

A Review of Education in the Alston Area – FAQ

Questions/answers will be added to this section as they are raised through the consultation process.

1. Why are you looking at education in the area?

The numbers of children in all of the Alston schools have been declining, but particularly so in Samuel King's. This is making the provision of a balanced curriculum increasingly difficult and there is unlikely to be any change to the situation in the foreseeable future if things remain the same. Recently up to a third of secondary aged children from Alston have been choosing to attend schools outside the area and children from Northumberland are returning to schools in their own catchment areas following improvements in standards there.

2. How will falling numbers in the area affect the schools?

School budgets are dependent on the numbers of children on roll. So, as school numbers fall so does the school budget, although many of the costs facing the school will remain unchanged. Reduced budget allocations as a result of falling numbers affects the number of teachers and support staff able to be employed in a school and therefore curriculum options are likely to be limited. This can even affect after school clubs, sports and field trips.

3. Why not just leave things as they are?

The problems as a result of the decline in numbers at Samuel King's will become increasingly difficult to manage and it will become harder to maintain a balanced curriculum. The long-term sustainability of the school is a genuine cause for concern.

4. If an all-through school was decided on who is to say which is the best site?

Feasibility studies have taken place at Alston Primary, Nenthead Primary and Samuel King's to examine which site would be most suited to the housing of an all-through school. All three sites proved to be of a sufficient size to accommodate the changes, however there would be a large cost difference in delivering the options. It is apparent from the feasibility studies carried out that the Samuel King's site would be the most efficient and, whilst there are access difficulties associated with the site it is felt that work could be done to overcome these. A decision on site location would ultimately be made by Cumbria County Council's Cabinet.

5. Won't there be problems mixing secondary and primary aged children in the same building at Samuel King's?

During the feasibility studies on the existing schools the headteachers were asked to contribute their expertise and observations to the layouts for the all-through plans. A number of possible layouts were devised, but all of them ensured that there would be separate classrooms, facilities, playground and entrances for the smaller children. These layouts also provide, to varying degrees, spaces that could be used by both age groups helping to provide improved continuity between key stages and also giving the primary children access to facilities and resources enjoyed at secondary schools.

6. What happens after this consultation?

Your views from this process will help the council in deciding what to do next. More work will be done on whatever option it is decided to take forward and a detailed formal consultation on this favoured option will be undertaken before any changes are implemented.

7. What is Cumbria County Council's Home to School Transport Policy?

The policy states that entitlement to free home to school transport is linked to your catchment or nearest qualifying school (for those aged between 5 and 16 years). The statutory walking distance for children aged under 8 is 2 miles. This rises to 3 miles for those above 8 years of age.

The details of the policy can found using this link

<http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/childrensservices/schoolsandlearning/schooltransport.asp>

8. How much would it cost to make alterations to SKS so that the Primary school could be accommodated to at least the standard they have now?

The feasibility studies available on the School Organisation website contain details of costs for each of the options.

9. How much money could be saved per year by sharing the same building?

It is not possible to provide financial detail at this stage as it would depend on which option was chosen and the final design. Clearly, premises costs would be reduced if some buildings were no longer used.

10. How many years would it take to recoup the refurbishment costs?

The refurbishment costs will come out of the council's capital fund and therefore will not be a cost to the schools.

11. How many children are on the rolls of the 10 smallest secondary schools in England/Wales/Scotland and how much (approximately) do they cost to run? How does this compare with SKS?

This information is not available to the county council.

12. What sort of guarantee can the County Council give to keep the 11-16 part of a 4-16 school open in the next 20 years?

No such guarantee can be given as there are likely to be many variables over this period of time.

13. What would happen to a 4-11 year school occupying part of a 4-16 year school if the 11-16 year part of the school is still not viable and has to close?

Under the options suggested both a federation and an all through school would be financially viable given the information we currently have. However, if this was the circumstance then some areas of the school that were not needed for primary education could be mothballed.

14. What would happen if there is an influx of families in a few years (eg if Minco goes in to full operation) and the 11-16 part of the school needs the classrooms back?

If proved to be commercially viable then mining will not be operational for a number of years and even then it may take some time for a workforce to become established in whatever location they will be based – current problems need to be addressed before that. Even with co-location of all schools and a new layout in Samuel King's there would still be spaces to accommodate additional children should the need arise.

15. How energy efficient are the three schools? Is this a reasonable place to look for long term savings?

Any energy savings in the individual school buildings will not make significant impact on the current situation. Combining the three schools into a single building will result in savings.

16. Would free transport be offered to secondary students having to attend other schools if Samuel Kings were to close? Would this include later transport so that children could attend after school clubs?

Transport will be available in accordance with the Transport Policy (see Q7 above). This will not include transport for after schools clubs.

17. Would redundancy pay be included in any costings if one of the headteachers had to resign?

Staffing would be reviewed under normal HR policy and procedures.

18. Regarding Option 1:

- **When would this come into force**

Further consultation would be required if this were to be carried forward as an option and a timescale would be brought forward then.

- **What would become the catchment of the school**
This would also form part of a further consultation.
- **Would transport be provided and would it be free of charge**
See Q7 above
- **What would happen to the premises**
If surplus buildings / premises were the result of physical relocation and buildings became unoccupied, the county council would decide at that point what they wanted to do with their assets.

Regarding Option 2:

- **Official reason that the federation has been declined**
That is a matter for the governing body of the Alston Moor Federation
- **What would the budget be and where would it come from**
See Q10 above.
- **If co-located, where would money come from to relocate and develop the site**
See Q10 above.
- **How would the Governing Body work**
A single governing body would be formed to work with all schools in the federation.
- **How would staffing be decided**
Staffing would be determined by the governing body.
- **Are there different budgets for federation on different sites as opposed to on one site**
The budgets would remain the same but would come under the control of a single governing body.
- **What would happen to closing premises**
See Option 1

Regarding Option 3:

- **Who would decide on which schools were to close**
Ultimately the decision would rest with Cumbria County Council's Cabinet.
- **How would staff be appointed**
The governing body would appoint staff.
- **Where would funding come from**
See Q10 above
- **What is the budget**
Feasibility studies have provided a number of options – see Q8 above.
- **How would a Governing Body be appointed**
It is likely that the existing governing bodies would combine to form a new single governing body.
- **How long would this take to achieve**

- Further consultation would be required if this were to be carried forward as an option and a timescale would be brought forward then.
- **What would happen if the academy was to fail**
 Firstly, an all through school need not be an academy as it could be formed by the closure of two of the schools and an age range extension to the remaining school. Whether the school is an academy or not, should either the secondary or primary section of the school become unsustainable then unused parts of the school could be mothballed (see Q13)

19. Is the bus service from Alston to Carlisle stopping and if so where would the children go for secondary education?

This is not part of the consultation. Home to school transport would be provided under the County Council's school transport policy.

20. If there is a move into SKS could the primary schools be mothballed?

The primary schools would probably be retained for a short time but would not be able to be left unoccupied indefinitely.

21. Access to the SKS building is already an issue, how will this work with primary children and buses entering through either a working garage or along a residential street?

Feasibility studies recognise that access to the site is an issue and it is acknowledged that an essential part the all through option is to arrive at a workable solution. Further work would need to be undertaken should this option be selected.

22. Do other secondary schools in the area have the capacity to take all the children from Alston Moor if SKS closes?

Yes, there is sufficient capacity in the surrounding schools.

23. If all the schools are co-located what happens to the buildings that are vacated?

If it is decided to take a proposal for co-location forward then all the options around use of the buildings will be fully explored, but these could include alternative community uses or sale of the sites.

24. Could SKS be set up as a village college broadening the offer in Alston to F.E. and adult education?

See Q23

25. Would a decision on the future of schools be made at this stage?

No formal decision could be made at this stage. The informal consultation that is running now will help us to see what the community think about the future of

education in the area and this would shape any proposal that might be brought back to the community.

26. Could a confederation with schools in Northumberland be formed?

SKS has a formal working relationship with some Northumberland schools in the form of the North Pennine Learning Partnership. The Northumberland schools involved are Haydon Bridge, Allendale Middle School and Bellingham Community Middle School.

27. What will be the future financial position of SKS be if there is no change?

School funding is inextricably linked to pupil numbers so as numbers decline so does funding which will affect the ability of SKS to offer a broad curriculum. See Q2.

28. The UK government is actively pushing a move from urban centres to rural locations – in this light how could the closure of SKS be justified?

We are all keen to retain a secondary presence in Alston and this is why two out of three of the suggested options in the consultation document explore possible combinations of the existing schools to keep it there. However, if numbers continue to decline and no change is made the ability of SKS to give a broad curriculum offer will become increasingly difficult to maintain.

29. Would the academisation of the primary schools stop the co-location of schools?

All schools are able to apply to the Department for Education (DfE) to opt of Local Authority control. By becoming an academy a school receives funding directly from the government rather than through the local authority, as well as determining their own curriculum and other organisational matters. At present we are aware that the Alston Moor Federation has made enquiries but as far as we are aware, it has not applied for conversion. Should an application be made then the DfE will ask the county council if there are any school organisation plans for the area and they would take them into consideration when deciding on the application outcome.

30. If co-location happens and the secondary phase becomes over-subscribed what would happen to the primary school?

Capacity at a co-located school would allow expansion of the secondary, or primary, phase and would certainly accommodate all the children currently within the catchment area of SKS.

31. Can we have more details on the effectiveness of small all-through schools?

Some examples of small all through schools are available on our website at this link

<http://www.cumbria.gov.uk/childrensservices/schoolsandlearning/lss/school-organisation/Consultations.asp>

The examples detailed here are of Scottish schools as they offer comparable pupil numbers and face similar rural issues. However, there are lots of examples of successful all through schools in England as well, and the model is also effectively used by many private schools.

32. Has the option of a 6th form been explored in detail and, if so, why has it been rejected?

Samuel King's School did formerly have a sixth form. In 1980 the number on roll in the sixth form stood at 10 and this number dwindled until the final intake at upper sixth of 3 in 1987. Current numbers remain insufficient to create a viable sixth form.

33. If an all-through school is created the number of secondary aged children would not rise, so how could a balanced education be given?

Should an all-through option be selected the new school could well encourage more secondary aged children to remain in the area thereby increasing secondary numbers on roll. It is the prospect of numbers falling further than the current levels at Samuel King's that will create problems in the near future.

34. If the schools federated what funds would be retained/lost?

Under a federation arrangement all schools would continue to be eligible for the individual funds they currently receive.

35. Can parents risk prosecution if they are unable to get children to school in wintry conditions?

Child welfare is the primary concern around safety in poor weather and headteachers in Cumbria are used to making decisions based on our sometimes extreme weather conditions. A headteacher will have the discretion to decide that a child's absence on a particular day was justifiable or not. Individual schools can determine whether it is viable for them to open in poor weather conditions and transport operators will do the same.

36. Why is there money available to improve buildings but not to help out with budgets?

The alterations that are laid out in the feasibility studies would be paid for through county council capital funds which are not linked in any way to school budgets.

37. Do your SKS figures take account of children from the Weardale area?

Yes they do. There are currently more than 30 children in SKS from the Weardale area. However, numbers applying from the Weardale area have reduced in recent years (even over the current school population). Applicants from the Weardale area 5 years ago averaged around 13 per year and had

done for some years previously; since that time numbers have steady dropped into single figures and have reduced to around 3 per year in the last couple of years.

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