

**PROPOSAL TO AMALGAMATE ASHFORD CARBONELL CE (CONTROLLED) AND CAYNHAM CE (VOLUNTARY AIDED) SCHOOLS – REPORT ON FORMATIVE CONSULTATION**

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**Summary**

On 30 January 2008, Cabinet commissioned formative (pre-statutory) consultation on the amalgamation of Ashford Carbonell and Caynham schools. This report sets out the outcomes from the consultation, the recommendation of the Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services and asks Members to consider whether to proceed with formal proposals.

**Recommendations**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- (1) note the outcomes from the formative consultation;
- (2) decide whether to proceed to formal proposals to close Ashford Carbonell and Caynham Schools and invite the Diocese of Hereford to open a new 90 place Foundation School with a Church of England character to serve the combined catchment area, in line with the recommendation of the Acting Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services.

**1. Background**

On 30 January 2008, Cabinet considered a report on the future organisation of primary schools. At the meeting, Cabinet resolved to consult with eight pairs of schools on school organisation change. This decision was subsequently confirmed, following call in, by the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel on 20 February. The consultation period ran from 11 March to 2 May. A number of strategies were used to inform stakeholders and collect views and the outcomes are attached to this report. As this consultation is at the formative stage of the process, there were no predetermined outcomes, and the consultation documents made it clear that all options would be considered, including the option of making no changes. The consultation document also noted that the process was not a referendum, but a chance to inform the consideration of elected Members.

Cabinet is asked to decide whether to proceed with formal proposals to amalgamate the schools, and, if so, what form the proposals should take.

## **2. Proposals**

Consultation took place on three options for possible routes to amalgamation, as well as whether amalgamation was appropriate. These were:

- expansion of Ashford Carbonell School with consequent closure of Caynham School;
- expansion of Caynham School with consequent closure of Ashford Carbonell School;
- opening a new school following closure of both existing schools.

In addition, the consultation sought views on the character of the amalgamated school. Other options were also sought as part of the consultation.

## **3. Consultation**

A consultation document was prepared and distributed to all parents, governors and staff of the schools (see Appendix 1). A special section of the Council's website provided more information. Officers, accompanied by senior Members, have held consultation meetings with each school included in the proposals, and the minutes of the meetings for Ashford Carbonell and Caynham schools are attached at Appendices 2a and 2b. Responses to the consultation were sought by post, e-mail, via the Customer Service Centre and via the Council's website. A file containing all responses received is available to Members.

Twenty two letters have been received. Comments in the individual letters include support for or opposition to the proposed amalgamations. Many of the responses were supportive of a new school to serve both communities. Some responses supported a specific site in either Ashford Carbonell or Caynham. General comments on issues raised in the letters are dealt with below whilst individual comments or concerns and the responses to these can be found in Appendix 3.

The formal position of the two Governing Bodies is that they agree in principle to the amalgamation of the two schools to include a new school build. They confirm that this is an 'exciting opportunity to develop a flagship rural school'.

Cabinet members visited Ashford Carbonell and Caynham schools on 29 April.

## **4. Key Issues and Factors for Consideration**

The key issues regarding whether or not to proceed to formal proposals, and if so what form the proposals should take, are set out in the paragraphs below. The key issues are: the effect on standards of education, effect on local communities (including the location for the new school), effect on equal opportunities and community cohesion, effect on diversity of provision, financial implications and effect on staffing.

Amalgamation of two very small schools into a slightly larger school can have significant benefits. This section sets out some of those benefits.

- 4.1 Slightly larger schools have more staff resources allowing staff the opportunity to specialise to a greater degree and share more specialist knowledge, to the benefit of the pupils and the curriculum.
- 4.2 When results are corrected for intake, larger schools in Shropshire add slightly more value to the education of both mainstream pupils and children with special educational needs.

- 4.3 Slightly larger newer schools have additional types of specialist accommodation, while smaller schools have to make the same space, often a general classroom, to be multi-functional.
- 4.4 Slightly larger schools can cope more easily with short term changes in pupil numbers, so that they do not have to employ then possibly lay-off staff short term or employ staff on short term contracts.
- 4.5 Slightly larger schools can maintain a wider range of out of school activities, including sports teams.
- 4.6 Slightly larger schools attract more investment in buildings and services because the costs per pupil are lower than in a smaller school.
- 4.7 Slightly larger schools allow pupils to interact with a wider range of peers. This is an advantage both socially and in academic and sporting terms where pupils of all abilities can challenge themselves to compete with pupils of the same age and approximate ability.

## **5. Effect on Standards of Attainment**

Standards of attainment at the existing schools are recognised as “good” by both Shropshire County Council and Ofsted. However, both schools have inadequate buildings and this limits the range of activities and resources which can be made available.

A proposal to bring the two schools together would enable the schools to build on the undoubted strengths of the existing schools and to provide additional opportunities for children. This will include both access to a wider range of specialisms amongst staff and improved physical resources.

## **6. Effect on the Local Community and the Environment**

Investment in the buildings of a combined school will probably lead to a small net reduction in carbon emissions, even allowing for some additional traffic, and an overall increase in community facilities. The location of the school will inevitably mean uneven access to these facilities between the two villages. However, both villages have village halls, so neither village would be left without any facilities. It should be noted that, in the main, responses to the consultation have suggested that both schools and their respective villages feel that a new school is more important than the location. This is perhaps a reflection that there are very few children actually living in each village and that the majority of the pupils already travel to the site of their current school from elsewhere in the catchment area or beyond.

Governor representatives have been closely involved in considering criteria for site selection against the requirements set out in the current School Building Bulletin. They have also actively engaged in identifying potential local sites for a combined school.

Officers have discussed, visited and reviewed a number of potential sites. An options appraisal for a number of potential sites is attached as appendix 4. It should be noted that this appraisal has not been discussed with land owners and any conclusions drawn are subject to both successful negotiation with the landowner and to obtaining planning permission. Whichever site was selected, there would be need to take into account traffic management to ensure that children and parents were able to access the site safely.

The options appraisal suggests that, subject to negotiations with the land owner and planning considerations, the new school should be sited next to the existing Ashford Carbonell school

on newly purchased land, but that the school should use all new accommodation for the main teaching accommodation. The second option is a site in Caynham village, and it is recommended that this option also be explored through feasibility stages.

## **7. Effects on Equal Opportunities and Community Cohesion**

Combining the two schools would mean that children would interact with a wider range of peers and would meet children from a wider geographical range at an earlier age. This will prepare them for later stages of their education where they will interact with increasingly diverse groups. Children with special educational needs will benefit from interaction with a wider range of ability and improved opportunities for staff support and specialisation.

## **8. Effect on Diversity of Provision**

The Ashford Carbonell and Caynham schools have a Church of England religious character. The proposals would take out 35 places which are currently unfilled. The proposal would have little effect on the overall balance of places in the County.

## **9. Financial Implications**

The total budget for the two schools in the financial year 2010/11 (the first full year after the proposed date of implementation) is £313,690. The budget for a combined school would be £240,080, a saving of £73,610. This is an efficiency saving as a result of having fewer tasks completed twice, and will not affect the quality of education or the resources available. Investment in the buildings could also lead to reduced running costs, freeing more money for expenditure on staff and resources.

## **10. Effect on Staffing**

Both schools currently have a permanent headteacher. One headteacher's post would be made redundant in an amalgamation. If one school were to be expanded and the other closed, then the headteacher of the school which was to be expanded would become the headteacher of the new school. Should both schools close, then the temporary governing body for the new school would recruit a headteacher for the new school.

Other staff from both schools would be transferred to the new school. If the new school were to have a Foundation or Voluntary Aided character, the Governing Body would be the employer. TUPE style arrangements would apply, and the terms and conditions of many categories of staff, including teachers, are set by national agreement. The staffing structure of the new school would be a matter for the temporary Governing Body. All or almost all staff would be allocated posts within the new structure on the basis of their experience and interests, in consultation with the head teacher designate and the temporary Governing Body to decide.

Staffing protocols have been agreed with the trade unions representing school staff. Assistance and support would be given by Shropshire County Council to any member of staff who could not be accommodated in the new staffing structure for a combined school. This includes support in seeking suitable work in other local schools.

## **11. Consideration of Alternatives and Conclusion**

### 11.1 Make no change

Making no change would have three main effects on education in the area.

- (i) Although there would eventually be some investment in the condition of the buildings, many of the known inadequacies with the suitability and accessibility of the buildings could not be addressed because of the restricted nature of the sites and existing buildings.
- (ii) Each school would continue with a small staff, each of whom would be under pressure as a result of the need to keep up to date with a large part of the curriculum. This would limit the access of pupils to staff with different specialisms. There would be less support, and less non-teaching time, for management.
- (iii) The revenue savings set out above would not be achieved, with a consequent effect on all schools in Shropshire. As the Dedicated Schools Grant comes under greater pressure, there would be difficulties in maintaining even the current staffing structure.

### 11.2 Expand Ashford Carbonell School with consequent closure of Caynham School.

The new school would be a C of E Voluntary Controlled school. Ashford Carbonell School is on a restricted site. The listed main school building is inadequate and most teaching takes place in a demountable. It is just feasible to extend the school to include a third full size teaching space, but this would reduce further the play space available on the site. Pupils would have to cross the road to access the village playing field for outdoor PE. There is no school hall and the Village Hall is inadequate for KS2 PE. There is no parking for the school.

### 11.3 Expand Caynham School with consequent closure of Ashford Carbonell School.

The new school would be a C of E Voluntary Aided school. Caynham School's site is about two thirds of the site expected of a modern 90 place school. There is restricted access. Although there are currently 90 places in three classes, these are all in demountable accommodation. There is no hall and the resource and administrative areas, in the historic school building, are separated from the teaching block. The front of the site is situated near a bend in the main road through the village. Development of further accommodation would reduce the available green space, which is already smaller than the recommended size. There is no hall and the Village Hall is inadequate for Key Stage 2 PE.

### 11.4 Open a new school following closure of both existing schools

The new school would be a C of E Foundation School sponsored by the Diocese of Hereford. This places similar responsibilities upon the Governors of the school as a Voluntary Aided school, but without the need for the Governors to contribute 10% to capital works. The school would be in wholly new buildings, addressing many of the concerns about the quality of the learning and teaching accommodation, including outdoor areas. It would also be possible to address parking and other site safety concerns.

### 11.5 Federation

The Governing Body of another school suggested a wider area federation including both Ashford Carbonell and Caynham schools. The school concerned (Onny) is located some 9 miles from Ashford Carbonell and 8 miles from Caynham. Ashford Carbonell and Caynham serve neighbouring communities that are 2.5 miles apart.

A federation would mean that each school would continue on its existing site. However, it would lose many of the benefits set out in section 4 above, and would have many of the problems set out in section 11.1 above. As federations can mean that Governing Bodies have discretion over the deployment of staff and financial resources between schools, some of the concerns about access to specialisms and support for management could be addressed.

The federation model has not been requested by parents, staff, governors or community representatives from either Ashford Carbonell or Caynham.

## **12. Recommendation of the Corporate Director for Children and Young People's Services**

Following analysis of the available evidence including all the responses made during the consultation, due consideration of all the alternatives and their effects on the attainment of pupils, the environment and the community, it is recommended that Cabinet proceed to consult on formal proposals to close both Ashford Carbonell and Caynham schools and invite the Diocese of Hereford to propose a new ninety place Foundation school with a Church of England character to serve the combined catchment areas.

## **13. Next Steps**

If Cabinet accept the recommendation of the Acting Director for Children and Young People's Services to amalgamate the schools by closing both schools and creating a new school, the next step would be to initiate negotiations with the land owners over the new site, for the Diocese of Hereford to contact the Secretary of State to request permission to publish proposals to establish the new school and for the Council to publish proposals to close both the existing schools.

Publication of proposals would be followed by a six week consultation period during which comments would be invited from interested parties. It is intended to bring a report back to Cabinet on this phase of consultation on 22 July 2008, but this is dependent on a speedy response from the Secretary of State. Should the Secretary of State require it, the Council could be instructed to conduct a competition to commission the new school, but this is thought to be relatively unlikely in this case.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

Primary School Organisation – Report to Cabinet 30 January 2008

**Human Rights Act Appraisal**

Children have a right to education. However, there is no right to a place within a specific maintained school. A proposed closure or amalgamation of a school does not, therefore, affect an individual pupil or parent's human rights.

**Environmental Appraisal**

The recommended proposal would mean a minor improvement in the effect on the environment as the new and refurbished accommodation would be more efficient than that in use currently.

**Risk Management Appraisal**

Changes to the organisation of schools must be carefully managed to achieve the full benefits, or there is a risk that the disruptive effects of change will outweigh the benefits to be gained.

**Community / Consultations Appraisal**

Formative consultation already undertaken is detailed in the report. Full community consultation would be undertaken as required by Statute if the decision is taken to proceed to formal proposals.

**Cabinet Member**

Cllr. Ann Hartley

**Local Member**

All

**Appendices**

- 1 Consultation document
- 2a Notes of meeting with Governors
- 2b Notes of meeting with Parents and Other Members of the Community
- 3 Key points from responses and commentary by officers
- 4 Options Appraisal on alternative sites