

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM 9

REPORT TO CABINET

10 AUGUST 2006

REPORT OF CORPORATE MANAGEMENT TEAM

REPORT FOR INFORMATION

Children and Young People – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Cunningham

OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION ON THE POSSIBLE AMALGAMATION OF BEWLEY INFANT SCHOOL WITH BEWLEY JUNIOR SCHOOL

1. Summary

In general the Authority prefers primary schools to separate infant and junior schools, but has not sought to impose amalgamation against the wishes of schools.

Cabinet agreed on 18 May to undertake consultation on the possibility of amalgamating Bewley Infant School with Bewley Junior School to form a single primary school with nursery. This report summarises the responses to that consultation.

A consultation paper was widely circulated and meetings were held for parents and for school staff. The idea of amalgamation was also discussed at meetings of the governing bodies of the two schools. All of these groups expressed very strong support for retaining separate infant and junior schools at Bewley on grounds including the successful record of pupil attainment at both schools, the quality of teaching, leadership and management, and very effective arrangements to manage the transition between schools for children at the age of seven. Amalgamation was seen as unnecessary and potentially harmful. There was concern over the possible loss of staff expertise and the certain reduction in funding. The need to continue using two buildings separated by security fences and a public footpath was seen as a major barrier to effective operation as a primary school.

No support for amalgamation emerged at any of the meetings or in any of the written comments received. In view of this clear response from the community of these schools, no formal proposal to amalgamate these schools is advised.

2. Recommendation

Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

3. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

Sections 28 to 31 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (modified in some details by the Education Act 2002) lay down a statutory procedure that must be followed when any change to school organisation is being considered. Before deciding whether to publish a proposal for change (by means of a Statutory Notice), the Authority must first consult those persons most likely to be affected by the change. All views expressed during consultation must be taken into account.

Statutory guidance to decision-makers issued by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills specifies that the views expressed in consultation shall be one of the principal factors on which any proposal must be determined. Others include the impact on standards of education, community cohesion and cost-effectiveness.

4. Members' Interests

Members (including co-opted members with voting rights) should consider whether they have a personal interest in the item as defined in the Council's code of conduct (paragraph 8) and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with paragraph 9 of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest in the item, he/she must then consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgment of the public interest (paragraph 10 of the code of conduct).

A Member with a prejudicial interest in any matter must withdraw from the room where the meeting is being held, whilst the matter is being considered; not exercise executive functions in relation to the matter and not seek improperly to influence the decision about the matter (paragraph 12 of the Code).

Further to the above, it should be noted that any Member attending a meeting of Cabinet, Select Committee etc.; whether or not they are a member of the Cabinet or Select Committee concerned, must declare any personal interest which they have in the business being considered at the meeting, and if their interest is prejudicial, they must also leave the meeting room during consideration of the relevant item.

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

10 AUGUST 2006

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

REPORT FOR INFORMATION

**OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION ON THE POSSIBLE AMALGAMATION OF BEWLEY
INFANT SCHOOL WITH BEWLEY JUNIOR SCHOOL**

SUMMARY

In general the Authority prefers primary schools to separate infant and junior schools, but has not sought to impose amalgamation against the wishes of schools.

Cabinet agreed on 18 May to undertake consultation on the possibility of amalgamating Bewley Infant School with Bewley Junior School to form a single primary school with nursery. This report summarises the responses to that consultation.

A consultation paper was widely circulated and meetings were held for parents and for school staff. The idea of amalgamation was also discussed at meetings of the governing bodies of the two schools. All of these groups expressed very strong support for retaining separate infant and junior schools at Bewley on grounds including the successful record of pupil attainment at both schools, the quality of teaching, leadership and management, and very effective arrangements to manage the transition between schools for children at the age of seven. Amalgamation was seen as unnecessary and potentially harmful. There was concern over the possible loss of staff expertise and the certain reduction in funding. The need to continue using two buildings separated by security fences and a public footpath was seen as a major barrier to effective operation as a primary school.

No support for amalgamation emerged at any of the meetings or in any of the written comments received. In view of this clear response from the community of these schools, no formal proposal to amalgamate these schools is advised.

RECOMMENDATION

Members are asked to note the contents of this report.

DETAIL

Method of consultation

1. A detailed consultation paper was circulated to:
 - a. parents of children attending Bewley Infant School (including the nursery), and Bewley Junior School;
 - b. all teaching and other staff of both schools;
 - c. representatives of staff unions and professional associations;
 - d. the Headteachers and Chairs of Governors at neighbouring primary schools;

- e. the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle;
 - f. Hartlepool Borough Council;
 - g. Ward Councillors for the Billingham North, East, West and Central wards;
 - h. The Member of Parliament for Stockton North.
2. A joint meeting was held for parents on 29 June. This was attended by 45 people. A joint meeting for staff was held on 28 June. This was attended by 31 people. An officer of the Council's Human Resources section was present. Representatives of unions and professional associations had been invited but none were present.
 3. At both meetings the statutory decision-making procedure was explained, and parents and staff were assured that the views expressed in consultation would be an important factor in that process. In spite of this, many expressed doubts that the Authority would be influenced by views that were contrary to Council policy, and there was much concern that amalgamation would be imposed on these schools.

Views expressed at the consultation meetings

4. One central point put forward in both meetings was the conviction that the high quality of education provided at Bewley would limit the potential benefits of amalgamation listed in the Authority's consultation paper. Pupil attainment at the end of Key Stage 2 (age 11) has been consistently above local and national averages (figures for Key Stage 1 are not published). The reports of Ofsted inspections confirm the views of parents and staff that teaching, leadership and management at the schools are very good. Arrangements for co-operation between the schools, particularly as children approached the transition point, are very highly regarded. Many share the view that there is likely to be very little, if anything, to gain from amalgamation.
5. The two teams of school staff are seen by parents as highly effective specialists in their particular key stages. A formal proposal to amalgamate would inevitably lead to a period of uncertainty for staff, and parents are concerned that this could lead to valued individuals seeking posts elsewhere. The two headteachers are very highly regarded, and there is concern that amalgamation would lead to the loss of one or both of these.
6. The distinctive ethos of Bewley Infant School is undoubtedly popular with parents. Many expressed the view that the size of the school creates a family atmosphere, and that after three years children develop a level of maturity and responsibility much more difficult for seven-year-olds to achieve in a primary school. Several parents view the transition from infant to junior school as a positive experience for their children, likely to make the greater transition to secondary school less daunting.
7. Staff and parents of children attending Bewley Junior School repeated the view that in general children suffer no adverse impact from the transition.
8. The physical separation of the Bewley buildings is seen as a major obstacle to successful operation as a primary school. The public footpath between the two sites means that gates must be kept locked during the school day for security reasons. This would make the routine movement of children or staff very difficult. It might be necessary, for example, to retain two staffed offices, negating any potential financial savings from amalgamation. It would be possible to gather all staff together in one building for scheduled meetings and development activities, but it would be very difficult to operate a single staffroom for the breaks between teaching sessions. Neither hall is sufficiently large to accommodate all the children for assemblies or

dining. Some parents expressed the view that whole-school assemblies in a primary school could not in any event meet the different needs of four-year-old and eleven-year-old children.

9. Amalgamation would lead to a net loss of funding for the Bewley schools. This is largely due to the fact that the Authority's funding formula gives every school a lump sum amount to contribute to fixed costs (e.g. the headteacher and school clerk). One of these lump sums (currently £33,275 per year) would be lost when two schools become one. Capital funding devolved to schools works in a similar way: an annual lump sum of £17,790 would be lost. In all, an amalgamated school would lose more than £56,000 every year (at 2006-07 prices) compared with the aggregate funding for the two separate schools. At almost 4.5% of the total budget, this loss is considered sufficient to negate the potential economies of scale and flexibility afforded by a single budget.
10. There was a request at the parents' meeting that a ballot be taken in order to demonstrate the strength of support for the separate schools. The officers present did not accede to this request for two reasons. Firstly they pointed out that consultation is not a referendum, but an opportunity for those consulted to present their point of view. By law, the Council may not decide to publish an amalgamation proposal without first taking account of all the views expressed in consultation. This must involve a serious consideration of the merit of the case put forward rather than a simple headcount of those for and those against. The second reason for refusing a ballot at the meeting was that perhaps as many as 90% of the school community (i.e. all parents and carers, staff members, governors) were not present.

Views expressed in writing

11. A total of ten people submitted comments in writing. One of these came from an official of one of the staff associations seeking a reassurance about the position of one individual. The others made points similar to those listed above. No comments in support of amalgamation were received.
12. One parent circulated written copies of his own views at the parents' meeting. With his consent, a copy of his statement is attached in the Appendix to this report. Written statements from the two governing bodies are also included.
13. Some of these letters repeated the belief expressed at the meeting that the Council intended to impose an amalgamation on the Bewley schools regardless of the views of the school community. The consultation paper (based on the experience of other schools) was seen by some as lacking in balance, too generalised and having little direct relevance to the Bewley schools. Some correspondents asked detailed questions about the decision-making procedure and the criteria on which any decision would be made.

Conclusion from the consultation process

14. The purpose of this consultation process was to discover the views of parents, staff members and school governing bodies towards the idea of an amalgamation of the Bewley schools. This was stated clearly in the consultation paper and in a letter that preceded it. The outcome is very clear. There is strong support for the separate infant and junior schools at Bewley. No support for amalgamation has emerged among parents, governing bodies or school staff.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial

15. None.

Legal

16. This consultation was carried out in accordance with the statutory requirements under Sections 28 and 29 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, and Schedule 6 to that Act, both as modified by the Education Act 2002. The Authority is required to take account of all the views expressed if any further action is proposed.

RISK ASSESSMENT

17. As no action is recommended, a risk assessment has not been carried out.

COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

18. No implications

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

19. Consultation is described in the body of the report.

Name of Contact Officer: John Hegarty

Post Title: Planning and Policy Development Officer (CESC)

Telephone No. 01642 526477

Email Address: john.hegarty@stockton.gov.uk

Background Papers

School Organisation Plan 2006-09 available on the Council website.

Cabinet report dated 18 May 2006.

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors:

Billingham North: Coun. Mrs J L Apedaile, Coun. K Dewison, Coun. C Leckonby.

Billingham East: Coun. A Cunningham, Coun. M N Stoker.

Billingham Central: Coun. N Teasdale, Coun. B Woodhouse.

Property

No change is proposed.

Appendix 1 follows



Bewley Junior School

WOLVISTON BACK LANE, BILLINGHAM, STOCKTON, TS23 3LR
Tel : 01642 560692. Fax 01642 563041
Email steve.aistrup@stockton.gov.uk
Headteacher : S.T. Aistrup

THOUGHTS ON THE POSSIBLE AMALGAMATION OF THE BEWLEY SCHOOLS

The Governing Body of Bewley Junior are not in favour of an amalgamation of the two schools.

We believe that such an amalgamation is not in the best interests of the children or the staff of our school and there are no real benefits to be gained for our children.

OUR REASONS FOR SAYING THIS INCLUDE:

- If amalgamated the schools would continue to operate in separate buildings.
- Both schools have been recognised by Ofsted as 'Particularly Successful Schools'. It is difficult to see how an amalgamation could improve on these high standards.
- Uncertainty over change and particularly job security will lead to anxiety amongst a range of staff.
- There would not be any financial benefit in amalgamating.
- There is no evidence to support the view that an amalgamation, that might arise from the consultation process, would be likely to improve the educational progression, curriculum provision or pastoral care of children attending our school.

THE LOCAL AUTHORITY WANT TO CONSULT WITH PARENTS TO HEAR THEIR VIEWS

A **very important** meeting will be held in the JUNIOR SCHOOL HALL AT 6.00 PM ON THURSDAY, 29TH JUNE.

Please come along to take part in the discussion and find out more about what an amalgamation would actually mean.

YOUR ATTENDANCE AND VIEWS ARE VERY IMPORTANT

PROPOSED AMALGAMATION OF THE BEWLEY SCHOLS



The Governing Body of Bewley Infant School believes that the proposed amalgamation of the two schools is not currently in the best interests of either the children or staff of this school.

Our reasons for saying this includes -

- Our educational provision is highly focused on the needs of the youngest children in our community.
- Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 expertise could be jeopardised.
- The insecurity of amalgamation brings increased risk of staff turnover.
- One Head Teacher will be appointed after a national advert (not necessarily either of the current Heads) - we feel two heads are better than one!
- OFSTED acknowledges the excellence of both schools as they are.
- There will need to be 2 buildings in use for many years - with one main entrance there could be security issues.
- Admission has not been an issue in the past and we cannot see this being an issue in the future.
- There is a potential closure of another school in Billingham - this would increase our numbers (and our budget).

We understand change is a part of today's culture but feel sure that the time is not yet right to bring it about at Bewley.

What do you think?

Parents from both schools are invited to the parents' meeting on Thursday 29th June at 6p.m. in the Junior School.

Please come and share your views and hear all sides of the argument.



An alternative view to the amalgamation of Bewley Infant & Bewley Junior schools

1. The smaller less threatening size of separate infant & junior schools benefits the nervous or timid pupils of Billingham. For some pupils the amalgamation turns 2 small less threatening schools into 1 larger more threatening school environment because of the larger numbers and size of pupils.
2. Increasing the range of size & weight of pupils on an amalgamated school site increases the likelihood of accidents to younger pupils.
3. The 2 smaller schools are more personal and friendly to children, particularly at this young age. We all have lasting memories of our first school. If those memories are pleasant we are likely to have in a more positive view of education and the opportunities presented to us in the future.
4. Whenever a change such as an amalgamation or changing of a head teacher occurs, there is an initial period of anxiety and instability for pupils and staff which is reflected in a down turn academic performance. This has been seen and proven with other amalgamations. We do not want this to happen at the Bewley Infant or Junior schools.
5. The anxiety in staff may result in good staff moving on, creating even more anxiety and instability so it becomes a spiral that results in a lack of continuity, unsettled pupils and poorer academic performance.
6. A reorganised school usually has to deal with an increase in bullying and altercations between pupils as a new pecking order is established in the playground.
7. The atmosphere within the separate infant & junior schools is more conducive to the learning of their particular age group. E.g. Displays, furniture ethos and atmosphere in the schools are more appropriate to schools age group. This means more effective teaching and learning takes place each school.
8. Year 2 pupils in an Infant school tend to be more mature than Year 2 pupils in a junior school. This is because, as the top year in the infant school, they are given more responsibility and are the role models for younger children. In a primary school Year 2 does not have such significance.
9. The transition from infant to junior School is a good less threatening rehearsal, for the later often traumatic transition from primary School to Secondary School. Having done it once, the second time around it will be less frightening. This transition is something even OFSTED think is done exceedingly well at Bewley.
10. Separate infant & junior schools means experienced & specialist staff teaching the age group they trained to teach. It also means closer, and more specialist support from a specialist Headteacher. Amalgamation means the loss of one specialist Headteacher. This means 1 Headteacher spread more thinly over 2 age ranges. The same level of support and monitoring is impossible from 1 Headteacher.
11. A separate infants and junior schools are a rare and disappearing educational set up within the Borough. Amalgamating Bewley infants and junior schools reduces the element of choice to people of Billingham even further.
12. Both the infants & junior schools are popular and successful schools so why change the situation and risk a fall in social and academic standards under amalgamation? The success of each of the two schools is due to their own individual ethos, staff, management styles and unique identities.

In Addition

The proposed amalgamation of Bewley Infant & Bewley Junior schools will come into effect after the Education & Inspectors Bills has become law.

The Education & Inspectors Bill will:

1. Favour affluent and articulate families over those who are less advantaged. The Bill gives schools more opportunity to select pupils. Those who are less able, or are not confident enough to make a case to the school for a place for their son or daughter, might lose out to someone who can make such a case.
2. Extend selection by ability, allowing schools to select pupils, rather than parental choice;
3. Reduce the direct influence of parents currently exercised through school governing bodies.
4. Remove the control and accountability of schools currently exercised by the local authority.
5. Increase damaging competition between schools rather than the collaboration needed to make the education service effective for all pupils .
6. Allow big business a say in influencing school policy in return for money. I do not think big business will give money to schools out of the goodness of their heart. They will want something back in return for the money. So we do not a trust school.
7. We do not want a faith school as an outcome of amalgamation. There are already a number of faith schools in Billingham. However, Reg Vardy with his Emanuel Colleges are not yet one of them. Do we want the creationist theory of life to be taught Bewley or whatever new name is dreamt up for the new school?

So the Education & Inspectors Bill will enable Stockton Borough Council to save money and become less accountable to the electorate they serve, for the education of pupils at the new school.

The views expressed in this flyer are the personal views of Mr. Liversidge (father of a pupil at Bewley Infant School).