

Proposed Amalgamation of Fairfield Infant and Junior Schools, Cockermouth

General

Q: What would the advantages be to pupils and families?

A: (extracted from responses to the consultation)

- The amalgamation would simplify logistics i.e avoiding errors in the online admissions system and allow children to follow-through their primary education to the end of KS2 without the need for application to a Junior school.
- Organisational advantages would enable the budget to be prudently and carefully targeted for the benefit of all pupils
- All proposals make sound educational and economical sense.
- The older children will provide wonderful role models.
- The financial savings can be used to enhance the teaching and learning of all pupils and the school can develop administrative expertise throughout the existing staff.
- The shared & consistent vision & values would ensure that parents of the community have a confidence in the school
- Expertise currently in the school could be better targeted across the age range. The career opportunities offered in a 3-11 school would be more attractive to applicants when staffing vacancies arise in the future.

Q: Will the name of the new school include Fairfield in it?

A: The name of the school will be decided by the governing body. Though it is believed that the new name will simply be Fairfield Primary School.

Q: When will the decision be made?

A: The process, being a statutory duty, has to be kept to a strict deadline:

End of consultation 14 December 2012

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

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

End of Representation 12 April 2013

Final decision on proposed amalgamation – 30 May 2013

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

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

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

Q: Why close one school and not both?

A: At the time of the initial proposal to amalgamate it was Government policy that if both schools closed then an Academy would need to be formed in their

place. The school considered converting to academy status but decided not to pursue this course. Having experienced the benefits of joint working, the schools decided to go to consultation on amalgamation. Since then, however, Government policy has changed and an Academy would no longer need to be formed if both schools chose to close. The process is simply a 'paper' exercise and though the Junior School would 'close' the school building would still remain.

Q: Why close the Junior School and not the Infant School?

A: The retirement of the Headteacher of the Junior School and the 'Outstanding' rating of the Infant School guided the decision to propose closure of the Junior School as opposed to the Infant School

Q: Due to dual sites, would the leadership team be weakened by the lack of presence of a Headteacher on site?

A: No, there are a number of examples across the county of where infant and junior schools have been amalgamated, but the buildings are not linked. The new governing body will work out an appropriate leadership team that will ensure leadership across the site.

Q: Would pupils not still believe they were in separate schools and would still be transferring to another site after Key Stage 2?

A: Potentially, the pupils will likely see very little difference to their education, and as they will be moving buildings they may still feel they are 'transferring'.

Q: It is said there would be savings due to amalgamation but surely it would not be practical to share all facilities and equipment.

A: Savings due to amalgamation will likely come from having 1 head teacher, shared backroom staff and potentially other contracted services.

HR/Staffing

Q: Will staff automatically be given a post in the new school? - I am concerned about staffing/jobs for all staff at both schools.

A: Staff will be moved into the new staffing structure using the Management of Change procedural guidance in the following way:

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

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

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

It is considered that there is no matching for any roles which score less than 50% and therefore will be filled through the normal recruitment processes.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A: They should discuss this with their Headteacher to see if their fears could be alleviated.

Note: Alternative Employment Programme is for those that are at risk of redundancy which was not the issue raised in this question. Occupational Health may be able to advise on the movement of staff if individual circumstances indicated that a referral was felt necessary.

Q: What support is available for staff who may have concerns about the proposed amalgamation?

A: Staff can discuss any concerns with the Headteacher and in addition there are confidential counselling/support services which are available for support staff and teaching staff. The helpline is a source of information, support and professional help on a range of subjects, free phone telephone number: **0800 282193**.

Support staff can contact the Employee Assistance Programme which is a free, confidential service for employees, their partners and/or immediate family members (living under the same roof). It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, online or by telephone. The helpline is a source of information, support and professional help on a range of subjects, free phone telephone number: **0800 282193**.

There is a similar worklife support telephone line for Teaching staff on **0800 856148** or contact Gillian Martin, the local authority HR Manager who will assist, where possible, with any concerns. Telephone 01228 221231

Q: Is there an assumption that the Infant School Headteacher will become the new Headteacher?

A No, a set process would be followed in that for a head if there was a 75% match and one post holder, there would be a non competitive interview with a threshold for appointment being decided in advance at which the applicant would need to also meet the essential criteria and a selection of the desirable criteria set out by the governing body, for the post in the new staffing structure.

Q: Would the Headteacher post be a new position?

A: Until the decision has been made by Cabinet whether or not to go forward with the amalgamation, a new governing body has been formed and a new school structure has been established it will not be clear as to whether the Headship position will be a 'new' post.

Q: Is the position of Headteacher of an Infant School comparable with being Headteacher of a larger Primary School?

A: There is a certain range of skills and knowledge that is needed to be a Headteacher, regardless of the type of school. It is also common for Headteachers to move successfully between different sizes and age ranges of school.

Q: Will all Fairfield Infant staff be automatically safe and Junior staff have to apply for jobs, as it is the Junior School that will close?

A: All jobs will be looked at as a whole. It is up to the governing body to decide on staffing matters.

Q: Will there be senior staff on both sites?

A: This decision will be made by the governing body the county council has no control on staffing structure, however, they are available to help and advise.

Governing Body

Q: Who would be on the new governing body and how would it be formed?

A: With regard to the guidance in 'School Reorganisation - Management during transition ', when for example, a junior school is closing and the remaining infant school is extending its age range, the governing body of the closing school would be disbanded whilst the infant governing body would remain. However, any governor from either governing body(GB) who wishes to be part of the GB can easily be incorporated under the new Constitution Regulations. These allow for a GB to appoint co-opted governors (no limit on numbers) once the statutory places have been filled.

Q: Would there be an election process?

A: Only as required should there be remaining vacancies as defined by the new constitution regulations once the ' slotting in' process as described above has been carried out.

Budget / National Funding Formula

Q: Is this consultation because of the National Funding Formula

A: The proposed amalgamation of the Fairfield Infant and Junior School has no connection to the new National Funding Formula.

Q: Will the Funding Formula allocations be distributed evenly over Key Stages?

A: The school's governing body will decide how they spend the allocated amount.

Q: How will the budget work up to and following amalgamation?

A: Helen Hamilton is the finance advice for the county council and she would be asked to contact the schools.

Q: Will the budgets of the schools be combined?

A: A new budget for the amalgamated school would be calculated.

Q: Would the wrap-around provision in the Infant School come out of the new school budget?

A: It is a governing body decision as to how they spend the school budget.