

JAMES WILD MP

Member of Parliament for North West Norfolk



HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Oliver Burwood, CEO
By email: info@dnearg.org

1 November 2024

Dear Oliver,

Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust: Brancaster Consultation Response

I am responding as the Member of Parliament for North West Norfolk to express serious concerns regarding DNEAT's proposal to merge Brancaster Church of England Primary Academy with Docking Church of England Primary Academy from 1st January 2025.

Brancaster Primary School is at the heart of the local community. Local parents and your broader community feel this proposal has been sprung on them without taking account of the impact on the children and the village and there has been a lack of serious attempts to work with them to look at options to continue to operate the school. As was apparent at the public meeting on 17th October, people do not feel the Trust has acted with the care and compassion they would expect.

Inadequate consultation

As I said at the public meeting, the consultation period is far too short. While it is the minimum period permitted under the Code, it is wholly inadequate and does not allow parents and people in the local community to fully understand the scope of the proposal and respond properly. Conducting the consultation over the half term period further limits the ability of people to respond. It does not give parents time to consider the impact on their children and their options. Given the significance of this decision, parents and the wider community deserved earlier engagement on options and a longer consultation period.

Damaging impact on children's education

The proposal to close Brancaster on 1st January must be dropped. I am very concerned that the Trust is proposing closing a school mid-year which would be very disruptive to the education of pupils and particularly for the cohort of children due to take their SATs in year 6. Mid-year transitions provide families with limited time to explore alternative placements and make informed decisions about their children's education. As one parent said at the public meeting, she was having to try and find an alternative school at very short notice which was causing her and her child considerable distress.

Pupil number forecasts


Brancaster's catchment could range between 30-37 pupils, with individual cohorts likely falling below the current operating PAN of 8, and parental preference modelling suggesting a continued decline due to these smaller numbers. However, as Norfolk County Council has set out in its response, the proposed plans do not fully account for the estimated catchment size or the historically positive preference shown by the local community for smaller class sizes. It states the situation facing Brancaster is not an uncommon one.

In contrast, Docking's projected catchment of 80-90 pupils - potentially increasing to 100-120 with external parental preferences—indicates the school may approach its capacity in the near future taking account of longer-term housing in the area. The potential for Docking to reach its capacity without space to expand is an obvious concern.

Whilst recognising the challenges that have motivated this proposal including small pupil numbers, I recommend a more collaborative approach working with the local community, county council, and other interested parties to find a solution that all can agree on.

Therefore, I urge DNEAT to withdraw this proposal and rethink the plans to minimise the impact and disruption on the education of pupils currently at Brancaster primary.

Yours etc.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "James Wild". The signature is written in a cursive style and is contained within a white rectangular box.

James Wild MP