

Planning primary education for East Penrith

A consultation document



February 2007

Introduction

As you may know, the County Council and its key partners are in the process of carrying out a very comprehensive exercise to review all schools throughout Cumbria. One of the general issues being examined is the future of separate infant and junior schools.

The governing bodies of Beaconside Infant and Junior Schools indicated jointly back in November 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 end 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 Beaconside 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 pages 10-11.

The consideration of the future of primary education in the east of Penrith sits within a countywide context and approach. We feel that we should say a little about this before focusing on the Penrith 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 of the right size, in the right place and 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



Beaconside Infant and Junior Schools are located close together on the same site on Hutton Hill and Eden Mount in East Penrith.

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 35% of children from outside the catchment area.

The Infant School caters for children aged 3 to 7. An accommodation plan appears as Appendix B (page 13). The current pupil capacity range is 223 (minimum) to 248 (maximum) excluding the nursery. It is a Church of England voluntary aided school. The school is a strategically resourced school catering for pupils with physical, medical and severe and complex difficulties.

Beaconside Junior School takes children aged 7 to 11. A plan of its accommodation is provided as Appendix C (page 14). It is a Church of England foundation school. The present pupil capacity range is 261 to 290.

Pupil numbers

At the peak of their pupil rolls during the last ten years, the schools collectively had almost 520 pupils. At the moment, the two schools together have 464 pupils; the Infant School has 182 and the Junior School 282.

Pupil numbers are likely to fall 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
472	455	431	418	414

Education in the Beaconside 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.

Beaconside Infant School

Beaconside C of E Infant School was inspected by Ofsted in May 2005 and was judged to be providing an effective education for its pupils with a very caring and extremely supportive family atmosphere. Pupils were judged to be well taught and to benefit from the school's exceptional inclusive approaches that ensure everyone's individual needs are well met. The leadership and management were judged to be very good, supported by a dedicated staff and governor team that ensures that the school moves forward and gives good value for money. The school was asked to further develop its systems and procedures for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school and in using the outcomes to plan the next stages for improvement.

Results in Key Stage 1 in 2006 in reading were below the Cumbria and National averages. However, they were in line with the Cumbria and National averages in writing and above average in mathematics. The school has maintained consistently higher than average standards of pupil attainment in mathematics for a number of years. However, in writing there is a declining trend over the same period of time. In reading, over time, results have mirrored the Cumbria and National picture but there has been a decline in 2006.

Beaconside Junior School

Beaconside C of E Junior School was inspected by Ofsted in September 2003 and was judged to be a good school with some very strong features. It was seen to be outstanding in the way it uses facilities locally and further afield to develop pupils' learning and personal development. Pupils achieve well in most subjects because teaching draws on an imaginatively designed curriculum to capture their interest and cater for different needs. Leadership and management were judged to translate the school's vision for successful personal development into reality. The school was asked to improve the use of information from assessments and other aspects of work monitoring to help pupils improve further.

Results in Key Stage 2 in 2006 in the core subjects of English and mathematics were above the National and Cumbria averages; in mathematics they were well above. The school has maintained consistently high standards over time in English and science. There is now an increasing trend appearing in mathematics that takes pupils' performance to a higher than Cumbria and National average level.

Considering the possibility of amalgamation

Background to the Beaconside review

The governors of the two schools have been looking into the possibilities of an amalgamation for some time. This involved discussions with County Council colleagues and visits to other schools that had amalgamated, to learn from their experiences and understand the issues involved.

Following separate governing body meetings early in the autumn term, a joint meeting of the governors of both schools to discuss their future was held in November 2006. The conclusion drawn was that an 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 Penrith 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 (ie where all or part of their catchment areas are shared), they are managed separately by their respective headteachers. 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 on which the National Curriculum lays a good deal of emphasis.



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 outcomes 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 the degree of 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.

The reduction in the overall number of schools means there will be a 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.

Special educational needs (SENS)/strategically resourced schools

As indicated earlier, Beaconside Infant is a strategically resourced school making specialist provision for Key Stage 1 pupils with physical, medical and severe and complex difficulties. At Key Stage 2, strategically placed pupils with those difficulties normally transfer to North Lakes Junior School. If the two Beaconside schools amalgamate, it is anticipated that this arrangement would continue ie strategically placed pupils would transfer from the new 3-11 Beaconside School at age 7 to North Lakes Junior School.

It is likely that the LPG for the Eden area will make suggestions for the future consideration of primary provision in the rest of the town within the next year or so. Any further review process would also involve the consideration of the provision of strategically resourced SENS facilities.

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 (DfES) 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 and 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 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.

New legislation which comes into effect in May 2007 means that, in the vast majority of cases, local authorities must hold a 'competition' when proposals are to be made for a new primary school. This includes situations like this where the new school would be a simple replacement of two existing schools. The Government's aim in introducing this requirement is to develop an education system in which there is a wider range of providers of schools in order to "increase diversity and maximise parental choice".

Given that this new requirement does not become effective until May, it is possible to make formal proposals before then, and so avoid having to have a competition. In the case of the Beaconside Schools, there is just enough time to achieve this deadline. This is if there are no delays and the County Council's Cabinet is able to consider the outcomes of the consultation process in early April 2007 and agree that an amalgamation is the way forward.

In this scenario, statutory proposals would need to be published in mid April. The County Council would propose the closure of the two schools, and the C of E diocese would be involved in proposing the establishment of the new school to replace the two existing schools. The diocese has indicated that it would prefer the new school to be a C of E voluntary aided school.

Alternatively, a different approach could be adopted in order to effectively achieve an amalgamation. This involves closing only one of the existing schools and extending the age range of the other to enable it to take both infant and junior aged children. In a technical sense, this does not involve the creation of a new school. Consequently, the competition rules would not apply, regardless of when any proposals were published. This might be felt to be a possible approach to adopt if there were delays in the consultation and decision-making processes which meant that statutory proposals to close both schools and open a new one could not be made before May.

It will be important, as part of the consultation process, to hear the views of staff and governors on the issues and approaches covered in this section of the document.

Whichever route is followed, it is anticipated that any amalgamation of the schools would be implemented on 1 September 2008.

Staffing issues

The members of staff at the Beaconside Schools are employed by their respective governing bodies. Should amalgamation occur, the governing body of the primary school would be the employer of the staff.

Where one organisation effectively takes over from another and provides the same service to the same people, The Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 ('TUPE') apply. Given what is involved in amalgamating the schools, TUPE would apply in both scenarios referred to above.

Where TUPE applies, staff employed at a school at the time it closes have their contracts of employment and statutory continuity of employment automatically transferred to the employing governing body. Employees and their representatives will be fully informed and consulted as part of this consultation exercise and as things progress further.

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 to provide additional teaching accommodation. Ideally though, some work would be undertaken to improve the school's ability to operate effectively as a single all-through primary school, and the governors of both schools regard this as being essential to its success. This work might well focus on staff/administration facilities and access arrangements. Funding to achieve such changes is likely to come from both the locally controlled voluntary aided capital programme (LCVAP) 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 particularly significant factor here. Furthermore, this review of the current arrangements in no way suggests that the schools have not been working well as they do currently operate effectively. The key issue is whether the primary education provision serving East Penrith 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, along with meetings on 28 February 2007, additional information available and individual discussions which are on offer (all outlined in the next 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 and decision making process



The consultation period

The consultation is based on this document. The consultation period starts on Thursday 8 February 2007. The final date for letting us have your thoughts and comments is **Friday 16 March 2007**.

How to express your views

This consultation document has been very widely distributed. It has gone to the Beaconside 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.

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

Meetings

A series of consultation meetings will be held on **Wednesday 28 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
Junior School Council (Infant pupils' views will be gleaned more informally)	3.00pm - 3.30pm	SEN Room Beaconside Junior School
Staff of both schools	3.45pm - 4.45pm	Beaconside 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. They 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 what is said in 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 decisions regarding the potential amalgamation.

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, the legal processes referred to in the section on 'Achieving amalgamation' on page 8 will need to be followed. As stated earlier, 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 Beaconside 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.

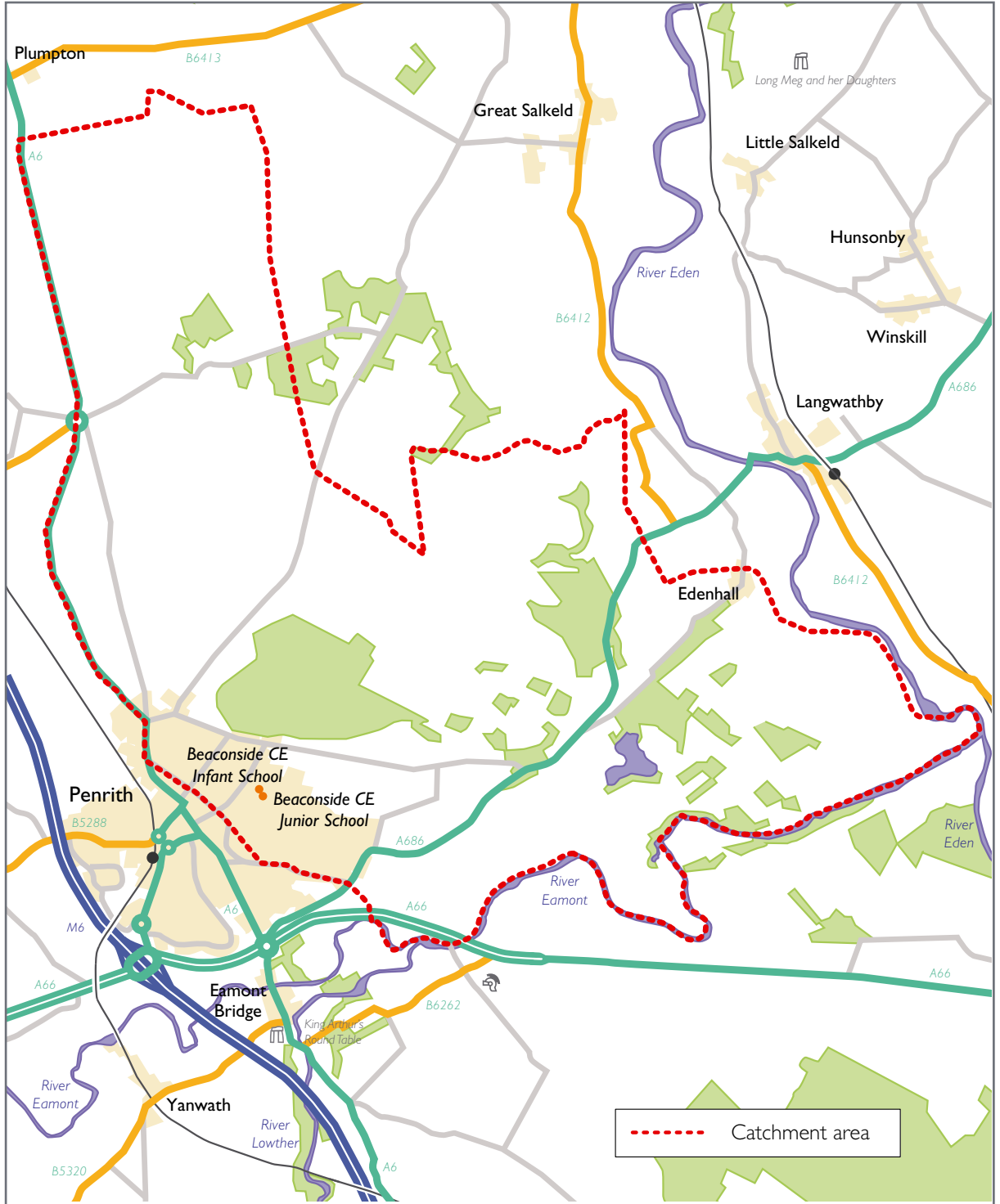
All of these documents are available to view or download on our website:

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

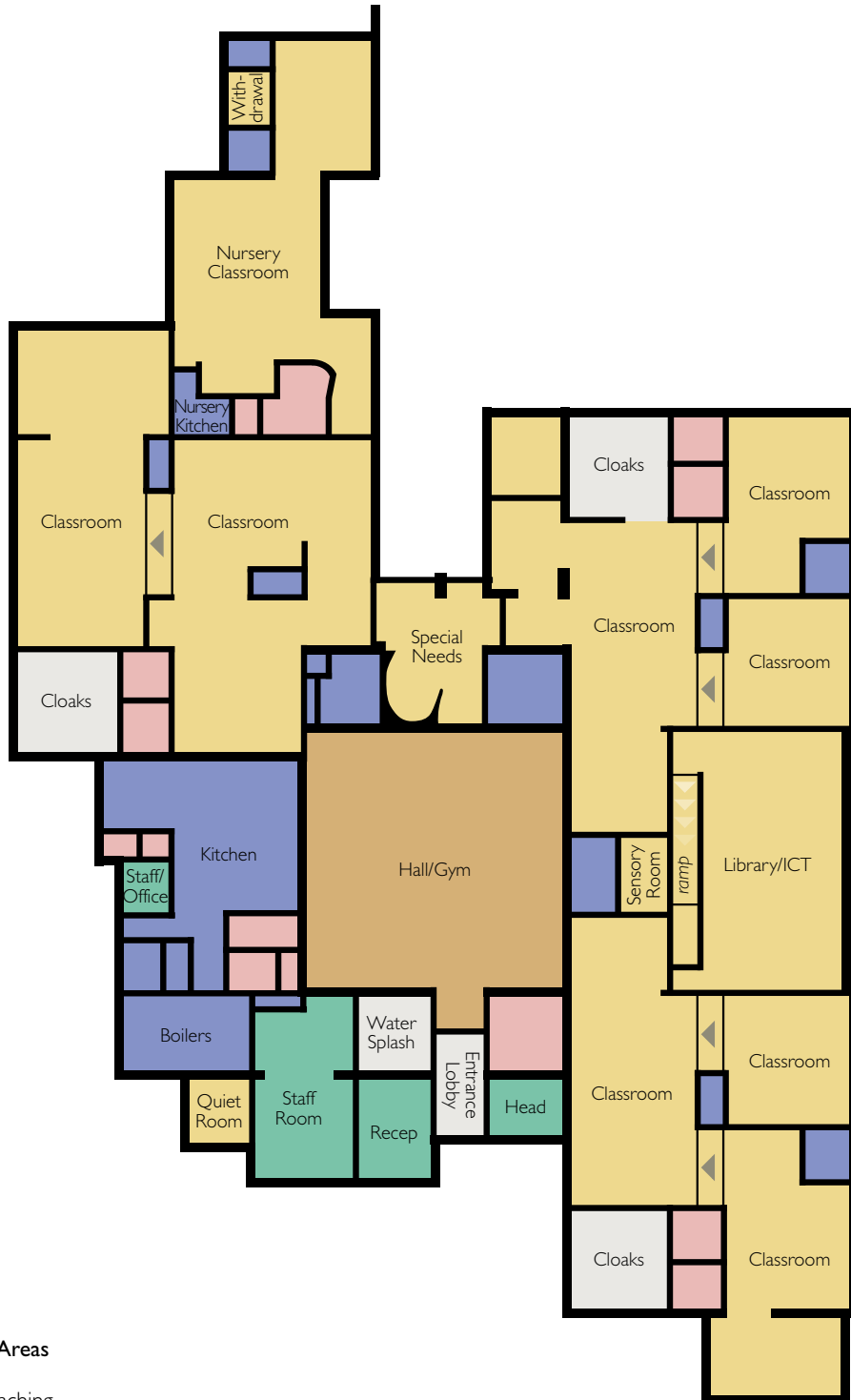
If you do not have access to the internet, we can provide you with a printed copy of any sections of the additional information. All you need to do is to call the School Organisation Project Team on 01228 606013. Alternatively, requests can be made by fax to 01228 606016, or by post to the following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

Freepost RRBS – RLBG – GZGL
CUMBRIA COUNTY COUNCIL
School Organisation
18 Portland Square
CARLISLE
CA1 1PE

Appendix A - Catchment area of Beaconside Infant and Junior Schools



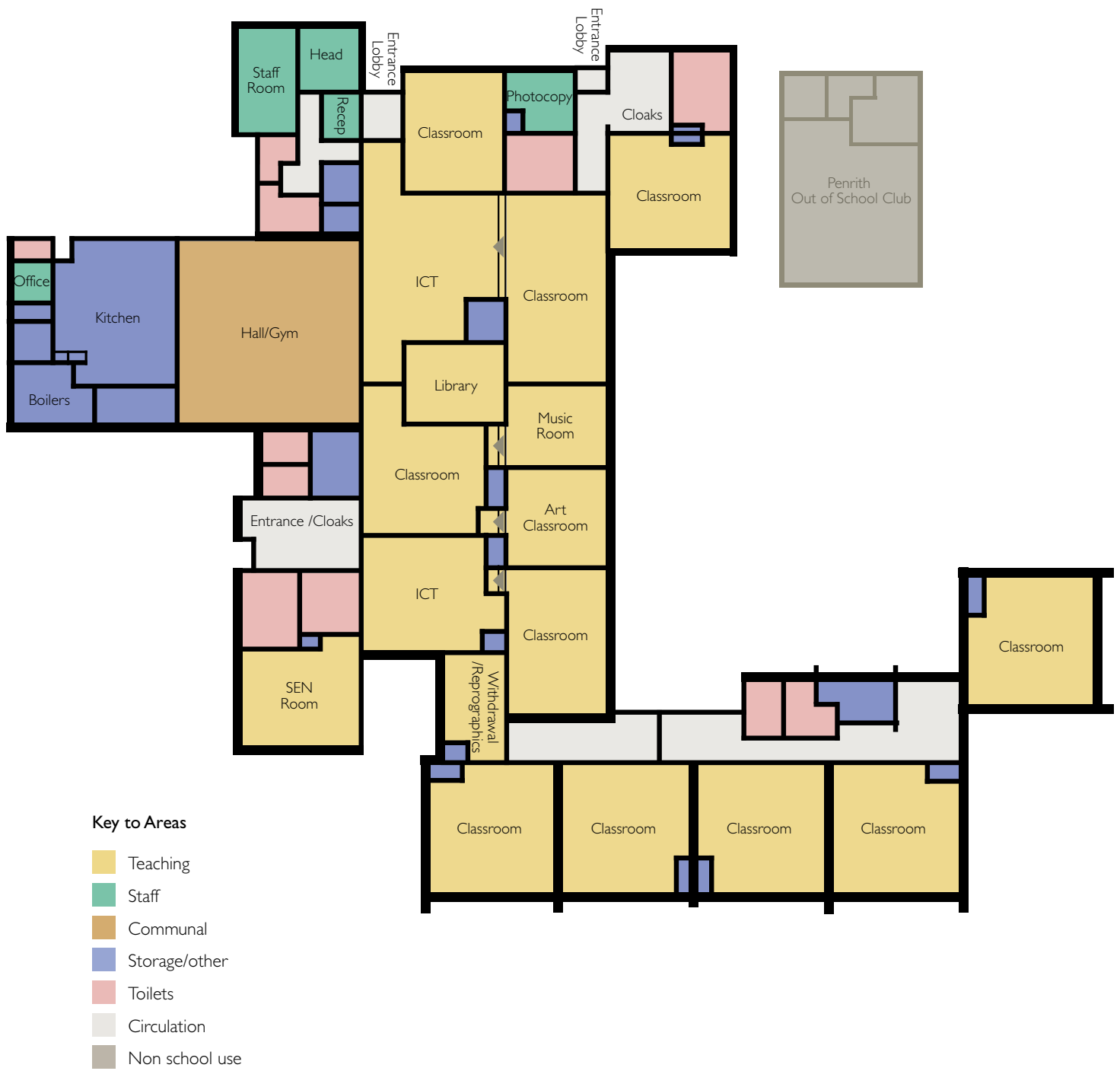
Appendix B - Accommodation plan: Beaconside Infant School



Key to Areas

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

Appendix C - Accommodation plan: Beaconside Junior School



Questionnaire

Planning primary education for East Penrith

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 16 March 2007**.

Q1 Given the current situation, and the information contained in this document, do you think it appropriate for Beaconside Infant School to amalgamate with Beaconside 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)?		
		Beaconside Infant (✓)	Beaconside 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:

Freepost RRBS - RLBG - GZGL
 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.



School Organisation Project Team

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