



BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE

REORGANISATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NORTH STOCKTON

As part of the £150+ million Building Schools for the Future programme (BSF), the Council is to consider changing the organisation of secondary schools in North Stockton. The proposal would close Blakeston School and The Norton School. A new Academy would be established in their place. Before any decisions are made, it is important that people understand this proposal and have an opportunity to give the Council their views. This paper explains the proposal in a series of questions and answers, and it tells you how you can give us your views.

What is an Academy?

An Academy is an independent school funded by the government. It takes students of all abilities and does not charge fees to parents. Every Academy has a lead sponsor who will bring something different to the local education scene. The lead sponsor of the proposed Academy in North Stockton will be NHS Stockton-on-Tees, formally known as the Primary Care Trust. This is the body responsible for commissioning health services for the people of the Borough. NHS Stockton-on-Tees will be supported by two co-sponsor organisations; the Council and a consortium formed by the two Stockton Colleges, Stockton Sixth Form College and Stockton Riverside College. Like all specialist schools, the Academy will offer a very broad academic and vocational curriculum, but the support of the sponsors will also aim to transform the educational experiences of young people, improve their employability prospects, and promote healthier lifestyles. NHS Stockton-on-Tees will support the Academy's curriculum specialism of Science, supported by a strong health and well-being theme. This brings a welcome connection between education and health recognising the role that education has in enabling young people to manage their own health and well-being and the contribution this will make to regeneration for the local community. As lead sponsor, in addition to voicing the vision for the Academy, it would also bring strong management and governance experience, as well as support to the Academy's administration. The College co-sponsors bring considerable and complementary experience to support the 14-19 progression pathways of the Academy's students, including promoting opportunities for higher education. As the other co-sponsor Stockton-on-Tees Local Authority will contribute to partnership working to support the Academy's commitment to the Every Child Matters agenda, and transforming learning. The inclusion of the Local Authority as a co-sponsor reflects the firm commitment of NHS Stockton-on-Tees and the colleges to develop an Academy which fully exploits the freedom of the Academies' framework whilst remaining a full and active member of the Stockton-on-Tees family of schools expressed through the concept of 'Campus Stockton', explained in more detail on page 2 of this paper.

Why one Academy to replace two schools?

There are not sufficient students at Blakeston School and The Norton School to sustain two separate schools or two Academies. Since 2001, numbers across the two schools together have fallen from more than 1,500 to just over 1,000 and they are still falling. In five years' time the total is likely to be around 800. That is not sufficient for two secondary schools.

Does the new school have to be an Academy?

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 introduced a new procedure for setting up new schools. It states that the Local Authority must normally hold a competition to decide who should set up and run a new school. It would normally be a foundation school (sometimes

called a “trust school”) or an Academy, and the people wishing to set up the school are called “promoters.” Any organisation such as a business, a charity, a religious organisation, a group of parents or a single individual could be a promoter of a new school. The Council would advertise, inviting any potential promoters to put forward detailed proposals for a new school. The Council would consider the proposals, consult local people, and decide which promoter to accept. The Council would have to provide a site for the new school and the money (from the BSF fund) to build it. The Council would also provide the annual running cost budget for a foundation school, but the school would be managed by a Trust set up by the promoter. In the case of an Academy, annual running costs would be paid by the government and the Academy would be managed by a Trust and Governing Body set up by the sponsors.

If the new school is to replace one or more existing schools, the Council has another option if the closing schools meet certain criteria. Instead of holding a competition, the Council could find sponsors interested in setting up an Academy, and the sponsors can negotiate directly with the government to set up the Academy. The Norton School and Blakeston School both meet the government’s criteria for replacement by an Academy because in recent years fewer than 30% of their students have achieved five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C including maths and English. Whilst progress has been made at both schools, standards have not improved significantly enough over time to rule out replacement by an Academy.

Why has the Council opted for an Academy rather than a competition?

We believe our Academy proposal is better for the young people of the Borough than a competition with an uncertain outcome. Our BSF programme is based on the idea of “Campus Stockton,” where all the secondary schools collaborate and work together to offer the best possible learning opportunities for every student in the Borough. A foundation school or Academy set up by an independent promoter through competition could choose to stay outside Campus Stockton and not collaborate with the other schools. We have no way of knowing what promoters might come forward in a competition. There could be bids from educational or business organisations based in other parts of the country. By choosing to establish an Academy instead of having a competition we have been able to approach sponsors for the Academy who share our vision for the regeneration of the Borough and for ‘Campus Stockton.’ We have developed a model of sponsorship which fits the vision we all have of ‘Campus Stockton’ where every school is a good school, and all young people can benefit from the opportunities on offer across the Borough. The Stockton Academy would be a full member of the family of schools across the Borough. It would apply the Council’s policies on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions.

Is it not possible to set up a new community school?

The government’s aim in the 2006 Act was to encourage the creation of more foundation schools, voluntary aided schools and Academies. The law allows a Local Authority to put forward a proposal for a new community school in a competition alongside any other promoters. If we did this, the winner of the competition would not be decided by the Council but by an adjudicator appointed by the government. It does not seem very likely that a government-appointed adjudicator would choose a Local Authority bid above other bids for foundation schools or Academies. If there were no other bids, the adjudicator could ask the Council to run the competition again. This would delay our efforts to bring about the transformation that our young people deserve. Again we cannot be sure what other promoters might come forward in a competition, but there is no appeal against an adjudicator’s decision. There would be a real risk that an adjudicator might impose on the young people of Stockton-on-Tees a school of a type that nobody wants. We believe that an Academy sponsored by a local organisation committed to local communities, supported by the Council and the local colleges as co-sponsors, would better understand the needs of young people in Stockton-on-Tees, the local community and the workforce.

When would the Academy open?

The Academy would open in two stages. A completely new building could be constructed through the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme by 2013, but the Academy would open first in the current buildings of Blakeston and The Norton, in January 2011.

Why not wait until the new building is ready?

A new building is important, but much more important is the teaching and learning that goes on inside and the outcomes for children and young people. Both Blakeston and The Norton are National Challenge schools. This means that fewer than 30% of their students have been able to achieve five good GCSE passes including maths and English. In spite of the hard work of school staff and support from the Local Authority it has not been possible to raise standards at these schools above the 30% threshold. We believe that a change in the governance of these schools – from community schools to an Academy – will help by bringing in outside partners, their ideas and expertise. The curriculum flexibilities available through the Academies Framework will also enable us to introduce new ideas and approaches. The young people in Blakeston and The Norton deserve to see this happen as quickly as possible. If we wait until 2013 to establish the Academy the young people in the schools now will miss out on these opportunities.

Where would the new Academy be built?

The Council believes that the new building should be constructed on a separate site away from the two existing schools. It should be something completely new, not a modernised Blakeston or The Norton. Construction work on a separate site would not disrupt learning. The best available site is the former Stockton Sports Centre off Norton Road, known locally as the Tilery site.

That site is a long way from Blakeston. How would students get there?

There are three answers to this question. Firstly, not all Blakeston students live near their present school. Blakeston School is situated on the edge of Roseworth, but it takes students from many areas of the Borough. In January 2009 there were 607 students attending Blakeston School. 303 lived in Roseworth or Hardwick. 206 lived in Norton, 56 in Newtown, and the other 42 in smaller numbers in many other parts of the Borough. For many of those students the journey to the Academy would be shorter than their current journey to Blakeston.

Secondly, not all the present or potential future Blakeston students may choose to go to the Academy. Parents may apply for a place at any school at any time. In total more than 100 students resident in Roseworth currently attend Bishopsgarth, Grangefield and Ian Ramsey schools. Our BSF programme includes a project to enlarge Bishopsgarth School to 750 places. This would allow the school to accommodate an extra 250 students.

Thirdly, the entire pattern of travelling from home to school is likely to be changed by BSF. Campus Stockton will bring new ways of working for the young people of this Borough, particularly beyond the age of fourteen. Students based at one school will follow Diploma courses managed by a different school or college. Sometimes students may need to travel to a different location to study, while at other times they could study at their base location, using technology to communicate with staff and students on other sites.

Is the Tilery area a suitable place for a new school?

The Academy would be a vital element in the Council's ambitious plans to regenerate a large area from Norton Road to North Shore. Planning permission has already been granted for more than 500 new homes on the derelict site on Norton Road opposite the Academy site, and for similar developments at North Shore and the former Corus Steel site. A new youth facility, 'MyPlace', will share the same site as the proposed Academy and a new building for Tilery Primary School is also planned. The whole Tilery area will look very different by the time a new Academy building is opened in 2013.

Why is this different from the options put forward in the first BSF consultation?

In 2007 the Council consulted on possible options for Building Schools for the Future in North Stockton. As well as putting forward some suggested options, this first consultation invited people to put forward their own suggestions. Many people suggested that North Stockton should be served by two schools one located in the east of the area and one in the west. The Council has accepted this view for four reasons. An east-west arrangement would better match the distribution of students in North Stockton; the west of the area is currently served by Bishopsgarth School; an Academy in the Norton area, the east, would contribute to regenerating that area; and it could be located on a “neutral” site which is in Council ownership and not previously occupied by either of the two present schools.

Would the Academy have a sixth form?

Like the vast majority of schools in Stockton-on-Tees the Academy would be for students aged 11-16, it would not have a sixth form. The Academy would be co-sponsored by Stockton Riverside College and Stockton Sixth Form College, and these colleges would guarantee places to all Academy students who choose to follow a course of education or training post 16.

Would the Academy work with other schools as part of Campus Stockton?

The model of co-sponsorship that has been developed, reflects the firm commitment of NHS Stockton-on-Tees, the colleges and the Council to develop an Academy which fully exploits the freedom of the Academies’ framework whilst remaining a full and active member of the Stockton family of schools expressed through the concept of ‘Campus Stockton’. The sponsors are very keen to share their expertise and the opportunities offered by the Academy, whilst at the same time benefiting from the partnership offered by the rest of the Borough’s schools. The Academy would not sit outside the family of schools in any respect.

How would the Academy select its students?

The Academy would not be selective. The sponsors have agreed that the Academy would adopt the Council’s school admissions policy. This means that students would not be selected by ability. If the school has more applications than places available, the Governors would apply the same oversubscription criteria as the Council does for community schools. A geographical admission zone would be defined after consulting local parents and other schools. Students living inside the zone would get priority over those outside the zone if the Academy were oversubscribed.

Would the admission zone include all of the present Blakeston and Norton zones?

The Academy sponsors will consult parents across North Stockton before working with the Council to define the admission zone. The zone needs to be defined carefully so that:

- students living in the area around the school can all get places if they want them
- students living further away are not put at a disadvantage (e.g. those living in the Northern Parishes ward who are currently in the zone for Blakeston)
- it is the right size to match the capacity of the school so that no in-zone students are refused places.

Maps showing possible zones will be displayed as part of this consultation process.

Would the Academy provide for students with special educational needs?

The Academy would adopt the Council’s inclusion, behaviour and special educational needs policies, and would ensure that provision was open and accessible to all. The Academy will not operate a separately funded additional needs support base or unit, its provision will be fully inclusive, enabling young people with additional needs to access a personalised curriculum matched to their interests and needs within the mainstream offer. The Academy will be a complete new build, enabling sympathetic design to support access to its facilities.

Would the Academy have any impact on the number of students at any other schools?

That would depend on the preferences of parents, who always have the right to apply for a place at any school. Some students living in the Stockton Town Centre ward currently choose to go to Grangefield School (about 100) or Ian Ramsey Church of England School (around 50). These are popular schools, and their student numbers have remained high during a period when rolls were falling elsewhere. About 200 students living in Norton (not all of them Catholic students) currently choose to attend St Michael's Roman Catholic School in Billingham. In the future a successful Stockton Academy might attract some of those students. It is equally likely that St Michael's, Grangefield and Ian Ramsey will continue to draw students from the Norton and Town Centre wards. All the schools in our BSF programme will be designed so that they will be able to expand in the future if demand for places increases significantly, or reduce capacity if necessary to follow the preferences of parents.

Is this proposal really about saving money for the Council?

No, this proposal is not about saving money for the Council. The proposal is about providing the best possible learning opportunities for the young people of Stockton-on-Tees. Academies are not "maintained schools," which means that local authorities do not pay their running costs. They are funded directly by government at the same level as other local schools. The Council receives a sum of money from government each year (the Dedicated Schools Grant) based on the number of pupils attending our maintained schools. The students in the Academy would not count towards that grant. In other words the Council would not be any better off or any worse off because we would not receive government money for students at the Academy and we would not have to provide an annual budget for their school.

Would the Academy take on all the staff from The Norton and Blakeston schools?

An Academy is a new school run by a Trust made up of sponsors, and a new Governing Body appointed by the sponsors following normal election procedures. The Trust would first appoint a Principal before the Academy opens, and would then involve that person in appointing all the other staff for the Academy.

All staff other than agency staff, staff employed by an external organisation, or staff employed on a fixed term contract related to the closure of the existing schools will have the right to transfer to the Academy on their existing terms and conditions. The Academy will determine a staffing structure to meet its immediate and future needs and may subsequently conduct a review of the staffing provision to achieve the optimum staff to pupil ratio and to ensure that the skills, abilities and qualifications of staff meet its needs. Any staff displaced through this process may be given prior consideration for suitable posts in other schools with the agreement of the Governing Bodies of those schools. The Local Authority will facilitate this process and will seek to minimise any compulsory job losses that may arise.

Staff that are eligible to transfer to the Academy but who choose not to do so will be deemed to have resigned their post from the date of closure of their existing school. Such staff will not be eligible for a redundancy payment or be given prior consideration for vacancies elsewhere within Stockton.

How do you know the student number projections are accurate?

These are not Council figures: they are provided by an independent body called the Joint Strategy Unit (JSU). Their forecasts have been astonishingly accurate in the past. In 1997 they forecast that we would have 11,924 students in the Borough's secondary schools in 2007. The actual figure was 11,899 – only 25 out. The projections for secondary schools are based on the number of children already in our primary schools. The statisticians make adjustments for the effect of planned house building and for previous patterns of migration in and out of the area. The money we will receive for Building Schools for the Future is based on the same projections. The Council has nothing to gain from under-estimating student numbers. The government has approved these projections as part of our BSF Strategy for Change.

Has the decision to close The Norton and Blakeston already been made?

No. The Council must follow a procedure laid down by law in Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. There are four stages:

1. Consultation. We must consult everyone likely to be affected by the closure. This will include parents and carers, students, school staff and Governors, the dioceses and neighbouring local authorities. We must explain the reasons for the closure proposal and give people an opportunity to comment and ask questions. **This is where we are now.** This paper is part of the consultation stage. We will also arrange public drop-in sessions at the schools so that anyone can ask questions or express opinions in person.

2. Publication

The Council's Cabinet will consider the responses to the consultation on 5 November. They will decide whether to go ahead with the proposal to close the schools. If they do they will issue a Public Notice. This document has to set out how anyone may comment in writing if they wish, the address to write to, and the final date for comments. The notice is a summary of the proposal. More details would be published on the Council website, and a printed copy of the full proposal would be available to any person on request.

3. Representations

If a Public Notice is published there will then be six weeks in which anyone can comment in writing.

4. Decision

The final decision on the closure of The Norton and Blakeston schools would be made by the Corporate Director for Children, Education and Social Care (Jane Humphreys) and the Council's Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Councillor Alex Cunningham). They must consider all the comments received during the representation period, and must take account of statutory guidance from the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families. This guidance is available to read and download at www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolorg. Their decision would be final. There is no appeal procedure.

A decision on establishing the Academy would be taken jointly by the sponsors and the Secretary of State. They would sign a funding agreement that would commit the government to funding the Academy.

Your chance to comment on this proposal

If you wish to comment on this proposal or ask any questions about it, you may write to:

Lionel Danby, BSF Programme Director
Bayheath House
Prince Regent Street
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1DF.

You may also send comments by email to: BSF@stockton.gov.uk. All comments received up to 17 October will be taken into account.

What happens next?

All the views expressed at the drop-ins and any written messages will be reported to the Council's Cabinet on 5 November. That report will be published on the Council website about a week before the meeting. Cabinet must take account of those views before deciding whether to publish a Statutory Public Notice if it intends to proceed with the proposal. If that is their decision in November, the Public Notice will give everyone another chance to comment before a final decision is made.

BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE

THORNABY COMMUNITY SCHOOL

As part of the £150+ million Building Schools for the Future programme (BSF), the Council is to consider making a proposal to close Thornaby Community School. A new Academy would be established in its place. Before any decisions are made, it is important that the people of Thornaby understand this proposal and have an opportunity to give the Council their views. This paper explains the proposal in a series of questions and answers, and it tells you how you can give us your views.

What is an Academy?

An Academy is an independent school funded by the government. It takes students of all abilities and does not charge fees to parents. Every Academy has a lead sponsor who will bring something different to the local education scene. The lead sponsor of the Academy in Thornaby will be Teesside University. The University will be supported by two co-sponsor organisations; the Council and a consortium formed by the two Stockton Colleges, Stockton Sixth Form College and Stockton Riverside College. Like all specialist schools, the Academy will offer a very broad academic and vocational curriculum, but the support of the sponsors will provide additionality to transform the educational experiences of young people and improve their employability prospects. The University will support the Academy's curriculum specialism of Business and Enterprise, supported by a strong digital creativity theme. As lead sponsor, in addition to voicing the vision for the Academy, it would also bring strong management and governance experience, as well as support to the Academy's administration. The college co-sponsors bring considerable and complementary experience to support the 14-19 progression pathways of the Academy's students, including promoting opportunities for higher education. As the other co-sponsor Stockton-on-Tees Local Authority will contribute to partnership working to support the Academy's commitment to the Every Child Matters agenda, and transforming learning. The inclusion of the Local Authority as a co-sponsor reflects the firm commitment of Teesside University and the colleges to develop an Academy which fully exploits the freedom of the Academies' framework whilst remaining a full and active member of the Stockton-on-Tees family of schools expressed through the concept of 'Campus Stockton', explained in more detail on page 2 of this paper.

Why is the Council suggesting an Academy in Thornaby?

Thornaby Community School (TCS) is a National Challenge school. This means that fewer than 30% of its students have been able to achieve five good GCSE passes including maths and English. Any school in that position is eligible to be replaced by an Academy. Whilst considerable progress has been made across a range of levels in the school it is evident that in spite of the hard work of school staff and support from the Local Authority it has not been possible to raise standards at TCS above the 30% threshold. This needs to change quickly. We believe that an Academy would help to raise standards quickly by bringing in outside partners with a wide range of expertise. Stockton Riverside College and Stockton Sixth Form College would join the Local Authority to co-sponsor the Academy with the University.

The number of students attending TCS has fallen by 402 in the last five years. This has made it very difficult for the Governors to manage the school because the annual budget to pay for staff and other costs is based on the number of students. If this trend continues there will be fewer than 500 on roll in 2013. This has happened in part because there are fewer young people in Thornaby than five years ago, but it is also due to the large number of Thornaby

residents who choose other schools instead of TCS. In January 2009, 203 students living in Thornaby were attending other schools in Stockton-on-Tees; a further 160 Thornaby residents went to Macmillan Academy in Middlesbrough; and about 140 non-Catholic students chose to go to St Patrick's RC Comprehensive School. These numbers add up to over 500 students who could have gone to TCS but opted for other schools instead. The Stockton-on-Tees BSF programme aims to make sure that every school in the borough is a good school. We want parents to be confident that their local school will offer the best possible learning opportunities for their child. They will always have the right to apply to any school, but it should not be necessary for 500 students to reject their local school. The Council believes that an Academy would soon begin to reverse this trend.

Does it have to be an Academy?

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 introduced a new procedure for setting up new schools. This applies whether the new school is an additional school or a replacement for a closing school. The Local Authority must normally hold a competition to decide who should set up and run the new school. It would normally be a foundation school (sometimes called a "trust school") or an Academy, and the people wishing to set up the school are called "promoters." Any organisation such as a business, a charity, a religious organisation, a group of parents or a single individual could be a promoter of a new school. The Council would advertise inviting any potential promoters to put forward a detailed proposal for a new school. The Council would consider the proposals, consult local people, and decide which promoter to accept. The Council would have to provide a site for the new school and the money (from the BSF fund) to build it. The Council would also provide the annual running cost budget for a foundation school, but the school would be managed by a trust set up by the promoter. In the case of an Academy, annual running costs would be paid by the government and the Academy would be managed by a Trust and Governing Body set up by the sponsors.

If the new school is to replace one or more existing schools, the Council has another option if the closing schools meet certain criteria. Instead of holding a competition, the Council could approach sponsors interested in setting up an Academy, and the sponsors can negotiate directly with the government to set up the Academy. Thornaby Community School meets the government's criteria for replacement by an Academy because fewer than 30% of its students have achieved five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C including maths and English.

Our BSF programme is based on the idea of "Campus Stockton," where all the secondary schools collaborate and work together to offer the best possible learning opportunities for every student in the Borough. A foundation school or Academy set up by an independent promoter in a competition could choose to stay outside Campus Stockton and not collaborate with the other schools. We have no way of knowing what promoters might come forward in a competition. By choosing to establish an Academy instead of having a competition we have been able to approach sponsors for the Academy who are committed to Stockton-on-Tees, and who share our vision for the regeneration of the Borough and for Campus Stockton. We have developed a model of sponsorship which fits the vision we all have of Campus Stockton, where every school is a good school, and all children have opportunities to benefit from the opportunities on offer across the Borough. The Academy in Thornaby would be a full member of the family of schools across the Borough. It would apply the Council's policies on admissions, special educational needs and exclusions. We believe this Academy proposal is better for the young people of Thornaby than a competition with an uncertain outcome would have been.

Is it not possible to set up a new community school?

The government's aim in the 2006 Education Act was to encourage the creation of more foundation schools, voluntary aided schools and Academies. The law allows a Local Authority to put forward a proposal for a new community school in a competition alongside any other promoters. If we did this, the winner of the competition would not be decided by the Council but by an adjudicator appointed by the government. It does not seem very likely that a government-appointed adjudicator would choose a Local Authority bid above other bids for

foundation schools or Academies. If there were no other bids, the adjudicator could ask the Council to run the competition again. This would delay our efforts to bring about the transformation that our young people deserve. Again we cannot be sure what other promoters might come forward in a competition, but there is no appeal against an adjudicator's decision. There would be a real risk that an adjudicator might impose on the young people of Thornaby a school of a type that nobody wants. We believe that an Academy sponsored by a local organisation committed to the local community, supported by the Council and the local colleges as co-sponsors, would better understand the needs of young people, the community and the workforce in Stockton-on-Tees.

When would the Academy open?

The Academy would open in two stages. A completely new building could be constructed through the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme by 2013, but the Academy would open first in the present TCS buildings in September 2010.

Why not wait until the new building is ready?

A new building is important, but much more important is the teaching and learning that goes on inside and the outcomes for children and young people. Thornaby Community School is a National Challenge school. This means that fewer than 30% of students have been able to achieve five good GCSE passes including maths and English. In spite of the hard work of school staff and support from the Local Authority it has not been possible to raise standards at TCS to meet the 30% threshold. We believe that a change in the governance of the school – from a community school to an Academy – will help by bringing in outside partners, their ideas and expertise. The curriculum flexibilities available through the Academies Framework will also enable us to introduce new ideas and approaches. We want to implement these changes quickly. If we wait until 2013 to set up the Academy the young people in TCS now will miss out on these opportunities.

Where would the new Academy be built?

The new building would be constructed on part of the site shared by TCS and St Patrick's RC Comprehensive School. It would be completely new, not a modernised TCS. Construction work would not disrupt learning in the classroom but it would put parts of the playing fields out of bounds for about three years. This is because our present plans are to carry out four phases of work:

1. construct the new Academy building on part of the playing fields and move students and staff into it
2. adapt and refresh part of the TCS building and move the students and staff from St Patrick's into it on a temporary basis
3. refurbish the St Patrick's building to a high standard and move its students and staff back in
4. demolish the TCS building and create new playing fields for the two schools to share.

The all-weather pitch will remain available to both schools throughout the build and after it. That pitch, and the remaining part of the playing fields will provide some sport and PE facilities, and the new sports fields at the Academy will be available to St Patrick's students when phase 1 of the work is completed. Additional indoor facilities can be made available in the sports hall at Thornaby Pavilion.

Would the Academy have a sixth form?

Like the vast majority of schools in Stockton-on-Tees the Academy would be for students aged 11-16, it would not have a sixth form. The Academy would be co-sponsored by Stockton Riverside College and Stockton Sixth Form College, and the colleges would guarantee places to all Academy students who choose to follow a course of education or training post 16.

Would the Academy work with other schools as part of Campus Stockton?

The model of co-sponsorship that has been developed reflects the firm commitment of Teesside University, the Colleges and the Council to develop an Academy which fully exploits the freedom of the Academies' framework whilst remaining a full and active member of the Stockton family of schools expressed through the concept of 'Campus Stockton'. The sponsors are very keen to share their expertise and the opportunities offered by the Academy, whilst at the same time benefiting from the partnership offered by the rest of the Borough's schools. The Academy would not sit outside the family of schools in any respect.

How would the Academy select its students?

The Academy would not be selective. The sponsors have agreed that the Academy would adopt the Council's school admissions policy. This means that students would not be selected by ability. If the school has more applications than places available, the Governors would apply the same oversubscription criteria as the Council does for community schools. A geographical admission zone would be defined after consulting local parents and other schools. Students living inside the zone would get priority over those outside the zone if the Academy were oversubscribed.

Would the Academy provide for students with special educational needs?

The Academy would adopt the Council's inclusion, behaviour and special educational needs policies, and would ensure that provision was open and accessible to all. The Academy will not operate a separately funded additional needs support base or unit, its provision will be fully inclusive, enabling young people with additional needs to access a personalised curriculum matched to their interests and needs within the mainstream offer. The Academy will be a complete new build, enabling sympathetic design to support access to its facilities.

What impact would the Academy have on St Patrick's RC Comprehensive School?

St Patrick's provides a distinctive Catholic education for students who prefer a faith-based education. This gives an important element of diversity and choice in the south of the Borough, and the Council welcomes the decision of the Governing Bodies of the three Catholic schools in the Borough to consult on forming a hard federation. A successful federation will sustain Catholic education on three sites in Billingham, Stockton and Thornaby. In the longer term it is possible that a successful Thornaby Academy might reduce the number of non-Catholic students attending St Patrick's, but the federation would be able to sustain a strong and viable St Patrick's.

As well as working closely with the other schools in the Catholic federation, St Patrick's would collaborate closely with the Thornaby Academy as part of Campus Stockton in order to offer a wide range of curriculum choices to its students.

What size would the Academy be?

The Thornaby Academy would be designed for 750 students. These places, plus 500 places at St Patrick's, would provide a total of 1,250 11-16 places in Thornaby. This would be sufficient if about half of the 500 who currently opt for schools outside Thornaby chose to return to Thornaby schools. All the schools in our BSF programme will be designed so that they will be able to expand in the future if demand for places increases significantly, or reduce capacity if necessary to follow the preferences of parents.

Is this proposal really about saving money for the Council?

No, this proposal is not about saving money for the Council. It is about providing the best possible learning opportunities for the young people of Stockton-on-Tees. Academies are not "maintained schools," which means that local authorities do not pay their running costs. They are funded directly by government at the same level as other local schools. The Council receives a sum of money from government each year (the Dedicated Schools Grant) based on the number of pupils attending our maintained schools. The students in the Academy would not count towards that grant. In other words the Council would not be any better off or any

worse off because we would not receive government money for students at the Academy and we would not have to provide an annual budget for their school.

Would the Academy take on all the staff from Thornaby Community School?

An Academy is a new school run by a Trust made up of sponsors, and a new Governing Body appointed by the sponsors following normal election procedures. The Trust would first appoint a Principal before the Academy opens, and would then involve that person in appointing all the other staff for the Academy.

All staff other than agency staff, staff employed by an external organisation, or staff employed on a fixed term contract related to the closure of the existing schools will have the right to transfer to the Academy on their existing terms and conditions. The Academy will determine a staffing structure to meet its immediate and future needs and may subsequently conduct a review of the staffing provision to achieve the optimum staff to pupil ratio and to ensure that the skills, abilities and qualifications of staff meet its needs. Any staff displaced through this process may be given prior consideration for suitable posts in other schools with the agreement of the Governing Bodies of those schools. The Local Authority will facilitate this process and will seek to minimise any compulsory job losses that may arise.

Staff that are eligible to transfer to the Academy but who choose not to do so will be deemed to have resigned their post from the date of closure of their existing school. Such staff will not be eligible for a redundancy payment or be given prior consideration for vacancies elsewhere within Stockton.

How do you know the student number projections are accurate?

These are not Council figures: they are provided by an independent body called the Joint Strategy Unit (JSU). Their forecasts have been astonishingly accurate in the past. In 1997 they forecast that we would have 11,924 students in the borough's secondary schools in 2007. The actual figure was 11,899 – only 25 out. The projections for secondary schools are based on the number of children already in our primary schools. The statisticians make adjustments for the effect of planned house building and for previous patterns of migration in and out of the area. The money we will receive for Building Schools for the Future is based on the same projections. The Council has nothing to gain from under-estimating student numbers. The government has approved these projections as part of our BSF Strategy for Change.

Has the decision to close Thornaby Community School already been made?

No. The Council must follow a procedure laid down by law in Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. There are four stages:

1. Consultation. We must consult everyone likely to be affected by the closure. This will include parents and carers, students, school staff and Governors, the dioceses and neighbouring local authorities. We must explain the reasons for the closure proposal and give people an opportunity to comment and ask questions. **This is where we are now.** This paper is part of the consultation stage. We will also arrange public drop-in session at the school so that anyone can ask questions or express opinions in person.

2. Publication

The Council's Cabinet will consider the responses to consultation on 5 November. They will decide whether to go ahead with the proposal to close the school. If they do they will issue a Public Notice. This document has to set out how anyone may comment in writing if they wish, the address to write to, and the final date for comments. The notice is a summary of the proposal. More details would be published on the Council website, and a printed copy of the full proposal would be available to any person on request.

3. Representations

If a Public Notice is published there will then be six weeks in which anyone can comment in writing.

4. Decision

The final decision on the closure of Thornaby Community School would be made by the Corporate Director for Children, Education and Social Care (Jane Humphreys) and the Council's Cabinet Member for Children and Young People (Councillor Alex Cunningham). They must consider all the comments received during the representation period, and must take account of statutory guidance from the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families. This guidance is available to read and download at www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolorg. Their decision would be final. There is no appeal procedure.

A decision on establishing the Academy would be taken jointly by the sponsors and the Secretary of State. They would sign a funding agreement that would commit the government to funding the Academy.

Your chance to comment on this proposal

If you wish to comment on this proposal or ask any questions about it, you may write to:

Lionel Danby, BSF Programme Director
Bayheath House
Prince Regent Street
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1DF.

You may also send comments by email to: BSF@stockton.gov.uk. All comments received up to 17 October will be taken into account.

What happens next?

All the views expressed at the drop-ins and any written messages will be reported to the Council's Cabinet on 5 November. That report will be published on the Council website about a week before the meeting. Cabinet must take account of those views before deciding whether to publish a Statutory Public Notice if it intends to proceed with the proposal. If that is their decision in November, the Public Notice will give everyone another chance to comment before a final decision is made.