

Appendix 3

Consultation on Draft Proposal to Amalgamate
Longmeadow School and Oakland School

Introduction

This appendix selects and responds to the main points raised during the consultation, including at the meetings with staff, governors and the community. The minutes of the meetings at each school are also attached to the report as appendices 2a and 2b. The actual responses received are available for inspection in the Members Library and will be available to Members at the Cabinet Meeting on 19 May 2008.

Points Raised and Response by Officers

Ref.	Point Raised	Response
1	Bayston Hill is large enough to have two schools	Pupil numbers in Bayston Hill have reduced sharply in recent years. Although the fall has now levelled off, by 2012 there will be more than 150 fewer pupils in Bayston Hill than in the mid 90s. A larger school of almost two form entry in size is capable of responding much better to changing pupil numbers than either of the current schools, and is more likely to attract significant capital investment. This position is supported by Bayston Hill Parish Council.
2	Should Bayston Hill have been included in the current proposals? Some respondents questioned whether Longmeadow and Oakland Schools should have been included in the current proposals on the basis that they are rural and not urban schools.	Shropshire County Council's Primary School Organisation Policy provides more than the statutory level of protection to rural schools. However, there has been some confusion about what this means. There are several different meanings and use of the word rural. In legislation there is a system of checks and balances for schools deemed to be rural, which require a higher standard of case before they can be closed. Both Oakland and Longmeadow School are listed on the database of schools which are subject to this additional standard of case. However, this is not the same as protection from closure, and, indeed, the Department for Children Schools and Families' statutory guidance says "This does not mean

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		<p>that a rural school should never close, but the case for closure should be strong and the proposals clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area.” This wording is also used in Jim Knight MP’s letter to local authorities dated 31 January 2008, who then goes on to say “For example, closure can be justified ... when an alternative school can offer superior facilities within an acceptable travel distance.”</p> <p>Clearly, both Oakland and Longmeadow schools are located in a populated area. The numbers at the two schools are such that they can easily be accommodated on a single site. A new school would be less than the maximum size of school expected in a populated area, with almost all its pupils able to walk to school in significantly less than the Department for Children Schools and Families recommended maximum walking distance of two miles. It is therefore appropriate that the two Bayston Hill schools should have been included in the current consultation.</p>
3	Amalgamation equals closure.	<p>There is a specific technical, legal sense in which this is true, as the Department for Children Schools and Families has not made available to Local Authorities any school organisation procedure called “amalgamation” or “merger”.</p> <p>However, in spirit nothing could be further from the truth. The proposal for the legal route is to close both existing schools and create a new school, so that there is no feeling of one school taking over the other.</p> <p>A temporary governing body would be set up drawn from the governors of both schools. This governing body would appoint a headteacher to the new school, and develop and populate the staffing structure (see below).</p> <p>There would be a great deal of work done with both schools in the planning stage before the amalgamation took place to ensure that new, jointly agreed staffing arrangements and</p>

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		policies were in place. Pupils would be introduced to working with each other over a period of time, and this would help to reduce the tensions in the community which have risen to the surface during the current debate.
4	What benefits will there be from the amalgamation	The main benefits from amalgamation are set out in the body of the report. In summary they are: being able to build on the differing strengths of both schools, having more staff and resources to support individual pupils and curriculum and professional development and attracting capital investment to make a school for the future.
5	Will the standards in the new school be lower than in my child's current school	The standards in both schools are good, and largely comparable, but each school has particular strengths in different areas (see the Ofsted reports in the evidence files) which are complementary. Building on these strengths, and with more flexible resources and better buildings, standards in the combined school will be enhanced.
6	Will children with special educational needs suffer from being in a larger school?	Research in Shropshire and elsewhere shows that the more flexible use of staffing resources and larger peer groups of children with similar needs means that pupils with special educational needs often do slightly better in larger schools. This is perhaps not so surprising when it is considered that primary school pupils spend much of their time as a class group, with individual or small group support for SEN pupils being more readily available in a larger school. Longmeadow School has been acknowledged by Ofsted to have particular strengths in supporting children with SEN.
7	Will there be large classes in the new school?	There is no reason why there should be large classes in a new school. Schools are funded on the basis of the number of pupils, so as they get more pupils, they are able to employ more staff to teach them. Some very small classes may get slightly larger, but there is a legal limit of 30 on classes for children less than 6 years old (in the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1)

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		and classes are likely to be below rather than at the limit.
8	Will there be too many children on one site?	The consultation document was entirely open on the route to be taken to reach an amalgamated school, but made a specific suggestion as to the site to be used. This is because the Longmeadow site used to accommodate numbers in excess of 330 pupils with no difficulty in pupils arriving or leaving, or having sports facilities. The new school would have similar numbers.
9	The new school will cause congestion and damage the environment	<p>Travel distances within Bayston Hill are short, and so bringing children to school by car is only essential for a small number of parents. However, it is accepted that some parents drop of their children as part of another journey, for example on their way to work. Both schools have undertaken work with parents on alternatives to car journeys, and walking buses, etc. mean that children could have some exercise on the way to school while their parents could get on with their journey. The extended school day also means that there is less of a peak around school opening and closing times.</p> <p>There might possibly be a small overall increase in vehicle traffic. However, the efficiencies of improved buildings would mean that total carbon emissions would be less.</p>
10	Are single age groups the only good way to organise classes?	No, there are other models of organisation which produce good results. However, having children at the same age and at a similar stage of development does simplify planning, which means that staff have more time to spend supporting individuals and developing personalised learning. The organisation of groups would be a matter for the new governing body, but many schools operate a mixture of teaching by age and by stage, that is, in groups which are sometimes of the same year groups and sometimes of the same ability in a given subject.

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11	Oakland has a unique community. Will amalgamation destroy it?	Oakland school has its own character and strengths. However, both schools serve the Bayston Hill community, as can be seen by looking at a pupil scatter map. A new school would also serve all the community, and would bring pupils and parents together as part of a single, cohesive community.
12	If the new school has Church of England character, will this exclude some families.	No. Church of England schools welcome pupils and their families from all faiths and those with no religious affiliation. Indeed, in other parts of the county families from communities which do not have their own faith schools often actively seek out Church schools rather than community schools. A new school would teach the same religious education syllabus as the two existing schools. As the proposal is for a Voluntary Controlled school, Shropshire County Council would still manage admissions, and staff would still have contracts with Shropshire County Council, as at present.
13	What would happen to my child's teacher and the other staff in the school?	<p>Shropshire County Council has negotiated a staffing protocol with the local and regional trade unions which will support and protect staff. The new temporary Governing Body would set the staffing structure and appoint the headteacher. The headteacher supported by temporary Governors would then populate the new structure from staff already at one or other school. If it was not possible to accommodate all current staff who wanted to remain in the new school in the structure set by the governors, Shropshire County Council would consider retaining, redeployment and finally voluntary severance arrangements. There has not been a compulsory redundancy arising from a school organisation proposal in Shropshire in the current decade.</p> <p>It was suggested by one respondent that all staff should have to apply for their jobs. It is important to emphasise that this is not the intention, and the Staffing Protocol seeks to avoid this happening in as many situations as</p>

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		possible.
14	What will happen to existing Early Years & Wrap Around Care	Shropshire County Council would work with existing providers to ensure that the best Early Years provision is available and with the Governing Body develop extended schools services including wrap around care. There is no intention to “take over” the existing early years provision.
15	Will a new school mean a new build school building?	It is not planned to build a new school. Shropshire County Council would work on a buildings development with the new Governing Body so that a mixture of remodelling, refurbishment and limited new build could meet all the needs of the educational vision for the new school.
16	What would happen to the redundant site.	There are no plans at this time for the redundant site. Shropshire County Council would discuss options with the Parish Council, and any change of use would require a full planning application and the associated public consultation.
17	Why aren't more schools being amalgamated?	There are a number of other villages in Shropshire where there is more than one school. These areas are different from Bayston Hill in one, or sometimes both, of two ways. In some cases, the villages are hubs for far larger rural communities, whereas pupils in Oakland and Longmeadow come almost exclusively from the built up area of Bayston Hill.
18	What account has been taken of the Parish Poll?	The consultation document made it clear that this consultation was not a referendum on the draft proposal. It is clear that the residents of Bayston Hill take education provision very seriously and, like the County and Parish Councils, are committed to getting the best possible outcome for all the children. With regard to the outcome, neither the Electoral Reform Society, any independent polling organisation nor Shropshire County Council were consulted on the wording of the question. Shropshire County Council was not involved in arrangements for information on the proposals

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		to be made available to all electors, and it has come to light that there were concerns about the accuracy of the information on the leaflets circulated in Bayston Hill. Shropshire County Council elected members will come to their conclusion based on all the information received leading to the best outcome for pupils, as stated at the outset of the consultation period.