



**Children and Young People's Services**

**Proposal to Amalgamate Clunbury and Lydbury**

**North Schools:**  
**Consultation Document**

Issued 7 March 2008

Shropshire County Council wishes to hear the views of the community on bringing Clunbury and Lydbury North Schools together, and if so what form the proposals should take.

**Initial consultation meetings:**

**Staff 4pm,**

**Governors 5pm,**

**Parents and other members of the Lydbury North**

**School community 6.30pm,**

**17 March 2008 at the School.**

(Note: there is a meeting for parents and other members of the Clunbury school community 6.30pm, 18 March 2008 at Clunbury School)

## **Introduction**

This Consultation Document sets out proposals for the possible amalgamation of Lydbury North and Clunbury Schools. The consultation document also includes a timetable for the consultation process and details on how to respond to this stage of the process.

This consultation document sets out a selection of basic facts in order to inform the consultation. It is not intended to provide all the possible relevant facts about this proposal and submission of other relevant information is welcomed and encouraged through the consultation process. Officers will help within the law and available resources to find or extract helpful facts or data whether it argues for or against the proposals. Although the information in the document is believed to be correct, any proposed corrections with evidence will be incorporated and acknowledged in the report at the end of the consultation period, and alternative interpretations of data will be reported along with views and opinions.

Consultation is being undertaken whilst the proposals are still at the formative stage. No final decisions have been taken and the options presented in this paper are provided merely as illustrations of solutions to the issues faced by the Council. Other proposed solutions will be given full consideration.

The purpose of consultation is to test the accuracy of the facts, uncover and investigate additional information, and assess the significance of what is brought forward. There is an opportunity to collect the views and opinions of those informed by the debate. A consultation exercise is neither a competition nor a referendum, but is intended to gather evidence to allow decision makers to make a full and informed choice between alternatives.

## **Proposal to Amalgamate Clunbury and Lydbury North Schools**

Lydbury North and Clunbury Schools are two very small primary schools in a rural part of south Shropshire. Both schools teach the whole primary age range of 4-11 years old. Each school has some problems with the suitability of the buildings for a modern curriculum. The current Lydbury North site has a detached playing field. It is proposed to bring the two schools together to create a single institution to serve the two catchment areas. The detail of how this might be accomplished is part of the current consultation process. A map of the catchment areas of the schools will be available at the consultation meeting and afterwards via the school.

## **Background to the Proposals**

Clunbury and Lydbury North Schools are Church of England Voluntary Aided schools, which means that the schools have a religious character. They also have links with the Church of England Diocese of Hereford which owns the buildings. The Governing Bodies each employ the staff of their school directly and control the admission to their school within the School Admissions Code of Practice.

Clunbury has 65 children in a building with only 60 workplaces, (although normally there would not be more than 56 pupils admitted). This is as a result of a temporary bulge, and numbers at Clunbury are currently forecast to decrease to around 52 by 2012. Lydbury North has 41 pupils in a school with a maximum capacity of 60

(although normally there would not be more than 56 pupils admitted). This number is forecast to remain at about this level for the foreseeable future.

Both schools were judged to be “good“ by Shropshire County Council in 2007. Clunbury School was judged as “as a good school with outstanding features” by Ofsted in 2007. Lydbury North has just been inspected by Ofsted and judged as “good”. The proposal is to bring the two schools together as equals, to create a new school community to serve the combined catchment area including the two villages which currently have schools, and the other settlements in the area.

There is no definitive technical legal process for bringing two schools together in an amalgamation. As well as considering whether the schools should be brought together, the consultation will also explore the best way to make the change. The three options are:

- Close the Lydbury North School and expand the Clunbury School to take all the pupils;
- Close the Clunbury School and expand the Lydbury North School to take all the pupils;
- Close both schools and open a new school.

In all three cases, the consultation also needs to consider the location of the combined school, whether this is on one of the existing sites or elsewhere. It is proposed that the new school should be able to take up to 120 pupils, in four classes, although the projected numbers suggest there would usually be between 90 and 100 pupils in the school. This recognises the rural nature of the area served by the schools, and would mean that there would be no further review of the school in the foreseeable future.

If the catchment area of the new school was unchanged and the selected site was towards the south west of the catchment, some houses in the north and north east of the catchment would be more than six miles from the new school. The reverse would also be true, of course. This would still be within the Council’s policy, however, because these homes would have the option to send children to a closer school within six miles should they choose, and would be eligible for free home to school transport.

If the third method was chosen, there would be an opportunity, if there was local support, to change the character of a new school by having a “competition” to find a body to run it. This could be a foundation composed of local parents and/or businesses, a church or other religious body.

## **Why are we making these proposals?**

Shropshire County Council is keen to ensure that there is a sustainable, accessible network of primary school education across the County. Pupil numbers have dropped over recent years and will reduce further in the next few years, so that there will be 3,400 fewer pupils by 2012 compared to 2001. This in turn means that there will be a large number of unfilled places in Shropshire primary schools, up to 5,540 by 2012. Unfilled places mean both a reduction in government grant and an extra cost to the service. If Shropshire County Council does not address this in a planned way, there is a danger that individual schools could fail, affecting the quality of education for all children.

Shropshire County Council has adopted a new Vision for Shropshire Primary Schools of the Future which sets out key characteristics for successful schools. There is also a new Primary School Organisation Policy, which is summarised below. Both these documents are available in full at

<http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/youngpeople.nsf/open/29F4D9462121DA1080257359004A7B35> or through your local school, and were summarised in the leaflet “Shropshire Primary Schools for the Future: Proposed Changes and How They Might Affect You”. The current proposals for school organisation have been developed through implementation of the new policy.

## **Shropshire Primary School Organisation Policy**

The new policy is based on five principles: a sustainable network of primary schools serving communities; high quality, inclusive provision; access from every Shropshire home; opportunities for life-long learning and support for families, and; support for geographically isolated communities.

These principles then give rise to a number of policy statements which say that:

- Shropshire children should have access to a primary school within 6 miles (or 45 minutes travelling time) of their home address in rural areas and 2 miles in urban areas;
- Schools should normally have at least 92 pupils, but where this would mean homes would be more than six miles from a school smaller schools should be supported. The preferred (but not exclusive) sizes of schools are 4 or 7 classes;
- Schools should normally cover the whole primary age range, but separate infant and junior schools are acceptable if an amalgamation would result in too large a school (normally over 420 pupils in the medium term);
- There should be at least maintenance of the proportion of primary school places in schools with a religious character, and existing early years providers should not be replaced wholesale by maintained nurseries. Other commissioning models, such as foundation schools, will be considered;
- Schools should be inclusive of children of all abilities and backgrounds;
- The new network should be developed over time to provide access to other services, including childcare, family support and lifelong learning.

## **The Review Process**

Once the County Council agreed the new policy, officers reviewed every school against the policy criteria. Lydbury North and Clunbury schools were identified as being small. However, it was recognised that the schools are relatively nearby and serve similar, rural areas. It was therefore proposed to consult on bringing the schools together rather than proposing the closure of one or both and the dispersal of the pupils. As noted above, the technical legal route to amalgamation is part of the consultation, but the intention and feeling of the process is to create a single school which draws from the strengths of each school and is an equal partnership.

Schools between 50 and 100 pupils (the range into which a combined school would fall) are characterised by Ofsted as small schools. In 2000, they reported that this

group, while not performing academically better collectively than larger schools with the same intake, were highly prized by parents for their ethos and family feeling. Schools up to 50 pupils, which Ofsted characterise as being very small schools, were reported as being more vulnerable in terms of standards and resources and over represented in the group of schools with poor inspection outcomes. That is not to say that any particular very small school is not performing well or will do poorly in the future. Ofsted were reporting that there is a greater risk associated with very small schools than slightly larger schools. This report is available at <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/assets/837.pdf> .

## **Community and Environmental Appraisals**

Bringing the two schools together will have some positive community effects. Pupils and adults, through extended schools activities, will socialise with peers from a larger community area. The Council will be better able to invest in facilities to benefit pupils and in the community of a larger school, which will be known to remain viable for an extended period. However, as at least one of the school sites which will be vacated, there will be some residents who will be concerned about the effect this will have on nearby services and the community.

One of the aims of the consultation is to collect views and information on these concerns so that Members can take decisions on the basis of full information. It should be noted that there are many viable and vibrant communities in Shropshire which already share a primary school with another settlement. Recent work carried out by Professor Reynolds of Plymouth University on the effect of small closures in Wales indicated that after a short period teachers, pupils and parents felt process of amalgamation into slightly larger schools to be overwhelmingly positive. However, Professor Reynolds also reminded decision makers that “the needs of children –not their parents, communities or any other interests – should be considered above all others. In public discussions, media debate and general discourse on this issue, whether the educational interests of the children are being served must become the acid test of closure plans, and crucially of any opposition to those plans”.

There might also be some environmental benefits from an amalgamation. Removing at least one of the school sites and building more efficient buildings will save carbon emissions and reduce pollution. This might be offset to some extent, or completely, or even be more than offset by the fact that some children who currently walk to school might travel by vehicle in the future. This effect is often less than is first thought, because by providing shared transport some children who currently travel by car might change to shared transport. At the moment, only a small percentage of pupils walk or cycle to school in any case.

Calculations undertaken by Shropshire County Council indicate that the additional CO2 emissions from transport as a result of an amalgamation on to a single site would be about 10.5 tonnes. Estimates using data from West Mercia Supplies are that Lydbury North School used fuel equivalent to 13.9 Tonnes and Clunbury 21.5 Tonnes in 2006/7 (the last full financial year). These are quite high, particularly given the relatively small pupil numbers and the fact that neither school has a kitchen on site. The environmental effects will also be discussed further and investigated during the

consultation period. Any development of the new school would include increasing the energy efficiency of the buildings.

## **What Would The Proposal to Amalgamate Mean For The Staff Of the Schools?**

There is no reason why your child shouldn't continue to be taught by largely the same team of staff before and after the proposed amalgamation. We would expect that, whatever model for change was adopted, the governing body of the primary school would initially employ all the existing staff, with the exception of headteachers. If the new school was a Foundation or Voluntary Aided school, the employees of the current schools would all become employees of the Governing Body. However, there would be no break in service and no change in conditions of service. If the new school was a Voluntary Controlled or Community School, the staff would be employed by the Council, but would be under the control of the governing body.

How the Headteacher was selected for the primary school would depend on whether one school was used as the basis of the new school, in which case, if there was a current head of that school they would remain the head of the combined primary school. If there was no permanent head of the school selected to be the basis for the new school, or a new school was formed, there would be a selection process for a new Headteacher. There might also be changes to the administrative and site staff, such as secretaries and caretakers, as the two schools come together. However, this is not always the case, and the final decisions would lie with the Governing Body of the primary school. Shropshire County Council would help any staff who might be displaced from their current post to find suitable alternative arrangements. We have always been successful in this in the past. As time goes on, there will inevitably be changes to staffing levels. As these natural changes happen, we will help any displaced staff find a suitable alternative. There will be full consultation with and support for staff before any decisions, and if the decision is to amalgamate on-going support will be put in place.

## **What About The School Buildings?**

The proposal is to create a four class school with a capacity of 120 pupils but a normal occupancy of between 95 and 105. The location of the combined school will form part of the discussions during the consultation, and if the amalgamation is approved, the form of the new buildings will be part of the discussion with the Governing Body which will run the combined school. The decision on the location is also independent of any decision on which of the three routes to amalgamation is used.

## **Further Information**

Shropshire County Council has dedicated a special section of the Council web site to the Shropshire Primary Schools for the Future school organisation process. This can be accessed from [www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk). We will also continue to send information out to and through schools, and through the media. A senior officer and a member of the County Council's political administration will visit each affected school to explain the proposals to staff, governors and the local community including parents. For parents of children at Lydbury North School, this meeting will take place on 17 March 2008.

## **Making your views known**

Shropshire County Council wants to hear the views of all interested parties, particularly children, their parents and staff. In addition to feedback at the school specific meetings, you will be able to comment on the website ([www.shropshire.gov.uk](http://www.shropshire.gov.uk)), by e-mail ([schools.consultation@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:schools.consultation@shropshire.gov.uk)), letter (to Children and Young People's Services, Shirehall, Abbey Foregate, Shrewsbury, SY2 6ND) or telephone (0845 678 9000).

Shropshire County Council is very keen to hear your views on whether the proposed amalgamation should take place and the reasons for or against, and what method should be used to amalgamate the schools if amalgamation is to take place. In addition, we would be interested to know your views on whether the school should be run by a foundation or as present and whether or not it should have a religious character.

## **Next Steps**

Following the meeting on 17 March, and receipt of views through the consultation process, a report will be presented to Cabinet on 19 May. You will be contacted again through the school when this report is published, explaining what the report's recommendations could mean for your school. If the agreement at that stage is to go forward to the next stage, then there would be a further round of consultation, a further examination of the case to proceed, and if every decision is positive then amalgamation would take place from September 2009.