

# Save Colvestone Primary School

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**Submission to the  
School Sufficiency team  
at Hackney Council**

**For inclusion in the Cabinet report ahead of  
the meeting on Monday 22 May 2023**

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# The case for Colvestone Primary School

This document has been collated and written by parents at Colvestone Primary School. While we understand that Hackney Council, like the rest of London, has to respond to falling rolls, we don't believe closing Colvestone at this time is the right solution.

The Council has put forward this proposal in order to sustain academic excellence and ensure the schools are financially healthy. This report makes the case that those causes are better served by keeping the school open.

The school is academically strong, and we believe it is financially viable. It offers a learning environment that is unique in Dalston and its immediate surroundings. Closing Colvestone would have a devastating impact not only on its students, but the entire local community and would represent the loss of one of Hackney's stronger local authority schools. It would have a negative impact on the academic success of current SEN students, reduce choice for Dalston families, jeopardise plans for Dalston's development and leave a dead building in the heart of Dalston.

Colvestone has been a critical part of Dalston's past and is critical to its future. We request that Hackney Education recommend to the Council that Colvestone **should not** move to the informal consultation phase.

## Colvestone: A village school in the heart of Hackney

Colvestone Primary School offers a unique opportunity to showcase the future for Hackney Council's ambition for education. The current vibrant, buzzing community – rich in history and local association – has relevance to all the borough's needs for families now, and the future.

### Financial viability

Following more turbulence than many other schools have battled over the last 3-4 years, the new school leadership team and partnership with Blossom Federation has turned around the financial position and viability of Colvestone. That transformation is *not solely* as a result of any 'additional investment' made above statutory funding from Hackney Council, but can be attributed to some excellent planning, prudent financial acumen and skilled resource management.

This efficient use of resources – and in some areas – a budget surplus, are a solid commercial reason for Colvestone to remain open. Blossom partnership should be given a chance to continue their skilled and committed financial transformation implementing the deficit recovery plan, taking the school to 'break even' by 2027/28 [1].

### Vacant places

Well-documented falling pupil numbers across the borough, and vacancies at schools like Colvestone, can impact the efficient running of a school. But it has *not impacted* the quality of education – and contrary to predictions, Colvestone is proud of its newly found financial stability. These unexpected, but positive outcomes, are because a small school like Colvestone can be nimble, it can be flexible, and it can be quick to adapt and change when needed.

### When is a merger a closure?

When planning any proposed merger, many factors clearly need to be considered – this is an exercise in efficient use of public money and Council resources, so due diligence is a critical part of the process. However, regardless of the size of either Princess May or Colvestone, and regardless of the suitability of either site to host the merger – if 87% of those parents (who responded) from one school in the merger, refuse to send their child(ren) to the other site – what happens then? The main reasons people gave for not wanting to send their child(ren) to Princess May were due to its location on a main road (81.5%). So rather than a proposed merger, this plan will effectively close down Colvestone Primary School without necessarily improving the situation at Princess May.

### The need for Colvestone

Part of Hackney Council can actually see how special, unique and essential Colvestone is to the development of Dalston, as the school forms part of the planning of a new-build neighbourhood proposed over the road. The Dalston Development Plan includes building more than 600 new homes in the area around the school with around 30% of the housing being family sized units. This could bring 200+ families into the immediate area.

Offering real parental choice and an attractive proposition for families in these ambitious plans for ‘genuinely affordable’ new homes in Dalston *have to be supported by local infrastructure*, such as a successful primary school like Colvestone. A school that will suffer less from pollution and that can be safely walked to. So it does come across as somewhat short-sighted, to shut down a well-performing school that could form the heart of a family-focussed, community-led Dalston vision.

### Ofsted rating and projected outcomes

Colvestone is academically strong. This is due to the excellent and effective staff and leadership team, the closeness and individual attention of a one-form entry environment and the high standards and expectations across the school.

The last Ofsted inspection paid tribute to the school’s excellent community focus, in addition to the effective teaching: “You have a relentless focus on improving the quality of the curriculum. You are providing the pupils with a creative and diverse curriculum which broadens their minds and helps them think critically. The curriculum often focuses pupils’ learning on the community around them. This provides pupils not only with good subject knowledge, such as the geography and history of the area, but also with a strong sense of identity and connection to where they live.” What parent would not want that rich and diverse learning environment for their child(ren)?

### Summary

Colvestone Primary School brings together the best of Hackney in a non-denominational, local authority school – and it shows the way forward, by putting a small, well-run financially viable school at the heart of the borough’s future.

**Colvestone is a village school, at the heart of a 21st Century Street, in the centre of Hackney. It’s a school where every child matters, and we implore Hackney Council to take Colvestone off the list of schools to merge or close.**

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### Footnotes

[1] School Resource Management Adviser Comprehensive Report for Colvestone Primary School 2042120 Hackney. Education and Skills Funding Agency. 16.03.2023

## 1. Context for Colvestone

After a period of instability Colvestone has entered into a successful partnership with Blossom Federation, which is seeing rapid impact on all areas: quality of education, finances, premises, leadership and have kept the community at the forefront of the changes they make. The dynamic and proactive approach has resulted in positive changes that will only continue. The governors have recommended that this partnership continues for the next 1-2 years and a decision about Colvestone's future after that would be made swiftly to ensure stability, continuity and success.

### **A successful partnership with Blossom Federation**

Colvestone has had three years of instability alongside the pandemic. There has been a challenging restructure of support staff, defederation of Soaring Skies and the restructuring of the Senior Leadership Team which led to the unexpected resignation of the Executive Head and resignation of the Head of school in May/June 2022. As a result, Hackney Education asked the governors to seek partnerships with other schools to support Colvestone rather than externally recruiting a Headteacher. At a meeting with parents in May 2022, the then Director of Education Annie Gammon explained this approach and talked about the process. During the meeting, she was asked about the future of Colvestone and she confirmed that there was no intention to close the school.

Altogether 5 partnerships were proposed, which included a proposal from the Princess May leadership team, and 3 were selected for interview – 1 pulled out because of capacity and the other 2 were interviewed. Blossom was selected for many reasons:

- Successful partnership with other schools before their schools joined the federation
- Capacity and experience of Executive Headteacher
- Capacity to have a dedicated and experienced Head of School with a focus on teaching and learning and wellbeing
- An experienced federation school Business Leader which was paramount for the financial management of the school.

This successful partnership is in place and from the start Blossom have bought clear direction both with regards to finance and resources and also the teaching and learning. They have managed to keep the stability of a highly dedicated staff with minimal change to the school and the community.

### **Building on the success**

The Partnership with Blossom Federation only started in September 2022 so it is still very much in its infancy. By proposing the amalgamation (closure) for Colvestone there has been no opportunity to continue to build the successful partnership and see the impact.

With hard work, there have been rapid changes and developments with impact already being seen in only 6 months most notably in:

- Finance: There is an improved financial picture and the team are on their way to bringing the school back to financial health. The school has a clear understanding of the finances with an in year surplus achieved in the school budget.
- Safeguarding: Safety and safeguarding within the school has dramatically improved. The building is compliant and has seen significant cosmetic and structural improvements
- Marketing and Communication: New website and increased use of social media to raise the profile of the school.

Despite the uncertainty around the change of leadership, the staff and parent community are largely stable and overwhelmingly supportive of the partnership and the school development.

Prior to the Council's announcement, the governors had decided to continue to partner with Blossom Federation for another year to continue building a stable and successful school.

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#### **Footnotes – Context for Colvestone**

Soaring Skies Federation Governing Board minutes September 2020 – July 2021

Colvestone Primary School Governing Board minutes September 2021 – April 2023

## 2. Financial viability

Through the successful partnership with the Blossom Federation, in only 6 months the new Senior Leadership Team have demonstrated that they can return the school to financial health despite the reduced pupil numbers. We believe there is a strong case for the financial viability of Colvestone for the following reasons:

- New strong financial leadership led by Senior Leadership Team with experienced Senior Business Manager with proven track record of successfully returning schools to financial health.
- The new SLT have delivered a surplus school budget for Colvestone for the year ending 2022/23 and projects an in-year surplus for the years ending 2023/24 and 2024/25. This financial modelling has been submitted to Hackney Education by the school.
- The new SLT have worked closely with the Local Authority over the last 6 months to identify detailed cost savings and provided a viable budget deficit recovery plan based on detailed forecasted pupil numbers, evidenced efficiencies and cost saving measures.
- Hackney Funding: whilst significant investment has already gone into the building over the last 12 months, Mr Senior implied at the Colvestone engagement meeting on 24 April that the surplus in the school budget was a result of that investment, but we don't agree with Mr Senior's assumption. The Council invested £50k last year as part of the Schools Contingency Fund and £25k as part of the Supported Schools Programme. Firstly, Colvestone is entitled to de-delegated school contingency funding as much as any other school in financial need so implying that it is only funding from Hackney that has kept Colvestone in surplus is not a fair point. This could also be said of other schools in the borough and historically. Colvestone had received contingency funds from Hackney last year yet were not in further deficit.
- The deficit situation of Colvestone should have been more closely managed by Hackney Council over the last 6 years. Colvestone's cumulative school deficit has **not** been added to in the last 2 years (School financial years 2021/22 and 2022/23). The deficit has not entirely been caused by falling roll of pupil numbers over the last 2 years so the deficit narrative as a result of the falling roll is inaccurate.
- Low reception numbers for Sept 2023: we think the unusually low reception preference numbers were a blip, the result of a building that was under extensive repair during the time when school tours were taking place, a leadership team that was new and unproven in the eyes of a prospective parent, and a reputation that may have taken a hit due to the turbulence of defederation and restructure. We believe the improvements to the physical building and the new equipment, the increased social media presence, the strong academic performance, the embedding of successful leadership, and the construction of the 21st Century Street will restore sustainable numbers to the school. In addition, an



independent report has been commissioned by the Education & Skills Funding Agency titled the School Resource Management Adviser Comprehensive Report for Colvestone Primary School written in March 2023 working with the Local Authority and SLT in which pupil numbers are forecast to rise by 15% [1] from now until 2025.

- Partnering with the Blossom Federation (that includes Daubeney, Sebright and Lauriston) allows Colvestone to share some costs and deliver cross-federation financial efficiencies. Only incremental costs are being charged to Colvestone by the Blossom Federation for cross-federation support to help the school financially and also realise the benefits of economies of scale through this type of collaboration/structure.
- In the case of closing/amalgamating Colvestone, the historical debt would have to be swallowed by Hackney, making Colvestone an extremely expensive school to close. There may be less risk-taking to first see if the school can be financially viable and run down its own debt fairly rapidly.
- Through proactive marketing measures including social media the new leadership has increased Colvestone's profile and with the recent upgrades in the premises and new hall, we believe Colvestone will further prove it's financial viability by attracting new pupils cementing it's position in the community and establishing new revenue streams through lettings and community events.

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#### **Footnotes – Financial viability**

[1] School Resource Management Adviser Comprehensive Report for Colvestone Primary School 2042120 Hackney. Education and Skills Funding Agency. 16.03.2023

Soaring Skies Federation Governing Board minutes September 2020 – July 2021

Colvestone Primary School Governing Board minutes September 2021 – April 2023

### 3. Academic record

Education standards at Colvestone have been consistently high. This is a successful school with children receiving a high quality of education.

Colvestone has a 'Good' Ofsted rating and this has been in place for the last 15 years. There have been three Full Inspections (2008, 2011 and 2014) and a Short Inspection in 2018 that confirmed the on-going rating.

Colvestone achieved excellent KS2 SATs results in 2022 that were well above the national average AND the Hackney average. For instance, 81% of children at Colvestone achieved expected attainment in all three subjects – this is 12% points above the Hackney average of 69% of children.

The attached attainment data for the last three years shows that Colvestone has been improving its outcomes for children, despite challenges at the national level.

| RWM        | 2018 | 2019 | 2022 * |
|------------|------|------|--------|
|            | EXS  | EXS  | EXS    |
| Colvestone | 71%  | 76%  | 81%    |
| Hackney    | 71%  | 66%  | 69%    |
| National   | 65%  | 65%  | 59%    |

| Reading    | 2018 | 2019 | 2022 * |
|------------|------|------|--------|
|            | EXS  | EXS  | EXS    |
| Colvestone | 71%  | 79%  | 88%    |
| Hackney    | 78%  | 72%  | 80%    |
| National   | 76%  | 73%  | 75%    |

| Writing    | 2018 | 2019 | 2022 * |
|------------|------|------|--------|
|            | EXS  | EXS  | EXS    |
| Colvestone | 89%  | 83%  | 81%    |
| Hackney    | 84%  | 84%  | 79%    |
| National   | 79%  | 78%  | 70%    |

| Maths      | 2018 | 2019 | 2022 * |
|------------|------|------|--------|
|            | EXS  | EXS  | EXS    |
| Colvestone | 86%  | 79%  | 81%    |
| Hackney    | 79%  | 78%  | 78%    |
| National   | 76%  | 79%  | 72%    |

Colvestone has been noted as a school that centres diversity effectively in its curriculum and that this is a strength which is important in the current climate and Hackney's dedication to Anti-Racism.

A letter of support to keep Colvestone Primary School open has been sent by Hackney National Education Union (see [Appendix](#)).

### Summary

In its statement announcing the potential closures and mergers, Hackney Education states that part of the purpose is "to ensure all our schools continue to provide excellent education for our children, with the very best resources and facilities." If the intent of closing schools is to ensure educational excellence, **it doesn't make sense to close a school that is consistently delivering above average performance in the borough.**

## 4. Parent choice

The merger of Colvestone with Princess May and the closure of De Beauvoir would erode parent choice in two ways:

- It would directly undermine the choices Colvestone parents have made for their children
- It would severely reduce the choices local parents have for educating their children

### Impact on current Colvestone families

Hackney Education is proposing merging two schools that are very different. Princess May is a two-form entry school in an imposing Victorian building that sits on a busy main road.

Colvestone is a one-form entry school in a small, intimate building that sits on a quiet side street.

A recent poll of Colvestone parents, in which  $\frac{2}{3}$  of households responded, **showed that 95.7 % of respondents did not list Princess May as one of their top 6 choices** when they originally selected a primary school. Out of 70 households, only 3 had originally placed Princess May on their elective list, with only 2 having it in their top 3.

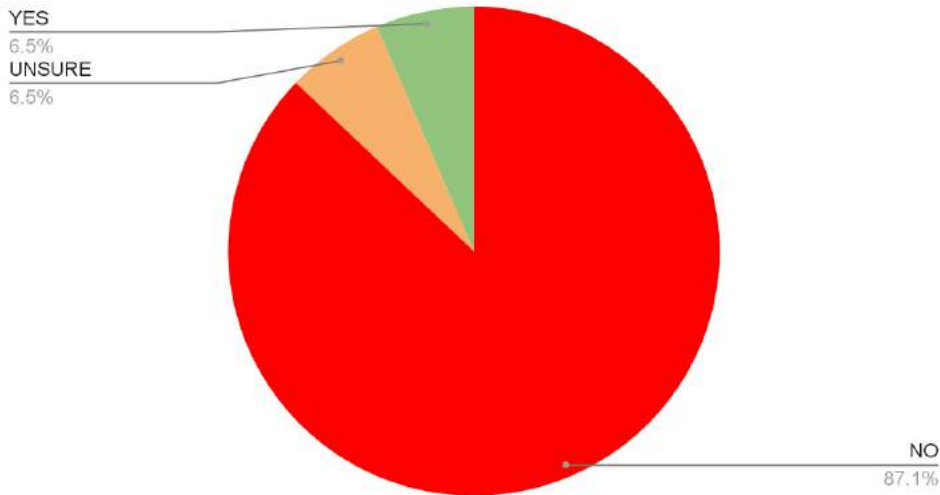
When parents questioned Paul Senior very directly at the Colvestone engagement meeting on 24 April as to what would happen if the Council went ahead with this decision to merge the schools and a majority of parents **chose not** to send their children to Princess May, no clear answer was provided. It doesn't seem Hackney Education has prepared for this scenario.

Colvestone parents then conducted a second survey of our parent and carer community, to provide Hackney Education with some more detailed insight about parental school choices. In our second survey, we reached again approximately  $\frac{2}{3}$  of Colvestone households. We were very careful to ask for only one response per household so that we were not doubling up on opinions. **There are 104 households with children at Colvestone and 73 took part in the survey.**

Our first question was very simple: "If the Council were to go ahead with the proposed merger of Colvestone Primary School with Princess May in September 2024, **would you agree to sending your child(ren) to the Princess May Site.** (Please answer as honestly as possible – Please don't answer (this question only) if you only have a child in year 5 or 6.)"

Out of 73 answers, 62 have children who would be affected by the proposed merger in 2024. Of these 62 households, 54 answered **NO, they will not agree to send their child to Princess May. This is 87%.** A further 4 households were unsure at this point. Only 4 households said they would agree to sending their children to Princess May.

## WILL YOU SEND YOUR CHILD(REN) TO PRINCESS MAY?



The main reasons people gave for not wanting to send their children to Princess May were around:

- Location on a main road (81.5%)
- Pollution levels (77.8%)
- Not liking the school itself (66.7%)
- Not wanting to send their children to a bigger school (63%)

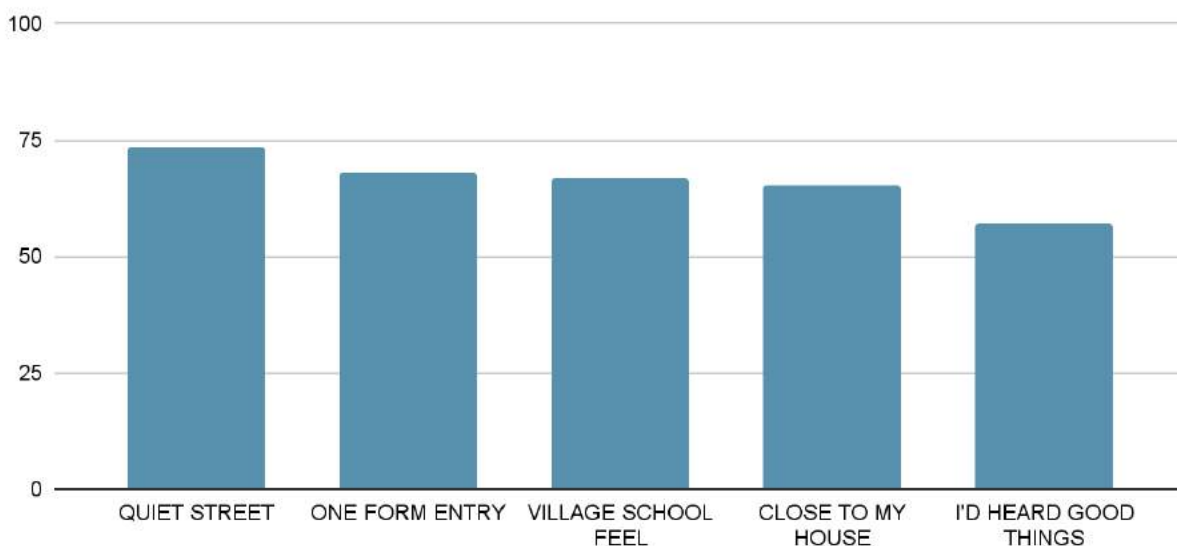
We also asked our families what the principal factors were that they took into consideration when choosing a primary school for their children. **Distance from home** was overwhelmingly the most important (chosen by 70.8% of families). A close second were **pollution levels around the school** (65.3%) and the **size of the school** (63.9%), coming in at **more important** than **academic performance and Ofsted ratings** (58.3%). The **quiet location of the school** was also considered important by over 50% of the parents. Another very important factor for many parents (40.3%) was being able to choose a **non-faith** school. **SEN** support and community feel of school were also repeated themes (22.5% of respondents to our survey have a child with SEN). Most of these categories, such as quiet street, distance and one-form entry, are not qualities that can be fulfilled at Princess May, hence Princess May barely featured on families' radars when they were making their initial choices.

Comments from the survey:

"I sent my eldest son to Princess May 8 years ago and had to change schools after a few months because we were really unhappy with the standards of the school. We visited the school again a couple of years ago, whilst going through the selection process for my youngest child, who currently attends Colvestone and we were disappointed to discover that Princess May is still not a viable option for us to send our children. We would not send our child to Princess May, our child is very happy at Colvestone and we're it to close we would look at finding a similar school to Colvestone probably outside the borough."

We proceeded to ask parents and carers, what were the **specific appeals of Colvestone itself**. See the graph below:

## WHY WE CHOSE COLVESTONE



Other important reasons were of course the wonderful staff, and the architecture and layout of buildings, the SEN support, the experience of older siblings, and the strong community feel.

We thought it would also be useful for the Council to know **which schools parents are actually interested in**, should they no longer be able to send their children to Colvestone. Here are the responses, ranked in order of preference:

- 1) Shacklewell Primary (35.3%) – yet this school is oversubscribed
- 2) Out of borough (22.1%) – a clear risk of losing even more school funding for the borough
- 3) None of the closest schools but staying in borough (16.2%)
- 4) Halley House / Queensbridge / Mossbourne Parkside (all 14.7%)

The local faith schools all attracted much lower numbers. The remaining survey results are in the [Appendix](#).

When reviewing what Colvestone Primary School has to offer, it is clear from the factors listed above that parents are choosing it very deliberately. **It is simply not acceptable to ignore all of the factors that go into making this choice.**

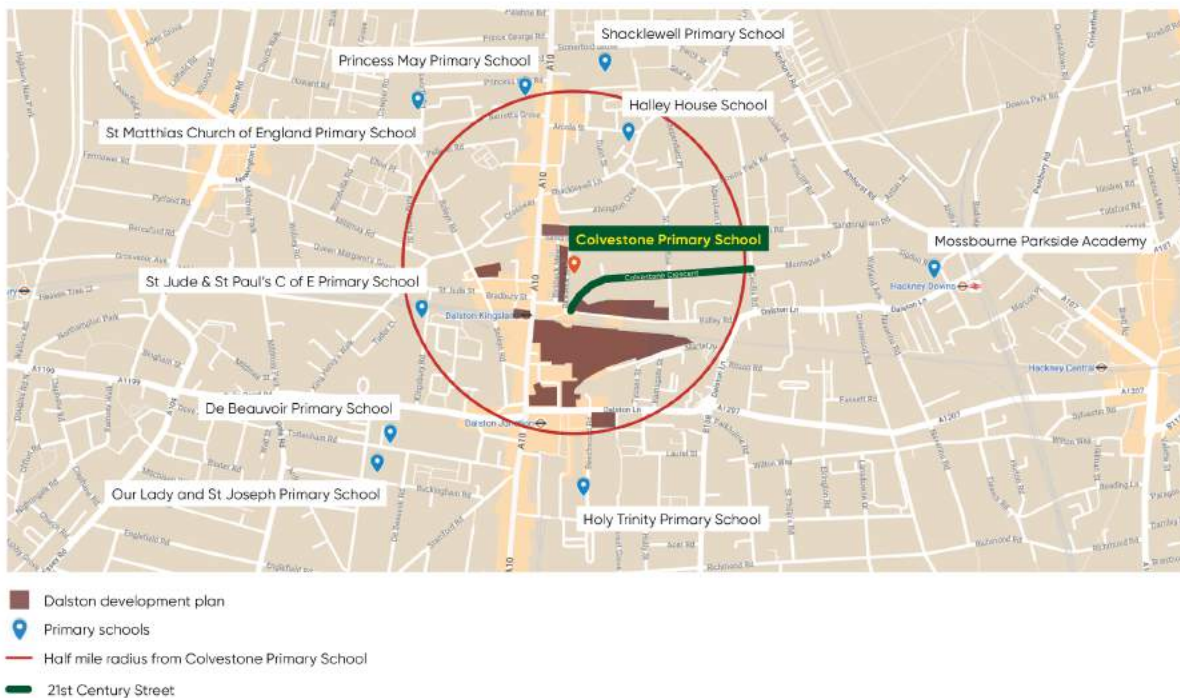
Also, please note that at the 24 April meeting, parents asked Paul Senior if they were to send their children to Princess May what guarantees they would have that Princess May, which is

also struggling with under enrollment, would not be closed in the next 5 to 6 years. Mr. Senior replied that he could make no such assurances.

If a minority of parents send their children to Princess May, the merger could do little to improve the enrollment problem at Princess May. In addition, Colvestone children who move there could have the deeply traumatic experience of having their school closed twice. **If the Council can't ensure the stability of the Princess May/Colvestone merger, it should not be undertaking this plan.**

## Reduction of choice for local families

The closure of Colvestone and nearby De Beauvoir Primary School would mean there would be no non-faith, one-form entry local authority schools within a mile of the Colvestone building.



Our local area would have three religious schools, Holy Trinity, St Matthias, and Our Lady and St. Joseph. According to a 2017 consultation report, **84% of respondents agreed that they would like Hackney's schools to be non-denominational.**[1] But the closure of Colvestone and De Beauvoir could force parents to choose between sending their child to a religious school or travelling further for school. And the further they are from a school, the less likely they are to get in.

The area also has an academy, Mossbourne Parkside Academy, and a free school, Halley House.

Halley House has deeply troubling ownership. It is run by the Bellevue Place Education Trust, (BPET) which operates 10 primary schools mostly in London and which is a joint venture of the Bellevue Education Trust and a company called the Place Group. Bellevue Education Trust is owned by GEMS Education, the largest operator of private kindergarten to grade 12 schools in the world, whose founder and chairman is based in the UAE. A consortium led by the private equity firm CVC Capital Partners owns a 30 percent share of GEMS Education including its stake in Bellevue Education Trust. BPET and its related companies have been the subject of several newspaper articles questioning their ownership and business practices. The articles include:

- Trustees of BPET own substantial shares in companies, including the Place Group, to which BPET has awarded large contracts. [2]
- In 2016 the Sunday Times revealed that a Saudi oil tycoon was the largest investor, via a British Virgin Island's company, in Bellevue Education. [3]
- The Good Law Project threatened to issue legal proceedings after the Place Group won a contract to run tender competitions on behalf of public sector bodies to procure services to reach their net zero goals. The framework was valued at £70 billion and the Place Group was the only bidder. The agreement was withdrawn after the Good Law Project exposed this shoddy procurement deal. [4]

It should be noted that although Hackney Council says now it was against the establishment of free schools, in fact BPET says it was fully supported by the Council to open up Halley House.[5] A 2014 article in the Hackney Citizen about the opening of free schools in Hackney states, "Hackney Council's newly-appointed Cabinet Member for Children's Service, Councillor Antoinette Bramble said: 'We've always been very open to innovation within education, and the phenomenal improvements seen in our schools over the last decade are testament to that.'

'We work closely with all of the schools in Hackney and *we look forward to supporting any free schools which open in our borough*. They join a family of schools with high aspirations for all of Hackney's young people.'" (emphasis added) [6]

It appears rich people are using schools, including Halley House, to become richer. Parents in the area should not feel forced to send their children there due to limited options in the area.

The only nearby local authority options would be Shacklewell, which is currently full, and Princess May. Hackney Council is proposing sending students from Colvestone to Princess May. However, as indicated above, Princess May is a very unpopular choice for Colvestone families.

The reduction of choice in the Dalston area also threatens to jeopardise the Council's ambitions for the new development in Dalston Plan (see [Impact on local development](#)). While the Council claims that it wants to attract families to the new flats, **those flats may not be attractive to**

**families if the only choices in the area are three religious schools, a free school owned by remote and global corporations, an academy, a school on the busy A10 and a school that is oversubscribed.**

The Hackney Labour Party 2022-26 Manifesto states, “We will continue to oppose the forced academisation of schools... and campaign for an education system that is democratic and inclusive.”[7] However, the current proposal could lead to academisation via the back door. **If Hackney closes local authority schools and later demand requires new schools to be built or reopened, the government’s Free School Presumption policy means the Council will be under pressure to reopen them as free schools/academies, further reducing the proportion of local authority schools.** [8]

Hackney Education has already been disproportionately allocating students to free schools, academies and faith schools. In 2022 although academy, faith and free schools represent 33 percent of schools, they received 40 percent of allocations and in 2021 received 46 percent of allocations.[9] Using current per pupil funding figure (£6,484), that means that in 2022, Hackney gave more than £162,000 per year to academy, faith and free schools and in 2021 more than £233,000 per year that might have gone to local authority schools.[10]

In the 24 April Council engagement meeting with Colvestone parents/carers, Hackney Education said that students are allocated to their closest school. In a time of dropping enrollment Hackney Education is allocating students and hundreds of thousands of pounds to schools that it says it has no or limited authority to close. That practice undermines local authority schools, and is based on a presumption that academy, faith and free schools are the same as local authority provision, which this current situation has clearly demonstrated is not the case. **If Hackney were genuinely committed to ensuring local authority schools can survive this period of decreasing enrollment and remain a viable choice for parents now and in the future, it would allocate students to their closest local authority school.**

## Summary

The consequences of this proposed merger have not been fully considered. In merging Colvestone and Princess May, the Council is attempting to send families to a very different education environment and our evidence suggests a majority of parents do not want to go to Princess May. In a choice system the Council has limited control over where parents send their children and the question of which school parents will choose is hard to predict. Parents may go to free schools or academies, which doesn’t help the Council’s finances. They may leave the borough altogether.

The Council appears to have no plan in the event that only a minority of parents send their children to Princess May, which seems likely therefore leaving Princess May in a similar vulnerable position. In the absence of a plan, those who do send their child(ren) to Princess May, run the risk of having their school closed twice.



The proposed merger and closure plan also severely reduces choice for all local parents and prospective parents and increases the proportion of faith, academy and free schools both now and in the future.

Colvestone offers families of this area a choice that should continue to be available. This community deserves to have a non-denominational, local authority school they can walk to, one that has a strong academic record and that offers the closeness and individual attention of a one-form entry environment.

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### Footnotes – Parent choice section

- [1] Hackney: schools for everyone, Consultation Report, Dec. 2017, page 30. See: [https://consultation.hackney.gov.uk/communications-engagement/hackney-schools-for-everyone/user\\_uploads/hackney-schools-for-everyone-survey-report.pdf](https://consultation.hackney.gov.uk/communications-engagement/hackney-schools-for-everyone/user_uploads/hackney-schools-for-everyone-survey-report.pdf)
- [2] “Will government plans lead to 1,000 academy chiefs paid £150,000+?,” The Guardian, 26 Apr. 2016 <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/apr/26/academy-chiefs-pay-bromley-schools-rachel-de-souza>
- [3] Saudi oil tycoon revealed as investor in schools company, The Sunday Times, 10 April 2016. See: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/f53a9274-fe97-11e5-b5b9-5f40d4ddd6f6?shareToken=06209c7b9c1b19f09b17eec896f6d00b>
- [4] Transparency has prevailed this time, the Good Law Project, 11 November, 2022. See: <https://goodlawproject.org/update/transparency-has-prevailed-this-time/>
- [5] Bellevue Place Education Trust—the free school group you’ve never heard of, Schools Week, 22 Apr. 2016 See: <https://schoolsworld.co.uk/bellevue-place-education-trust-who-are-they/>
- [6] Three new free schools approved for Hackney, Hackney Citizen, 19 June 2014 See: <https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2014/06/19/three-new-free-schools-approved-hackney/>
- [7] Hackney Labour Party 2022-26 Manifesto, page 26. See: <https://www.hackney-labour.org.uk/hackney-labour-2022-26-manifesto/>
- [8] The free school presumption, Jan. 2023. See: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/113056/5/Free\\_school\\_presumption\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/113056/5/Free_school_presumption_guidance.pdf)
- [9] Applications and Offers at Hackney Primary Schools 2018-22, See: <https://education.hackney.gov.uk/sites/default/files/document/Applications%20and%20Offers%20at%20Hackney%20Primary%20Schools%202018-22.pdf>
- [10] Primary schools potential closure / merger plans, See: <https://education.hackney.gov.uk/content/primary-schools-potential-changes#:~:text=Hackney%20Council%20is%20considering%20consulting,September%202024%20at%20the%20earliest.>

## 5. Impact on children with special educational needs

Colvestone has a high proportion of children who are on the SEND register (25%).

Seven percent of Colvestone students have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), above the 4.3% average across the borough and significantly above the national average of 2.2%. This is 10 individual children with a range of identified needs.

In addition, there are another 25 children who have identified as needing additional support due to their special educational needs. This 17% is similar to the Hackney average but much higher than the national average.

This proposal will affect the majority of children on the SEND register as they are concentrated in the lower year groups (rather than Year 5 and Year 6 who will not be directly affected).[1]

| Year Group   | EHCP      | SEN Support |
|--------------|-----------|-------------|
| Reception    | 0         | 6           |
| Year 1       | 3         | 6           |
| Year 2       | 2         | 2           |
| Year 3       | 1         | 2           |
| Year 4       | 1         | 1           |
| Year 5       | 1         | 4           |
| Year 6       | 2         | 4           |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>10</b> | <b>25</b>   |

There were 16 SEND families who responded to the second parental survey about parental choice. ALL of those families affected (14 families) stated that they would NOT send their child(ren) to Princess May.

For SEND families the main reasons people gave for not wanting to send their children to Princess May were around:

- Not wanting to send their children to a bigger school (71%)
- Pollution levels (64%)

We also asked our families what the principal factors were that they took into consideration when choosing a primary school for their children. For SEND families, the **size of the school** was significantly more important (chosen by 81%) than **distance from home** (chosen by 38% of SEND families but 71% of all families). In second place were **pollution levels around the school** (63%).

“Colvestone is the ideal school for my 6-year-old autistic son,” said one parent. “As a one-form entry school, tucked away from busy roads, it provides a calmer, less overwhelming environment, which is of utmost importance to children that are autistic and struggle to process overstimulating surroundings. I could never imagine him settling into a two-form entry school and being as happy as he is at Colvestone. Losing this school would be devastating for him.”

We also asked SEND parents which schools they are interested in. Again there are very broad responses:

- Queensbridge (25%)
- Out of borough (25%)
- Shacklewell Primary (19%) – yet this school is oversubscribed
- None of the closest schools but staying in borough (19%)
- Halley House / Mossbourne Parkside (both 13%)

The local faith schools were not chosen by faith schools at all. Two SEND families stated that they would not choose another school and would consider home-educating instead. The remaining survey results are in the [Appendix](#).

Once again, it is clear from the factors listed above that parents are choosing Colvestone very deliberately. At the public meeting, a parent talked about how they travel from Newham with their SEND child because it is a small, friendly, inclusive school where her son is supported and encouraged rather than feeling excluded from the other pupils. We are aware of another family who travels from Islington for similar reasons.

This informal proposal to close/amalgamate Colvestone, places these SEND children in a very vulnerable situation as they would have to move to another school. The parents are particularly concerned about potential transitions as these children need stability and routine.

Two example letters from parents of children with special education needs can be found in the [Appendix](#).

**The Council should understand that Colvestone is a positive choice for many SEND families, and this is a strength to build on for the future as there is increasing demand for SEND places.**

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#### **Footnotes – Impact on children with special educational needs**

[1] Colvestone SENCO presentation to SEND parents in October 2022

## 6. Impact on local development

### Impact on the Dalston Development Plan

The Draft Dalston Plan has ambitious plans for Dalston with Hackney's population set to increase by 16% [1], which, as the Mayor stated, was created so that "Residents' priorities will be put at the heart of the Council's work in Dalston". This would be harmed by the closure of Colvestone Primary School. Those plans include:

- [Building more than 600 new homes in Dalston](#) [2]. For almost all of the new developments, Colvestone would be the closest school. There is no similar development plan near Princess May.
- Turning Colvestone Crescent into the [first 21st Century Street](#) [3], the borough's first permanent play street.

Most of the development would be concentrated at the [Kingsland Shopping Centre](#) [4] (see reference image below) with around 30% of the proposed housing being 3 bedroom family sized units and the aim of 50% of the development to be affordable housing (as well as smaller residential developments at surrounding sites) [5]. This could bring 200+ new families into the immediate area. If Colvestone and De Beauvoir schools were closed, parents in that development would have to travel almost half a mile to get to a non-denominational school. And even the closest one, Princess May, sits next to the A10 (see map in [Air pollution](#)).



Reference image: Hackney Local Development Plan 2033 – opportunity site D5 – Kingsland Shopping Centre

[Government guidance](#) [6] on school closures advises that local authorities can close schools when “there are surplus places elsewhere in the local area which can accommodate displaced pupils and there is no predicted demand for the school in the medium to long term”. The Dalston Plan makes it clear that there is demand for Colvestone’s school places in the medium to long term, because of the large number of new housing which the SPD will encourage in the immediate vicinity, and for which Colvestone will be the nearest primary school.

Closing Colvestone could impede the success of the development by making it hard for developers to sell those apartments to families, given the limited schooling options. The closure of so many local authority schools, and particularly one close to a new development, threatens to lock Hackney into a death spiral when it comes to families living in the area--a reduction in families leads to the closure of schools and reduction of choice, which makes the area unappealing to families, which leads to more closed. If Hackney wants to get out of that pattern, it has to fight to keep as many schools afloat as possible during these difficult times, especially ones near new family-friendly developments, in order to make it possible to bring families back to the area.

## Impact on Hackney’s first 21st Century Street

Colvestone Crescent is slated to become the first 21st Century Street, a long tree-lined pedestrian walkway with lots of new plantings, ecology gardens, spaces for congregating and a small playing field. A key tenet of the 21st Century Street is that it is located next to a primary school. Explicitly, without the school, that plan makes less sense.

[The plan](#) [7][8] says “The first phase – positioned directly next to Colvestone Crescent Primary School presents an opportunity to create a permanent school street. It will expand the existing school playground into the street, creating a safe space for children to play on the street itself”

(see more about 21st Century Street in [Colvestone Crescent 21st Century Street](#)).

## Summary

**The proposed closure of Colvestone could be potentially damaging to Hackney’s plans for Dalston’s future, making the new developments a harder sell to parents and ripping out the heart of the first 21st Century Street.**

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### Footnotes – Impact on local development section

[1] 16% Hackney’s population to increase by 2033, LP33 Supplementary Planning Document – Draft Dalston Plan – Summary Doc – Buildings 2021.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WNNYPAJPzAIDtg3nOnJDWtwbQOtyl8LI/view>

[2] Hackney Local Plan 2033 – Development Plan – Dalston Opportunity Sites.

<https://dalstonplan.commonplace.is/en-GB/proposals/opportunity-sites-in-dalston/step1>

[3] Hackney’s 21st Century Street consultation – Colvestone Crescent, Dec 2020.

<https://consultation.hackney.gov.uk/streetscene/21cstreets2/>

[4] Hackney Local Plan 2033 – Opportunity Site D5 – Kingsland Shopping Centre.  
<https://dalstonplan.commonplace.is/proposals/opportunity-sites-in-dalston/step6>

[5] DfE paper on Opening and closing maintained schools – Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers, Jan 2023,  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1131568/Opening\\_and\\_closing\\_maintained\\_schools\\_Jan\\_2023.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1131568/Opening_and_closing_maintained_schools_Jan_2023.pdf)

[6] LP33 Supplementary Planning Document – Draft Dalston Plan, Hackney, 2021.  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ARhuxFDHuwAC8\\_sYfs7LhSkdgbJFgYk/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ARhuxFDHuwAC8_sYfs7LhSkdgbJFgYk/view)

[7] LP33 Supplementary Planning Document – Hackney Draft Dalston Plan - Implementation Strategy May v13, 2021. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GDFSBDiMkl5cz5g-XMebwQxjYvvzhqIF/view>

[8] Colvestone Crescent Engagement Pack prepared by 00SW for London Borough of Hackney, Nov 202.  
[https://consultation.hackney.gov.uk/streetscene/21cstreets2/user\\_uploads/266\\_221129\\_cc\\_consulationpres.pdf](https://consultation.hackney.gov.uk/streetscene/21cstreets2/user_uploads/266_221129_cc_consulationpres.pdf)

## 7. Air pollution

This section details London-wide and London Borough of Hackney policy commitments regarding pollution generally and specifically in relationship to schools, the problems inherent to proposals to merge Colvestone Primary School with Princess May School on the Princess May site, and landmark planning commitments to make Colvestone Crescent the first London Borough of Hackney 21<sup>st</sup> Century Street.

### Background

The Mayor of London and the London Borough of Hackney have both made commitments to reducing pollution generally and the Mayor of London has made reducing pollution specifically around schools a key policy focus. As identified by the Mayor of London: ‘There are two main air pollutants of concern in London, based on their impact on human health: nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub>). Poor air quality stunts the growth of children’s lungs and worsens chronic illness, such as asthma, lung and heart disease. There is also emerging evidence of impacts on mental health and an increased vulnerability to the most severe impacts of COVID-19. For particulate matter the challenge is even greater still. All schools in London still exceed the World Health Organization guideline for PM<sub>2.5</sub>.’[1]

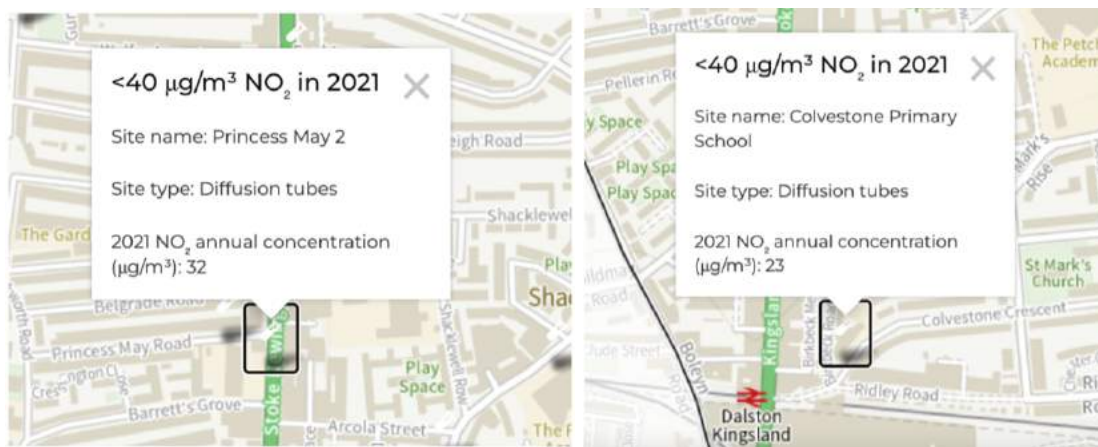
Each year, ‘the capital’s poor air quality contributes to around 1,000 emergency hospital admissions for children with asthma and other respiratory conditions.’[2] Furthermore, ‘children growing up in polluted areas in London showed significantly smaller lung volume, with a loss of approximately five per cent in lung capacity – equivalent to two large eggs – compared to their peers in the rest of England...[and] research shows that *those exposed to the worst air pollution are more likely to be deprived Londoners and from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities*.’[3] Furthermore, pollution has been shown to ‘also affect [children’s] working memory and hence their ability to learn’ [4]

In 2018 the Mayor of London launched the School Air Quality Audit, a scheme in which the London Borough of Hackney took part and committed to further measures across the Borough[5] – a pledge to expand these schemes borough-wide is an explicit commitment to funding received under the Mayor of London’s Clean Air for Schools Audit. As part of these initiatives, a greater number of pollution monitoring sites have been installed enabling us to see clear disparities between sites across the borough.

Hackney’s own Air Quality Action Plan 2021-2025 identifies school communities as amongst the most susceptible groups to the serious health impacts of air pollution within its strategy to improve air quality throughout the borough.[6]

## Proposed merger of Colvestone Primary School with Princess May School on the Princess May site

The Council is proposing to send students from Colvestone Primary School to Princess May Primary, whose playground is right next to the A10. To get to and from Princess May many Colvestone students would be forced to walk along the A10.[7] As [Hackney's Local Plan 2033](#) states, "Kingsland High Street (A10) is the main route through this area and is heavily traffic dominated. As a result of this, it suffers from high noise and air pollution levels." [8] The Council's [air quality monitoring system](#) shows that the Princess May site had 40 percent higher levels of Nitrogen Oxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) in 2021 than the Colvestone Primary School site.



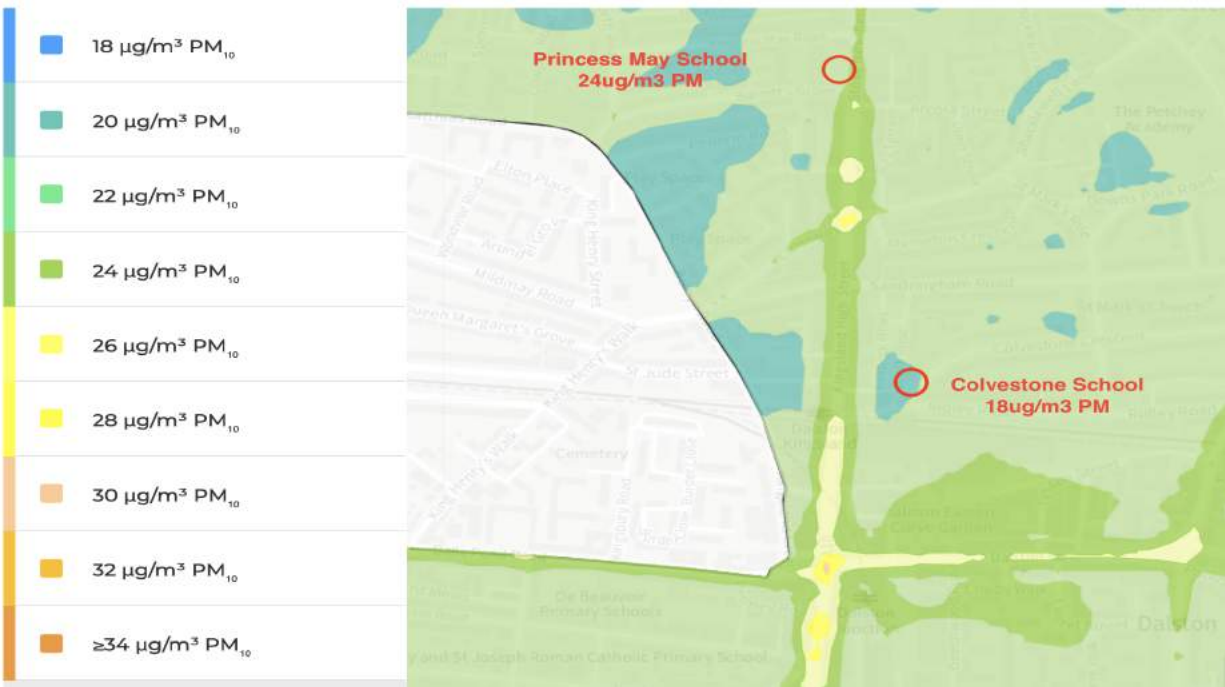
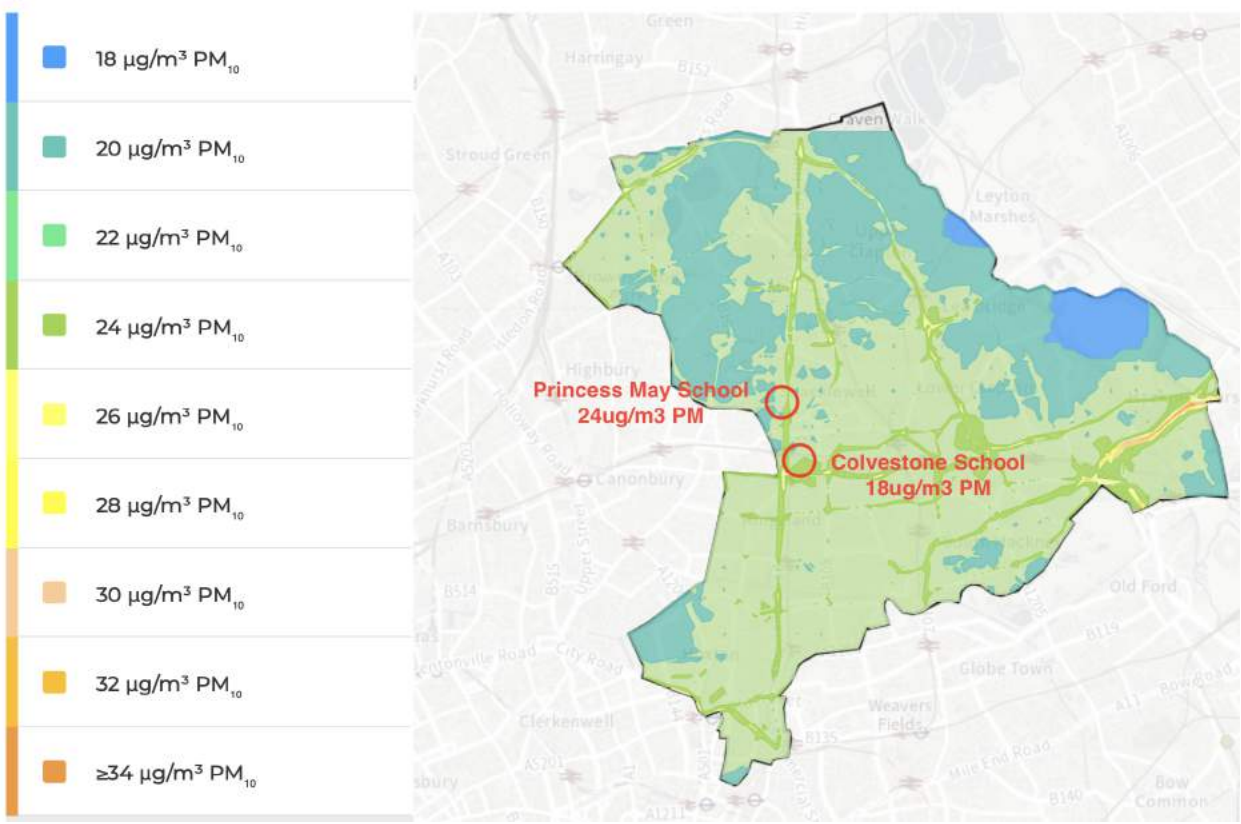
Key: Hackney Council air quality monitoring figures from 2021 showing that the Princess May site has 40% higher concentrations of NO<sub>2</sub> compared to the Colvestone Primary School site. It is reasonable to assume that the completion of the Colvestone Crescent 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Street with 40% tree canopy and other pollution-mitigating measures will reduce it further around Colvestone Primary School, whilst Princess May will remain on the A10, further increasing this disparity.

Ref: <https://hackney.gov.uk/air-quality>

[Note the WHO annual mean air quality guideline is 10 µg/m<sup>3</sup> for NO<sub>2</sub>.]

In addition to Breathe London air quality monitoring project figures that show 'almost 40 per cent of the NO<sub>x</sub> pollution at schools comes from road transport, with diesel cars being the single biggest local contributor to NO<sub>x</sub> pollution at London primary schools...' [9] the borough is also recording dangerously high levels of particulate matter (PM<sub>2.5</sub> and PM<sub>10</sub>). Whilst more dangerous PM<sub>2.5</sub> levels are not currently available on the London Borough of Hackney website [10], it is reasonable to assume that these figures track (if not exceed, owing to the types of vehicles on main roads) PM<sub>10</sub> concentration comparisons between the Princess May site and that of Colvestone Primary School. These comparisons, using London Borough of Hackney data, show particulate pollution at least 20% higher at the Princess May site compared to those at Colvestone.





Reference images: Hackney Council air pollution mapping (2018, prior to LTNs and removal of parking / School Street at southern end of Colvestone Crescent) shows PM10 levels at least 20% higher at the Princess May Site.

Ref: <https://map2.hackney.gov.uk/maps/air-quality-pm10/index.html>

[Note that the WHO annual mean air quality guideline for PM10 is 15 µg/m<sup>3</sup>]

At the Princess May site approximately half of all available outdoor space sits next to the A10 with a bus route and a traffic-light-controlled pedestrian crossing immediately adjacent that serves to further concentrate congestion and idling traffic. As noted above, these stark differences in levels of pollution are likely to increase both with recently completed and future plans at both sites: the greening of Colvestone Crescent as it becomes the borough's model 21<sup>st</sup> Century Street (see below) contrasting with LTNs that entrench Princess May's position on the main road traffic route through the local area.[11]

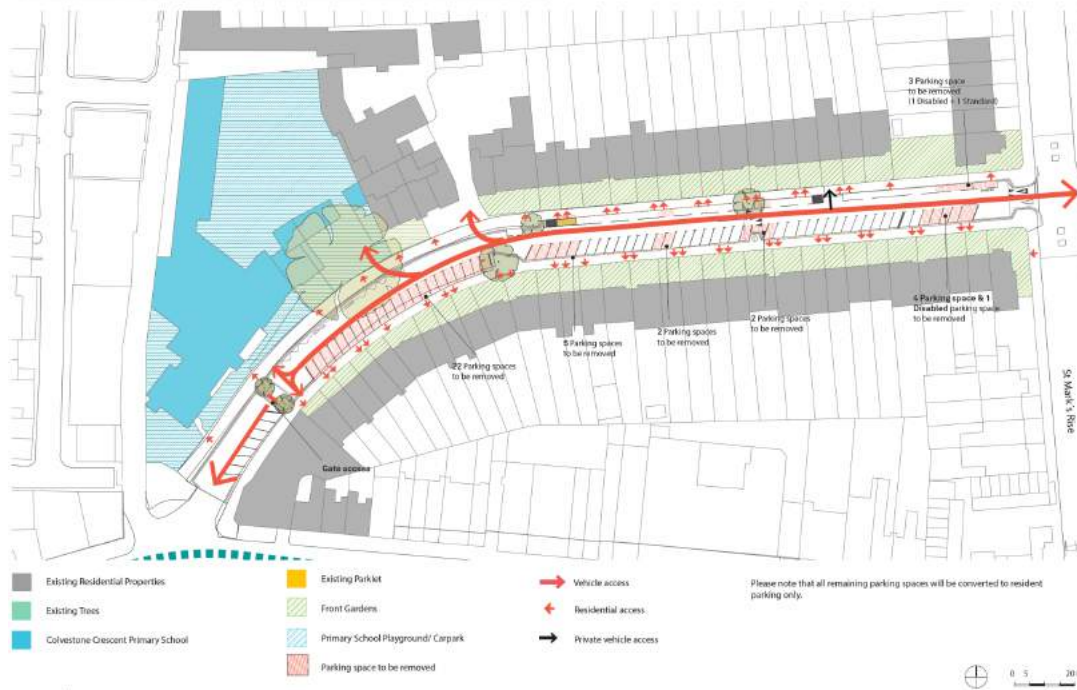
### **Colvestone Crescent 21<sup>st</sup> Century Street**

Adjoining the £1m Ridley Road Market scheme that incorporates local landscaping (portions of which are already completed at junction of Colvestone Crescent and Ridley Road) the Colvestone Crescent 21<sup>st</sup> Century Street forms part of the Colvestone Crescent masterplan.

The Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and School Streets the Council have established to improve air quality in the borough could drive even more traffic to the A10. By contrast, Hackney Council already has an intelligently-designed and fully-funded plan to reduce air pollution around Colvestone Primary School. Colvestone Crescent, the road on which the school is located, is already a [School Street](#)[12], closed to traffic during the school run. The next fully-funded[13] stage is to develop it into the borough's first 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Street, the initial phase of which, 'positioned directly next to Colvestone Crescent primary school – presents an opportunity to create a permanent school street. It will expand the existing school playground into the street, creating a safe space for children to play on the street itself.'[14]

The consultation documents notes that the project, with the school at its heart, builds on 'a highly successful parklet project on Colvestone Crescent, instigated in 2019 by an active and passionate group of residents' and has 'been developed in collaboration with residents to ensure that the proposed green space will serve as an extension of an active and passionate local community.'[15] The Colvestone Crescent 21<sup>st</sup> Century Street is a community project formed around a community school, and a bold and forward-looking plan that promises both to draw and retain families in the heart of Dalston.

Existing Site & Proposed Parking Removal



The Colvestone Crescent 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Street reinvents Colvestone Crescent into a long tree-lined pedestrian walkway with lots of new plantings, ecology gardens, spaces for congregating, 'wobble walks' and informal play structures.

Proposed\_Overall Masterplan



① School Street/ Parklet

② New trees/ kerb build out

③ Entrance Zone with greening, cluster seating & cycle stands



Paving enhancements & greening replace car parking at intervals along the street.

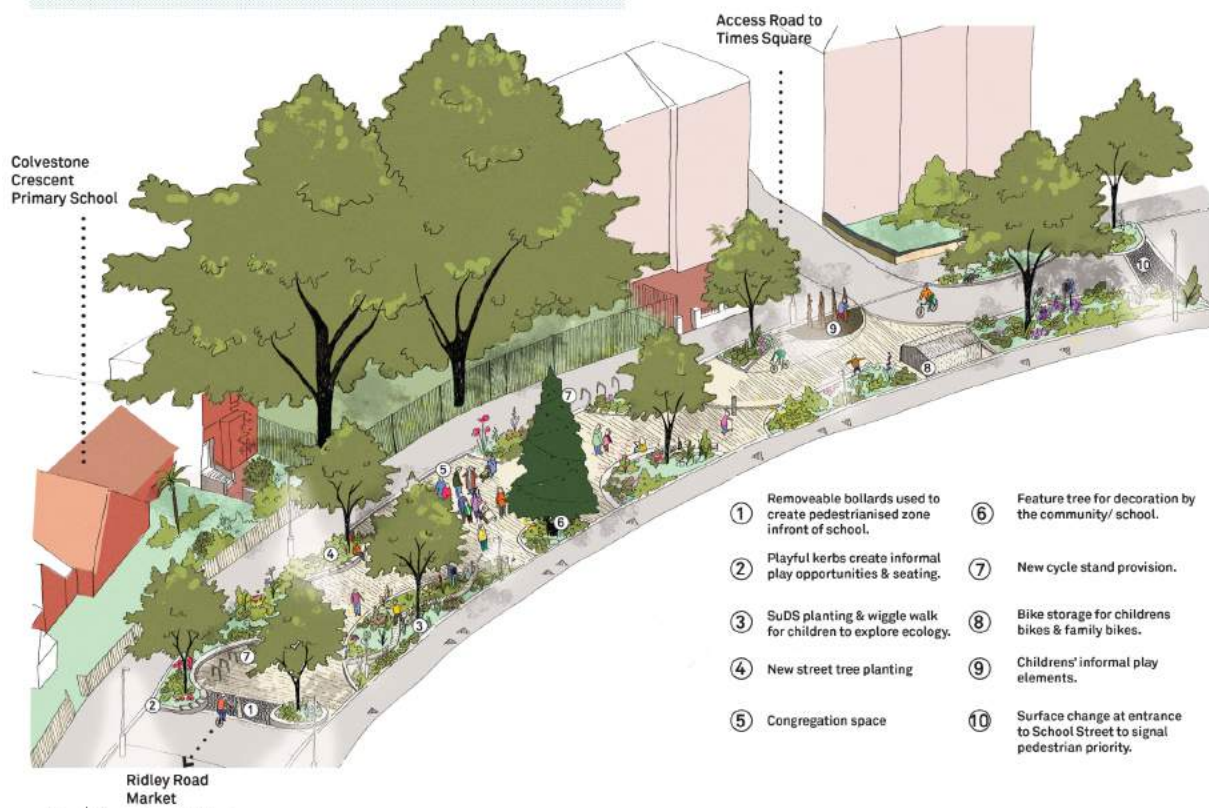


Clustered seating along the whole length of the western stretch of the street





Illustrative Axonometric



Whilst remaining accessible, the scheme incorporates an ambitious tree-planting strategy, significantly increasing the tree canopy of the street, active travel infrastructure and an innovative play strategy.[16] It could be assumed that further funding for the expansion of this

plan, if desired, would reasonably be derived from Community Infrastructure Levies on the Hackney Local Plan (LP33) / the Dalston Plan – CILs having the intention of ‘ensuring that a new development contributes to the cost of the infrastructure that the development will rely on, such as schools and roads.’[17]

The Colvestone Crescent 21st Century Street will be the London Borough of Hackney’s first demonstration of how ‘streets can adapt to help tackle the climate crisis’.[18] Oliver Lord, Head of policy and campaigns at Environmental Defense Fund Europe has said: ‘The health burden of air pollution is not equal. Whether kids attend school on a main road or in a leafy suburb should not determine the quality of air they breathe, which will affect them for the rest of their lives. Our schools should become a catalyst for safer, quieter and less polluted roads.’[19] Colvestone Primary School is a shining example of exactly this catalyst: an historic school, imbedded in its local community, directly inspiring the model 21<sup>st</sup> Century Street project – a progressive prototype of which the London Borough of Hackney should be extremely proud.

It is impossible to see how a proposal to move children, one of the most vulnerable groups in the borough to the ruinous effects of pollution[20], to a site with higher levels of pollution is either defensible on duty of care terms or commensurate with Hackney Council’s public pledge to ‘no increases in pollution at schools in Hackney’[21]. Indeed the site at Colvestone – embedded as it is in the landmark 21<sup>st</sup> Century Street project, adheres to bolder commitments to *lower* pollution specifically around schools, in accordance with the Mayor of London’s strategy to improve the air quality around all London schools.

## Summary

As identified by the Mayor of London and Hackney Council there is a clean air crisis in London. Children are amongst the most vulnerable groups to the damaging long-term effects of pollution: it determines future quality of life (in terms of health, attainment and other vectors of inequality). The pollution at Princes May Primary School, the proposed site for a merger with Colvestone Primary School, is drastically higher than at the Colvestone Primary School site (as demonstrated by London Borough of Hackney figures). The Council has an innovative, fully funded plan to continue to further reduce air pollution near Colvestone. No such plan yet exists for Princess May. While it is incumbent on the Council to protect the children who attend school there currently, it makes no sense in the meantime to move children from a school with lower pollution and a plan for further reductions to a school with higher pollution and with limited scope for further reductions.

The landmark London Borough of Hackney Colvestone Crescent 21<sup>st</sup> Century Street is a signature demonstration of how our streets and our communities can adapt to rise to the challenge of the climate crisis, and it has Colvestone Primary School at its heart. To remove the vulnerable group for whom, in the first instance, the project has been designed would be perverse: moving students from a school where there is a clear plan for improving air quality to a school whose playground and buildings are close to a high traffic, high pollution street simply doesn’t make sense – either for a proposed merger or for prospective parents. On the contrary,

the position of Colvestone Primary School at the heart of the model 21<sup>st</sup> Century Street greatly enhances its offer to families, the retention of whom in the heart of Dalston is a priority concern for Hackney Council with ramifications across education, planning and community cohesion. Further, given concerns for falling roll numbers (challenged in ‘Financial Viability’ and ‘Impact on the Dalston Development Plan’ earlier in this document), the Colvestone Primary School site is a more viable and attractive destination site for pupils affected by any proposed mergers or closures of primary schools in the borough.[22]

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### Footnotes – Air pollution section

[1] Press Release / Policy Announcement, Mayor of London, 1 November 2020. See:

<https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-unveils-plans-to-reduce-toxic-air-at-schools>

[2] Harriet Edwards, Senior Policy and Projects Manager, Air Quality, at Asthma UK and the British Lung Foundation, quoted in Press release, Mayor of London, 6th Aug 2021:

<https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/31m-kids-going-to-schools-in-areas-with-toxic-air>

[3] Emphasis added. Press release, Mayor of London, 6th Aug 2021:

<https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/31m-kids-going-to-schools-in-areas-with-toxic-air>

[4] Larissa Lockwood, Director of Clean Air at Global Action Plan, quoted in Press Release / Policy Announcement, Mayor of London, 1 November 2020. See:

<https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-unveils-plans-to-reduce-toxic-air-at-schools>

[5] Mayor of London School Air Quality Audit (2018), re: Local Implementation Plan (funding that could be applied for, for work 2019/2020), p.46/7, quoting from the bid guidelines: ‘2.34 In the short- to medium-term, there must be a particular focus on action to reduce air, pollution, reducing exposure to it and tackling pollution hotspots, which boroughs should support through their LIP. Locations that have large numbers of vulnerable Londoners, such as schools, should be prioritised for action. In particular, the boroughs have an important role in ensuring recommendations from the Mayor’s school air quality audit programme are implemented, and LIP funding can be directed at both the audits and the delivery of measures.’ Accessed here:

[https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/saq\\_report\\_-\\_de\\_beauparc\\_hackney\\_final\\_draft\\_-\\_inc\\_appendices.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/saq_report_-_de_beauparc_hackney_final_draft_-_inc_appendices.pdf)

[6] London Borough Hackney Clean Air Plan 2021-25, section 3.8 (p.35). Accessed here:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1g2gQvKM71Fto95rw0rdYo8sPtJAM1kjo/view>

[7] See the Mayor of London’s School Air Quality Audit documents on the importance of considering travel to and from school in the overall consideration of a site’s pollution impact / potential for mitigation.

Accessed here:

[https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/saq\\_report\\_-\\_de\\_beauparc\\_hackney\\_final\\_draft\\_-\\_inc\\_appendices.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/saq_report_-_de_beauparc_hackney_final_draft_-_inc_appendices.pdf)

[8] Hackney Local Plan 2033, adopted July 2020, p.22. Accessed here:

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HRu0A\\_fdoWUi3OBfzUT03TT4S9gYwHDq/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HRu0A_fdoWUi3OBfzUT03TT4S9gYwHDq/view)

[9] Press Release / Policy Announcement, Mayor of London, 1 November 2020. See:

<https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-unveils-plans-to-reduce-toxic-air-at-schools>

[10] The link from <https://hackney.gov.uk/air-quality> is a dead link and no other published monitoring data for PM2.5 from the London Borough of Hackney can currently be found.

[11] Even if, as is hoped, LTNs bring down overall traffic volumes in the borough, the relative positions of the two sites in regards to road infrastructure / traffic, the surrounding buildings, vegetation and use are

so manifestly different that this stark difference in levels of pollution between the two sites is long set to remain.

[12] <https://hackney.gov.uk/school-streets>

[13] Confirmed by Cllr Woodley, Colvestone Primary School public consultation meeting, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2023

[14] Colvestone Crescent / 21<sup>st</sup> Century Street, London Borough of Hackney, November 2021. Accessed here: [file:///Users/mc/Downloads/266\\_221129\\_CC\\_ConsulationPres.pdf](file:///Users/mc/Downloads/266_221129_CC_ConsulationPres.pdf)

[15] Colvestone Crescent / 21<sup>st</sup> Century Street, London Borough of Hackney, November 2021. Accessed here: [file:///Users/mc/Downloads/266\\_221129\\_CC\\_ConsulationPres.pdf](file:///Users/mc/Downloads/266_221129_CC_ConsulationPres.pdf)

[16] Colvestone Crescent / 21<sup>st</sup> Century Street, London Borough of Hackney, November 2021. Accessed here: [file:///Users/mc/Downloads/266\\_221129\\_CC\\_ConsulationPres.pdf](file:///Users/mc/Downloads/266_221129_CC_ConsulationPres.pdf)

[17] Community Infrastructure Levies (Planning Act 2008) are due on local developments and here specifically the developments committed to in the Hackney Local Plan (LP33 / 'Dalston Plan', adopted July 2020). See Mayor of London School Air Quality Audit (2018), section 5.8.10. See also 'Financial Viability' and 'Historical Significance and Protections' (this document).

[18] Colvestone Crescent / 21<sup>st</sup> Century Street, London Borough of Hackney, November 2021. Accessed here: [file:///Users/mc/Downloads/266\\_221129\\_CC\\_ConsulationPres.pdf](file:///Users/mc/Downloads/266_221129_CC_ConsulationPres.pdf)

[19] Quoted in Press Release / Policy Announcement, Mayor of London, 1 November 2020. See:

<https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-unveils-plans-to-reduce-toxic-air-at-schools>

[20] In addition to impeding brain function, 'primary school children are amongst the most vulnerable of the at-risk groups, as their lungs are still developing, and toxic air can stunt their growth, causing significant health problems in later life.' Mayor of London School Air Quality Audit (2018), accessed here: [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/saq\\_report\\_-\\_de\\_beauparc\\_hackney\\_final\\_draft\\_-\\_inc\\_appendices.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/saq_report_-_de_beauparc_hackney_final_draft_-_inc_appendices.pdf)

[21] Mayor Philip Glanville, quoted 2018, accessed here: <https://www.cleanair4schools.co.uk/about>

[22] It might also be assumed that the Princess May site also offers the Borough greater asset value for repurposing without the listing and local protections that apply to the Grade II listed / Asset of Community Value / potentially covenanted Colvestone Primary School site in Colvestone Crescent (see [Historical significance and protections](#)).



## 8. Historical significance and protections

This section details the history of the building, its continuous operation as a school for the past 161 years, the existing protections on the building and site, and research relating to a possible covenant(s) on the building stipulating its educational function.

Built in 1862, Colvestone Primary School is a Grade II listed building[1] designed by TE Knightley in a Gothic Revival Style, which is situated in the St Mark's Conservation Area and to which it forms a protected architectural gateway[2]. It was one of six Birkbeck Schools founded by businessman and educational philosopher and philanthropist William Ellis. The schools were named after George Birkbeck, founder of Birkbeck, University of London, and pioneer in adult education.

The Colvestone building (formerly known as the 'Kingsland Birkbeck School') was purpose-built to reflect Ellis' radical ideas about education. Richard Clarke (Birkbeck / University of Westminster) writes: 'The Birkbeck Schools were secular, often for girls as well as boys, emphasised teaching through dialogue, rejecting rote learning (as well as corporal punishment)' with an emphasis on "social economy" and "useful knowledge"[3]. Ellis' schools and social focus to learning were explicitly aimed at widening access to education.[4]

'Its premises, which today remain nearly intact as Colvestone Primary School, reflect in their architecture some of the most progressive elements of Ellis' philosophy', Clarke continues. 'Two aspects of the Kingsland School's design stand out...: the presence of individual classrooms and good lighting and ventilation' – here in contrast to the heavier, more overbearing and larger-scale architecture of the London Board schools which were built from 1870 onwards (for example, Princess May School, built 1899 and which is not a listed building). The small scale of the school building is particularly appealing to children – both in establishing a proximity with their peers in a school community in which familiarity is the rule, but also in the way that this nurturing environment is reflected through the architectural detailing – for instance, the low-level eaves and the decorative elements of the building. These features, combined with the overall layout of the school – including the main hall which is central to the plan form – is both comforting for SEN children and helps them to navigate the building.

The Council has recently invested in sensitive refurbishment works to the listed school building, undertaking long-awaited and significant repairs to the external envelope including to the brickwork and stonework, as well as to the tiled roof and leadwork. The separately Grade II listed front railings have been also been carefully restored. The works have noticeably enhanced the school's appearance as a landmark building in Colvestone Crescent, marking the western gateway to the conservation area. The children's internal learning environment has also been brightened up by the decoration of classrooms, communal teaching spaces and corridors.[5] Whilst the building was shrouded in scaffolding and subject to both internal and external renovation over the last year (sadly also through the Reception open days) the wonderful benefits of these sensitive works are now being enjoyed as they reach completion and manifestly improve Colvestone's offer to prospective parents and pupils.

In addition to the light, airy nature of the purpose-built teaching, study and recreation spaces, the school benefits from two separate playgrounds: one for the Nursery and Early Years provision and one for the main school. The larger of its two playgrounds is calm, well-landscaped and proportioned, and insulated further from the road network by the enclosing school buildings and surrounding houses, together with the drop in land levels away from Colvestone Crescent. **The smaller of the two playgrounds, appearing on Council-produced pollution 'heat maps'[6] as having one of the lowest levels of pollution in the local area, is an outdoor classroom for Nursery and Early Years pupils and as such is designated an Asset of Community Value (2021).**

Most significantly, the Heritage Statement prepared in 2020 for the school refurbishment works writes in glowing terms of the contemporary condition of Colvestone Primary School, noting that 'in heritage terms, the original use is synonymous with the optimum viable use.'<sup>[7]</sup>

## **A note on ownership**

The Kingsland Birkbeck / Colvestone Primary School building was independently financed by William Ellis to house the school he founded in 1852, the building being completed in 1862. Initially built on leasehold land, the freehold was acquired 20 years later.<sup>[8]</sup> It remained unaffiliated with the School Board (founded 1870) but, in 1904, motivated by a shortage of secondary school provision in the area its foundational trust (The Birkbeck and William Ellis Schools Trust) entered into negotiations with the LCC initially for a grant to support the change to secondary use (and specifically the installation of a science laboratory).<sup>[9]</sup> By early 1905 however LCC demand in Hackney was specifically for girls secondary provision, and the trustees of the Birkbeck and William Ellis Schools Trust were under financial pressure relating to a second school (the William Ellis School, then in Gospel Oak).

In January 1905 a proposal was made to sell the Kingsland Birkbeck School (and site) to the LCC directly.<sup>[10]</sup> It was initially thought that the Trust could 'sell the freewill outright to the Council... free of all restrictions under the Endowed Schools or Charitable Trusts Acts'<sup>[11]</sup> though subsequent legal advice received in July 1905 advised that the Trust was determined an 'educational (as opposed charitable) trust' and therefore could not sell off educational assets, without condition and agreement by the Charity Commission, unless the Trust was wound up.<sup>[12]</sup> The Trust however continued to operate (not least with regards to the William Ellis School) and agreement of terms was not reached until November 1905<sup>[13]</sup> and the purchase completed in 1906.<sup>[14]</sup> Such was the pressure on provision the LCC committed to the conversion works on the site and the first new pupils began at the school in October 1905 prior to the LCC taking ownership.

Given the time taken to find an equitable solution for the Trust, LCC and Charities Commission it is suspected that a covenant exists on the building pertaining to its ongoing function as a school as a condition of its purchase. This is the subject of ongoing research, not limited to a request made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to the London Borough of Hackney (ref: 16591453), further research in the archived papers of the LCC (London Metropolitan Archive)

including legal advice received around the purchase of the school buildings in 1906, the archives of the Charities Commission (held in the National Archives at Kew) and the Land Registry.

The Birkbeck and William Ellis Schools Trust is still extant as a charitable foundation (and still appoints governors to the William Ellis School, in Highgate Road, Kentish Town).

## **Summary**

Colvestone Primary School is the last remaining Birkbeck School building and has functioned as a school for 161 years. Its architectural design and scale explicitly reflects the socially-minded and community-focus ideals of its founders – ideals specifically focussed on increasing access to education. As a purpose-built grade II listed school building, its best use is its optimum viable use as a fully-operational school educating local children. Recent restoration works on the building and internal modifications manifestly improve the school's appeal and parental offer.

Closing it as a school would be a significant historical loss to Dalston, one named in its listing, but would also remove the social heart from the St Marks Conservation Area and the community of Dalston. The school carries multiple site protections: two separate Grade II listings; its position as integral and planning-protected 'gateway' to the St Marks Conservation Area; an outdoor classroom designated an Asset of Community Value; with a potential covenant on the site protecting its educational function.

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## Footnotes – Historical significance and protections section

- [1] 'Colvestone Primary School was added to the National Heritage List for England in February 1975 at Grade II and is of special heritage interest on account of its architectural and historical value.' Heritage Statement (prepared for London Borough of Hackney Planning), *Heritage Collective*, 2020, p.9. Listed building entry (Historic England): 1265832. Separate Grade 2 entry for railings: 1226422. Accessed: [historicengland.org.uk](http://historicengland.org.uk)
- [2] For the identification of the Grade II listed Colvestone Primary School as a protected / locally important view see Draft Dalston Plan Supplementary Planning Document, May 2021, p.99, and recent planning applications on Colvestone Crescent. DDP SPD accessed here: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JKYYxGAtynP0NsxumGUAq\\_tR70Lg90\\_a/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JKYYxGAtynP0NsxumGUAq_tR70Lg90_a/view)
- [3] 'Self-Help and the London Mechanics' Institution – Birkbeck After (George) Birkbeck', Richard Clarke, Birkbeck College, University of London, 2009
- [4] 'Social Economy in the Classroom: The London Birkbeck Schools', Richard Clarke, in *The London Journal*, 2023
- [5] It is suggested that these and potential future (unforeseen) works that benefit the school (for example the expansion of the (funded) 21<sup>st</sup> Century Street) could be financed by the Community Infrastructure Levy (Planning Act 2008) due on local developments and specifically the developments committed to in the Hackney Local Plan (LP33 / 'Dalston Plan', adopted July 2020). The intention of CILs: 'a means of ensuring that a new development contributes to the cost of the infrastructure that the development will rely on, such as schools and roads.' See Mayor of London School Air Quality Audit (2018), section 5.8.10. See also 'Financial Viability' and 'Pollution' (this document).
- [6] See 'Pollution', this document. Images: <https://map2.hackney.gov.uk/maps/air-quality-no2/index.html>
- [7] Heritage Statement (prepared for Hackney Planning), *Heritage Collective*, 2020, p.39
- [8] 'Social Economy in the Classroom: The London Birkbeck Schools', Richard Clarke, in *The London Journal*, 2023
- [9] Educational Committee Report, 1<sup>st</sup> November 1904, LCC Minutes, London Metropolitan Archive, p.2363
- [10] Higher Education and Scholarships Sub Committee: Agenda Papers, LCC Archive, London Metropolitan Archive, 27<sup>th</sup> Jan 1905
- [11] Higher Education and Scholarships Sub Committee: Agenda Papers, LCC Archive, London Metropolitan Archive, 5<sup>th</sup> May 1905
- [12] Higher Education and Scholarships Sub Committee: Agenda Papers, LCC Archive, London Metropolitan Archive, 21<sup>st</sup> July 1905
- [13] Higher Education and Scholarships Sub Committee: Agenda Papers, LCC Archive, London Metropolitan Archive, 17<sup>th</sup> November 1905
- [14] Educational Committee Report, 8<sup>th</sup> May 1906, LCC Minutes, London Metropolitan Archive, p.1169

## 9. Campaign summary


Colvestone Primary School's campaign to be taken off the list for merger has captured people's attention locally, regionally, nationally – and even internationally.

The strength of feeling across the Colvestone community has been remarkable.

In a short period of time, we have rallied support and endorsements from school families, ex-pupils, local residents and the wider Dalston community.

### Petition

Since the launch of our petition at the start of April, we have amassed 1,701 signatures each putting their name to: *...remove Colvestone from the potential closure list, thereby ensuring security and stability for staff, pupils and parents.*



The screenshot shows a Change.org petition page. At the top, the Change.org logo is visible. Below it, there are navigation links for 'Petition details', 'Comments', and 'Updates'. The main title of the petition is 'Save Colvestone Primary School in Dalston'. A progress bar indicates that 1,697 signatures have been collected, with a goal of 2,500. A message states that at 2,500 signatures, the petition is more likely to be picked up by local news. There is a green banner with the text 'SAVE COLVESTONE PRIMARY SCHOOL'. Below the banner, it says 'Colvestone FSA started this petition to Hackney Council (Mayor Philip Glanville, Cllr Anntoinette Bramble, Cllr Guy Nicholson, Paul Senior)'. A paragraph explains that in response to falling enrolment, Hackney Council has made a proposal to merge Colvestone Primary School with Princess May Primary School at the Princess May site from September 2024, which means the closure of Colvestone school. On the right side, there is a 'Sign this petition' section with input fields for 'First name' and 'Last name'.

The petition is still gaining signatures and supporters every day:

[www.change.org/p/savecolvestone-fsa-colvestone](http://www.change.org/p/savecolvestone-fsa-colvestone)

Some people who signed the petition also added their thoughts about the Council's proposal:

“This school is a vital part of Dalston’s community, as a parent of a child who attended Colvestone it was brilliantly placed with no other schools nearby. He went on to study chemistry at Oxford, as did another of his classmates. I cannot imagine this school no longer existing, it must not close.”

Former parent

“Colvestone Primary School is an essential part of the Ridley Road area community.”  
Local resident

“Colvestone is a valuable part of the Dalston community, our children benefited from a fantastic educational experience that is as open and diverse as the local area. It is really important for future generations of children.”  
Former parent

## Local support

Our cause has caught the attention of Dalston’s local Councillor including Zoe Garbett – and the campaign made the neighbourhood update mailed to every household in the ward.



Hackney Council wants to close Colvestone Primary School, leaving parents and staff in shock. The council wants to move the school’s students to Princess May Primary School, due to falling pupil numbers across Hackney.

Colvestone is Dalston’s only non-denominational school. It is a tight-knit community with one-

form entry. The council has recently spent more than £200,000 to help the school improve.

Zoë Garbett, Dalston’s Green councillor, is backing local parents who want Colvestone to stay open. Parents are also worried about air pollution in the playground at Princess May.

Zoë said: “This announcement

has shaken parents, staff and the whole school community. Parents tell me that they want Colvestone to stay open and have time to keep improving.”

Want to help support Colvestone Primary? Visit: [www.change.org/SaveColvestone](http://www.change.org/SaveColvestone) or contact: [zoe.garbett@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:zoe.garbett@hackney.gov.uk)

## Press coverage

Our story was featured in the Hackney Gazette and Hackney Citizen:

[www.hackneygazette.co.uk/news/23469925.author-michael-rosen-joins-bid-stop-hackney-school-merger/](http://www.hackneygazette.co.uk/news/23469925.author-michael-rosen-joins-bid-stop-hackney-school-merger/)

<https://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2023/04/20/parents-dalston-primary-school-merger-council-boosts-rethink/>

# Hackney Gazette

## Author Michael Rosen joins bid to stop Hackney school merger

20th April

HACKNEY COUNCIL

MICHAEL ROSEN

EDUCATION

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

PEOPLE

HACKNEY



By Julia Gregory

Children's author Michael Rosen has added his name to a campaign to save a Hackney primary school at risk of closure because of falling school rolls.

## **‘It’s not a commodity’: Parents from Dalston primary school at risk of a merger urge council bosses to rethink plans**

By [Julia Gregory, Local Democracy Reporter](#) | Thursday 20 April 2023 at 17:32



Protest outside Colvestone Primary School. Photograph: Julia Gregory

A group of Hackney parents have launched a campaign to save their children's primary school.

Colvestone is one of four primaries that could merge under plans that also include the potential closures of De Beauvoir and Randal Cremer schools in September 2024.



Parents Corine and Brandon Bishop at Colvestone Primary School, Hackney. Their child has special needs. Because of falling school rolls Colvestone primary could merge with Princess May School. Photo: Julia Gregory



We were also featured on ITV News:

<https://www.itv.com/news/london/2023-04-24/school-closing-as-young-families-are-driven-out-by-spiraling-london-costs>

itvX

## School closing as young families are 'driven out' by spiraling London cost of living

LONDON | EDUCATION | POLITICS | ⌚ Monday 24 April 2023 at 6:27pm



And we are in conversation with German broadcaster ADR who would like to feature Colvestone's story in an extended report later in May "to look at the bigger picture and what these developments mean for a city like London and what possible solutions would be to keep a city attractive for families".

### Social media

Our campaign on social media (Facebook and Twitter) has seen tweets, posts and the petition shared by our supporters to help us reach thousands of people, including previous Colvestone parent, the renowned poet and activist Michael Rosen.

### Public meeting

On Monday 24th April, 135 people attended the public meeting at the school. The session ran for 1 hour and 45 minutes, as parents, teaching and support staff and the local community voiced their deep concern for the plans.

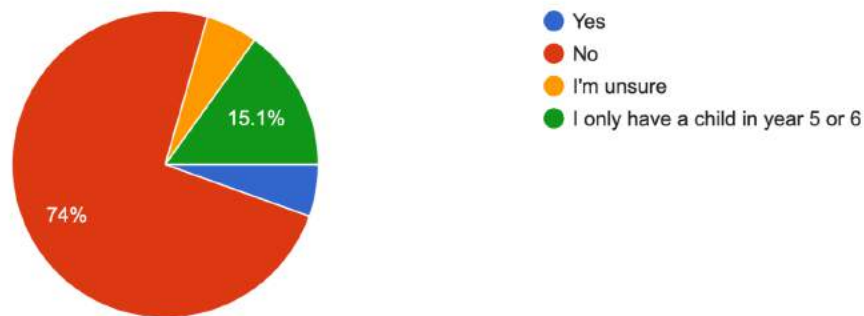
## 10. Appendix

### Appendix 1: Full Results of survey conducted during 26 – 28th April, after the April 24th meeting.

#### Colvestone Parents Choice Factor Survey

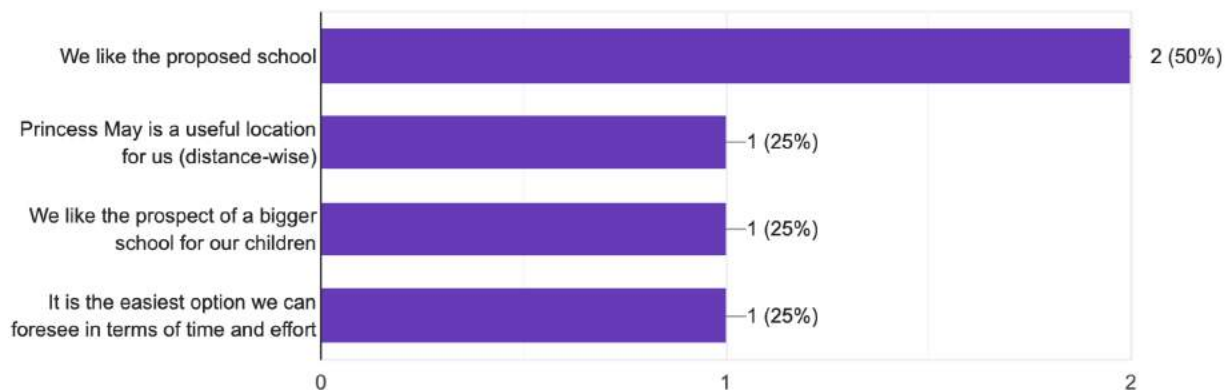
\*If\* the council were to go ahead with the proposed merger of Colvestone Primary School with Princess May in September 2024, will you agree to sen...tion only!) if you only have a child in year 5 or 6.

73 responses



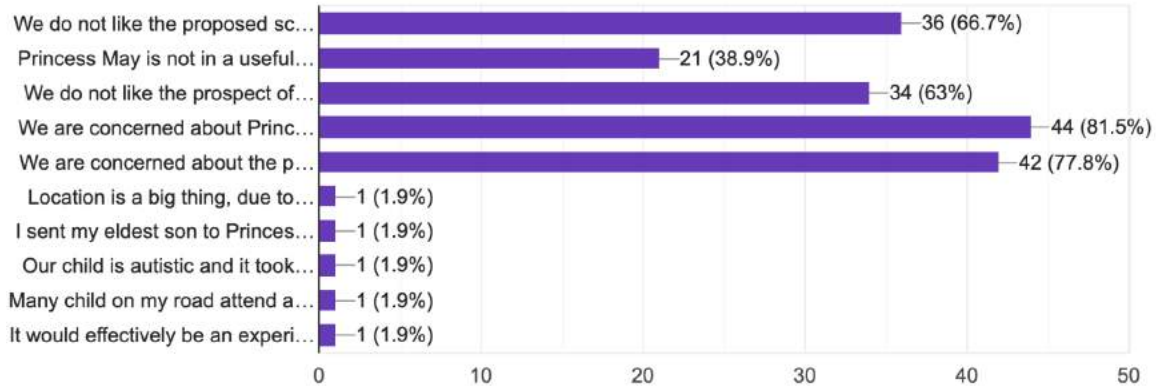
If you are happy to send your child to Princess May in September 2024, please help us understand the main reasons - please check all that apply

4 responses



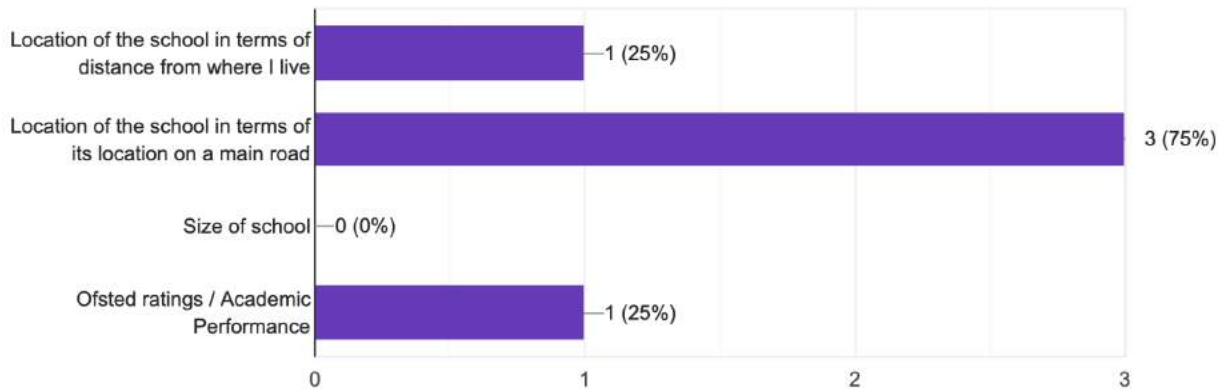
If you have no intention of sending your child to Princess May in September 2024, please help us understand the main reasons - please check all that apply

54 responses



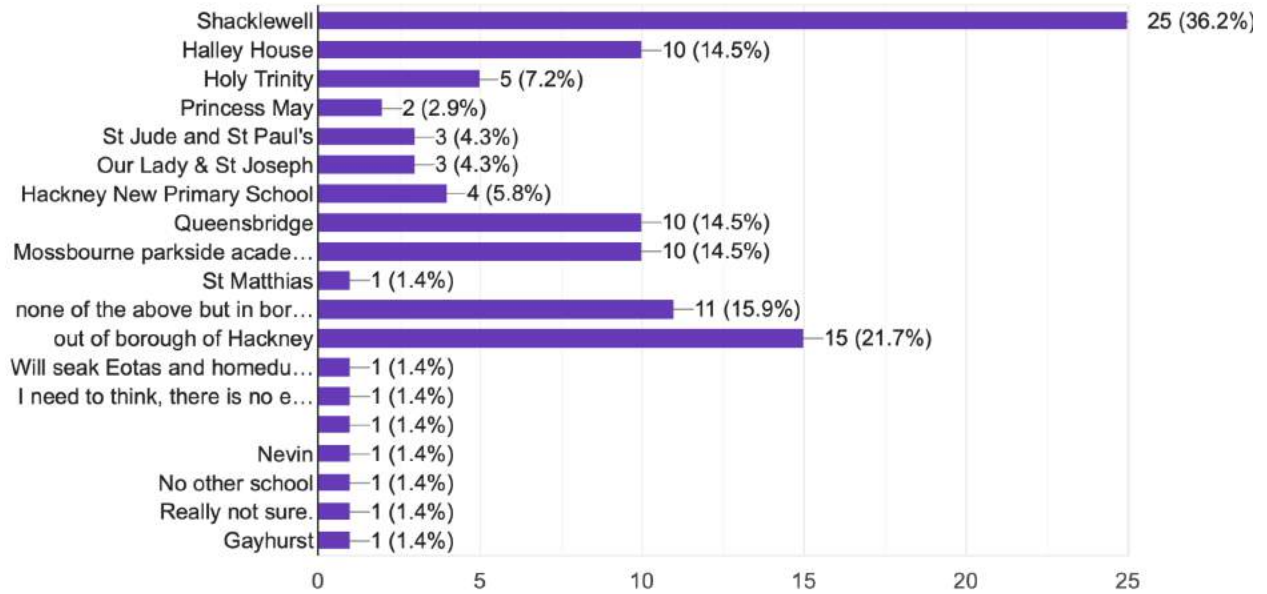
If you are unsure about whether you would send your child to Princess May, what factors will affect your decision? - please check all that apply

4 responses



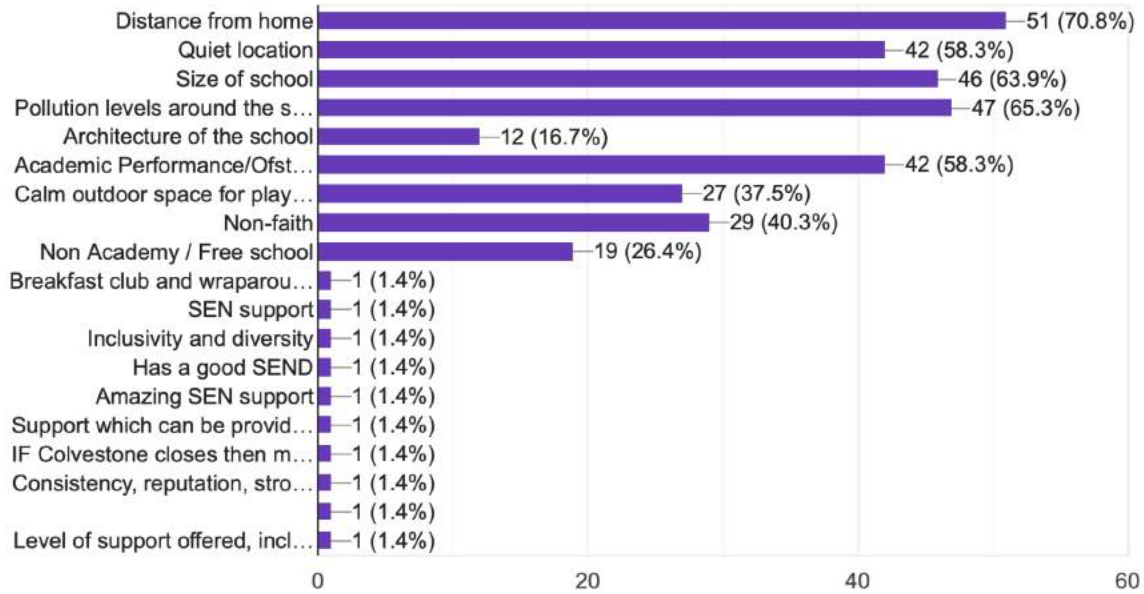
If Colvestone were to merge, what would be your preferred choices of school for your child - please answer this question whether or not you answered yes or no above (and please check all that apply)

69 responses



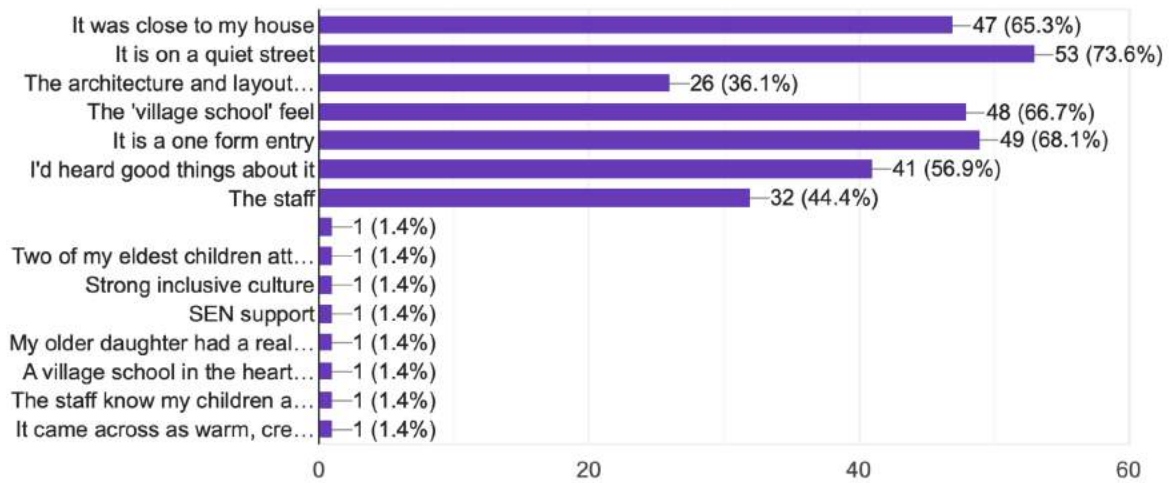
What are the main factors you take into account when choosing schools for your child(ren) - please check all that apply

72 responses



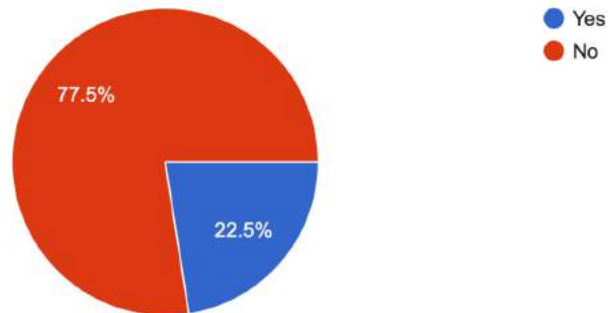
### Why did you choose Colvestone - please check all that apply

72 responses



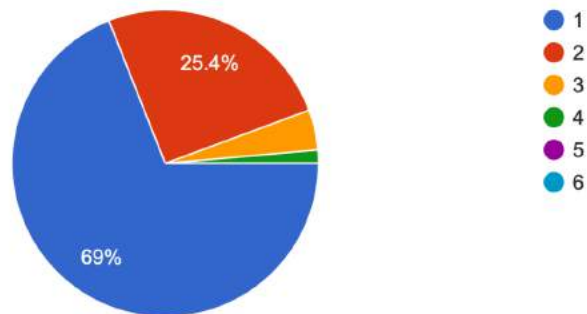
### Does your child(ren) have Special Educational Needs

71 responses



How many children do you have /care for who attend this school?

71 responses



Final survey question: Anything else you think the Council should know:

“Our child is autistic and it took us a long time to settle her and be happy at Colvestone. It will be extremely difficult and impossible to move her to another school at this stage.”

“Many children on our road attend [Princess May] and both parents and children are not happy”

“I sent my eldest son to Princess May 8 years ago and had to change schools after a few months because we were really unhappy with the standards of the school. We visited the school again a couple of years ago, whilst going through the selection process for my youngest child, who currently attends Colvestone and we were disappointed to discover that Princess May is still not a viable option for us to send our children. We would not send our child to Princess May, our child is very happy at Colvestone and we’re it to close we would look at finding a similar school to Colvestone probably outside the borough”

Some powerful statements from families about Colvestone and the proposed merger:

“A village school in the heart of the city. A place the children could ‘own’ and know ALL their peers.”

“It came across as warm, creative, fostering community feel, inclusive of parents”

“The Staff take the ethos of the school very seriously”

“[Colvestone has a] Strong, inclusive culture”

“Closing Colvestone would push us as parents away from the centre of Dalston and potentially out of the Borough. It’s an academically strong and inclusive school with an excellent community whose non-faith, non-academy/free status, and single form intake gives it a village feel in the centre of bustling Dalston and is unique to the area.”

“A big school is not suited to every child's need and therefore the reason why Colvestone was chosen even though it was a bit of a distance.”

“The new leadership team have worked hard to create a viable school going forward – with a little support (and at least not being shot in the foot by our own education authority) I believe we are the model for Hackney’s future. A 21st century school on a 21st century street.”

“My daughter has additional needs and I would be looking for an out of borough move to find something similar to Colvestone”

“I don’t know a single parent that would consider sending their child to Princess May. I think it would be a shame for Hackney Council to have to close both schools as I’m almost certain that Princess May will close after Colvestone because it will not get the pupil numbers. I don’t see why Princess May couldn’t close if it was needed and pupils transfer to Colvestone. Colvestone is flourishing currently and I’m sure with the new management structure it will continue to do so.”

“No other school we looked at had the small, family feel that Colvestone had.”

“The emotional impact on children’s well-being will be the biggest issue if the merger happens, not the finance element.”

“I’d prefer to not go to a faith or free school; however I feel this is all I’ll be left unless I accept a school on the A10 that is twice the distance from my current school”

“We believe that Colvestone primary school is a unique offering in the area, we are adamant that we will not be sending our children to Princess May”

“Please save Colvestone for future generations. This school is unique.”

“[Please tell Hackney] That my daughter loves Colvestone Primary School and the teachers that teach there and closing a community primary school will send out a very negative and lasting message to young families looking to live in Hackney.”

“Colvestone and Princess May schools are the worst match for merger, they are completely different.”



“Princess May has been an unpopular school for a long time. For the Council to decide that a good plan/good offer would be to shut Colvestone and move all the children to Princess May shows a massive lack of understanding of the Dalston community and/or a flippant attitude to families at Colvestone.”

“If Colvestone Primary School closes the wider community will become impoverished.”

“This will not only affect school age children and their families but the wider community too. Don’t do it”

“I am very worried about the outcome of this proposal as there doesn't seem to be any real choice here -there is no nearby one form non religious option – other than keeping Colvestone open.”

“It is discrimination against non-religious people to only close non-faith schools in this proposal. I would like to speak with a legal team to understand if we have a discrimination case. The Councillors have a legal responsibility to provide quality education for our children so why is the Council not closing the academically worst performing schools and sending those pupils to better schools? If the worst academic schools have a chance to improve then Colvestone should be afforded equal rights to improve pupil numbers.”

“If The school was to close, this would have a knock on effect with my job and being able to get to work on time.”

## Appendix 2: Emails sent by parent of children with special educational needs

### Email from [parent A] sent 25.4.2023

Dear [councillor]

I hope you are well.

Thank you for attending the meeting at Colvestone on Monday, and thank you for giving me your email address so I could write.

My name is [parent A] and I delivered my rather emotional speech advocating for the SEN children and families of Colvestone.

I wished to write and further express to you what this school means for my [child] in particular.

[child] is a wonderful little [child].

[They are] pure joy and sunshine.

[They] owns any room he walks in.

[They are] creative and unique.

[Their] greatest superpower is that despite being autistic, [they] has and is able to show great empathy and a strong ability to express and discuss [their] emotions.

Despite all the struggles [they have] had to face due to [their] neurodiversity, [they remain] self-confident in all aspects of [their] life.

The biggest challenge [they are] facing is school and access to education, which is due to the fact [they] struggles with visual and auditory stimuli processing by [their] environment and has learning difficulties.

Attending a school even like Colvestone that is a one form entry is already a hard mission for my [child].

[Their] first year at reception (Sep 2020) was pretty much a write off, as [they] needed time to climatise and adapt to the new environment.

Despite the fact that [their] then teachers took things really slow with [them], [they] found the demands of school extremely challenging and cried every morning when I was dropping [them] off.

At the end of the reception year we could see that academically [they were] more than a year behind [their] peers, so we decided to have [them] repeat reception. This decision was taken in the August before the school year started and the school supported us fully in our decision to keep [child] back. There was no argument or discussion, they just listened to what [our child] needed and what [their] parents advocated for [them] and gave [our child] that.

My husband and I have no words for how grateful we are that [their] needs were respected in such an immediate and supportive way.

Reception the second time round (Sep 2021) was hard again, [they] cried a lot at drop offs, but gradually became more accustomed to the school environment.

[Their] writing improved and [child] started writing [their] name and being able to copy letters. [Their] recognition of letters was much slower, and by the end of the second year at reception [they] still had not mastered the letters or numbers, however [they] seemed more comfortable with the school setting and started to make friends.

Forming friendships is one of the things we always worried about, so to see [them] play with other children, request their company and to be included was a wonderful development.

When we started year one in (Sep 2022) [our child] was almost fully adapted to the school environment and would only have the occasional cry in the mornings.

However the educational challenges of year 1 were too much for [them].

[They] became withdrawn and anxious, [their] sleep got affected and overall [they] seemed lacklustre and sad.

When we spoke to [them] about [their] sadness, [our child] would say things like

“I hate my brain”

“ I want to kill my brain”

“ I don’t understand and I don’t want to go to school”

“numbers and letters are moving in my head, I don’t know what to do with this mama”

As you can imagine it was heart breaking for myself and my husband to realise that [our child] has these feelings of sadness, frustration and unworthiness.

So we discussed this with the school, who listened to our concerns, and adapted [our child]’s learning environment and curriculum so that [they] would learn **in [their] way and [their] pace.**

Moving forward to this week, I can tell you that with the love and investment of his teacher, [name removed], his TA, [name removed], [name removed] our Headteacher and the school Senco [name removed], [they are] able to count to multiples of 10! And [our child] has started to be able to read a few words!

This week [our child] is also **receiving an achievement award** from [the] school for all the progress [they have] made.

[Our child] gave me the letter inviting me to the ceremony with such pride.

[Our child] now skips to school most mornings and only ever asks to stay at home towards the end of the week when [they are] tired.

**[Our child] is finally able to access education in [their] terms in an environment [they are] happy in**

Both my husband and I are amazed by the progress and the happiness we see in our little [child]. We believe that moving [them] to a different setting would devastate [them] and settling [our child] will most likely take another two years, by which time we will be looking at the end of Primary.

We will most likely have to apply for EOTAS and homeeducate.

You must understand after our meeting this evening the significance of Colvestone for the SEN families of Dalston.

All be it emotional, I believe I made my point loud and clear.

Colvestone is not an accident, it is not a postcode lottery, it is our choice, our **ONLY CHOICE**.

There is no other school in the area that can ensure that our SEN children get the **access to education they have a right to.**

Closing this setting would mean the removal of **that right to access education for 35 SEN kids** that are currently on the register for Colvestone.

Another point that I would like to visit that I did not have time to elaborate on during my speech was the recent announcement that Hackney will be investing FIVE MILLION pounds across the borough to support SEN kids and services.

**What about these 35 kids that will loose their school?**

Their little family in which they feel **comfortable to access education?**

Might I ask what does it take so that the Council will consider making Colvestone an autism provision school?

Or an autism and SEND friendly school?

I mean it is well on its way there, as 24% of the children that attend have some sort of special education needs.

Double the national average which is 13.2%.

Please do note that the only two schools in the area that have autism provision are both two form, and they only have 10 places each in their units.

So not only they are two form and therefore **tragically unsuitable for autistics** due to the overwhelming and noisy environment, but they also **only offer 10 places**.

It is my understanding that there is to be additional autism provision units established in more schools in Hackney, however all the proposed schools like Nightingale, are two form schools.

**I implore you to consider Colvestone as the perfect school to create an autism friendly environment.**

Below, I am including the main points of my speech from Monday the 24th of April.

The Cull de sac nature of Colvestone facilitates a safe access to school.

SEN children get overwhelmed when they are walking through busy streets and can often run into traffic. This has happened to us a few times when walking the Dalston high street. You can imagine how scary this is for us but also for [our child], first to be overwhelmed and then to have [their] parents grab [them] to save [them] from traffic. Once a week when we go shopping on the high street is bad enough, but to have to deal with this twice a day on our school run, would bring so much danger and anxiety in our daily routine.

The neutral tones of this grade 2 listed building are ideal for SEN children as they offer a calm and unintrusive environment in which to play, so rather than being overwhelmed, autistic children can be free and comfortable and able to access PLAY.

Being a one form entry Colvestone is naturally a calmer and less overwhelming environment. A busy assembly in the morning stays with SEN children for the whole day, and that overwhelm makes their access to education impossible.

SEN children thrive in caring and loving environments that are willing to listen and really “SEE” them and their additional needs.

A home from home family that is willing to support them in ways that allow them to access education and realise their potential.

The Colvestone team operating as a close knit and caring family, achieves just that.

This school is a rare gem because of the wonderful humans that work there.

The small community of Colvestone gives SEN children much needed access to friendship and inclusivity. Attending a school with a smaller community provides fertile ground for **inclusive friendships to grow**. It is often the case that neurodiverse children struggle to create relationships as a rule and that becomes even harder in large, two form settings.

Finally, please do take note that for my [child], and for most of the SEN children of our school, adapting to new environments and routines is a herculean task and a big change such as their school environment will be detrimental to their education, well being and happiness.

Please listen and take note to the Sen parents and the School community, please show us that our choice matters. That we have the right for a non faith, local **one form** school.

And that our children will be given the **fair and suitable access to education they have a right to**.

Note that the majority of the families WILL NOT BE SENDING THEIR CHILDREN TO PRINCESS MAY.

So that will continue to be an empty school as it will not be brought to capacity by Colvestone students. If we wished for our kids to attend that school, we would have made it so already.

I do hope that during the Monday evening meeting you could see the passion demonstrated by the parents and wider community, but also that you have taken note of how organised and clearheaded we are.

This is not going to be another school closure that will go unnoticed.

In the three weeks since this proposal has been announced, we have come together to fight for our school.

We have researched and pulled together our historical, scientific and personal evidence and created a website for our cause :

<https://www.savecolvestone.com>

We have run a very successful petition that keeps gaining traction:

<https://www.change.org/p/savecolvestone-fsa-colvestone>

Our cause has attracted local press:

<https://www.hackneygazette.co.uk/news/23469925.author-michael-rosen-joins-bid-stop-hackney-school-merger/>

We were also featured in ITV news:

<https://www.itv.com/news/london/2023-04-24/school-closing-as-young-families-are-driven-out-by-spiraling-london-costs>

And we have attracted international press, from a German TV channel, as they are working on a documentary about London and how “friendly” it is for families.

And we are only three weeks in.

We will keep fighting this, until the Council realises how important this ONE FORM ENTRY school is.

We have the strength of parents fighting for their children and the support of the local community.

Please take note, please fight alongside us.

Thank you for your time

With Respect

[parent A]  
A SEN parents representative for Colvestone Primary School

Email from [parent B] and [parent C] sent 26.4.2023

Dear [councillor],

We are writing to express our disagreement regarding the recent proposal to include Colvestone Primary School in the consultation to close schools in Dalston (Hackney) by Hackney Council.

We are very disheartened by this proposal and in the worst case scenario that this is going ahead, in total honesty, this will have a tremendous effect on [our child]'s education and subsequently in [their] future academic life.

We believe this will be an ill-considered and damaging move for children especially for our SEN children, parents and carers and the community in this area. As one of the only non-religious, non-academy, non-free schools in Dalston, it should remain open to offer families the choice to be part of a small, close-knit community school – run by the local education authority.

We live [very local to the school] and have been part of the Dalston community for a long time, we love our diverse community. We have chosen Colvestone Primary school for our little [child], who is [age removed] years-old and autistic because it provides a required quick journey access to school (5 minutes), a safe and happy environment (that a small one form school offers) and a wonderful SEN support ([our child] has a experienced SEN one to one). These are the 3 fundamental poles for [our child] to access education. It has taken time and great effort for [our child] to be happy and settled in [their] school (3 years now) and changing school at this stage will have an incredible difficult impact on [them] and it will be practically impossible for [our child] to access education, and this also will have an enormous impact on [their] mental health.

Let me give you a brief history of [our child]'s life so that you have an insight of where [they are] coming from:

[Our child] was diagnosed at 2.5 years' old with Autism by Hackney Ark (with severe delays in communications, severe delays in social interactions and severe repetitive behaviour). [Our child] regressed from age 18 months, she was prior to that stage able to say 5 words: Maman, Daddy, cheese, hello and bye (I am [redacted] and Daddy [redacted] – I only spoke [redacted] to [our child] from note to 2) and literally became non-verbal and lost [their] sounds capacity A, E, I, O, U, [our child] was now only screaming, lost eyes contact and only presented with repetitive behaviours. With tremendous tenacity we managed to access straight away hackney services of Speech Therapy (once a week where Specs was implemented) and Portage ([our child] attended the later services for one year, at home and at the Guarden (in pre-school) once a week alternatively).

At this point when I thought I would get back to my career I realised that [our child] needed so much support and decided to stopped my career to support [our child] full time and at this point I went on a mission and to become my child's therapist and a nucleus that would utilise all services offered and my own therapies. I taught myself an american therapy which is called ESDM (Eearly Start Denver Model), taking my child everyday to Gymboree (a pre-school private center) and implementing ESDM at the same time, helped also [our child] to support [their] physical mobility as at this stage [our child's] upper-body and hands were going inwards (I used



daily a home a school bench at home, making [our child] copying me standing on one leg and other leg and also using a climbing wall we had at home). With all these combination of supports from hackney services and my own therapies, [our child] progressed, we retrieved her eye contacts and [their] body posture developed now to a straight posture.

At the end of the year, when [our child] turned 3, Portage Coordinator asked me what we foresee for [our child] academically and I expressed at this point that [our child] could go mainstream to a nursery, which was 7mns from home, Portage facilitated transition to nursery and [our child] entered nursery with an EHCP and worked hard at making sure [our child] has all support needed so that [they] attend nursery. The setting kept on using pecs for promoting speech and in 2019, when [our child] started to make the sound A, I, O, I found the Gemiini therapy programme and within a month [our child]'s perceptive communications improved tremendously. We have used this programme since then and [our child] is now talking more, single words and understand everything we are saying to her. [Our child] attended nursery for two years 3 days a week with allocated one to one.

We then chose Colvestone Primary School because it is a one form small school and just 5 mns from home. [Our child] remained in one corner of the Reception class for a term and half and by the end of that year [they] had ventured in all corners of the school with a phenomenal support of [their] allocated TA. [They] attended Reception (with of course the pandemic, and attended school during the second lock-down).

When [our child] was in year 1, after a week at school (Sept. 22) [they] refused to go to school and leave the house, it took us 7 months to bridge [our child] back to school and as you can imagine, it was a real isolated work for us as [our child] didn't want to go out anymore but with great effort, determination and tedious work we thankfully managed for [our child] to be happy going out and then managed to bridge [our child] back to school, with the School Senco we worked very hard collaboratively to get [our child] back and [they] did for the end of year one. [Teacher, name removed] has done a tremendous work. Now, we have complete faith in the school SEN support which as you may have heard from other families is not a given, [our child] has an EHCP and now a level 5 in funding which goes towards [their] SEN and [their] needs to be cared by someone all the time.

But even thought, we have all in place on paper, the tremendous work we have had to do with the school in order to secure [our child]'s support has been a real effort, as well as working hard to make sure that [our child] is happy attending Colvestone and this in view to attend [their] years at Colvestone to year 6.

To be honest I can't believe we have to write this and the idea of this plan going ahead is very difficult for us and we are trying not to think about it!

We know our child feels safe and happy at Colvestone, [our child] receives a wonderful SEN support with a fantastic experienced SEN one to one [name removed] and a brilliant teacher/senco [name removed]. Moving our child to another school will be strongly difficult and

disruptive in our child's education and have consequences on [them] achieving long term education goals. And it will take us years to get to where we are and by then, it will be the end of primary school. This will literally damage all the hard work we have put together for the past 5 years. I hope you realise the difficulty of what we have to do on a daily basis to get to where we are. We are working hard at [our child]'s school foundation so that [our child] can thrive in the future and become the astronaut [they] want to be (I asked lately [our child] what she wanted to be and [they] astonishingly responded to me: "Astronaut" and repeatedly saying: "Captain [our child], to the rescue").

I have added few pictures below so that you can see how amazing [our child] is doing at Colvestone. In January, [our child] was awarded a Colvestone's Achiever for: "[Our child] enjoys the creative aspects of the curriculum. In art lessons and in Music, [child] shows good level of engagement. [Child] takes part in daily phonics lessons where [they are] exploring environmental sounds with [their] peers. [Child] enjoys drawing and will often draw pictures that are detailed in design. [Child] has drawn pictures linked to [their] favourite stories, such as "Class Two at the Zoo". Which [they enjoy] listening to and reading alongside the adult, some of the known phrases. [Child] takes part in PE lessons and will join the class line when [they] knows that it is time for PE. Well done [child]! – [our child] went to receive her award in front for Y1/Y2 assemblée.

Last Friday [our child] was awarded 100% attendance Award, there again [our child] during full school assemble stood up when [their] name was called and went to receive [their] award and came back to sit with everyone else aside [teacher's name removed]. Yes 100% attendance! Incredible! What a journey, what an amazing achievement! And this done to the wonderful work of the school, one to one, Senco, staffs and the Leadership team, [Head of School], [Executive Headteacher] and team.

I also included a picture showing how [our child] is happy at school with [teacher's name removed] during Easter parade.

Colvestone is a unique primary school offering my child an opportunity to develop and thrive in a single-form entry, community-focussed environment, which we strongly believe in and is required. We strongly hope that our wonderful Colvestone Primary School can stay open and all is done to support our school and for our [our child] to keep accessing education as well as all the SEN children and all the children.

Yours sincerely,

[parent B] & [parent C]

Parent of [name / year removed] at Colvestone Primary School

## **Appendix 3: Excerpt from an email sent by a local historic and town planning specialist**

### Uncertain Future of the School Building and Site

Our foremost concern is the potential loss of Colvestone Primary School, but we also wish to stress the negative impacts its closure would have on the school building and the surrounding area. I write here in my capacity as a historic buildings and town planning specialist.

The school building dates from 1862, and was designed by architect Thomas Knightly in a Gothic Revival style. As such, it is one of Hackney's oldest surviving school buildings. It is a grade II listed building, which means that there is a duty under the Planning Acts to preserve its special interest as a building of outstanding historic and architectural significance for future generations. The optimum use for a listed building is its original use, which in this case is as a school. It is also possible that there is a deed of covenant on the site stipulating that the building should be used solely for educational purposes. If the school is to close, the building will lose the vital use for which it was designed and built – most likely forever.

Closure will also see the building become redundant. There are suggestions locally that the Council intends to keep the building vacant for the foreseeable future. As such, it will be sealed up and rendered lifeless within the community. The recently completed refurbishment works will be wasted, as the building will become a target for vandalism and unlawful entry. Disused buildings deteriorate at a rapid rate, as they are more prone to water ingress, damp and a lack of ventilation. Only recently, thieves stole lead from the school roof, an unwelcome act which inevitably will increase if the building falls empty. If the school use ceases, the building is likely to feature on the Historic England Heritage at Risk Register, which identifies those historic sites that have an uncertain future and are most at risk of being lost as a result of neglect, decay or inappropriate development.

There are fears locally that the Council will sell the school site to a private developer, preventing it from ever returning to use as a Hackney-run primary school. Although the school is not currently an opportunity site in the Council's draft Dalston Plan, it lies midway between sites D6 (Ridley Road) and D7 (Birkbeck Mews). Undoubtedly it will be attractive to housing developers as it is located on the western side of St Mark's Conservation Area, a leafy sought-after Dalston residential neighbourhood made up of houses dating from the same period as the school building. The site is adjacent to Dalston Town Centre and excellent transport links, including two Overground stations and numerous bus routes; a Crossrail 2 station entrance is also proposed within metres of the site boundary.

The redevelopment of the site at minimum will require a change of use for the listed building, resulting in internal and external alterations detracting from its special historic and architectural interest. But the pressure for development and the developer's profit margins will inevitably result in the large-scale redevelopment of the site, which at best will harm the setting of the listed building and at worst destroy it.

There will also be a negative impact on the character and appearance of the St Mark's Conservation Area. Firstly, the character of the area will be severely affected by the loss to the community of an important primary school attended by many local children. The hustle and bustle of school life will disappear forever, including the noise of children in the playground, children walking to and from school, children singing and playing musical instruments, performing in plays and partaking in sport. There will be no more school fetes, no more Christmas concerts, jumble sales or sports days – activities shared with the wider community.

Secondly, the physical changes to the site, whether simply the deadening effect of closing up the school building or the more drastic visual harm arising from a major redevelopment, will have a negative impact on the appearance of the conservation area. This is particularly pertinent as Colvestone Primary School is not only a landmark building at the western entrance to the conservation area, but it is also one of a handful of buildings in the neighbourhood which have a community use, the loss of which would have an homogenizing effect on the conservation area and a reduction in the quality of life of its residents.

## Conclusion

For the reasons outlined above, please review and reconsider the Council's plans to close Colvestone Primary School and merge it with Princess May Primary School in 2024. Nobody in the school or in the wider community wants to lose this very special school just to balance the Council's books. Nobody wants it to be subsumed into another much larger school with very different values, with which it has nothing in common. **To close Colvestone would be untimely, misguided and short-sighted. Please let Colvestone rise again, above all for the children of Dalston.**

## **Appendix 4: Hackney National Education Union letter of support Hackney NEU comments on the closure of Colvestone school**

**We have been asked by parents and NEU members of Colvestone school to briefly outline some of our concerns regarding the potential merger with Princess May.**

Colvestone school is a small one form entry school that has served the local community in the heart of Hackney for over 170 years. It has historic significance as the last remaining of William Ellis's "Birkbeck" schools and is currently a Grade II listed building.

The proposal to close Colvestone school and merge it with Princess May is based on financial considerations rather than any social or educational benefit.

Hackney NEU believes that there are significant benefits in retaining small one form entry primary schools wherever possible. Whilst we understand the financial difficulties presented by years of government underfunding we believe that smaller schools and smaller class sizes are a desirable aim for our students.

As the recent Sutton Trust report has stated the UK has the largest class sizes in Europe\* and all efforts should be made to arrest this trend. Research by the Education Endowment Federation suggests that *"The average impact for reducing class size is around 2 months additional progress over the course of an academic year."*

As well as improved academic progress we would argue that smaller schools and smaller class sizes have the following benefits.

### **Tailored learning**

With small classes, teachers can more easily monitor every pupil's progress and tailor learning to each pupil. Teachers get to spend more individual time with each child, so they have a better idea of what they may need some extra support with. Pupils will also feel more confident talking to their teacher about any issues they are facing or areas of work they need some help with.

### **More social confidence**

In smaller classes, pupils will usually feel more confident talking in front of a group. You also find with small schools, there is a greater sense of community and less cliques. The community spirit between pupils helps children to socially interact better and feel safe to try new things and discover new interests.

### **Teaching staff know their pupils better**

At a school with a smaller community, teachers know more about their pupils, across their academic, emotional and even medical needs. Sometimes at larger schools, problems impacting a child's mental health or other aspects of their life can be missed.

### **More inclusive**

At smaller schools, unique characteristics are embraced more, and students who are less outgoing can feel more relaxed about being around peers and have a better chance of enjoying their school experience.

### **Parents have a better relationship with the school**

It is also easier for parents to be more involved in the school community, whether that is having a quick chat with their child's teacher about their progress or getting involved with school events and social events. Many parents make friends with other parents or getting involved with events related to their hobbies.

Colvestone school has consistently performed above the national and local average at both KS1 and KS2 with the last published SATs results showing 76% of children reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and maths (compared with a 65% national average)

This speaks to the value of having a small local community school.

The transition to a new school, especially a larger one located further away (and the other side of one of the busiest roads in Hackney) would be very traumatic to the current pupils and the Council need to give serious consideration to this.

