

12. Factors underpinning the recommendation

Key factors from the feasibility study were extracted and scored to inform the recommendation on which school site and which school name should be proposed for the amalgamated school. A panel of officers discussed and scored the factors for each school as set out in the table below.

Category	Number	Criteria	Duncombe Score	Montem Score
A. Building site and condition	A1	School has capacity to accommodate 420 pupils from R to Y6	3	3
A. Building site and condition	A2	School has capacity to accommodate existing pupil numbers from nursery up.	1	2
A. Building site and condition		School site meets minimum Gross Internal Floor Area (GIFA) requirement of 2,677 square metres for a two-form entry school with two nursery classes	2	3
A. Building site and condition		School has 20 individual classrooms	2	3

A. Building site and condition		School site has lift to all floors	0	1
A. Building site and condition		Building has double-glazing on all windows	1	0
B. Financial position and running costs		Ratified budget in May 2023 indicates school will end 2023-2024 with an in-year surplus	2	0
B. Financial Position and running costs		Ratified budget in May 2023 indicates school will end 2025-2026 with a surplus	0	0
C. Financial Position and running costs		EPC rating of E (minimum rating for commercial let)	2	2
D. Location		Percentage of Duncombe and Montem pupils that live within 1km of school site (<50%=0; 50-60=1;60-70=2;>70=3)	3	2
C. Location		School is only school in local area, with fewer than three other schools within	3	0

		500m of school location		
D. Air quality and congestion		Nitrogen Dioxide (NO ₂) levels are in top quartile of all Islington schools for the lowest annual mean readings (between 17 and 20µg m ⁻³)	2	0
E. Ofsted		Ofsted rating of 'good'	2	2
Total			23	18

The scoring key:

0	The school does not meet the criteria
1	The school partially meets the criteria
2	The school meets the criteria in full
3	The school exceeds the criteria

13. Recommendation

13.1.1. Based on the feasibility study, our recommendation is that we consult on a proposal to amalgamate Duncombe and Montem Primary Schools on the Duncombe site and keep the Duncombe name and Ofsted number.

13.1.2. We do not believe closure of either school would be in the best interests of the children or school communities. Closing one school creates a significant risk that the displaced pupils may not have a school place after the school is closed, as we are not permitted

to automatically enrol pupils in another school. Closure of one school would also result in one staff group being made redundant.

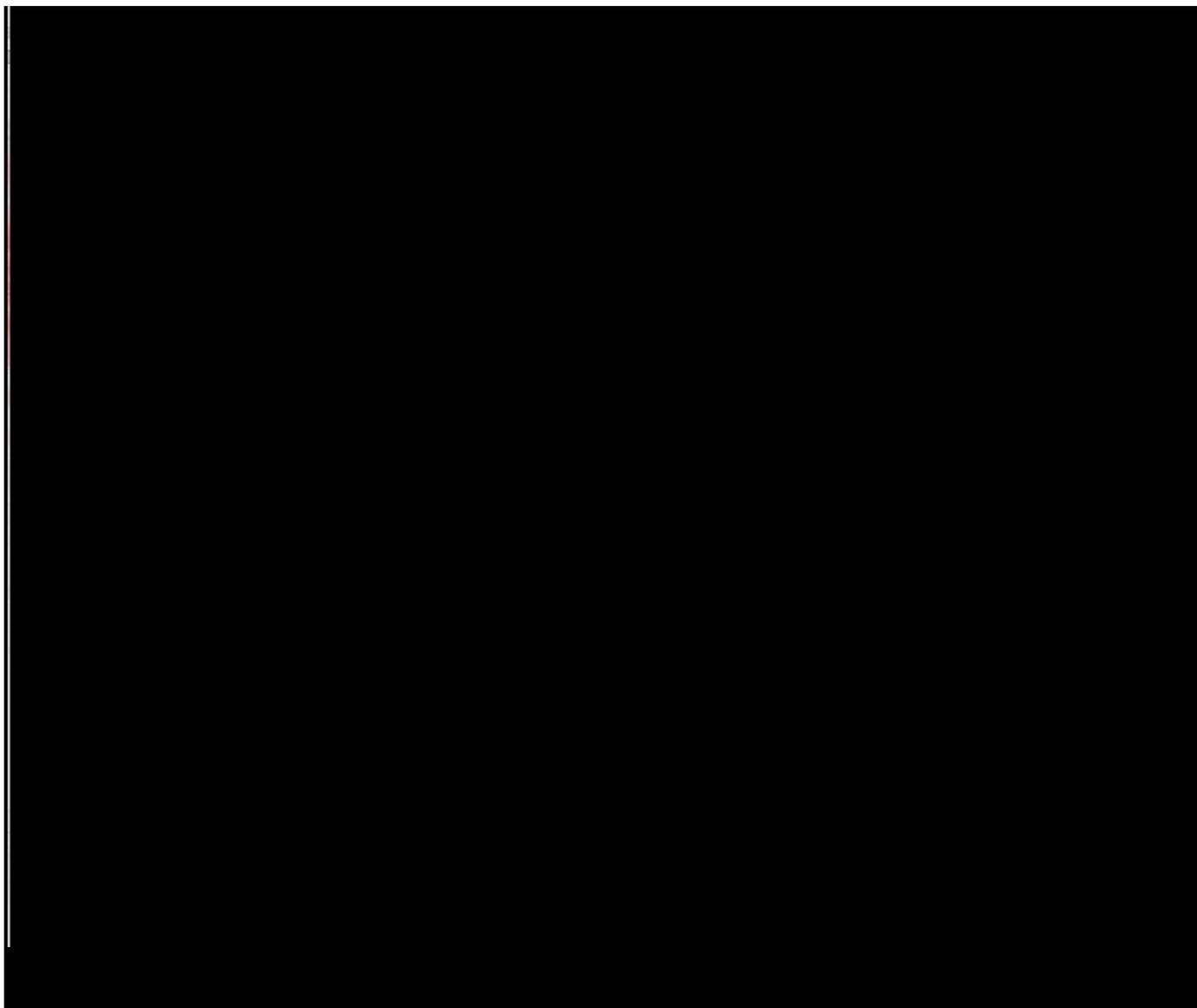
- 13.1.3. We are recommending an amalgamation due to the high levels of vulnerable and disadvantaged pupils attending both schools. Amalgamation will ensure all existing pupils will be guaranteed a place at the amalgamated school and will not be required to apply for another school place.
- 13.1.4. Amalgamation will also bring benefits to staff at both schools whose roles will be ring-fenced, and their culture and teaching practices included in the amalgamated school. Montem leadership and staff have expertise of working across two schools and the delivery of a flexible curriculum model that will support the delivery of a multi-form-entry school.
- 13.1.5. We are recommending the Duncombe site for the amalgamated school because of these key factors:
- More pupils from both schools live nearest to Duncombe
 - Air pollution and traffic congestion is lower in the Duncombe area
 - Montem has more neighbouring schools than Duncombe meaning there are more alternative options for any parent with children currently at Montem who may not want to travel to Duncombe, compared to the options for parents with children at Duncombe
- 13.1.6. We are recommending that the proposal includes keeping the Duncombe school name and Ofsted number as this would ensure the newly amalgamated school will not start with an enhanced deficit at the point of amalgamation. This would safeguard the financial position of the school and help secure the school's long-term future. At the point of amalgamation, the deficit budget of the closing school would revert to the Local Authority. By technically closing Montem which has a projected deficit, this would provide a more secure start for the amalgamated school as it would start without a deficit budget.

Appendix 1: pupil residences

Duncombe Pupil residences based on January 2023 school census

Legend

- Duncombe School
- Pupil residence (size of circle relates to number of pupils) Islington boundary
- Other LAs boundaries



Montem Pupil residences based on January 2023 school census

Legend

- Montem School
- Pupil residence (size of circle relates to number of pupils) Islington boundary
- Other LAs boundaries

