

Consultation about the potential closure of Viking Primary School and merger into Downe Manor Primary School: Questions and Answer Document

A decision will soon be taken on whether to launch a public consultation on the future organisation of Downe Manor Primary School and Viking Primary School.

A report published ahead of an upcoming decision recommends consulting on a range of options for Downe Manor and Viking. This reflects the significant fall in the number of children starting school over the past decade and the need to ensure that schools are as educationally and financially sustainable as possible.

That decision is due to be taken by the Cabinet Member for a Fairer Start on 22 September. If the decision is approved, a public consultation would invite residents, parents, staff and governors to share their views on a range of options for the future organisation of Downe Manor and Viking. It is expected that consultation would start on 5 October 2026.

No decisions have been made about the future of either school. If a consultation is approved, it would take place during October and November. The council's cabinet would then consider the responses before deciding whether to publish a statutory proposal for any changes.

This question and answer document is organised into the following sections:

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1. Rationale - why is this being considered?

1.1. What is being considered?

The council is considering reducing primary school capacity in Northolt West End ward. This is in response to pupil numbers reducing and forecast to remain much lower than the capacity of the schools. The aim of the process is to give schools the best chance to be educationally and financially sustainable and so serve the community as effectively as possible.

There are several options that the council has considered. The council's current preferred option is to close Viking Primary School and merge with nearby Downe Manor Primary School. This would mean that Viking Primary School would close and its pupils would transfer to Downe Manor Primary School (at its current site on Down Way) at the start of September 2027, and Downe Manor would return to admitting up to 60 pupils in each year group from September 2027.

The preferred option would mean:

- All Downe Manor pupils currently in Reception to Year 5 would continue to attend Downe Manor;
- All Viking pupils currently in Reception to Year 5 who are on roll at the end of this academic year would automatically transfer to Downe Manor Primary School on 1 September 2027;
- Viking Primary School would close on 31 August 2027; and
- Downe Manor Primary School would remain at its current site on Down Way. It would return to admitting up to 60 pupils a year from September 2027, which the site and building are designed for.

1.2. Why does the council believe that this is necessary? Why is the preferred option the most suitable?

- Pupil numbers have reduced and are expected to remain lower – the community does not need as many school places. Viking and Downe Manor have capacity for three classes of pupils each year between them, but only two classes are needed.
- Downe Manor has reduced to 1 class a year (from 2) and Viking is also 1 class a year. Both schools are forecasting financial deficits in all future years – over time this impacts the quality of education.
- Most of the funding that schools receive is based on the number of pupils that they have. This means that schools that have reduced in size, or which have empty places, receive less funding. Over time this negatively impacts the quality of education that they can offer – they have less money for staff, resources, equipment, extracurricular activities and to invest in their buildings. In Ealing there are now 13 council-maintained primary schools in overall financial deficit, compared with 6 schools three years ago.

- All current Viking and Downe Manor pupils could fit in the Downe Manor building, which is newer, has better facilities, and is in better condition than the Viking one. The Downe Manor site and building were designed for two classes a year (60 pupils).
- The Downe Manor building is part of a Private Finance Initiative contract which means that the school has to pay a fixed amount every year towards its maintenance irrespective of how many pupils the school has – this fixed cost is a major reason for the schools' financial difficulties since it reduced to 1 class a year.
- A single school with up to 60 pupils in each year group is more educationally and financially sustainable than two separate schools each of up to 30 pupils a year (especially when one of those schools can accommodate all of the pupils).
- From October 2026, Downe Manor will be part of a federation (The Northala Federation) with Gifford Primary School. Being part of a federation enables the school to share resources and expertise with another local, popular and larger primary school.

1.3. What are the pupil numbers and forecasts?

- There are falling numbers of children in many parts of London. Within Ealing, fewer children being born and living in the local area has resulted in fewer children seeking places in our primary schools. The number of children starting Reception in Ealing has reduced from over 4,600 ten years ago to around 3,700 – a decline of over 900 pupils (20%). Forecasts suggest that Reception cohorts will remain below 3,900 until at least the end of the 2020s.
- The number of Reception places in the borough has already been reduced by over 600 places, across 18 schools by schools reducing in size. However, the sustained decline in pupil numbers, together with the resulting financial pressures on schools, means that the council may now need to consider a broader range of options to ensure a financially sustainable education system.

- Viking and Downe Manor are part of Greenford, Northolt Perivale (GNP West) primary planning area, which also includes 2 academies (St Raphael's and Alec Reed). The council is not the decision maker for school organisation changes for academies.
- Within this planning area, the number of Reception pupils have reduced by nearly 40%, from a peak of 285 in 2014/15 to 175 in 2025/26. In response, Downe Manor reduced from 60 places a year (2 classes) to 30 places a year (1 class), and St Raphael has reduced from 90 places a year to 60 places a year. Viking offers 30 places a year (1 class). Alec Reed Academy offers 90 places a year in the primary phase (3 classes).
- In total, currently there are 210 Reception places available within the GNP West planning area, with capacity for 240+ places. Reception cohorts are forecast to remain below 180 until at least the end of the 2020s.

1.4. Can the Downe Manor building fit in all of the pupils who attend Downe Manor and Viking?

- Yes. The Downe Manor building has accommodation for 2 classes per year, and classes must be limited to 30 pupils each until the end of Year 2. The following table shows the number of pupils on roll at each school in May 2026 for the year groups that would still be in primary school in 2027/28.

Year in 2025/26	YR	Y1	Y2	Y3	Y4
Year in 2027/28	Y2	Y3	Y4	Y5	Y6
Downe Manor	14	25	27	25	44
Viking	27	26	30	28	22
Total	41	51	57	53	66

- If the decision was taken to proceed with the preferred option, parents would continue to have the option to apply for their children to attend a different school through the usual in year admission process. There are vacancies at other local primary schools within reasonable walking distance.

1.5. What other options are there?

Alternative options are:

- **Do nothing:** This would leave both schools in financial difficulty and offers a less secure educational provision for the future.
- **Close Viking Primary School without an amalgamation:** This option would remove one form of entry primary capacity but would not provide the benefits for pupils and families of amalgamation whereby every pupil has certainty of progression to Downe Manor. In this option every family would need to apply for a place at a local school, most probably through the council running a specific admissions process. The potential transfer of pupils to several successor schools would also make pupil transition more complicated and may impact the opportunities for Viking staff to transfer to other local schools. Amalgamation with Downe Manor is expected to provide a more effective transition process and result in a more educationally and financially sustainable school.

- Close the Downe Manor site: This would remove the capacity for two classes a year and so removes too many places. This option would also result in financial challenges for the council due to the deficit at Downe Manor (which would need to be paid if the school closed) and the contractual requirement to continue paying the Private Finance Initiative costs into the future even if the site was not used as a school. The Viking building would require investment in the future to address some of its aging infrastructure and this would be a financial pressure for the school and council. This option is not considered to be the best use of public funds.
- Move Viking into **Downe Manor and close Downe Manor**: This would result in a single school of up to 60 pupils a year (like the preferred option), but through a more complicated process which does not seem justified. This would also require the council to pay off the Downe Manor deficit which would create a financial challenge for the council.
- **Close both Viking and Downe Manor and establish a new school**: This option would involve establishing a completely new institution, including new governance, admissions and organisational arrangements. The council believes that retaining one school as the continuing school provides greater stability for pupils, families and staff, reduces disruption, and enables the benefits of amalgamation to be achieved through a simpler and more efficient process. This option would also require the council to pay off both the Downe Manor and Viking deficits which would create a financial challenge for the council and is not considered to be the best use of public funds.

1.6. Does this affect the partnership that Downe Manor has with Gifford Primary School?

No. Downe Manor is part of a formal partnership with Gifford Primary School, with an Executive Headteacher over both schools. Gifford is a popular, successful large primary school less than 2km from Downe Manor and approximately 1km from Viking. In summer

2026 the governing bodies of Downe Manor and Gifford decided to form a federation (to be called The Northala Federation). The Northala Federation will be formed in October 2026. The formation of the federation would not be affected if the preferred option was implemented. If the preferred option was implemented, Ms Wilson would remain the Executive Headteacher of Gifford and Downe Manor.

1.7. Are other London boroughs also merging or closing schools?

Yes. 31 primary schools in 11 boroughs have closed in the last 3 years. It is anticipated there will be further mergers or closures in the next year or two.

2. The process

2.1. What is the overall process?

It is important to emphasise that this is the start of a process. No decisions have yet been taken. The first stage is for the council's Cabinet Member for a Fairer Start to make a decision about whether to consult on potential changes – this decision is due to be taken on 22 September. The following table sets out the potential overall timetable, but it is subject to change.

Date	Activity
22 Sept 2026	Decision: Cabinet Member decision whether to consult
5 Oct to 13 Nov	Consultation (subject to Cabinet Member decision) takes place with families, staff and others affected by the options.
2 Dec	Decision: Ealing Council's Cabinet consider the consultation responses and decide upon the next steps.

Date	Activity
	• If the decision is to proceed (including any modifications that are considered appropriate after the consultation), the next stage would be to publish a statutory proposal. • If the decision is not to proceed, the process would stop.
8 Feb to 8 March	Statutory Proposal – this is the publication of specific proposals. Any individual can provide comments on the proposals for a 28-day statutory representation period.
24 March	Decision: Ealing Council's Cabinet consider the responses to the statutory proposal and decide whether to implement the proposals or not. • If the decision is to proceed (including any modifications to the proposal that are considered appropriate after the representation period), the proposal would be implemented during April to August • If the decision is not to proceed, the process would stop
31 Aug 2027	If the Cabinet decision is to proceed, the proposal takes effect.

2.2. If consultation is undertaken, who can respond to it?

Anyone with an interest can respond to the consultation, including (but not limited to) pupils, parents and carers, staff, governors, local residents, community groups, and trade unions.

2.3. Who makes the final decision?

Ealing Council would make the three key decisions – whether to consult, whether to publish a statutory proposal, and whether to implement that proposal. At each stage the

council can decide to proceed, to end the process, or to change the proposal (and the next steps would then be dependent upon what the change is).

2.4. Is this a 'done deal'?

No. The current stage is about whether to consult on the options, including the preferred option. If the Cabinet Member decision on 22 September is to consult, the council has to follow a statutory process which is set out in statutory guidance produced by the Department for Education. The process involves a public consultation stage and then following consideration of the consultation, a statutory proposal representation stage so there are two opportunities for anyone interested to share their views.

3. Supporting children through change

3.1. How can parents and carers support children through uncertainty and change?

Periods of uncertainty can be unsettling for children as they often thrive on routine and predictability. Guidance and reassurance from parents and carers helps children feel secure and supported. Here are some suggestions for supporting children through this process.

- There are no 'good' or 'bad' feelings: Encourage children to share their feelings. Reassure them that their emotions are valid.
- Give honest and age-appropriate advice: Explain the situation simply, focus on the present and avoid assumptions about the future. Highlight that change can be uncertain and challenging, but it can also bring new opportunities and experiences.
- Keep routines and stability: A consistent schedule, like family meals and bedtime routines, help provide stability during times of uncertainty.

- Encourage healthy emotional outlets: Activities like drawing or storytelling can help children process their feelings, and reading together can provide an opportunity for children to express emotions and understand change through characters in the book.

3.2. How can parents and carers be prepared for the potential change?

As well as supporting your child or children, the options may represent a change for parents and carers. To help yourself and your child or children, you may find the following helpful:

- Stay informed: Keep up to date with the communications about the options and the process and, if changes proceed, about transition arrangements. Understand how the schools are working together to support pupils through the changes.
- Engage in events: Take part in the activities and events that are part of the consultation and transition so we can hear your views, including Viking parents and carers taking the opportunities to visit Downe Manor.
- Encourage kindness and empathy: Everyone at both school communities is going through an uncertain period, and empathy and kindness help pupils, parents and carers, and staff support each other. Small gestures of friendliness can make a big difference.

Talk about / read books about transition with your child or children: age-appropriate books about change or starting something new can be a good way to start conversations with your child.

4. Potential implications – for pupils at Viking

4.1. Where would pupils go to school if Viking does close and merge into Downe Manor?

- Year 6 pupils would apply for a Year 7 place at high schools by 31 October 2026 as usual. They would then receive their offer on 1 March 2027 and transfer to high school in September 2027.
- All Reception to Y5 pupils on roll at Viking at the end of the 2026-27 academic year would automatically transfer to Downe Manor in September 2027. The Headteachers, supported by Ealing Council, would work together to make transition as smooth as possible.

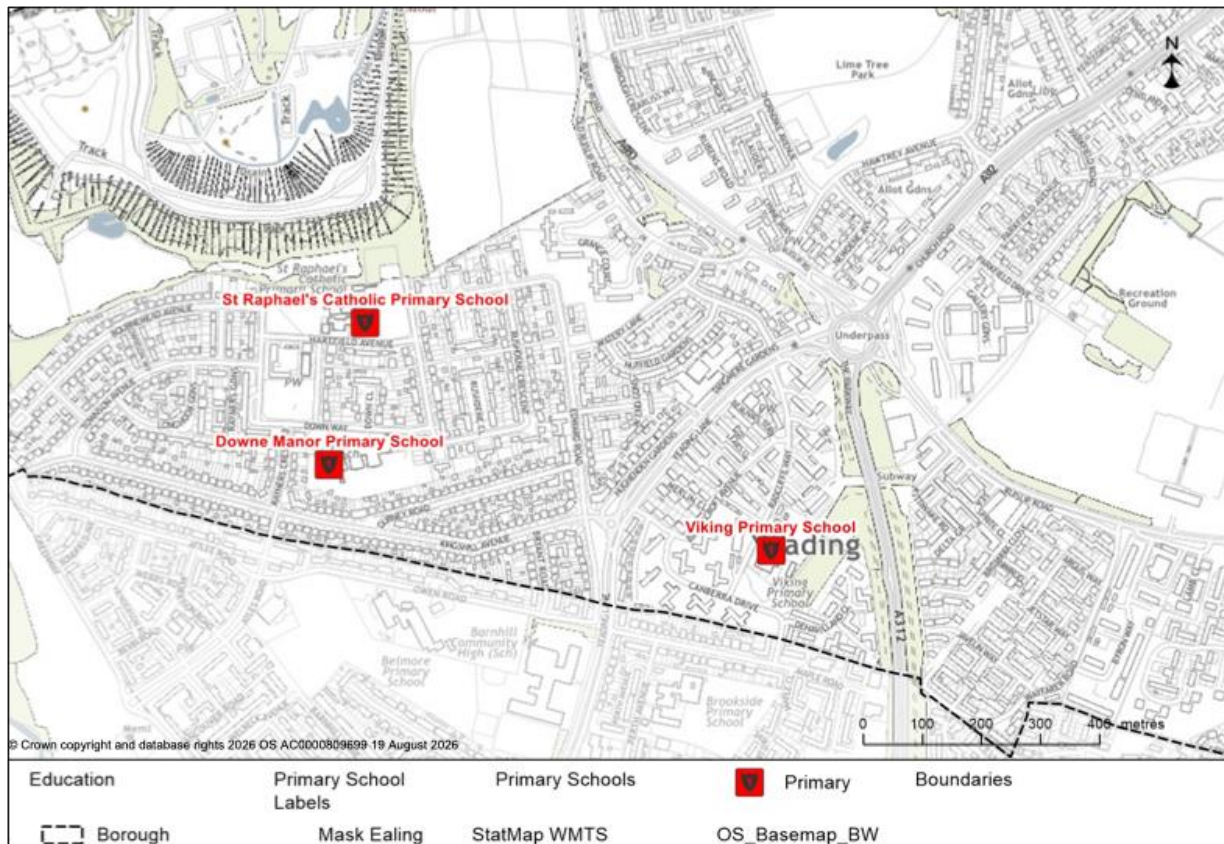
4.2. We have a child due to start Reception in September 2027 – what happens to them? Which schools should we apply to?

- For children due to join Reception in September 2027
 - a. Applications have to be submitted by 15 January 2027;
 - b. Families would be able to state a preference for Viking and Downe Manor as one of their choices because at that stage there would have been no decision about the future;
 - c. If the decision is to proceed with the preferred option and the decision is made at the Ealing Council Cabinet meeting in March 2027:
 - i. All 2027 reception applicants with a sibling at Viking would receive a sibling link for Downe Manor. A sibling link is an admissions oversubscription criterion that gives higher priority to a child if they have a sibling already attending the school.
 - ii. All preferences for Viking in the applications for September 2027 entry would be withdrawn as the decision would have been taken to close the school.

- For children due to join Nursery in September 2027, families would be able to seek a place at Downe Manor or another provider.
- If you have any questions about admissions please contact the school admissions service by email (mainroundadmissions@ealing.gov.uk or in-yearadmissions@ealing.gov.uk) or telephone 020 8825 5511 (opening hours: 9am to midday). For pupils with an Education Health and care Plan (EHCP), the contact details would be SENAS@ealing.gov.uk 020 8825 6910 (Monday to Friday, 10am to 1pm).

4.3. If the preferred option was implemented, would Viking pupils be expected to walk to Downe Manor given that it's further and involves crossing Yeading Lane?

It is less than a mile by road from Viking to Downe Manor (700m in a straight line), with crossings over Yeading Lane. Around 85% of current pupils at Viking live within a mile of the Downe Manor site. If there are suggestions for improvements to the walking route then the council's transport team can investigate those.



4.4. Do I need to move my child or children to another school?

- Every child in Reception to Year 5 at Viking who is on roll at the end of this academic year would automatically transfer to Downe Manor in September 2027 if the preferred option is implemented. There is no need to move children to another school.
- As now, parents are able to apply in-year for places at other schools if there are vacancies. If the decision in spring 2027 is to proceed with the preferred option and you did not want your child to attend Downe Manor you would be able to apply for a place at a different school.

4.5. Would we have to buy a Downe Manor uniform?

- School uniforms are similar – grey trousers / skirt, white polo shirt, school jumper. For pupils who transfer from Viking (i.e. currently in Reception to Year 5) to Downe

Manor, there would be support available to purchase the Downe Manor branded parts of their uniform.

- All pupils who join Downe Manor in Reception in September 2027 would need to have Downe Manor uniform, provided by their families.

4.6. What time does Downe Manor start and finish each day?

Class doors open at 8:45am, with Registration at 8:55 by which time all pupils must be in the classroom. The school day ends at 3:15.

4.7. Does Downe Manor have breakfast and afterschool provision?

- Breakfast club is available from 7:30am each day
- There are after school activity clubs

4.8. Can the Downe Manor building fit all of the pupils from Downe Manor and Viking in?

Yes. The Downe Manor building has sufficient space for 2 classes in each year group – which is the current size of Downe Manor and Viking combined.

4.9. Who would teach Viking pupils if staff leave?

- If the preferred option was implemented, Downe Manor would require additional staff to teach and support the pupils who move from Viking. If Viking staff transfer to Downe Manor that would provide continuity for pupils and families and bring Viking expertise into Downe Manor.
- Downe Manor would seek to provide conditional offers of employment as early as possible so that staff know that they have future roles and so do not need to apply for other jobs. The council and schools share a desire to get to this point as soon as possible to give certainty for families and for staff.

- If staff do leave mid-year (and this does happen in schools), Downe Manor would work as closely as possible with Viking to support staff arrangements for the rest of the academic year.

4.10. If children transfer to Downe Manor, would they still be in a class with their friends?

- Downe Manor would ask for information about who your child would particularly like to be with to ensure that children are with some of their friends, but the classes would not be confirmed until towards the end of 2026/27 academic year (as is normal in schools with more than one class in each year group where classes are sometimes changed before a new school year).

4.11. How would Downe Manor know what our children have or have not learned so far?

- There would be close collaboration this year between Viking and Downe Manor staff, and also careful planning for next year.
- If Viking staff join Downe Manor there would be a pooling of knowledge and expertise to support pupils from both current schools.

4.12. My child has additional needs – how would Downe Manor be able to support them effectively?

- Both schools successfully support pupils with a range of additional needs, as all mainstream schools do.
- There would be a carefully planned transition for pupils moving to Downe Manor, which would include sharing information regarding any additional needs that pupils have. This applies regarding any pupil, including (but not limited to) those with Education, Health and Care Plans.

- This would be enhanced by the knowledge brought by those Viking staff who join Downe Manor.

4.13. Can we visit Downe Manor?

- If the decision on 22 September is for consultation to take place, visits to Downe Manor for a look around and to meet the Headteacher would be arranged for current Viking pupils and their families.

5. Potential Implications – for pupils at Downe Manor

5.1. If there is a second class, would pupils from both schools be mixed together? Or would it be a Viking class and a Downe Manor class at least to begin with?

It is too early to say how classes would be arranged for 2027/28. It would be affected by how many pupils transfer from Viking in each year group. If there are changes to classes, staff know the pupils well and would ensure that children are with some of their friends.

5.2. If only some Viking pupils come, could a class have two year groups in it (i.e. some Year 2 pupils and some Year 3 pupils) rather than just being for one year group?

There are enough pupils at Viking to require a second class in each year group at Downe Manor. But if a significant number of pupils were to choose to go to different schools, it may mean that Downe Manor would need to consider whether to have some mixed age classes. Such classes are standard in schools that admit 15 or 45 pupils a year and are increasingly common in London as pupil numbers drop and schools now have, for example, 45 children per year when they previously had 60.

6. Potential Implications – future use of Viking site

6.1. What would happen to the Viking site if the school closes?

The council would need to determine a future use for the site. As the site has been used as a school, Department for Education permission would be required for any change of usage. The council would welcome views about what the site could be used for.

6.2. Would the community centre on the Viking site remain open?

Any decisions about the future management of the community centre would be considered separately from decisions about Viking Primary School. The council's intention is that community activities and services continue.

6.3. What happens to the community centre if Viking closes?

The community centre is not part of this consultation. The council's intention is that community activities and services continue, and any decisions about the future management of the centre will be considered separately.

6.4. What's going on at the community centre? Why isn't the community centre open?

Following a recent marketing exercise, a preferred tenant has been identified. The proposed tenant has a proven track record in managing and maintaining community centres, operating hireable spaces, and supporting the use of facilities by third-party organisations. We are hopeful that the new tenant will be in place shortly. Any updates regarding the community centre will be communicated separately from the school consultation.

7. Wellbeing support and services

7.1. Who should I contact if I have concerns about my child's well-being?

If you have concerns about your child's emotional well-being through this process, reach out to their school for support. Schools can provide guidance or direct you to appropriate services.

External services that provide information and support that parents could contact include:

- ParentKind – offers information and webinars about a wide range of topics:
www.parentkind.org.uk
- Young Minds – expert advice for parents concerned about their child's mental health.
Phone: 0808 802 5544 (Mon to Fri, 8:30am to 4pm); www.youngminds.org.uk/parent

7.2. What support is available to parents and carers?

It is important to take care of your emotional health during this process. When parents and carers feel supported, it helps you provide stability and reassurance for your children.

You can:

- Recognise your own emotions and give yourself time to process them;
- Seek support from trusted friends, family or professionals if needed;
- Take part in activities that help you to relax.