

**Children's Services Scrutiny Committee  
Wednesday 29 November 2006**

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**THE CLOSURE OF BURTON HILL SCHOOL, MALMESBURY**

**Introduction**

1. On November 8, the Shaftesbury Society issued the following press release:

**MALMESBURY'S SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOL TO CLOSE:  
Charity announces closure of Burton Hill School**

The decline in student numbers and the lack of capital funding has led to the announcement this week that Burton Hill School, in Malmesbury is to close. The special needs school, which is run by the Shaftesbury Society and provides education, therapy and care for 28 boarding and day pupils up to the age of 19 will close at the end of the summer term 2007.

The decision to close the school comes after much uncertainty about the future of the school which has seen the charity carrying out a number of feasibility studies and reviews to try and secure future options.

Speaking about the closure Director of Education Mark Hughes says; "Deciding to close a school like Burton Hill is a very difficult decision and not one that anyone at the charity took lightly. We have worked with the school and outside agencies for some time to investigate alternative ways to prevent this closure, but government policies to include children with special needs in mainstream schools mean that student numbers are declining and will continue to do so. With great reluctance trustees took the decision to agree the closure of the school at an Extraordinary Council meeting on 31 October 2006".

Staff were told of the decision at meetings in the school on Monday (November 6) and the Principal, Harry Dicks is now working with parents and local authorities to support them in finding alternative places for the students to continue their education from September next year.

Commenting on the announcement Harry Dicks said "We are all very sad our type of education for children with severe and complex needs has to cease here in Malmesbury. Burton Hill is a very special place and its pupils have been an important part of this community for many

years. Although we currently have 28 students, next year numbers were expected to drop to 19 because of policies to include more children with special needs in mainstream schools. It is difficult to fund and provide the education, therapy and care young people need at a school of that size. “

2. The following day, the County Council issued the following press release:

“Wiltshire County Council is saddened to learn that Burton Hill School near Malmesbury is to shut at the end of this academic year.

There are a number of pupils at the school which the county council has responsibility for. All of these children have complex needs.

The council's priority now is to find continuing placements for pupils currently at the school.

County council officers are currently reviewing each individual's educational needs, supported closely by the school and other professionals.

Parents from Wiltshire who have a child at Burton Hill will be contacted by an officer shortly.

Bob Wolfson, director of the department for children & education, said: “Wiltshire County Council has enjoyed a good working relationship with the Shaftesbury Society over the years and has valued the service provided by Burton Hill.””

3. These announcements came after months of close working between the Council and the Shaftesbury Society to seek an alternative way forward for the school. Ultimately, however, the Society decided that the forecast number of pupils on roll was too small to justify its continuance.

### **What happens next?**

4. Wiltshire currently has 15 pupils attending the school with 4 of these already planning to leave in July 2007. 13 current pupils attend on a day basis only. The school has met some social care needs with 6 pupils receiving short break overnight stays at the school.
5. The County Council is committed to fulfilling its education and social care duties to the young people at the school. Staff have already attended meetings between the headteacher and parents to identify needs and how these might be met. The headteacher has been asked to convene an Annual Review for each Wiltshire pupil before the end of term. Annual Reviews are a formal part of the procedure for identifying educational needs for statemented pupils. They can involve parents/carers, pupils, school staff and other relevant professionals as necessary. Recommendations from the reviews will go through the usual decision

making processes. Any changes to educational provision will be included in new Statements of Special Educational Need which will be issued to parents. Any changes in social care provision will be summarised in the usual written notifications to parents.

6. It is too early to predict the precise impact of the school's closure on the County Council's budget. The purely educational part of provision is met from the Dedicated Schools Grant and not from the County Council's budget.
7. The closure may affect some performance targets which the County Council has set. In particular, we have been successfully reducing the number of pupils who attend independent special schools outside Wiltshire. This planned reduction may need to be revised next year.
8. The closure of Burton Hill means that the County will have to consider what provision is made for younger pupils who might at some point in the future have required placement at Burton Hill. Enhancing the County's capacity to meet the needs of these pupils in our own mainstream or special schools is already being pursued as part of our Strategy for special educational needs.

**Bob Wolfson**

**Director – Department for Children & Education**

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