

**STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL  
CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CARE**

**POSSIBLE AMALGAMATION of BEWLEY INFANT SCHOOL  
and BEWLEY JUNIOR SCHOOL**

**What is the Council proposing to do?**

1. The Council intends to use money from the government's Primary Capital Programme to create a primary school to replace Bewley Infant School and Bewley Junior School. The school would be a largely new building attached to the best parts of one of the existing school buildings. The school, nursery and playing fields would all be on one site. The new building could be ready for September 2011.
2. It would be necessary for the Council to issue a formal proposal to close the present infant and junior schools and establish a new primary school. The Council cannot do that without first consulting everyone likely to be affected by those changes. This note explains what the changes would mean for you.
3. The Council believes that primary schools offer many advantages over separate infant and junior schools. In recent years we have amalgamated four pairs of infant and junior schools. In every case the majority of parents, school staff and governors supported the change. The Bewley schools are now the only separate infant and junior schools in the borough.

**What benefits could a primary school bring?**

Benefits for children and parents

4. Many children are unsettled by transitions in education (moving from nursery to school, and from primary to secondary school). It can take half a term or more to get used to different buildings, different staff, different rules and routines, and this can hold back the smooth progress of their education. Separate infant and junior schools create an extra transition point at the age of seven. This can have a negative impact on children's achievement in Year 3.
5. A primary school can offer a more consistent learning experience across the entire primary age range. There would be one curriculum leader for each subject rather than two to guide and support other staff, choose teaching materials and so on.
6. Children would know the headteacher and all the staff from Foundation Stage to the end of Key Stage 2, and would be able to build long-term relationships with them. Parents would not have to get to know a different headteacher and staff when their children reach Year 3. Each child's individual circumstances (including medical or dietary needs, for example) would be recorded once.
7. While the schools are separate, there has to be a formal admission procedure between the infant and junior schools. It is very unlikely to happen, but it is possible that a child attending the infant school might not get a place in the junior school. This cannot happen in an amalgamated primary school.
8. The timing of school sessions, teachers' professional development days, outings and special events can be better co-ordinated in a single school. There would not need to be separate school uniforms for infant and junior schools.

### Benefits for school staff

9. Staff could work with children in a wider range of age groups, increasing job satisfaction and improving their career opportunities through broader experience.
10. Each school normally has a curriculum leader for each subject. In small schools one teacher may have more than one curriculum responsibility. In a primary school there would be more people to share subject responsibilities, so the burden on individuals would be less demanding. There could also be wider opportunities for professional development activity with a larger staff team.

### Benefits for school management and governors

11. With a single budget (about £1.3 million a year) and a single staff team, the head and governors would have much more flexibility in how they organise classes and deploy staff throughout the school.
12. As one school, there would be a reduced burden of administration and less duplication: one Ofsted inspection instead of two, for example, and fewer curriculum and planning documents.
13. An amalgamated school could save money through economies of scale: having one headteacher, one caretaker, one kitchen, and a smaller overall area of buildings and grounds to maintain. This would leave more money to spend on teaching and learning.

### **What are the disadvantages in amalgamation?**

#### Uncertainty over jobs for staff

14. When two schools become one it is inevitable that some jobs would be duplicated: a primary school could not have two headteachers, for example. Overall the number of jobs would be almost exactly the same (because that relates to the number of children) but the nature of some jobs might be changed. Staff members would need to choose whether to apply for one of the new jobs at the primary school or to apply for any vacancies at other schools. A temporary governing body would appoint all staff for the new school.
15. Staff working at schools are employed by the local authority, and the Council can help staff in two ways. First we would make sure that the temporary governing body is made up of governors of the present schools, people who know the staff and the children (including parent and staff governors). Then we would ask the new governing body to look at existing staff first for all posts at the new school. The Council recognises its obligations towards its employees and would try to make sure that everyone found a suitable job, but all appointments at schools are made by governing bodies, not by the Council. The Council's Human Resources officers would work with staff members and their professional representatives to find the best outcome for each individual.

#### Possible disruption to teaching and learning

16. Major building work on a school site creates potential hazards to children and staff and is likely to be distracting. It can also be a unique learning experience. The Council selects building contractors carefully to ensure that all necessary health and safety precautions are observed. At recent new school projects in Hardwick and Roseworth the contractors involved children and school staff in the project. They contributed ideas to the design and visited the site under controlled conditions to monitor progress at key points in the construction.
17. The Council has a legal duty to promote high standards in all its schools. We employ a team of specialist advisers, all of them experienced headteachers. They have been

trained to monitor schools and give each school a level of support that is appropriate for its particular circumstances. The Bewley schools achieve high standards and need only a routine level of support from advisers. An amalgamation is a major event in the life of a school, and the Authority's advisers would raise the level of support for these schools through this period of change to help avoid any adverse effect on teaching and learning. There would also be specialist support for the governing bodies in dealing with management issues such as staffing and budgets. We would try to ensure that the design of the new building and the phasing of building work minimised any disruption to education.

### **Would the primary school be built on the infant or junior school site?**

18. That has not been decided yet. The Council's architects would carry out a feasibility study on both sites to see where a primary school would fit best. The buildings and playing fields would need to be large enough to comply with the relevant regulations. The study would involve looking at safe access routes into the school for children, parents, staff and visitors, and factors such as deliveries and car parking. It would also consider any impact on residents near the site. Residents would be consulted formally at a later stage as part of the application for planning permission.

### **What would happen to the other site?**

19. It is possible that the unused school building might be adapted for some other use. If it is not needed for any Council or community purpose the building might be sold and any money raised would be added to the Primary Capital Programme fund. This would be only a small proportion of the total site. The law does not usually allow school playing fields to be sold. It is likely that these would remain open space.

### **How would amalgamation affect the school budget?**

20. A primary school would receive a smaller annual budget than the total allocated to the separate schools, but its costs would also be lower. Overall there would be little difference. Every school receives an annual revenue budget intended to cover all normal running costs including staff salaries, teaching materials, utility bills and routine maintenance of the building and grounds. About 90% of each school's allocation is based on the number and age of pupils. This part would not change. The remaining 10% is based on the floor area of the buildings and the size of the grounds, and there is a lump sum for each school to contribute towards the cost of a headteacher and school clerk. Bewley Infant School also receives a small school allowance for having fewer than 200 full-time pupils. An amalgamated school would get only one lump sum instead of two, and the small school allowance would be lost. The difference is an estimated loss of nearly £68,000 a year from a budget of £1.3 million. An amalgamated school would have lower costs than the two separate schools. There would be only one headteacher, one caretaker and one set of kitchen and cleaning staff. The costs of utilities, building and grounds maintenance would all be lower. The savings for the school are likely to be greater than £68,000.

### **Has a decision to amalgamate already been taken?**

21. No. The law does not allow the Council simply to decide to close any school. Major changes of this kind are governed by a statutory process designed to make sure that the views of people affected by the change are taken into account before a final decision is made. This note is just the first stage in that process. You can read about the procedure on the DCSF website at [www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg). That website also includes the guidance for decision-makers published by the Secretary of State.

22. Three years ago the Council carried out consultation and found no support for the idea of a Bewley primary school at that time, largely because the proposal at that time was for a primary school using both the existing sites. That has changed now that funding is available to create a primary school in a single building. The law has also been changed since 2006. After consultation has been carried out, a proposal for a new community primary school **would not be decided by the Council but by an independent adjudicator** appointed by the government.

### **If the schools stay separate will they be able to share the Primary Capital money?**

23. No. Before the government released this money for Stockton-on-Tees the Council had to prepare a Strategy for Change and have it approved by government. The Strategy for Change must set out criteria for prioritising schools for investment. These criteria must include the condition and suitability of the present buildings, standards of attainment at the school, and the degree of deprivation in the local community. All the primary-phase schools in the borough have been evaluated against these criteria to identify those with the greatest need for investment. Our Strategy for Change lists the schools planned for the first few years of the programme. There is a quick link to the strategy on the home page of the Council website ([www.stockton.gov.uk](http://www.stockton.gov.uk)). If you don't have internet access you can ring 01642 527040 for a copy. If the Bewley schools remain separate they will not score highly against these criteria and will not receive investment for some years. If they were to amalgamate, their need for investment would increase because the present buildings on two sites separated by a footpath are not very suitable for an integrated primary school. If there is no support for a primary school at Bewley the Council would use this money to bring forward one of the schools expecting to receive money in 2011-12.

### **What happens next?**

24. You can send your comments or questions by letter to John Hegarty, BSF Team, Stockton Borough Council, Bayheath House, Stockton-on-Tees TS18 1DF, or by email to: [john.hegarty@stockton.gov.uk](mailto:john.hegarty@stockton.gov.uk) . We would like to receive all comments by the end of the school term on 20 July.
25. After the end of the school term in July, Council officers will consider all the views expressed in writing and at consultation meetings. After the summer holidays we will write to parents, staff and governors to tell you the outcome. If there is no support for amalgamation we will not take the idea any further. If the response from parents has been largely favourable we will apply to the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families for consent to publish a proposal for a new primary school. If consent is given, we will then ask the Cabinet (the Council's main decision-making body) to consider making a formal proposal to close Bewley Infant School and Bewley Junior School and establish a new primary school. This would probably be in October. All Cabinet reports are published a week before the meeting, and meetings are open to the public.
26. If Cabinet agreed to make a formal proposal, a public notice would be published in a newspaper and posted at the entrances to the schools. There would then be six weeks in which any person could comment on the proposal again. After the end of those six weeks we would send the proposal and all the comments received to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator in Darlington. An adjudicator would make the final decision. The adjudicator must consider the views expressed during consultation and must also take account of the statutory guidance published by the Secretary of State. We would write again to parents, staff and governors to tell you the adjudicator's decision. That would probably be in spring 2010.