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This analysis has been undertaken with significant use of AI tools to provide it in sufficient time for the extraordinary FTB meeting. It has had manual checking and editing.

👉 Suggests falling rolls are:

- Not purely demand-related
 - Influenced by local socio-economic factors
-

7. Overall Conclusions

Strong Areas of Consensus

- ✓ Doing nothing is not viable
- ✓ A merger is necessary
- ✓ St Mark's site is the preferred location
- ✓ Educational outcomes would likely improve

Areas of Concern / Risk

- ⚠ Community resistance (especially St George's)
- ⚠ Loss of village identity
- ⚠ Social perceptions and stigma between communities
- ⚠ Implementation and transition issues

Key Insight

Staff views are pragmatic and education-focused:

- They overwhelmingly support the merger as the best long-term solution
- However, they recognise that:

The biggest challenges are social and emotional, not educational

- Especially:
 - Improved teaching quality
 - Better facilities
 - Long-term sustainability
-

Final Summary

Staff are largely aligned with the proposed merger, particularly on the St Mark's site, viewing it as the only realistic way to sustain high-quality education. However, they clearly signal that community sentiment, identity concerns, and social perceptions will be the key barriers to overcome—not the educational case itself.

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💬 Notable view:

- Some families reluctant for children to mix with others due to perceived differences

Interpretation

- These concerns are:
 - Social and cultural rather than educational
 - A significant barrier to stakeholder acceptance
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D. Change Management Challenges

Staff highlight:

- Resistance driven by:
 - Sentimentality
 - Historical perceptions
 - Community identity

One comment suggests past failure to act earlier has:

- “kicked the can down the road” leading to current crisis
-

E. Naming and Identity of the New School

Suggestions include:

- Renaming the merged school to:
 - Create a fresh start
 - Reduce resistance
 - Some suggest:
 - Retaining St George’s name to ease transition
-

F. External Factors Affecting Pupil Numbers

Staff identify:

- Housing instability (families being relocated)
- Lack of local affordable housing
- Movement of families out of the area

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6. Key Themes from Qualitative Comments

A. Educational Benefits of Merger

- Larger school seen as enabling:
 - Single-year classes (less mixed-age teaching)
 - Improved curriculum delivery
 - Better staffing structure

 Example insight:

- St Mark's site would allow "separate year classes... for every year group"
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B. Superiority of St Mark's Site

Frequently cited advantages:

- Better facilities and design
- Safer and more spacious
- Significant outdoor space (8 acres)

 Widely viewed as:

"obviously the best location... for a first-class merged school"

C. Social and Community Tensions

A major theme:

1. Fear of losing village identity (St George's)

- Concerns about:
 - Loss of small school ethos
 - Larger class sizes
 - Less community feel

2. Perceived "divide" between communities

- References to:
 - Historical negative perceptions of St Mark's
 - Stigma around higher SEND and pupil premium populations

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4. Views on Alternatives

Very limited appetite for alternatives

- 90% (18/20) say they do not have alternative solutions

Few alternative ideas raised:

1. Specialist / SEN provision model
 - Possibility of a split-site model with specialist provision
 - Recognition of gaps in local SEN provision and high cost of alternatives
2. Housing-related suggestion
 - Increase family housing locally to stabilise pupil numbers

Interpretation

- Staff generally view the merger as the only viable strategic solution
 - Alternatives are either:
 - Structural/system-level issues (housing, SEND provision)
 - Or not immediately actionable
-

5. Preferred Option Ranking

Staff were asked to rank four options:

Top-ranked option:

- Merge on St Mark's site
 - Highest rating score (3.71 average)
 - 85.7% ranked it as their top choice

Other options:

- B2 (merge on St George's site): weaker support
- C (split infant/junior schools): moderate but not preferred
- A (do nothing): lowest support (1.93 average)

Interpretation

- Strong, consistent preference:
 - ✓ Merge schools
 - ✓ Use St Mark's site

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Appendix A: Summary of responses from staff

1. Respondent Profile

- 100% of respondents (23) were existing staff members
 - ✓ This means the findings represent a pure staff perspective, with no parental or community input in this dataset.
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2. Perception of the Current Situation (Declining Rolls)

Strong consensus on risks of doing nothing

- 90% (18/20) believe that continuing with two shrinking schools would reduce education quality
- Only 10% (2/20) disagree

Interpretation

- Staff broadly accept the core premise of the consultation:
 - Falling rolls → more mixed-age classes → reduced educational quality
- There is little support for maintaining the status quo



Staff comments reinforce this:

- Recognition that mixed-age teaching and declining numbers are not sustainable
 - Some acknowledgment of emotional resistance from communities, especially about losing small village-school identity
-

3. Support for the Proposed Merger

Overall support level

- 71.4% (15/21) support merging into St Mark's site
- 23.8% (5/21) are unsure
- 4.8% (1/21) oppose

Interpretation

- Clear majority support, but not unanimous
 - Notable uncertainty (almost 1 in 4) suggests:
 - Some staff have reservations about implementation, not principle
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8. Final Conclusion

The consultation reveals a deep and polarised response:

- St George's community: overwhelmingly opposed, with strong emotional, educational and community arguments
- St Mark's community: broadly supportive, with pragmatic focus on sustainability and facilities
- Wider community: strongly aligned with preserving St George's as a village school

➡ The Trust's preferred option as stated in the consultation document—merger on the St Mark's site—is:

- Least preferred overall
- Strongly resisted by the most affected cohort
- Supported primarily by one stakeholder group

The Board is therefore faced with a high-stakes decision that extends beyond education into community sustainability, parental choice, and Trust credibility.

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Area	All Respondents	St George’s Parents	St Mark’s Parents
Wide mixed age teaching worsens education	Reject premise	Strong rejection	More agreement
Support for merger at St. Mark’s	Strong opposition	Overwhelming opposition	Majority support
Preferred option	Keep both schools	Keep both schools	Merge at St Mark’s
Trust in rationale	Low	Very low	Mixed
Community impact concern	High	Extremely high	Moderate
Focus of concern	Community + education	Community + identity	Sustainability + facilities

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
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- Concern about:
 - viability of small classes
 - increasing multi-year teaching groups
- View that:
 - merger could improve curriculum delivery

2. Facilities and Site

- Strong emphasis on:
 - St Mark's purpose-built facilities
 - space, forest school, playing fields
 - capacity for full classes

3. Pragmatic View

- Greater willingness to accept:
 - need for structural change
 - long-term sustainability considerations

4. Key Concerns (even among supporters)

- Traffic and parking pressures
- Disruption to children
- SEND provision in larger setting

4.7 Overall Assessment (St Mark's Parents)

Position: MAJORITY SUPPORTIVE (with caveats)

- Support grounded in:
 - educational sustainability
 - facility advantages
- However:
 - practical concerns remain significant

5. Synthesis Across All Groups

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4. St Mark's Parent Responses

4.1 Respondent Profile

- Total responses: 47
 - 97.87% of these are current St Mark's parents rather than prospective
-

4.2 Educational Model

- 65.96% agree that the school getting smaller and utilising more mixed-age teaching would worsen education

→ Direct contrast to St George's parents.

4.3 Support for Merger onto the St. Mark's site

- 61.70% support
- 23.40% oppose
- 14.89% unsure

→ Clear majority support within this group.

4.4 Alternatives (Q4)

- Only 12.77% suggest alternatives

→ Indicates:

- Higher acceptance of proposed direction
 - Less appetite for alternative structural solutions
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4.5 Ranking of Options (Q9)

- Most preferred option: Strong preference for merger on St Mark's site
 - Second preferred option: Continue as two schools with increasingly fewer pupils and staff
 - Least preferred option: Merge the schools on the St. George's site.
-

4.6 Distinctive Themes from St Mark's Parents

1. Educational Sustainability

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- central to village life
- Losing St. George's from its current site seen as:
 - "killing the village"
 - driving out families

2. Educational Quality

- High confidence in:
 - current outcomes
 - teaching quality
- Perception that:
 - St George's is high-performing
 - merging risks diluting quality

3. Distrust of Rationale

- Strong concern that:
 - merger is financially driven
 - data on pupil decline is flawed
- Frequent references to:
 - new housing not being considered

4. Behavioural Intent

- Significant number indicate:
 - they would remove children from system if merger proceeds
- Risk of:
 - pupil loss to other schools / areas

3.7 Overall Assessment (St George's Parents)

Position: OVERWHELMINGLY OPPOSED

- Strongest resistance across all groups
 - High emotional, community, and behavioural stakes
 - Significant risk of unintended consequences (loss of pupils)
-

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3.2 Educational Model

- 84.62% disagree that a school getting smaller with more mixed-age teaching risks reducing the quality of education

→ Even stronger rejection than overall dataset.

3.3 Support for Merger onto the St. Mark's site

- 86.42% oppose
- 7.41% support

→ Near-unanimous opposition among St George's parents.

3.4 Alternatives

- 65% suggest alternatives

Key proposals

- Keep both schools open
 - Merge Swanage Primary and St. Mark's instead
 - Shared services and leadership
 - Increase promotion and intake
 - Expand wraparound care and pre-school
-

3.5 Ranking of Options

- Most preferred option: 73.33% prefer to remain as two separate schools with increasingly fewer pupils and staff (11%, remain separate as infant/junior – second preferred option).
 - Second preferred option: Merge the two schools together on the St. George's site.
 - Least preferred option: Strong rejection of merger on the t St Mark's site
-

3.6 Distinctive Themes from St George's Parents

1. Community Identity (Strongest Theme)

- School described as:
 - generational

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- Widespread challenge to the “declining numbers” assumption:
 - references to new housing developments (up to 400 homes)
 - expectation of increasing family population

4. Trust and Process

- Frequent criticism that:
 - questions are “leading” or “biased”
 - consultation feels predetermined
- Requests for:
 - clearer financial transparency
 - fuller modelling of future demographics

5. Practical Considerations

- Concerns around:
 - traffic and parking at St Mark’s
 - travel for rural families
 - disruption to children, especially SEND pupils

2.7 Overall Assessment

Strength of sentiment: VERY STRONG OPPOSITION

- Educational case: widely disputed
- Community case: strongly emphasised
- Preferred option: retain both schools
- Trust proposal: least favoured option

3. St George’s Parent Responses

3.1 Respondent Profile

- Total responses: 85
- 88.24% of these are current St George’s parents, rather than prospective

 This represents a highly concentrated and directly affected cohort

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- Close St. Mark's and redistribute those pupils across the area

➔ Observation: Where respondents engage, constructive alternatives are offered.

2.5 Ranking of Options

This question was added to the survey a few days into the consultation. This was a suggestion made by an early respondent it was considered that it would yield useful quantitative information.

- Most preferred option: Continue as two separate schools with increasingly fewer children and staff.
- Second preferred option: Two legally separate schools with different designations: infant / Junior
- Third preferred option: Merge the schools together on the existing St. George's site.
- Least preferred: Merge the schools together on the existing St. Mark's site

➔ Indicates:

- Retention of both schools remains the dominant preference
 - The Trust's preferred option (merge at St Mark's) is the least favoured overall solution
-

2.6 Core Themes from Qualitative Responses

1. Community Impact

- St George's described repeatedly as:
 - "heart of the village"
 - central to identity, cohesion, church, and social life
- Losing St. George's from its current location seen as:
 - irreversible community loss
 - accelerating shift to second homes and ageing population

2. Educational Experience

- Strong belief in:
 - benefits of small classes
 - nurturing environments
 - relationships across age groups

3. Future Pupil Numbers

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Interpretation

- A clear majority reject the consultation premise that declining numbers necessarily damage quality of education if it leads to very broad mixed age teaching.
- Many respondents explicitly argue:
 - smaller classes improve individual attention
 - mixed-age teaching has educational and social benefits
 - evidence cited from other successful small-school models

➡ Conclusion: The educational rationale for merger is not widely accepted.

2.3 Support for Merger Proposal

- 72.96% oppose
- 19.74% support
- 7.30% unsure

Interpretation

- Strong overall opposition across the full respondent base.
 - Opposition cuts across community members, not just parents.
-

2.4 Alternative Solutions

- 42.48% suggest alternatives
- 57.52% do not

Themes in alternatives

- Keep both schools open with:
 - shared leadership or staffing (this is already in practice)
 - improved marketing / recruitment to increase numbers
- Reconfigure provision:
 - infant/junior split
 - SEND hub or specialist provision
- System-wide solutions:
 - merge St. Mark's and Swanage Primary instead

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Analysis of responses received via the consultation online survey

1. Overview and Context

This report summarises the findings from responses submitted via the online survey to the public consultation on the proposal to secure high quality primary education for Swanage and surrounding areas. Central to this proposal is the option to merge St George's CE Primary School into St Mark's CE Primary School on the St Mark's site to form a single primary school with a PAN of 15. This option was presented as the one considered by the Trust Board to be most likely to secure high quality educational provision in the long term.

The report is structured as follows:

- Analysis of 'all' respondents
- How St George's parents differ
- How St Mark's parents differ
- Key conclusions

This report should be read alongside the summary of consultation responses received via the dedicated email inbox, although the overall themes and issues within that are strongly aligned with those reported here. Trustees have also been provided the full data sets leading to this summary report.

Appendix A is provided as a summary of responses from staff.

2. Analysis of All Respondents

2.1 Respondent Profile

- Total responses: 479
- Largest group: local residents (48%)
- Parents:
 - St George's: 15.66%
 - St Mark's: 9.60%
- Significant additional representation from:
 - former pupils, parents, and staff
 - wider community stakeholders

 Key point: This dataset reflects broad community sentiment, not just current and prospective parents.

2.2 Educational issue

- 66.45% disagree that smaller schools delivering increasingly broad mixed-age teaching worsens education provision
- 33.55% agree