

Planning Primary Education for the Belle Vue area of Carlisle

A consultation document



January 2007

Introduction

As you probably know, the County Council and its key partners have recently been looking at the future of education provision for 11-19 year olds in the city. This was the start of a very comprehensive exercise to review all schools throughout Cumbria.

For a little while now, primary education in the Carlisle area has also been under the spotlight. One of the general issues being examined is the future of separate infant and junior schools.

The governing bodies of BelleVue Infant and Junior Schools indicated jointly back in September 2006 that they wanted to see an amalgamation of their two schools considered. This consultation document is about the possibility of such a merger.

The issuing of this document is the start of a genuine and open consultation process. We would like as many people as possible with an involvement or interest in the two schools, or in primary education in the area more generally, to contribute their thoughts on what should happen. There is a questionnaire at the back of this document which we would like you to fill in and send back to us.

If you would like further information on our document and the things it covers, you can find out more by:

- visiting our website: www.cumbriacc.gov.uk/childrensservices/school-organisation
- ringing the School Organisation Project Team: 01228 606013

The outcomes of today's planning are not just for the benefit of our children and their future. They will potentially lead to improvements in the area's economy, and this will benefit the whole community. Your responses to this document will make a major contribution in helping to achieve these ambitions.



Philip Chappelhow

County Councillor Philip Chappelhow,
Cabinet Member for Children's Services,
Cumbria County Council



Moira Swann

Moira Swann,
Corporate Director, Children's Services,
Cumbria County Council

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The purpose and nature of the consultation document



The purpose of this document is to provide information and comment on the possibility of the amalgamation of Belle Vue Infant and Junior Schools.

Its aim is to focus on whether a merger would be likely to:

- create the most effective provision for the future;
- enhance the educational opportunities for pupils;
- lead to a more cost-effective use of resources.

We have tried to achieve the right balance covering the most important issues whilst keeping to a reasonable length. The document has been written for parents, school staff, governors, young people and other members of the public, who will have different starting points in terms of knowledge and understanding. We have attempted to take this into account. We also wanted to be direct and relevant and keep things as clear as we could. We hope that we have managed to make the document as easy as possible to read and understand.

Your views will be a great help in reaching a decision on the future of the two schools. We realise that you may want more information to help you form your opinions. Details of how you can access additional information or talk over any issues of concern with us are given on page 10.

The consideration of the future of primary education in the BelleVue area of Carlisle sits within a countywide context and approach. We feel that we should say a little about this before focusing on the Carlisle area.

A countywide approach to changing the school network

In Autumn 2005, Cumbria County Council launched a strategic review of schools to be carried out by the end of 2007. The review covers all nursery, primary, secondary and special schools in the county. Other services for children are also part of the review.

The aim is to bring about higher achievement and better educational standards. The County Council sees this as a great opportunity to improve young people's education and their life chances and choices.

The main reason that the countywide review is taking place is because the number of school aged children is going to fall considerably over the next 10-15 years. There are also some key educational issues which need to be addressed. With all of this in mind, it is important to plan for the future to ensure that we have the appropriate number and type of schools which are the right size, in the right place, with good quality facilities.

The review process is a new and ambitious approach. It includes all partners with an interest in education and other services for young people, and several groups are involved:

- **Local Partnership Groups (LPGs)** who:
 - look at their areas of the county and identify options for the future
- **School Organisation Forum** which:
 - oversees the whole review process
 - considers options from Local Partnership Groups and makes recommendations to the County Council
- **Cumbria County Council** which:
 - decides which options should go to public consultation and considers the results of the consultation
 - makes statutory proposals to achieve school organisation change
 - decides whether or not to approve statutory proposals, after considering any formal objections to them
- **School Organisation Project Team** which:
 - supports the entire review process



The current provision



BelleVue Infant and Junior Schools are located in adjoining buildings on Beaver Road in west Carlisle.

The catchment area from which the two schools take most of their pupils is shown on the map provided as Appendix A (page 12). This also shows the location of the schools. On average, the intake to the Infant School's reception year includes around 25% of children from outside the catchment area.

The Infant School caters for children aged 4 to 7. An accommodation plan appears as Appendix B (page 13). The current pupil capacity range is 162 (minimum) to 180 (maximum).

BelleVue Junior School takes children aged 7 to 11. A plan of its accommodation is provided as Appendix C (page 14). The present pupil capacity range is 216 to 240.

Pupil numbers

At the peak of their pupil rolls during the last ten years, the schools collectively had almost 430 pupils. At the moment, the two schools together have 380 pupils; the Infant School has 160 and the Junior School 220.

Pupil numbers are not likely to change much over the next few years. Based on recent parental preference and admission trends, the combined projected numbers of pupils at the schools are:

Sept 2007	Sept 2008	Sept 2009	Sept 2010	Sept 2011
364	363	368	376	377

Education in the Belle Vue schools

This section provides information about educational provision at the two schools. It is based on the most recent Ofsted inspection reports and monitoring by the Council's School Improvement Team.

Belle Vue Infant School

Belle Vue Infant School was inspected by Ofsted in February 2005. It was judged to be a good school with some very good features and providing very good value for money. Pupils' achievement, at the end of Year 2 was good and had improved significantly since 1999, when the school was last inspected. The leadership and management by the headteacher with contributions from the governing body were judged to be very good. The school was also judged to have productive links with parents and the community. The school was asked to improve the procedures for assessing and judging the levels of pupils' work and make more productive use of records of pupils' progress. Since the inspection in 2005, a new headteacher has been appointed.

Results in 2006 in reading, writing and mathematics were well above the national and Cumbria average. The school has maintained consistently high standards of pupil attainment for a number of years.

Belle Vue Junior School

Belle Vue Junior School was inspected by Ofsted in September 2003. It was judged to be a good school where pupils are highly valued and cared for as individuals. As a result, they were seen to be achieving well and making good progress. Teaching was judged to be good and a rich curriculum offered to pupils. The school was judged to be well managed, with the headteacher nurturing high levels of commitment from all members of the community very effectively. The school was asked to continue to focus on the already planned strategies for raising pupil attainment.

Results in Key Stage 2 in 2006 in the core subject of mathematics were well above the national and Cumbria averages. In English and science, results were slightly above the national and Cumbria averages. The performance of boys was significantly better than girls in mathematics and science, but there was no significant difference in English. The school has maintained relatively high standards over time. The school is recognised nationally for high pupil achievement in physical education.



Considering the possibility of amalgamation



Background to the BelleVue review

Following governing body meetings in March 2006, governor representatives of the two schools met to discuss their future in September. The conclusion drawn was that the amalgamation of the schools appeared to be the way forward.

Taking account of this and other factors covered later in this section of the document, the Local Partnership Group for the Carlisle area, the countywide School Organisation Forum and the County Council's Cabinet all agreed that consultation should take place on the amalgamation possibility.

Preference for all-through primary schools

The County Council has a long-stated preference for all-through primary schools, as opposed to separate infant and junior schools. In summary, this is based on the belief that, **all other things being equal**, they offer:

- better continuity of education;
- more financial efficiency;
- greater organisational and educational flexibility.

This preference was also included in the education vision document 'Enhancing Lives Through Learning - A Vision for Schools in Cumbria' formulated by the School Organisation Forum towards the end of 2005. This document underpins the countywide review exercise referred to on page 3.

Some general educational issues

Where there are 'linked' infant and junior schools they are managed separately. Each has its own ethos, philosophy and approach to the curriculum. Usually, the staff of the schools work hard collaboratively to try to ensure a smooth transition between the infant and junior phases. It is likely, however, that one effectively managed primary school would more easily achieve a sense of progression and continuity for pupils. This is extremely important both in curricular and social terms and it is something which the National Curriculum lays a good deal of emphasis on.

It is very difficult to produce impartial evidence to prove that amalgamations improve educational performance. There are too many variable factors which might have an impact in any particular situation to do that. There are indications though that the educational outcome of schools formed by amalgamation are, in general, better than those at the junior schools which they replaced. That, together with the observed dip in children's performance in Year 3 commented on by inspectors nationally, tends to support the County Council's broad preference for all-through primaries.

Both the Government and the Council are attaching increasing importance to enhancing pupil attainment in literacy and numeracy. Schools are required to set targets for improvement and to develop action plans which will lead to their achievement. The intention is for these targets to be challenging. A primary school planning for this across both Key Stage 1 of the National Curriculum (covered in infant schools) and Key Stage 2 (covered in junior schools) may be better equipped to meet the challenge.

Schools have limited resources with which to employ teachers. Headteachers are often faced with difficulties in finding an educationally effective pattern of class organisation which reflects curricular and individual pupil needs whilst balancing class sizes. Generally speaking, larger schools have more options in this respect.

In considering changes of this nature, concern is sometimes expressed at the loss of some staff specialisation which comes from experience of teaching infant aged or junior aged pupils. On the other hand, within larger schools, there may well be a greater range of subject expertise. There are also likely to be increased opportunities for professional development in larger schools, where teachers are able to teach across the full primary phase and gain line management experience.

Curriculum management within a primary school is based on a system of coordinators who take responsibility for developing policy, practice and assessment in a curriculum area(s). There are 12 main curriculum areas. Clearly for smaller schools, this burden of responsibility has to be spread amongst fewer teachers so they have to devote their time to a number of areas. Where there is a larger teaching staff, curriculum coordination can be more effectively organised and time-managed. Moreover, in all-through primary schools, curriculum planning can be coordinated across the first two National Curriculum key stages.

Assessment of pupils' progress is easier when done across the two key stages. Similarly, the increased emphasis these days on 'personalised learning' for children is supported by the greater opportunities for differentiation in work programming which exists in all-through primaries.

There are also likely to be advantages on staffing issues of 3/4-11 schools in comparison with what are generally smaller separate infant and junior schools. These include:

- increased and wider staff development opportunities;
- opportunities to develop subject expertise across the full primary education phase;
- the need for fewer headteachers, which eases the current difficulties being experienced with recruiting and retaining them.

Parents of infant aged pupils sometimes raise concerns about the welfare of their children in primary schools. These tend to focus on how well 'small' children cope with 'big' children, for example at playtime. However, examination of Ofsted inspection reports confirms that pupils' welfare is not threatened in amalgamated schools, any more than it is in other schools in Cumbria. More positively, younger children have the opportunity to learn from their older peers. Older pupils can also contribute to the teaching/learning process by mentoring younger pupils.

Although some parents do have concerns, many prefer all-through primaries. This is mainly because they avoid a change of school at the age of seven and the insecurity that this can bring about.

Cumbria has many examples of successful infant and junior schools and equally successful 3/4-11 primary schools. The number of separate infant and junior schools has, however, fallen very considerably following a series of mergers in recent years. This has resulted from the serious consideration of the kind of issues covered here.

Financial issues

School amalgamations

When schools are amalgamated, revenue resources are released for other purposes. Some of these benefits are received by the Department for Education and Skills and the remainder by the County Council and the schools involved.

In the case of the Council, the 'released' resources are available for distribution across all schools and thereby benefit all Cumbria's pupils. In addition to this, a significant proportion of 'freed up' resources become available to the schools for the direct educational benefit of pupils. This opportunity arises from more efficient and effective use of resources, eg reductions in school management and administration, more efficient use of staff, less duplication of materials and equipment.

Larger schools

There are also felt to be other financial advantages in relation to school amalgamations. For example:

- a larger single budget would offer greater flexibility in the use of resources;
- the ability to deal successfully with fluctuations in the level of the budget due to year on year changes in total numbers would be enhanced.

The cost-effective use of resources

The Government expects local authorities to use the funding available for education effectively. Cumbria County Council sees one of its key roles as seeking to ensure the cost-effective use of resources.

It is at least arguable that continuing to maintain linked but separate infant and junior schools, some of which may be shrinking in size and occupy the same site, would not represent the best use of resources. Having a single school in these situations may well mean that more of the available resources are spent directly on teaching and learning, thereby contributing to raising standards.

Parents and the community

The involvement of parents with schools and with their children's education is vital. Some families have children in two or three different schools and this can be quite demanding. Parents usually find it easier to develop and sustain relationships with the staff of one rather than two schools in the primary phase of education. Taking part in events and contributing to school activities does not have to be duplicated.

It may be that, for parents, having a single primary school would offer a clearer identity which they could relate to more easily. Schools are reliant on the efforts of the communities they serve, and parental support could possibly be channelled more effectively into one school rather than two. This is not a question of financial support; it involves the time and energy people in the community devote to their local schools.

Educational research shows that, where the school and home are engaged in a strong partnership, children generally achieve at a higher level. Parents may well benefit from having all-through primary schools so that there is continuity throughout their children's primary school careers which gives them a greater understanding of procedures, learning strategies and expectations.



Achieving amalgamation

General

In order to bring about school organisation change, it is necessary to publish what are known as statutory proposals. In all previous similar cases in Cumbria, amalgamations have been achieved through the closure of both of the existing schools and the establishment of a new one, albeit in most cases in one or both of the existing schools' buildings.

Very recent legislation and associated transitional arrangements mean that the decision on any statutory proposals by local authorities to establish new primary schools published after February 2007 and before May 2007 will be taken by a Government appointed school adjudicator. Previously, such decisions would have been taken locally in situations like the potential amalgamation of the Belle Vue Schools. It is not certain under these new arrangements what the likelihood is of proposals being approved or how long it would be before a final decision is taken.

There is an alternative approach which could be adopted that would effectively achieve an amalgamation by creating a single 4-11 primary school. This would involve the closure of one of the schools and extending the age range of the other to enable it to take both infant and junior aged children. In this scenario it would be for the County Council to take the decisions on the statutory proposals involved. This could happen within two or three weeks of the completion of the formal proposals process.

Whichever of the two processes was to be followed, the end product would be a single primary school catering for pupils aged between 4 and 11. As part of the consultative process, discussion will take place with the governors and staff of the two schools on what is felt to be the best route to take.

If it is decided to pursue an amalgamation of the two schools, appropriate statutory proposals to bring that about would need to be published, following which a final decision would be taken.

Staffing issues

It is accepted that the process of amalgamation can create uncertainties, particularly for staff. As part of the countywide review, a handbook on staffing issues associated with school closures and amalgamations has been prepared. A draft of the handbook has already been distributed to all schools.

The precise nature of the staffing processes will vary somewhat depending on which of the legal processes to achieve amalgamation referred to above is chosen.

The schools' buildings

The buildings at both schools are generally suitable for their purpose and well maintained. There is currently ample accommodation for an all-through primary school of the size required for the future.

Consequently, if the schools do amalgamate, significant capital investment will not be required. Ideally though, some work would be undertaken to improve the school's ability to operate effectively as a single all-through primary school. This work might well focus on staff/administration facilities and access arrangements. Funding to achieve such changes is likely to come from both the Council's Capital Programme and the schools' own capital resources.

Drawing conclusions

Although the reason for the countywide review is a big fall in the pupil population, pupil numbers are not a significant factor here. Furthermore, this review of the current arrangements in no way suggests that the schools have not been working well. The key issue is whether the primary education provision for BelleVue can be improved for the future.

As we have explained, the County Council has a preference for all-through primary schools rather than separate infant and junior schools. The Council feels that the case for an amalgamation is very strong and that it is the appropriate way forward for the future because it will enhance educational opportunities for the pupils. The governing bodies of the two schools have indicated that they feel the same way.

We would like to have your views on the possibility of amalgamation, and there is a questionnaire at the back of this document to help. Hopefully, this consultation document, as well as meetings on 7 February 2007, additional information available and individual discussions which are on offer (all outlined in the following section), will help you to form your opinions on the subject.

We look forward to receiving your completed questionnaire or e-mail response as your views are important and will influence the decision which is eventually taken.



Next steps

The consultation period

The consultation is based on this document. The consultation period starts on Friday 26 January 2007. The final date for letting us have your thoughts and comments is **Friday 9 March 2007**.

How to express your views

This consultation document has been very widely distributed. It has gone to the BelleVue Schools' parents, staff and governors, all of the County Council's key partners in the provision of education, neighbouring schools, the District Council, voluntary organisations, staff associations and unions, and many others. It is important that we know what you think about the possible amalgamation of the two schools. We look forward to hearing from you.

Meetings

A series of consultation meetings will be held on **Wednesday 7 February 2007**. They will give you the opportunity to express your views and to ask questions. The details of the meetings are set out below:

Meeting For	Time	Venue
Infant School Council	2.00pm - 2.30pm	Belle Vue Infant School Conference Room
Junior School Council	2.35pm - 3.15pm	Belle Vue Junior School Resource Room
Staff of both schools	4:00pm - 5:00pm	Belle Vue Junior School Hall
Governors of both schools	5:00pm - 6:00pm	
Parents and other members of the community	6:30pm - 8:00pm	

The Lead Member for Children's Services, Councillor Philip Chappelhow, will chair each meeting, which will start with a short introduction on how the session will be run. Then there will be a very brief presentation on the main points in the consultation document. During the rest of the meeting, you will be able to say what you feel about the document and ask questions of the panel of County Council officers who will be present.

Notes of each meeting will be taken to summarise the points made. These will be made available to members of the Council's Cabinet when they are taking the decision regarding the potential amalgamation.

Questionnaire

There is a questionnaire at the back of this document. We would like you to complete it and return it to us. Alternatively, you can complete the questionnaire on-line during the consultation period by following the consultation finder links on the County Council website: www.cumbriacc.gov.uk/consultation.

What happens after the consultation process?

Once the responses to the consultation process have been analysed, a report will be prepared for the County Council's Cabinet. The report will include notes of the consultation meetings, a summary of comments received from individuals and photocopies of the responses from recognised organisations. The report will be a public document, so will be available to the media and on the County Council website.

The Cabinet will consider the response to the consultation and form a view about what it believes to be the appropriate provision for the future. This is likely to occur on Tuesday 3 April 2007.

If it is decided to seek to amalgamate the two schools, one of the legal processes referred to in the section on 'Achieving Amalgamation' on page 9 will need to be followed. It is likely any merger would happen in September 2008.

How can I find out more?

Members of the School Organisation Project Team will be more than happy to discuss with you any of the issues covered in this document or anything else related to the Belle Vue Schools. You might find this helpful before completing the questionnaire.

The number to ring is 01228 606013.

As we said earlier, we wanted to keep this document as short as possible. There is extra information available if you want to read the detailed background documents that we used when we wrote this paper. These include summaries of projected pupil numbers and the most recent Ofsted inspection reports.

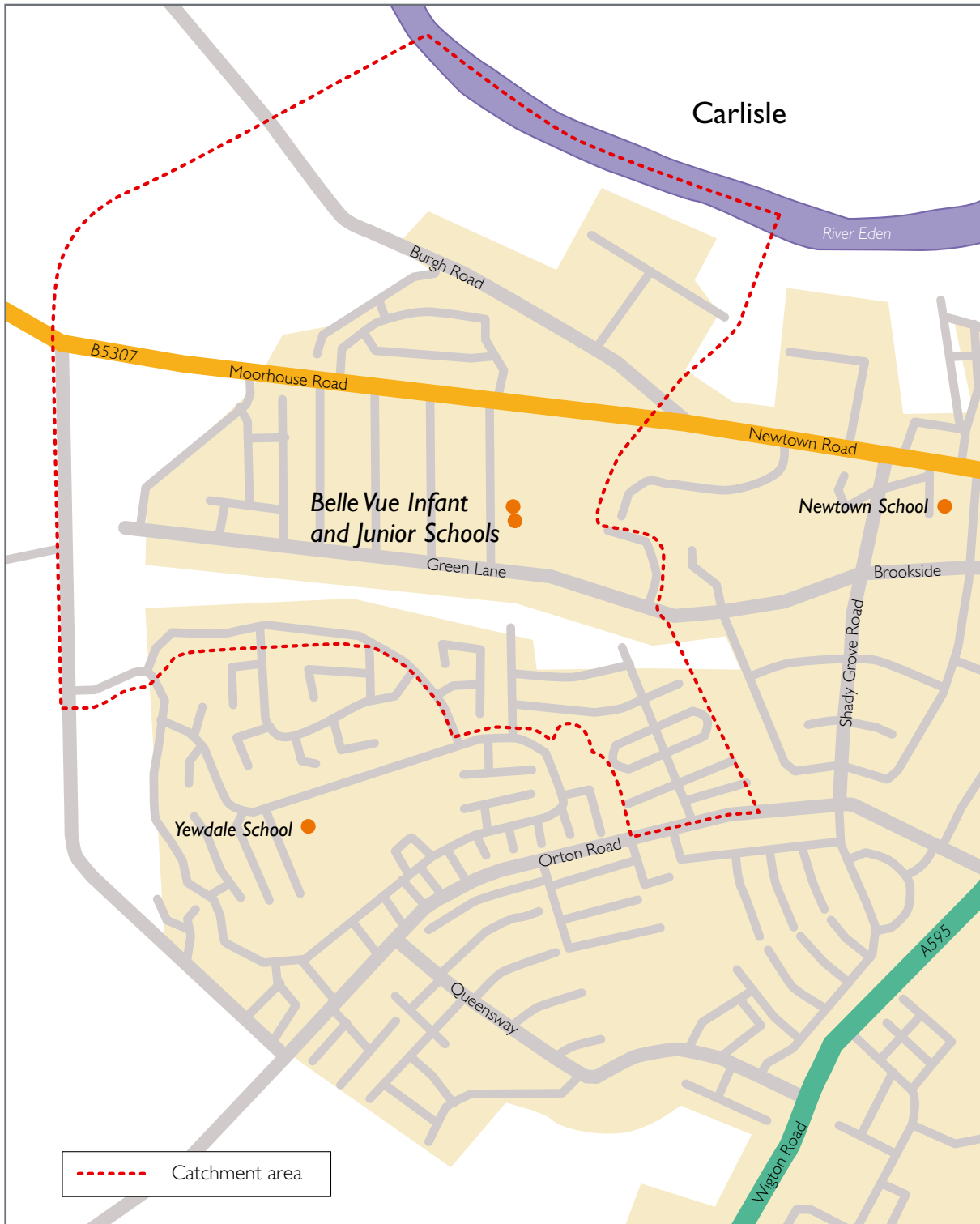
All of these documents are available to view or download on our website:

www.cumbriacc.gov.uk/childrensservices/school-organisation

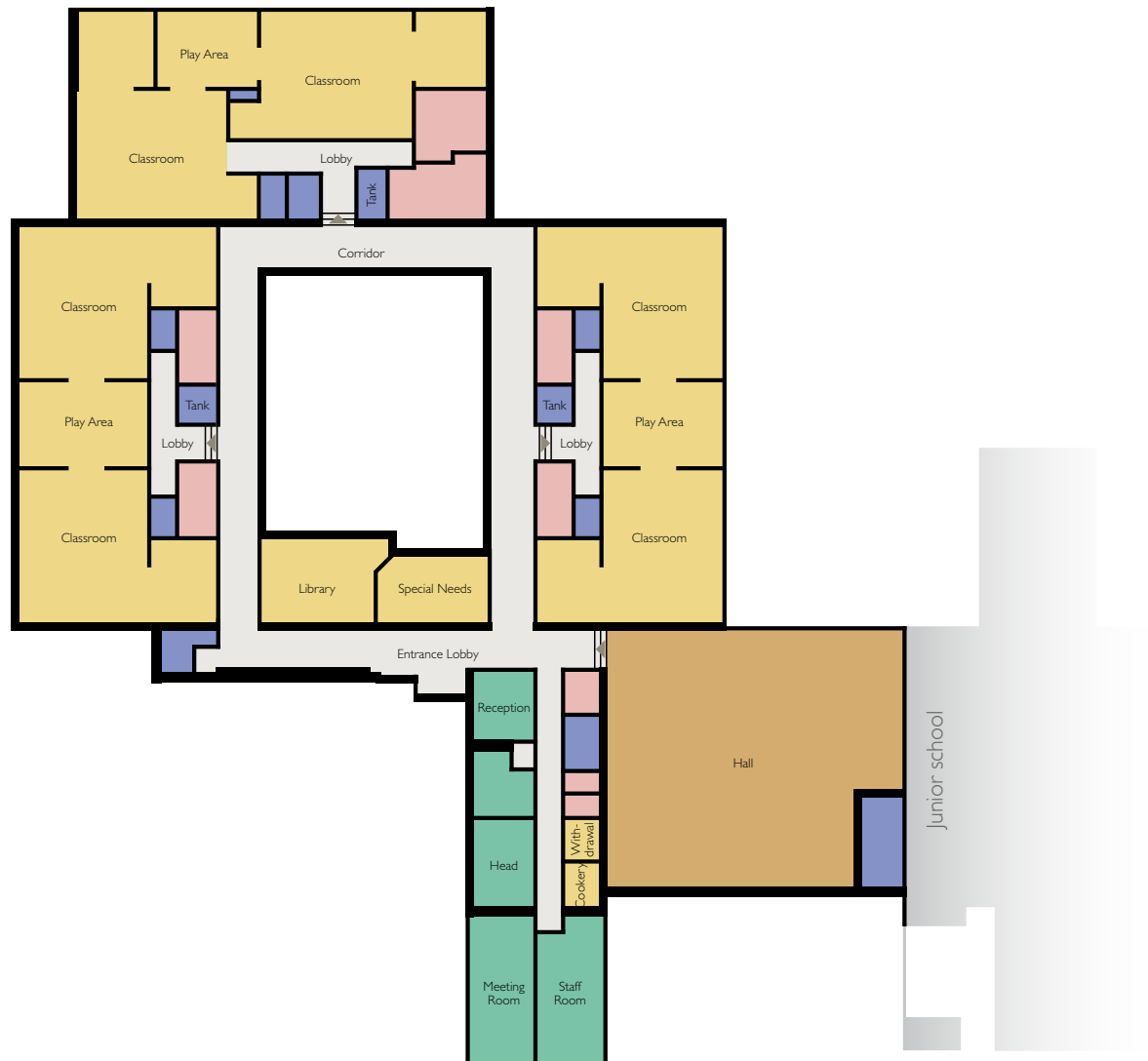
If you do not have access to the internet, we can provide you with a printed copy of any sections of the additional information. All you need to do is to call the School Organisation Project Team on 01228 606013. Alternatively, requests can be made by fax to 01228 606016, or by post to the address below.

Freepost RRBS - RLBG - GZGL
CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCIL
School Organisation
18 Portland Square
CARLISLE
CAI IPE

Appendix A - Catchment area of Belle Vue Infant and Junior Schools



Appendix B - Accommodation Plan: Belle Vue Infant School



Key to Areas

- Teaching
- Staff
- Communal
- Storage/other
- Toilets

Appendix C - Accommodation Plan: Belle Vue Junior School

Ground floor

First floor



Questionnaire

Planning Primary Education for the Belle Vue area of Carlisle

This questionnaire is to help you put your views, comments and suggestions in writing. All views will be made available to those taking decisions. Please continue on a separate sheet if required. Alternatively, complete your questionnaire online at www.cumbriacc.gov.uk/consultation.

Please complete, tear out and return to the address overleaf. The last date for responses to be received is **Friday 9 March 2007**.

Q1 Given the current situation, and the information contained in this document, do you think it appropriate for Belle Vue Infant School to amalgamate with Belle Vue Junior School?

- Yes 1
- No 2
- Don't know 3

Q2 Please give your reasons, and any additional comments you wish to make on the question above.

Q3 Please provide below any further comments or suggestions you wish to make on the content of this consultation document or more generally.

Q4 Please tell us the nature of your interest in the process, and which schools you are connected to.
Please tick all that apply.

Interest	✓	At which school(s)?		
		Belle Vue Infant (✓)	Belle Vue Junior (✓)	Other (please state)
Student	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Parent/Carer of current school pupil	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Member of support staff	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Member of teaching staff	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Governor	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Pre-school parent	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Local resident	<input type="checkbox"/>			
Other (please state)	<input type="checkbox"/>			

Q5 Name

Q6 Address

.....

..... Postcode

Q7 How old are you?

Under 20 1 20-39 2 40-59 3 60+ 4

Signature

Thank you for completing this consultation questionnaire.
Please now return it to the FREEPOST address below:

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CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCIL
School Organisation
18 Portland Square
CARLISLE
CA1 1PE

Translation services

English

You can get a copy of this document in different formats such as large print, braille, audio, or in a different language by calling 01229 894401.

Bengali

আপনি 01229 894401 -এই নম্বর ফোন করে, বিভিন্ন ফরম্যাট যেমন বড় প্রিন্ট, ব্রেইল, অডিও বা একটি ভিন্ন ভাষাতে এই নথিটির একটি কপি পেতে পারেন।

Portuguese

Pode obter uma cópia deste documento em vários formatos, como por exemplo em Braille, áudio, ou numa outra língua. Para tal ligue para o 01229 894401.

Cantonese

如果您想获取该文件的不同版本，如：大字体印刷、盲文、音频或不同语言版本，请致电：01229 894401。

Lithuanian

Paskambinę telefonu 01229 894401, galite užsisakyti šio dokumento kopiją įvairiais formatais, pavyzdžiui, atspausdintą dideliu šriftu, Brailio raštu, užsisakyti garso įrašą arba gauti dokumentą, išverstą į norimą kalbą.

Polish

Aby otrzymać kopię tego dokumentu w innych formatach, takich jak duży druk, druk Braille'm, audio, lub w innym języku proszę dzwonić pod numer 01229 894401.

Turkish

01229 894401'u arayarak, bu dokümanın bir kopyasını büyük puntolu, körler için kabartmalı, ses dosyası gibi değişik formatlarda veya farklı bir dilde edinebilirsiniz.



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