

REF: OB-011225-042

BY EMAIL

FAO: Gayton CoFE Primary Academy Parents

1 December 2025

Dear Gayton families,

You received communications (in October 2024) from us to let you know as part of ongoing updates regarding the school site situation combined with very low numbers on roll that we were considering all options for the future of Middleton CoFE Primary Academy and gathering your views to help us in our decision making. We said that we would update you as soon as any further decisions had been made in relation to the school's future, which is the purpose of this letter.

DNEAT has taken the difficult decision to consult on amalgamating Middleton CoE Primary Academy with Gayton CoE Primary Academy. We need to make a change in order to continue to secure children the education that they deserve.

All the details of the consultation, including the reasons for running the consultation and how you can share your views, are included in the enclosed document. Additionally, we are holding a consultation meeting to listen to views and answer questions. A consultation meeting on the proposal will be held at Middleton Village Hall on Wednesday 10 December 2025 at 4pm.

We have not taken the decision to consult on the amalgamation lightly. The merging of the schools will mean change, not least for the village's children. Although the Trust believes this change is necessary, I do understand why others will feel differently, and the impact that the decision will have on them personally and for the community as a whole.

In the case of this amalgamation we also fully recognise that there may be an increased demand for places in the Middleton area as a result of long-term housebuilding. We have worked with the site owner, the Diocese of Norwich, to ensure that if this happens we would be in a position to recommission the school, by offering to de-amalgamate Middleton from Gayton, and begin using the original school site once again. This is an unusual arrangement and we would particularly like to hear the community's views on this so the Diocese can be informed of the local view of seeking to maintain a primary school in the village long-term.

I understand how difficult this news will be for the wider Middleton community as a whole. I would like to end by thanking everyone; staff, families and community, for their involvement with this process and for sharing their views.

Yours sincerely,

Mr Oliver Burwood
Chief Executive Officer
DNEAT

Mrs Niamh Allitt
Executive Headteacher
St Matthew Federation

Mr Tony Leigh
Chair of Governors
St Matthew Federation

Community - Courage - Kindness - Wisdom

Proposal to amalgamate Middleton Church of England Primary Academy with Gayton Church of England Primary Academy from 1 September 2026 (by ceasing to maintain the Middleton site and a change of age range for an amalgamated school from 3-11, as a result of the nursery provision included in the Middleton age range, to 4-11)

This document is designed to:

- Notify you of the proposal by Diocese of Norwich Education and Academies Trust (DNEAT) to amalgamate Middleton CE Primary Academy and Gayton CE Primary Academy into a single primary school at Gayton
- Notify you that the proposal includes a change of age range for an amalgamated school from 3-11 (as a result of the nursery provision included in the Middleton age range) to 4-11
- Set out a longer term aspiration to maintain a primary school in Middleton
- Explain the rationale behind this proposal
- Invite your comments on this proposal
- Inform you of, and invite you to, a consultation meeting to be held at Middleton Village Hall on Wednesday 10 December 2025, 4pm

The statutory process

The Department for Education (DfE) has set out the requirements and processes for making changes to an academy in the guidance [‘Making significant changes to an academy’](#). This consultation period is the first stage in that process.

Why are we proposing to amalgamate Middleton CE Primary Academy with Gayton CE Primary Academy?

Middleton CE Primary Academy and Gayton CE Primary Academy are both members of the St Matthew’s Federation (‘the Federation’) within DNEAT. The Federation has a shared board of governors and executive headteacher, but they are separate schools. Middleton CE Primary Academy takes children from 3 to 11 years old with capacity for 126 pupils and has a published admission number (PAN) of 18. Middleton currently has 10 pupils on roll. Gayton CE Primary Academy admits pupils from 4 to 11 years with a capacity of 215 pupils and has a PAN of 30. Gayton currently has 171 pupils on roll. An amalgamation combines two or more separate organisations into one single and distinct legal entity.

DNEAT is proud that three quarters of its schools are ‘small’ and of all of their successes, but it accepts there is a ‘lower limit’ on pupil numbers. It has an agreed ‘Small Schools Strategy’ which outlines certain criteria that, if met, would result in the Trust considering significant change, such as closure, merger or amalgamation. The strategy supports the view that sustainable schools should be for 50 or more pupils, with three class bases and financed accordingly. The educational experience that can be offered in schools with fewer than 50 pupils is much more limited and results in poorer pupil outcomes over time. Middleton now meets three of DNEAT’s ‘Small Schools Strategy’ criteria in some way meaning it is currently unsustainable:

School size - currently Middleton has 10 pupils on roll. The PAN is 8 and it has capacity for 126 pupils. The current number of pupils does not generate sufficient finances to allow for the three-class structure required by DNEAT. Furthermore, the school is in the size category that does routinely less well when inspected by Ofsted and is currently at risk of an adverse inspection outcome.

Pupil forecasts – the number of pupils on roll at Middleton has decreased steadily over the past 3 years. There is an over-supply of school places in the local area which means that schools are competing for a reducing number of children.

It is recognised that significant new housing is planned in the local area, at West Winch, with a new school proposed as part of these plans. This future demand for pupil places means we are keen to work with the Diocese of Norwich, the Local Authority and the Department for Education to secure the long-term future of the school when / if pupil numbers grow. At this point the Trust would seek to de-amalgamate the two schools and reopen the Middleton site. Encouragingly, we have the commitment from the site's landlord, the Diocese of Norwich, to ensure that this possibility remains open, by not developing the site in such a way that it could not be used as a school in the future.

Finance - Middleton increasingly becomes a disproportionate draw on the Federation's resources as pupil numbers have declined.

The Trust's view is that Middleton is too small to be successful for its pupils and its community and that it has no realistic chance of increasing pupil numbers, in the short to medium term, because of the specific challenges it faces. Children would be better served attending another larger local school, preferably within the Trust. Gayton CE Primary Academy has space to accommodate all of the displaced pupils from Reception to Year 6 and indeed this is currently where Middleton children are attending.

What would change and what would not change?

Staffing

DNEAT is the employer of all staff across the federation. There is a potential impact on staff employed at Middleton CE Primary Academy but the extent of this will only be known once the number of pupils that transfer to Gayton is established. Work will be undertaken by DNEAT's Human Resources department to identify any members of staff who would be displaced by the implementation of this proposal. Support will be given in seeking their redeployment, initially within DNEAT. In the event that they cannot be deployed a redundancy process would be run in line with Trust policy and national legislation.

Governing Body

As with all school Trusts, the overall responsibility for governance sits with Trustees in DNEAT. They delegate some responsibilities for governance to a Local Governing Committee (LGC). The St Matthew's Federation is governed by a single Local Governing Committee. There would be no change of governance.

School uniform

The schools currently have different coloured branded sweatshirts, polo shirts, PE t-shirts and book bags. There will be flexibility to wear either uniform as children come across. Branded items for Middleton would cease to be available and some free Gayton items (one of each of the above items) would be offered to each child moving over.

Denominational choice for parents

DNEAT is very proud to be a Diocesan Trust and values its links with local parishes too. The choice of parents in the future who wish to send their children to a denominational school will not be restricted by these proposals as both schools within the catchment change proposal are DNEAT academies. Locally, Ashwicken VA Primary is also a Church of England school. The Diocesan Board of Education also supports the merger of Middleton CE Primary Academy with Gayton CE Primary Academy.

Buildings

If Middleton CE Primary Academy were to amalgamate with Gayton, all buildings and land comprising the Middleton site will return to its original ownership, the Diocese of Norwich. As outlined previously, we have commitment from the Diocese to maintain the site so that it could re-open as a school, by de-amalgamating it from Gayton, should local pupil numbers increase significantly.

The amalgamation proposal and process

The process to amalgamate is made up of two legal changes:

- The amalgamation of the two schools
- A change of age range for the amalgamated school from 3-11 (as a result of the nursery provision included in the Middleton Age Range) to 4-11

Change of catchment area

If a decision is made to amalgamate, Norfolk County Council (the Local Authority- LA) will be required to consult on changes to the catchment area for the current Middleton Academy's catchment. When a school closes or merges, its catchment must be reassigned to ensure every geographical area has an allocated school. These changes must be carefully planned to reflect the capacity of multiple neighbouring schools and reviewed by the Office of the Schools Adjudicator before any final decision is confirmed. For any redrawn catchment areas, the Local Authority will apply the Home to School Transport Policy ([School and College Travel Policy – Norfolk County Council](#)). Once a change is confirmed, future home to school transport will be provided in line with eligibility criteria.

The Local Authority and the Trust aim to work collaboratively for the benefit of children and families, though each has distinct responsibilities within the education system. A key responsibility of the LA is ensuring sufficient pupil places. While the LA's formal view will be shared during this process, previous indications suggest they believe Middleton's catchment numbers justify the school continuing as a stand-alone institution, meet medium- to long-term demand for school places, particularly considering potential developments at West Winch. Before any consultation on catchment changes can take place, a decision from the Department for Education on amalgamation is required. This decision cannot be assumed at this stage.

Trust provided transport

As well as any transport provision designated by the Local Authority the Trust would fund daily transport to and from Gayton for any children currently attending Middleton that wish to transfer to Gayton. If the Local Authority select Gayton as the catchment school for children in Middleton then they would provide transport in the longer term. If the LA select a different school they would provide transport from Middleton to this school. In this scenario we would continue to fund transport for children who currently attend Middleton until the end of their time in Year 6.

The next stage

This consultation period provides you with an opportunity to express your views and ask questions regarding the proposal to amalgamate Middleton CE Primary Academy with Gayton CE Primary Academy (which would include a change of age range for the amalgamated school from 3-11, as a result of the nursery provision included in the Middleton Age Range) to 4-11.

The 6-week consultation period starts on 1 December 2025 and will close on 9 January 2026

A consultation meeting on the proposal will be held at Middleton Village Hall on Wednesday 10 December 2025, 4pm

Who will make the final decision and when could the change happen?

After this consultation ends on **9 January 2026**, DNEAT will review the comments received and use the findings to inform their full business case to the DfE who will decide whether to proceed with the proposal. As well as the full business case we will send **all** responses received in the consultation to the DfE so they can gauge community views.

If in the future, we put a business case forward to de-amalgamate the two schools the decision making process is essentially the same.

How can I learn more about this proposal and have my say?

Tell us your views by:

- Attending the public consultation event at Middleton Village Hall on Wednesday 10 December 2025, 4pm
- Emailing us at [info@dneat.org](mailto:info@ dneat.org) (please quote Middleton as the subject in your response)
- Write to Middleton Church of England Primary Academy Consultation, DNEAT, Orchard House, Hall Lane, East Tuddenham near Mattishall, Norfolk, NR20 3LR

We need all responses by 11.59pm 9 January 2026