

PRIMARY SCHOOL ORGANISATION CONSULTATION

NOTES OF A MEETING HELD AT CAYNHAM CE PRIMARY SCHOOL ON 11 MARCH 2008

GOVERNORS' MEETING HELD AT 5.00pm

Present:

Governors

Mrs Emma Small (Chair)
Mrs Alison Parker-Morgan (Headteacher)
Mr Stephen Ashford
Rev Richard Green
Mr Carl Huntbach
Ms Sheila Madgwick
Mr Paul Suthern

Officers/Members

Mr Ian Budd
Cllr Ann Hartley
Mr John Baxter
Ms Laura Morris (Communications Team)
Mrs Helen Woodbridge (Note Taker)

Ian Budd opened the meeting and introduced those present. He explained:

- the reasons for the review;
- the review process; and
- possible next steps

Paul Suthern asked if individual decisions would be made or if the County Council members would want to make a decision collectively on all schools being considered for amalgamation.

Ian Budd confirmed that individual decisions would be taken.

John Baxter clarified the situation regarding consultation.

Stephen Ashford reported that people's main concerns were location. One element from the village would like to keep the site but another element were concerned that this would mean heavier traffic in the village. Many would be opposed to a greenfield site – if a site with existing use can be found then this would be acceptable.

Alison Parker-Morgan reported that there was a local rumour that the new school would be located on the new ECO Park.

Emma Small reported that people generally don't want the school stuck between the two villages. They felt that it was important to be able to walk to a church.

Paul Suthern advised that of the combined school population of Caynham CE Primary School and Ashford Carbonell CE Primary School, 60% were coming in from Ludlow. These important stakeholders need to be on board. The 19th century building is not fit for purpose as a 21st century school.

Carl Huntbach thought that footpaths should be increased. Many of his family had attended the school but he would be happy to see the location moved.

Ian Budd advised that both school sites have restraints, weaknesses and challenges. Neither the Council nor the Diocese owned any suitable land. Local soundings were being made in both Caynham and Ashford Carbonel. A list of possible sites will be compiled and checked out – pros and cons will be weighed up and then reported back to and talked through with governors of both schools.

Emma Small asked about the required area.

John Baxter advised that 1.5 hectares (3.7 acres) would be required.

Carl Huntbach commented that the current sites were much smaller than this.

Ian Budd advised that if a current site had to be used then extra land/facilities would need to be identified – this needn't necessarily have to be purchased – a long term agreement would be satisfactory.

Emma Small asked about the money – would the current sites be sold if a new site was identified.

Ian Budd advised that there was not provision for capital receipts and there are some reverter clauses. If there was any income, this would go into the project.

Alison Parker-Morgan asked if renting the field would be considered.

Ian Budd confirmed that this would be possible as long as it was a long term usage agreement.

Carl Huntbach asked about compulsory purchase orders.

Ian Budd advised that this process would take too long and so was not being considered.

Carl Huntbach asked how much the Council would pay for the land.

John Baxter advised that valuers would be engaged to consider this – all land was different and issues like flooding and chemical use would need to be considered.

Carl Huntbach asked if the land was cheap or free of charge, would this be attractive.

Ian Budd advised that all possibilities would need to be considered.

Emma Small asked what would happen regarding governance.

Ian Budd advised that it would depend on the decision.

If both schools were to close, then a small governing body to work on the new school project would be formed representing both schools. (He also said that in this case, special dispensation could be applied for to avoid the competition process. The existing governing bodies would remain in place until August 2009.

Stephen Ashford asked if a new school would be Voluntary Controlled or Voluntary Aided.

Ian Budd advised that the local authority would have no problem with either.

Ian Budd continued with the question re governance. If one school was closing and the other school changing its character the process is do-able if it is not as easy as in the previous scenario. The key thing is to keep everyone on board and for the views of both school communities to be heard. It is important is to make your views known. A statutory notice confirming which model was proposed would be issued in the summer if the consultation was progressing.

Paul Suthern thought that there was no need for a third governing body and that it would be wise to let the smaller balanced joint governing body concentrate on the new building/staffing/budget etc. He stressed that the needs of present and future children were key.

Ian Budd hoped that the earlier staff meeting had addressed some of the concerns and John Baxter commented that the staff had been receptive.

Alison Parker-Morgan confirmed that the staff were fine but would have a long time to worry about the future. She thought that the recent positive Ofsted experience had helped.

Ian Budd talked about the transition period where the governing body will work on the indicative budget and staffing structure enabling staff to be 'slotted in' as soon as possible. The governing body will decide the staffing structure but there are protocols to be observed eg with the Trades Unions. Staff should be 'slotted in' as far as possible. Any displaced staff will be, as far as possible, found roles in other schools (nearer to their home if possible).

Alison Parker-Morgan asked if staff would retain the same number of hours as their current contract.

Ian Budd confirmed that this would be the case. He advised that currently the turnover of staff in schools was such that there should be sufficient vacancies available within the area to deliver ongoing employment.

Ian Budd pointed out that Trades Unions often want the availability of voluntary severance for individuals and he would wish to make that available where required.

Emma Small asked if the number of pupils in the schools dropped in an interim period, would there be redundancies.

Ian Budd replied that if a 'dip' was temporary, then there is provision in the Local Authority to pay for employment to continue for a year rather than pay for a redundancy.

Paul Suthern stressed how important the timescale of this was. The decision on location would be important as a new school would be attractive to new parents/pupils and it could be over-populated.

Alison Parker-Morgan was unsure how many potential new parents/pupils there were.

Ian Budd stressed that for a rural school in a rural area the first priority will be for the current school population – but he confirmed that a new school would be likely to be attractive to other local people.

John Baxter advised of the need to be careful when considering people moving into the area as it is not possible to build in surplus places.

Ian Budd cited the example of St John's the Baptist CE School in Ruyton XI Towns which was built as a three class school and expanded at a later stage.

John Baxter explained that the school could be created as a three class school with the potential for expansion.

Ian Budd apologised for the press coverage about the process which had led some people to think that three class schools were not viable. In deeply rural areas two and three class schools will be needed to deliver the County Council's policy and children's primary education entitlement.

Emma Small asked about the pre-school and if it would form part of the school.

John Baxter advised that any provision for pre-school on the school site would be additional. He raised the issue of location and asked if the new school was situated in one village, would the other village make use of the pre-school if it was on the same location as the school.

Ian Budd advised that in some areas, the pre-school provision has been provided in various locations more local than the school. Consultation would help develop a local plan.

Ian Budd went on to talk about the design and development of a new school. He was proud that in Shropshire so far, no two new developments have been the same. Ian Budd advised that the Local Authority has a good track record in involving staff, governors, pupils, parents and the wider community in the development of a new school. He stressed the curriculum links which would be of benefit to pupils, particularly with sustainability.

Alison Parker-Morgan asked about Eco schools.

Ian Budd replied that any new school building would be developed to a high sustainable standard and a School Travel Plan would be developed. At a recent development, a 38% reduction in the carbon footprint has been achieved. Other sustainable features could include ground source heating, solar panels and indicators/gauges to enable pupil monitoring.

Carl Huntbach reminded the group that 10% of the funding has to be spent on sustainability. He asked about a wind turbine and stressed how much the children were interested in sustainability issues.

Paul Suthern asked about ICT provision (including laptops and whiteboards) and asked if the design could be flexible enough to allow for future developments in this area.

Ian Budd replied that mixed economies would be provided for. The key thing was that the building would be 'trunked' allowing for expansion in the future. He thought that whiteboards would be used in schools for some time yet. However, the main improvements in new schools are the provision of areas for smaller group/individual working, storage and for staff to work.

Paul Suthern felt that stakeholders should take time to look at other developments.

Ian Budd felt that it was vital to ask what the children, staff and governors want and to visit other new schools both in and out of county. He was sure that there would be likes and dislikes and at the end of the process something different from anything that currently exists. He felt that the process would benefit from Local Authority and Diocesan expertise. He advised that, typically, workshops would be held for parents, governors, staff and children on design specifications. He advised of involvement in two recent developments. He noted how children were very proud of their achievements and involvement. He also noted that to have children working together like this also helps to bring the two school communities together.

Alison Parker-Morgan asked whether new furniture would be provided as part of the development.

Ian Budd advised that this would be the case but that often the furniture budget is the one that has the most pressure. Current schools should consider the future when spending their DFC money.

John Baxter reminded governors how important it was to spend today's money on today's children.

Alison Parker-Morgan asked if she should proceed with the external painting of the demountable buildings.

Ian Budd advised that she should proceed.

Paul Suthern advised that any transitional governing body would be keen to ensure that neither school overspent its budget.

Ian Budd confirmed that the money would follow the children and there would be no rapid spending at the end of the life of either school.

Richard Green asked for clarification of the timescale and it was confirmed that any formal consultation would start on 23 May and would last until mid July. The final decision (ie on which of the three routes to pursue) would be taken at the end of the summer term.

Alison Parker-Morgan asked if this process would definitely result in a new school building.

Ian Budd advised that the proposed amalgamations are the first schools to go through the Primary School Organisation process. There is Primary Capital Funding available and therefore there is a requirement for new building.

John Baxter confirmed that the Local Authority would work with governors for the best outcome.

Alison Parker-Morgan asked if the joint governing body would make the final decision on the new school site and asked about listed buildings.

John Baxter advised that the Ashford Carbonell CE Primary School buildings are not listed and that a building on the Caynham site is Grade 2 listed.

Ian Budd advised that a full report would be available before 2 May which identified the pros and cons of all suggested sites.

Richard Green asked about identified sites and about planning permission.

Ian Budd advised that a site would have to be identified for a statutory notice to be proceeded with. He advised that Shropshire County Council is the planning authority for educational developments. Any perceived planning difficulties would be highlighted within the report on possible sites. Planning officers would be involved in the project from an early stage.

Alison Parker-Morgan asked about the village hall's involvement (ie linking the school development to the village hall).

Ian Budd advised that the funding from the Primary Capital Programme could not be used for the village hall.

Alison Parker-Morgan then asked what about if the village hall identified its own funds.

Ian Budd confirmed that this would be OK but that the school would need to be secure of the availability/existence of the funding if they were to be dependent on the use of the village hall.

Stephen Ashford asked about site ownership.

John Baxter confirmed that this was not clear. The Local Authority's understanding is that there is a reverter clause at Ashford Carbonell CE Primary School.

Paul Suthern advised that there was no reverter clause at Caynham CE Primary School.

Paul Suthern reported that the Diocese would be keen to have a school hall and an area for quiet reflection.

Emma Small was upset by the Shropshire Star comment that of the two communities, one is likely to lose its school.

Ann Hartley reported that at the Ashford Carbonell CE Primary School meeting, some reference had been made to funding which was available to develop services (eg halls) in villages which had lost their school.

Ian Budd stressed that it was helpful if the school community worked with the local councillors too.

Paul Suthern advised that the ownership of the school (based on the current school population) is serving Ludlow as much as Caynham itself.

Stephen Ashford said that emotionally, this was not the case.

Ian Budd offered the opportunity for anyone to contact officers at Shirehall with any questions or comments and thanked people for their attendance before bringing the meeting to a close.