**Consultation Meetings on Proposed Amalgamation of**

**Fairfield Infant and Junior Schools, Cockermouth**

**Held at**

**Fairfield Infant and Junior School**

**20 November 2012**

**Staff & Governors – 4.00pm**

The Headteacher of Fairfield Junior School, Alex Wilkinson, welcomed everyone (approximately 30 attendees) from the Infant and Junior Schools and introduced Owen David, County Council Project Officer.

Owen David introduced his team, Marjorie Hunt, Laura Nixon and Caroline Mcleod and also Gillian Martin the HR Manager for the local authority.

It was said that any questions that could not be answered on the evening would be placed on the School Organisation website – [www.cumbria.gov.uk/childrensservices/school-organisation](http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/childrensservices/school-organisation) - with answers supplied by the relevant colleagues. All the views and opinions gathered at this meeting, and via questionnaires, emails, etc would be forwarded to Cabinet in a report to enable them to make the decision on the proposed amalgamation of Fairfield Infant and Junior Schools.

It was explained that the local authority had been asked by both schools to proceed with looking at the proposed amalgamation of the schools with the closure of the Junior School and change of age range at the Infant School. This was now a prime time to look at the possibility of amalgamation with the pending retirement of the Junior School Headteacher.

At a recent Open Day, held by the Infant School, it was said that feedback from prospective parents of nursery and reception children had been positive. Parents approved the amalgamation with the secure knowledge that they would not need to apply for places in the Junior School. It was also expressed that out of catchment children (particularly Workington) had been asking about availability in the school and were, therefore, very happy about the proposed amalgamation.

It was expressed that county council policy is for all-through primary schools. Owen informed the attendees of the proposed developments of 300-400 houses in the area which would yield pupils to the extent of filling the spaces in both Fairfield Schools and other schools across Cockermouth.

Gillian Martin, HR Manager for the local authority, spoke of the need for the schools to contact their HR provider (Capita) as soon as possible, though she would be available to speak to anyone if they wished to do so. The local authority had no one specific procedure in place but would apply the Management of Change Procedural Guidance document which supports organisational change.

There is a section in the Guidance document to be followed for the filling of posts as a result of reorganisation. Gillian explained about “direct assimilation” and “ring fenced interviews”.

**Direct Assimilation** - a judgement made by management / HR based on whether the post in the new structure is materially the same as the post in an old structure, including consideration of where the post is located and the work style. Any such match must be substantially similar in nature, require similar skills and therefore be of at least a 75% match. The post must also be at the same profile grade as the employee’s current profile.

Direct assimilation can only occur where there are sufficient posts available for the number of employees involved. If there are fewer posts than employees then the ring-fenced interview process will apply.

**Ring-Fenced Interview** - applies where the match is between 50% - 75% and the profile grade is up to 2 grades above or below the grade of the employee’s current profile grade.

It is considered that there is not matching for any roles which score less than 50% and therefore will be filled through the normal recruitment processes.

It should be noted that where candidates are ring fenced, following a match of 50-75%, they must be able to evidence the ability to meet the essential criteria required through a selection process. There is, therefore, no guarantee that a candidate will be successful, especially if they are the only candidate.

Where an employee meets the criteria for a ring fenced interview (with the exceptions detailed below) the following will be adopted without advertisement of the job beyond those employees affected: -

1. a non-competitive ring fenced selection procedure (where there is only one such candidate); or
2. Competitive ring fenced selection between the candidates (where there is more than one).

This means that the appointing panel will decide whether or not one of the internal candidates is sufficiently capable for the job by comparing the individual with essential requirements of the Person Specification.

Some new posts may justify advertisement both internally and externally at the same time. These will be: -

1. where the post represents a substantial promotion for the likely internal candidates affected by the reorganisation;
2. where there are no internal candidates whose jobs are “at risk”; or
3. where, in exceptional and senior cases, the importance of the post is such that the ‘best candidate’ criterion is absolutely critical (this means that, in addition to the essential requirements, any postholder must, for demonstrated reasons, offer a selection of the desirable qualities in the person specification).

Owen explained how the shadow/interim governing body would be a mix from both schools. This ‘new’ governing body would set up the staffing structure and curriculum of the school. The new staffing structure of the school was not a local authority decision.

Owen continued that although nothing could be put into place before the end of the consultation it was expressed that the schools needed to commence with looking at the ‘new’ governing body and contacting their HR provider to enable the schools to retain the experienced staff they have and alleviate anxiety amongst staff. The School Organisation Team were to send out the Management During Transition document mentioned in the consultation document to schools to help them with the process, and which contains the contact details of relevant colleagues ie Governor Services, HR, Finance, etc.

It was asked ‘when would the decision be made’?

Owen gave details of the process. The process being a statutory duty has to be kept to a strict deadline:

End of consultation 14 December 2012

Decision whether to publish, or not, the statutory notice 7 February 2013

Publication of statutory notice 1 March 2013 – representation for a six week period

End of Representation 12 April 2013

Final decision on proposed amalgamation – 30 May 2013

It was explained that the final decision had been delayed due to the local Elections in May 2013. A decision cannot be made until the councillors are elected and in post. Only then can the Cabinet meet to make the final decision.

If the decision is to accept the proposed amalgamation then the Junior School would close on 31 August 2013 and the Infant School would have a change of age range from 01 September 2013.

Only after this decision would the new staffing structure be put in place and the assimilation and appointment of staffing could commence.

The question was raised ‘why close one school and not both’?

It was explained that at the time of the initial proposal to amalgamate it was Government policy that if both schools closed then an Academy would need to be formed in their place. The school considered converting to academy status but decided not to pursue this course. Having experienced the benefits of joint working, the schools decided to go to consultation on amalgamation. Since then, however, Government policy has changed and an Academy would no longer need to be formed if both schools chose to close.

It was expressed that this is simply a ‘paper’ exercise and though the Junior School would ‘close’ the school building would still remain and be transferred to the Infant school.

A few more HR questions were asked:

If a teacher, say, at the Junior School didn’t want to work for a primary school what would their options be?

It was explained that they should discuss this with their Headteacher to see if their fears could be alleviated.

Following this question there was discussion on the Alternative Employment Programme. The programme is for those that are at risk of redundancy which was not the issue raised in this question. Occupational Health may be able to advise on the movement of staff if individual circumstances indicated that a referral was felt necessary. It was expressed that the exercise of amalgamation of the schools is not meant as an opportunity to move employment.

There are telephone numbers available outside of the county council for anyone wanting to speak to councillors confidentially about their anxieties which will be made available on the website or are available from the School Organisation Team on 01228 226013.

Owen thanked the audience for attending the meeting and asked that they complete the consultation documents as their thoughts and options were valued.

There was a question asked after the meeting. ‘Will all Fairfield Infant staff be automatically safe and Junior staff have to apply for jobs, as it is the Junior School that will close’?

It was explained that all jobs will be looked at as a whole but that it was up to the governing body to decide on staffing matters.

The group who asked the question felt it important that the school still have two lots of senior staff as there will technically still be two sites and when one colleague wasn’t available the other would be able to pick up the tasks.

**Parent/Community 6.00pm**

Questions raised at this meeting were around the National Funding Formula, who would be the Headteacher of the new school and how would the shadow governing body be set up?

National Funding Formula

The proposed amalgamation of the Fairfield Infant and Junior School has no connection to the new National Funding Formula. The Funding Formula has now been set and each school will decide how they spend the allocated amount.

Shadow Governing Body

The new governing body will be a mixture of both schools’ present governing bodies, approximately 50:50. It would be up to those governing bodies to decide who will reside on the new governing body.

New Headteacher

Until the new structure is known, a process would be followed in that for a head if there was a 75% match and one post holder, there would be a non competitive interview with a threshold for appointment being decided in advance at which the applicant would need to also meet the essential criteria and a selection of the desirable criteria set out by the governing body.

Other points

* The Headteachers of both schools asked about budget and how it would work. Helen Hamilton is the finance advice for the county council and she would be asked to contact the schools.