

Consultation
on proposed
changes to Captain
Shaw's and
Waberthwaite
Schools



What this consultation is about

This consultation document is about primary education in the Captain Shaw's / Waberthwaite Schools' catchment areas. The council is proposing that Captain Shaw's School closes and the catchment boundaries for each school are combined. Pupils currently at Captain Shaw's would be transferred to Waberthwaite School.

The county council wants to hear your views on this proposal before deciding whether to make a change.

We are proposing this because of overall declining pupil numbers in the area and concerns about the ongoing quality of education we are able to offer to local children. Small and declining numbers of pupils can affect the viability of a school and its capacity to deliver a high standard of education to its pupils. Numbers on roll at Captain Shaw's School have now fallen to such a low level that the county council feels the school may be unable in the future to provide a broad, high quality educational experience for its pupils.

Who this consultation is for

This document is aimed at parents, staff, governors and everyone else with an interest or stake in primary education in the area.

How you can respond to this consultation

Use the form at on the back pages of this document to let us know what you think or you can attend the consultation events on 29 November at Captain Shaw's School and 1 December at Waberthwaite School to talk to us face to face.

If you would like any further information in the meantime, please contact the School Organisation Team on:

T: **01228 226013**

E: school.organisation@cumbria.gov.uk

The deadline for responses is 16 December 2011

Let us know what you think!

We hope that you will take the time to read this consultation document carefully. We both feel it is really important to hear from parents, governors, pupils and other local people about the proposals we are making before we make decisions. We look forward to hearing your views on our proposals.

Yours sincerely



Duncan Fairbairn
Cabinet Member - Children's Services



Julia Morrison
Corporate Director - Children's Services

More information

What is the current situation?

Captain Shaw's

Captain Shaw's School caters for pupils aged between 4 and 11 and has a net capacity of 56 pupils. It had 16 pupils on roll in September 2011 but numbers have been falling since September 2005. The school is housed in a two storey building which was constructed in 1830. Waberthwaite and Haverigg catchment areas abut that of Captain Shaw's.

Waberthwaite School

Waberthwaite School caters for pupils aged between 4 and 11 and has a net capacity of 56 pupils. It had 38 pupils on roll in September 2011. Numbers have been falling since September 2003 but to a lesser extent than Captain Shaw's. The school is housed in a traditional style build which was constructed in 1936.

	January									
Year	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12*
Captain Shaw's no. of pupils on roll	28	32	33	31	26	24	18	20	17	16
Waberthwaite no. of pupils on roll	54	45	47	37	37	35	35	30	31	38

*Sept 11 intake

Impact of declining pupil numbers

The question of whether two schools could be maintained in the area arose in 2007. Rural areas can be expected to have schools with small pupil numbers due to low concentrations of population. Pupil numbers change over time and declining populations can put further pressure on what are already small schools, largely because school budgets are mainly based on pupil numbers. As numbers fall, so does a school's budget, and that can make it difficult for the governors and the Headteacher to appoint the appropriate staff, to buy teaching and learning resources, and to generally improve the school.

The county council protects and supports small schools through the way it funds them. In addition, the Government wishes to protect rural schools and has a presumption against their closure. However, all schools clearly need to be educationally strong and viable.

At Captain Shaw's the number of pupils has declined over a number of years. Despite the best efforts of governors, staff and parents it has not been possible to maintain pupil numbers at a level that would make the school educationally or economically sustainable.

The county council feels a point has been reached where the situation must be reviewed and the closure of Captain Shaw's and its pupils transferring to Waberthwaite School should be considered.

Some important issues to consider

Educational issues

There is a view that young children thrive in the intimate atmosphere of a small primary school. The county council agrees that this can be the right environment for some children and that some parents very much value the positive experience that a small school can offer. However, once numbers fall to a very low level, it is extremely difficult for such schools to offer a broad and balanced curriculum.

The inspection report for Captain Shaw's School can be found online at www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Inspection-reports/Schools. The school last had a full inspection in November 2009 and was rated as good.

Since then, however, pupil numbers have continued to decline and there have been several changes in staffing. When a school has so few staff, any one change can be unsettling for children and can impact on the continuity of their education. The school is currently staffed by teachers on a fixed term contract and a part-time Executive Headteacher who is also permanently employed at another school in the area.

Waberthwaite School last had a full Ofsted inspection in 2008, when it was rated as good (www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Inspection-reports/Schools). An interim inspection in January 2011 confirmed the 2008 judgement. Waberthwaite has four permanent members of staff to support children's learning - a full time headteacher, a full time teacher, a part time higher level teaching assistant and a part time teaching assistant. The school also buy in from Learning Support Services a senior teaching assistant to work with children with SEN.

Financial issues

Budgets for running costs (staff salaries, heating, lighting, etc) are devolved to schools, largely on the basis of the number of pupils on roll; that means more pupils equals more money for the school.

Approximately 80%-85% of a school's budget is spent on staff, and this can be larger in smaller schools. Consequently, any significant changes in pupil numbers are likely to affect staffing levels. There is a point at which the ability to provide adequate staff to maintain a rich learning environment and remain financially viable is no longer possible.

Captain Shaw's School's budget position gives cause for concern. Whilst the budget for the current financial year has been approved, longer term it is uncertain whether the governors will be able to operate within their budget allocation. Schools must operate a budget which is in credit, or have in place an appropriate deficit reduction plan to return to credit in the near future. No such plan exists for Captain Shaw's, despite indications that the school will be in deficit next year. At this stage, it is unclear whether the school will be able to remain within budget without compromising educational provision.

Waberthwaite School has had a budget deficit for four years, which is predicted to rise further this year. However, the school has a recovery plan in place which should, together with an allocation of 'Schools in Financial Difficulty' funding, bring them back into surplus.

Community issues

When considering a school closure, the county council must take account of the overall effect that it would have on the local community.

Captain Shaw's is a rural school, and village life would clearly not be enhanced by its closure. But fundamentally, schools are about providing a good quality education that allows children to reach their full potential. This needs to be taken into account when the non-educational benefits of the school to the village and wider community are considered.

Alternative schools

As mentioned earlier, there are two primary school catchment areas abutting the catchment area of Captain Shaw's School. Whilst parents are able to express preferences for a place at any school, catchment areas remain important. This is because they affect priorities concerning admissions to schools and entitlement to school transport. If Captain Shaw's were to close, its catchment area would be incorporated into the catchment area of Waberthwaite School.

Parents of pre-school age children, and others with concerns are encouraged to express their views on the proposed revised catchment boundaries were Captain Shaw's School to close.

Please note a separate consultation on catchment boundaries will have to be held to fulfil legal requirements placed on the council. The information and feedback from this consultation will aid and inform that process. In the meantime the transition arrangements covered later in this document will apply if the closure of Captain Shaw's School proceeds.

School transport

Under the statutory element of the transport policy, free transport is provided to a child's nearest or catchment school if the distance between their home and the school exceeds the statutory walking distance. The statutory walking distance is two miles for children under eight and three miles for older children. The distance is measured by the nearest available walking route. For a route to be available, it must be one which a child, accompanied by an adult, could be expected to walk with reasonable safety. Where the distance is below the statutory walking distance and parents consider their route to school to be an unsafe walking route, they may ask for it to be assessed and may be eligible for free

transport if the route is deemed unsafe.

Looking to the future

Could the situation improve?

Whilst pupil projections indicate that there may be an increase in pupil numbers at Captain Shaw's over the next few years, the county council's view is that the rise will not be enough to provide the stability a school requires if it is to thrive and develop. Because the number of children living in the area is so small, it is almost inevitable that there will be ongoing uncertainty about the school's roll and, therefore, its budget. This may make appointing permanent staff more difficult and is unlikely to give the school's management much scope to develop the curriculum.

The county council recognises that the closure of a school impacts on its local community. Moving children to Waberthwaite, however, where there is sufficient teaching space available to meet the requirements of both existing catchment areas, would provide added certainty. More children on roll with fewer overheads – such as the cost of two Headteachers – may mean that a greater proportion of the available funding can be spent on teaching and learning resources. A larger budget also provides greater flexibility which allows schools to better manage any fluctuation in pupil numbers that may occur in the future. As distressing as a school closure can be, it can be the best option to preserve the quality of education on offer.

Transition arrangements

Should the proposals be agreed the council would look at the ways that it could best support pupils and parents over the transition period. Taking parental preference into account it would seek to place pupils into Waberthwaite School for the start of September 2012. This would avoid moving children part way through an academic year. Transport for current Captain Shaw's pupils would be provided in line with the county council's home to school transport policy in the event that Captain Shaw's School closes.

Next steps

The School Organisation and Governance Regulations mean that, if a council proposes to close a school, change an age range or increase the capacity above a certain point, their proposal must be published in a statutory notice.

There are five stages to the statutory process which must be followed:

Consultation

The issue of this document marks the beginning of a period of consultation during which the views of any interested parties are sought. These views will be considered before any move to the more formal stages of the process.

Publication

Dependent upon the outcome of the consultation, a decision to proceed to issue a statutory notice must be made by Cumbria County Council's Cabinet.

Representation

A six week period is allowed for statutory notices for school closure. Following publication of statutory notices representations can be made on the proposals.

Decision

Within two months after the six week representation period ends, the county council must make a decision on the proposal.

Implementation

If the proposal is approved then it is likely that Captain Shaw's School would legally close on the 31 August 2012 and pupils would transfer to Waberthwaite School on 1 September 2012.

Timetable

- Consultation *1 November - 16 December 2011*
- Decision: Cumbria County Council considers the results of the consultation and decides whether to publish a Statutory Notice *12 January 2012*
- Publication of the Statutory Notice *27 January 2012*
- Closing date for responses to the Statutory Notice *9 March 2012*
- Final decision by Cumbria County Council *15 March 2012*
- Possible implementation of any changes *31 August 2012*

Consultation Events

You are invited to a consultation event so that you can find out more about the options. A meeting for staff and governors will be held from 3.45pm.

From 6pm there will be opportunity for **parents and members of the public** to speak informally with council officers on a 1-2-1 basis. This will be followed at 7pm when there will be a presentation from council officers and an opportunity for questions. Events will be held:

Location	Date and time
Captain Shaw's School	29 November 2011 3.45pm - 8.00pm
Waberthwaite School	1 December 2011 3.45pm - 8.00pm

Your Response

As stated earlier in this document, we welcome your views on this proposal and all observations and objections will be considered very carefully before a decision is made to progress any further with this proposal.

The consultation runs until 16 December 2011 and you can respond by completing the questionnaire in this document or writing separately to:

**Cumbria County Council
School Organisation
Parkhouse Building,
Kingmoor Business Park,
Carlisle
Cumbria CA6 4SJ**

By Email to: school.organisation@cumbria.gov.uk

On-line at: (Use the link below to complete the questionnaire contained in this document on-line):
www.opinionsuite.com/cumbria/cumbria-county-council

It is not possible to enter into individual correspondence.

Captain Shaw's and Waberthwaite Schools

Reply slip - Please send by 16 December 2011 to Cumbria County Council, School Organisation, Parkhouse Building, Kingmoor Business Park, Carlisle, Cumbria CA6 4SJ.

1. We need to know some basic information so that we can accurately report back to the council's Cabinet. Please tick those boxes that apply.

Are you a	Captain Shaw's	Waberthwaite School
Parent/carer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Member of Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Governor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Other (please specify) _____

2. Given the situation regarding pupil numbers, available resources and educational quality covered in this document do you agree or disagree that the best option would be to close Captain Shaw's School and transfer pupils to Waberthwaite School?

Agree Disagree

3. Do you agree that Captain Shaw's and Waberthwaite Schools' catchment areas should be combined?

Yes No

Supporting and additional comments can be entered overleaf if required.

Name _____ Date _____

(Please print)

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Please provide any supporting / additional comments below: