

Appendix 3

Consultation on Draft Proposal to Amalgamate
Meole Brace Infant School and Meole Brace Junior 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	Will the new school have a religious character?	<p>The suggested option is that the two existing schools should close and the Diocese of Lichfield should be invited to open new Voluntary Controlled school to serve the community. The Diocese have indicated that they would support this option. There is an historic involvement in church provision noted by the Parochial Church Council in their response. The 2001 census returns showed the predominantly Christian composition (78%) of the local community.</p> <p>Some responses have suggested that the religious character of the Infant School is a reason why the schools should not amalgamate, as this would be unfair to families who do not have a Church of England faith. Almost all Church of England schools, including all those in Shropshire, are open to children (and staff) from families of all faiths and none. They all teach the Agreed Syllabus for Religious Education, as do Shropshire's community schools such as Meole Brace Junior. As it is proposed that the new school should have Voluntary Controlled Status, staff would be employed by Shropshire County Council, and admissions would be handled by Shropshire County Council's admissions team.</p>

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2	What evidence is there of a dip in performance in Infant to Junior schools?	Ofsted Chief Inspector reports through the 1990s highlighted slower progress in lower Key Stage 2 when there was a transfer from Infant to Junior school. Other academic research by the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge by Maurice Galton, Jean Rudduck and others available on the internet also points to a general dip in performance at the beginning of Stage 2 following transfer from Infant to Junior school.
3	Why are you not closing both schools to ensure a level playing field regarding the appointment of Headteacher?	<p>The original report on 30 January 2008 suggested that the route to amalgamation should be through closure of the Junior School and expansion of the infant school. This was based on concerns that closing both schools might lead to the need to hold a competition to promote the new school. Further discussions with the Department for Children Schools and Families have suggested that there might be an exemption from competition legislation. A number of responses, including from the Diocese of Lichfield, have suggested that closing both schools would be seen as the most even handed and fair way to proceed. This is now the suggested option. A temporary governing body would be set up, drawn from members of the current Governing Bodies. This temporary Governing Body would set the staffing structure and recruit a headteacher for the new school. The Headteacher and temporary Governing Body would then populate the staffing structure in line with the Staffing Protocol.</p> <p>During the consultation, there was also some support for the Infant school to be expanded and the Junior School closed. This appeared to be because there is a permanent headteacher at the former and an acting headteacher at the latter.</p>
4	If amalgamation proceeds it must be done in such a way that it does not feel that one school is "taking over" the other.	The suggested option of creating a new school recognises this concern. It would also be our aim through the transition period to work collaboratively with both schools.
5	If both schools are doing well, why bother to make any changes and in such	The benefits of all through primary education are set out in the main body of this paper and are not repeated here. It is acknowledged that the written

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	an arbitrary way?	submissions from both the Infant and Junior Governing bodies indicate a wish to see the retention of the status quo and not to amalgamate. The inclusion of a number of infant and junior schools within the current amalgamation process is not arbitrary but based upon the new policy approved by County Council in December 2007. There is an acknowledgement that planning for any reorganisation should involve seeking further improvement in pupil attainment/achievement.
6	Would the amalgamation affect the good standard of education in the existing schools?	Yes. The intention is that by amalgamating, the schools will build on the strengths of both the existing schools and the outcomes and opportunities for children in the new school would be higher than in the individual schools.