



Shropshire  
County Council

**Children and Young People's Services**

**Proposal to Amalgamate Meole Brace**

**Infant and Junior Schools:**

**Consultation Document**

Issued 7 March 2008

Shropshire County Council wishes to hear the views of the community on bringing Meole Brace Infant and Junior Schools together, and if so what form the proposals should take.

**Initial consultation meetings:**

**Governors 5pm,**

**Parents and other members of the Meole Brace**

**School community 6.30pm,**

**13 March 2008 at the Junior School.**

**Staff meetings:**

**Infant School, 4pm 12 March,**

**Junior School 4pm 13 March**

## **Introduction**

This Consultation Document sets out proposals to amalgamate Meole Brace Infant and Junior Schools. The consultation document also includes a timetable for the consultation process and details on how to respond to this stage of the process.

This consultation document sets out a selection of basic facts in order to inform the consultation. It is not intended to provide all the possible relevant facts about this proposal and submission of other relevant information is welcomed and encouraged through the consultation process. Officers will help within the law and available resources to find or extract helpful facts or data whether it argues for or against the proposals. Although the information in the document is believed to be correct, any proposed corrections with evidence will be incorporated and acknowledged in the report at the end of the consultation period, and alternative interpretations of data will be reported along with views and opinions.

Consultation is being undertaken whilst the proposals are still at the formative stage. No final decisions have been taken and the options presented in this paper are provided merely as illustrations of solutions to the issues faced by the Council. Other proposed solutions will be given full consideration.

The purpose of consultation is to test the accuracy of the facts, uncover and investigate additional information, and assess the significance of what is brought forward. There is an opportunity to collect the views and opinions of those informed by the debate. A consultation exercise is neither a competition nor a referendum, but is intended to gather evidence to allow decision makers to make a full and informed choice between alternatives.

## **Proposal to Amalgamate Meole Brace Infant and Junior Schools**

Meole Brace Infant School provides education for 3 to 7 year olds, and Meole Brace Junior School provides education for 7 to 11 year olds. The proposal is to create a school which will educate pupils between 3 and 11 with no transition at age 7. The current arrangement means young children have to change school between the ages of six and seven. This transition to a new school with different ways of working often has the effect of slowing their educational progress, and Shropshire County Council has adopted a policy of aiming for all-through primary schools, where this is the best educational and financial option.

There is no definitive technical legal process for bringing two schools together in an amalgamation. As well as considering whether the schools should be brought together, the consultation will also explore the best way to make the change. The three options are:

- Close the infant school and expand the junior school to the full primary age range;
- Close the junior school and expand the infant school to the full primary age range;
- Close both schools and open a new school for the full primary age range.

In all three cases, the new school would continue to use both the current infant and junior school buildings unless and until the Governing Body of the primary school was ready to move into a single building. No children would have to move to a different site.

If the third method was chosen, there would be an opportunity, if there was local support, to change the character of the new school by having a “competition” to find a body to run it. This could be a foundation composed of local parents and/or businesses, a church or other religious body or the Council and the Church of England as at present.

## **Background to the Proposals for Meole Brace Infant and Junior Schools**

Both Meole Brace Infant and Junior Schools were judged in 2007 as “good” by Shropshire County Council. In 2006, Ofsted judged the Junior School as “a good school where pupils of all abilities achieve well”. The infant school has not been inspected since 2003, and the grading system has changed. However, the judgements on the Infant school were positive in 2003 and there is no reason to suppose they would be different now.

At the moment, there are 303 pupils at the two schools (not counting the nursery). This includes a bulge of pupils passing through the infant school which will transfer to the junior school in due course. This number is not forecast to change significantly and so the balance of pupils between the two schools will be different but the total numbers will be much the same in 2012. At full capacity, the two buildings could hold up to 350 pupils. Bringing the two schools together could not only remove the break between infant and junior education and create a more viable school for the long term, it would also make it easier for the new primary school to cope with changing numbers between the two schools.

There is an additional factor with regard to the Meole Brace schools. The Infant School has Church of England voluntary controlled status, which means that the school has a “religious character” and is linked to the Church of England who own the buildings and land and nominate some of the governors. The Junior School is a community school, which means that it does not have a religious character and a larger proportion of the governors are nominated by the Council. Part of the consultation will need to consider whether the new school should have a religious character, as it would if it was based on the infant school, or whether it should not, as it would if it was based on the junior school. If both schools were closed, the new school could adopt whatever category and religious or secular character decided as part of the competition process.

## **What Would The Proposal to Amalgamate Mean For The Staff Of the Schools?**

There is no reason why your child shouldn't continue to be taught by the same team of staff before and after the proposed amalgamation. We would expect that, whatever model for change was adopted, the governing body of the primary school would initially employ all the existing staff, with the exception of the headteachers.

Which headteacher became the head of the primary school would depend on whether one school was expanded, in which case the current head of that school would become the head of the primary school, or a new school was formed, in which case there would be an interview process to find a new head. There might also be changes to the administrative and site staff, such as secretaries and caretakers, as the two schools come together. However, this is not always the case, and the final decisions would lie with the Governing Body of the primary school. Shropshire County Council would help any staff

who might be displaced from their current post to find suitable alternative arrangements. We have always been successful in this in the past. As time goes on, there will inevitably be changes to staffing levels. As these natural changes happen, we will help any displaced staff find a suitable alternative. There will be full consultation with and support for staff before any decisions, and if the decision is to amalgamate on-going support will be put in place.

## **What About The School Buildings?**

Initially, the new school would occupy both buildings. Shropshire County Council is about to embark on a major programme of investment in primary schools, and would work with the Governing Body to plan investment at the school over the next few years so that the new Meole Brace Primary School could have buildings which would be suitable for education through the majority of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## **Why Are We Making These Proposals?**

Shropshire County Council has adopted a new Vision for Shropshire Primary Schools of the Future which sets out 11 key characteristics for successful schools. There is also a new Primary School Organisation Policy, which is summarised below. Both these documents are available in full at <http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/youngpeople.nsf/open/29F4D9462121DA1080257359004A7B35> or through your local school, and were summarised in the leaflet "Shropshire Primary Schools for the Future: Proposed Changes and How They Might Affect You". The current proposals for school organisation have been developed through implementation of the new policy.

## **Shropshire Primary School Organisation Policy**

The new policy is based on five principles: a sustainable network of primary schools serving communities; high quality, inclusive provision; access from every Shropshire home; opportunities for life-long learning and support for families, and; support for geographically isolated communities.

These principles then give rise to a number of policy statements which say that:

- Shropshire County children should have access to a primary school within 6 miles (or 45 minutes travelling time) of their home address in rural areas and 2 miles in urban areas;
- Schools should normally have at least 92 pupils, but where this would mean homes would be more than six miles from a school smaller schools should be supported. The preferred (but not exclusive) sizes of schools are 4 or 7 classes;
- Schools should normally cover the whole primary age range, but separate infant and junior schools are acceptable if an amalgamation would result in too large a school (normally over 420 pupils in the medium term);
- There should be at least maintenance of the proportion of primary school places in schools with a religious character, and existing early years providers should not be replaced wholesale by maintained nurseries. Other commissioning models, such as foundation schools, will be considered;

- Schools should be inclusive of children of all abilities and backgrounds;
- The new network should be developed over time to provide access to other services, including childcare, family support and lifelong learning.

## **Some key educational benefits of amalgamating infant and junior schools**

(NB These summary points have been drawn from recent educational research and from the experiences and observations of Shropshire's School Improvement Partner team, four of whom have been headteachers of junior schools.)

Whilst all schools will do their best to minimise the impact, it is generally accepted that any transition point in education can be unsettling, both academically and socially. Whilst it is not inevitable, there is often a 'dip' in the earlier part of Key Stage 2.

- An all through primary school means improved continuity and progress from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 through smoother transition. For example, a single school will have common approaches to curriculum planning, assessment, record keeping and target setting. Staff have longer to get to know the children. Most importantly, the school will have a shared understanding of standards and expectations.
- An all through primary school allows more opportunities for flexibility in tailoring learning experiences to meet individual needs. For example, Year 3 children who require further experience of the Key Stage 1 curriculum and more able Year 2 children requiring the challenge of the Key Stage 2 programmes can be catered for. It means a wider range of resources can be shared and common themes developed across the school. This curriculum flexibility can be particularly important for children with Special Educational Needs.
- An all through primary school provides more opportunities for social development. For example, older children can have some appropriate pastoral responsibility for younger children, which can impact positively on whole school behaviour and children's self-esteem. Vulnerable children and their parents and carers have greater security from a consistency of staff and provision.
- A single school provides more consistency in terms of policies and practice. The school improvement agenda is led by a single leadership team and governing body. Research shows that a single vision and a common ethos is a key factor in school improvement.
- An all through primary school increases the range of experience and expertise of teaching and non-teaching staff and allows greater flexibility in staff deployment. Staff can have curriculum and other responsibility from the start of the Foundation Stage to the end of Year 6.
- An all through primary school means that there is closer contact for parents and carers with school staff over a longer period of time. A more continuous relationship between the school, parents, carers and outside agencies can ensure that all pupils, but particularly those with special needs, are supported effectively from the Foundation Stage through to the end of Year 6.

## **Community and Environmental Appraisal**

Shropshire County Council always carries out an appraisal of the potential community and environmental effects of any school organisation proposal. In this case, as there are no proposed changes to the site on which education takes place, there are no direct community effects to be considered. However, if the new school uses newly refurbished accommodation, there could be some positive environmental impacts from reduced energy usage. There should be no change to traffic volumes.

## **Further Information**

Shropshire County Council has dedicated a special section of the Council web site to the Shropshire Primary Schools for the Future school organisation process. This can be accessed from [www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk). We will also continue to send information out to and through schools, and through the media. A senior officer and elected Member will visit each affected school to explain the proposals to staff, governors and the local community including parents. For parents of children at the Meole Brace schools, this meeting will take place on 13 March 2008 in the Junior School.

## **Making your views known**

Shropshire County Council wants to hear the views of all interested parties, particularly children, their parents and staff. In addition to feedback at the school specific meetings, you will be able to comment on the website ([www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk)), by e-mail ([schools.consultation@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:schools.consultation@shropshire.gov.uk)) – please include the name of the school in the subject line), letter (to Children and Young People's Services, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, SY2 6ND) or telephone (0845 678 9000).

Shropshire County Council is very keen to hear your views on whether the proposed amalgamation should take place and the reasons for or against, and what method should be used to amalgamate the schools if amalgamation is to take place. In addition, we would be interested to know your views on whether the school should be run by a foundation or as present and whether or not it should have a religious character.

## **Next Steps**

Following the meeting on 13 March, and receipt of views through the consultation process, a report will be presented to Cabinet on 19 May. At that meeting, the Council can decide to go ahead and if so what process option should be adopted to accomplish the amalgamation, or can decide not to proceed further with the proposal. You will be contacted again through the school when this report is published, explaining what the report's recommendations could mean for your school. If the agreement at that stage is to go forward to the next stage, then there would be a further round of consultation, a further examination of the case to proceed, and if every decision is positive then amalgamation would take place from September 2009.