

Consultation on the Future of Steeple Langford Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School

Why are the Diocese, the governors and the local authority consulting with you?

We are consulting on the future of the school because after four attempts to appoint a new headteacher we have been unable to attract a suitable candidate. Simultaneously, we are concerned that even were we to be able to appoint a new headteacher, this could become a recurrent problem. We judge that it is time to take stock of the future of the school and to consult with you whether or not we can make it more secure.

Who is being consulted?

1. This document has been circulated to:

- Parents of current pupils of Steeple Langford and Codford schools
- Parents of children in the catchment areas but not yet of school age.
- Governors.
- Staff.
- The Diocese of Salisbury
- The Parish Councils
- Salisbury District Council and West Wiltshire District Council
- The local County Councillors, Mr Ian West and Miss Fleur de Rhe-Philippe.
- The local M.P.s, Mr Robert Key and Dr Andrew Murrison.
- The county secretaries of the relevant trade unions and professional associations.
- Primary Heads Forum.
- Wiltshire Association of Governors.
- Heads and Chairs of Governors of nearby primary schools.

Further copies of this document are available at the schools, the nearest libraries and on the County Council website.

What does the local authority say about small village primary schools?

In its School Organisation Plan, the local education authority is clear on its view on small village primary schools. It contains the following:

The LEA recognises the government's presumption against the closure of village schools, and will not normally bring forward proposals to close a village school unless it can be demonstrated that one or more of the following criteria apply:

- *There is only very limited demand for places at the school from children coming from the designated area.*
- *Standards are low and there is low confidence in the likelihood of improvement.*
- *Recruitment of a headteacher has not proved possible.*
- *The necessary improvements to the school accommodation are either not possible or cost effective.*

- *The school has a deficit budget without realistic prospects of recovery.*

All proposals to amalgamate or close foundation or voluntary aided schools, will be brought forward in consultation with the governing body/ies concerned.

For all schools with fewer than 90 pupils on roll, the LEA will actively encourage the governors at the schools to consider further collaboration and, ultimately, federation with one or more neighbouring schools.

What are the likely numbers of pupils on roll at Steeple Langford?

Steeple Langford	Apr 04 30	Apr 05 37	Apr 06 43	Apr 07 43	Apr 08 36
------------------	--------------	--------------	--------------	--------------	--------------

Therefore, even when Steeple Langford becomes a primary school, we are very unlikely to have sufficient pupils to run more than two classes. As a consequence, pupils will have all their lessons at Key Stage 1 (aged 5, 6 and 7) in one class and all their Key Stage 2 lessons (aged 8,9, 10 and 11) in a second class. There are many other primary schools in Wiltshire with this arrangement; some of them are very successful, while others face difficulties. While there are obvious benefits to a very small school, it is also likely that some parents will have reservations about their child being taught by the same teacher for successive years and in the same class with such a wide age range.

What are the alternatives?

We have been considering a range of options which we have outlined below:

Option A:

To continue to try to find a new headteacher and maintain Steeple Langford as a two class primary school.

We can obviously continue to do this but our concerns are that we will remain unsuccessful and that while the uncertainty goes on, parents will begin to move their children to other schools, in turn shrinking the size of Steeple Langford until it becomes unviable. This option therefore carries a strong risk of eventual closure and is not supported by the governing body.

Option B:

To federate with Codford Primary School.

This option is supported at this time by the Governors of Steeple Langford, the Diocese and Local Education Authority.

The Governors and parents of Codford Primary School have indicated their broad support for exploring the arrangements, but have indicated that there are issues of

finance and accommodation in particular that will need further consultation before they are able to reach a conclusion

In the appendix to this consultation document we have outlined some of the pros and cons of federation and the different models that are available.

The model of federation that is being considered is one in which two classes remain at Steeple Langford, one for Key Stage 1 and the other for Years 3 and 4, with Years 5 and 6 being educated at Codford. In these circumstances, there would be a single headteacher and governing body for the school together with a common curriculum across the federated school. In this way, we could be sure that the youngsters transferred to Year 5 at Codford had a similar curriculum experience to those they will be joining. It also makes it more likely that the Year 5 and 6 pupils could then be educated in single age classes.

The particular advantage of this model is that parents in Steeple Langford could continue to send their youngest children to the local school and to enjoy a small school environment while enabling them to have the benefits of a larger peer group and a wider range of opportunities as they become older. The obvious disadvantage of such a model is that parents may say that if their children are going to end up in Codford anyway they would rather they started school there.

There are other possible models for federation with Codford, but it is unlikely that the headteacher and governors of Codford would be able to support a model in which some Codford pupils were educated on the Steeple Langford site on a full-time basis.

Option C:

The closure of Steeple Langford Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School.

It would be possible to close the school, and for the pupils currently attending it to be provided with places at their nearest available primary school. In some cases this will be Great Wishford, in others it will be Codford. Should parents choose to send their children to other schools, they are of course at liberty to do so but would have to provide transport. The decision on which future school each pupil is entitled to attend is made in accordance with the County Council's transport policy on the basis of distance and that is the journey that is then paid for by the Council.

In the circumstances of the closure of Steeple Langford, we would naturally need to investigate the available accommodation at neighbouring schools and work with the Diocese and the LEA to ensure that this is sufficient in both the short and long term. For this reason, we have printed below the current and projected numbers at each of Great Wishford and Codford Primary schools:

	Apr 2004	Apr 2005	Apr 2006	Apr 2007	Apr 2008
Great Wishford	82	100	115	115	115
Codford	97	92	94	82	77

In addition, we are asking you whether there are any other proposals that might come forward during the period of consultation

We are putting this option forward in case there is a route for the school that those producing this paper had not previously considered. It is perfectly possible for you to have an alternative idea and put that forward to us. If you wish to do this, then please complete the relevant section on the attached document.

If a federation with Codford is established, where will children from Steeple Langford go to for secondary schooling?

If nothing changes, Steeple Langford would be in the Salisbury Designated Area, with secondary transfer by right to Westwood St Thomas School or, for those who qualify, the Salisbury Grammar Schools. Other Salisbury schools would be available through parental preference.

Codford Primary School is in the designated area of Warminster.

If a federation with Codford goes ahead a number of options are possible – the designated area of Kingdown School, Warminster could be extended to include Steeple Langford, or the Steeple Langford pupils could continue to be directed towards Salisbury with the Codford pupils going to Kingdown. In order to support our deliberations we have asked you to express an opinion on this question.

The process of change.

It is important that you understand what will happen as a result of this consultation. Following a six week period (May 28 – July 9) during which you are asked to express your views on these matters, including through a public meeting, a statutory notice will be published outlining the intended future of Steeple Langford Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary School. This proposal will take account of the views that are expressed both at the public meeting and in correspondence received.

The statutory notice will then be published for a period of six working weeks during which views on the proposal can be written to the governors and diocese.

Finally, the Wiltshire School Organisation Committee will consider the proposal, the outcome of this consultation and the responses to the public notice. The Wiltshire School Organisation Committee is a body independent of the County Council which has the power to make the final decisions on statutory proposals. This Committee is made up of representatives of the County Council, Church of England, Roman Catholic Diocese, Foundation and Community School governors and the Learning and Skills Council. In the event that the Wiltshire School Organisation Committee is unable to come to a unanimous view on the proposal, a final decision will be made by the Schools Adjudicator, who is appointed by the Secretary of State.

How to express your views

We want to receive your views on this matter as fully as possible. You can do this by completing the attached reply slip to the consultation document or by attending the public meeting that will be held on Wednesday, 9 June at Codford Primary School. It is being held at Codford to provide an opportunity for Steeple Langford parents to visit Codford and to enable parents from each schools to meet one another.

Summary – Next Steps

You are invited to:

- Consider the information and options set out in the document.
- Ask for further information – to do so please contact Malcolm Dodds at County Hall telephone number 01225 713766, e-mail address malcolmdodds@wiltshire.gov.uk, or the chairs of governors, Mark Shuldham at Steeple Langford or Simon Firth at Codford
- Attend the meeting on 9 JUNE to ask for more information and to make your views known.
- Identify any further options which should be considered.
- If you want to respond in writing do so by no later than 9 JULY 2004, identifying which option you support and why.

Bob Wolfson
Director, Department for Children and Education
Wiltshire County Council

Simon Tong
Director of Education
Diocese of Salisbury

Mark Shuldham and Simon Firth
Chairs of Governors

Response to a Consultation on the Future of Steeple Langford CE VA Primary School

Please give your name and your interest in the future of the school (e.g. current parent, parent of pre-school child, village resident).

1. Are there any other options which should be considered? If so, please give details of your suggestion.

2. Which of the options set out in the consultation document do you support? Please circle your preferred option:

A B C

If you wish to give your reasons for supporting this option then please do so below.

3. If a federation with Codford is formed, where would you want children in Steeple Langford to go to secondary school: Salisbury or Warminster ?

Please return this to:

Director, Department for Children and Education (Ref: MPD/SL), County Hall, Trowbridge, BA14 8JB to arrive no later than 9 JULY 2004.

APPENDIX ON SCHOOL FEDERATION

1. What do we mean by Federation ?

Two or more schools coming together to form a single institution, with one Governing Body, one Headteacher and leadership team, on separate sites and normally in different communities.

2. When and why do Governing Bodies consider federation ?

Federation can be considered at any time as a positive move to secure and enhance a school's situation, providing a better education for all the pupils.

Often – and perhaps unfortunately – federation is considered only when things are difficult. Some of the following circumstances often apply:

- Recruitment problems – it is hard to find a new Head and/or staff and/or governors.
- There is a range of mixed age-group classes and educational standards could be improved by changing these.
- The workload on the Headteacher and teachers is excessive.
- There are budgetary pressures, leading especially to a lack of flexibility
- Pupil rolls are showing signs of falling, perhaps leading to a reduction in the number of classes – often, Governors and Headteachers are concerned by reducing from three classes to two, with the likelihood of a mixed key stage class following
- Class size may be seen as too small to be educationally and/or socially effective
- There may be accommodation issues, such as suitability, adequacy, inability to meet National Curriculum or health and safety requirements.

3. What are the potential advantages of federation ?

- Federation can stabilise the school population and prevent the shrinkage or even closure of a village school, thereby guarding the village's identity
- More access to teacher specialist expertise to support curriculum coordination and planning – teachers don't have to be coordinators for so many subjects. At the same time, a larger team of teachers can support each other better for planning and assessment.
- Fewer mixed age and/or cross-phase classes. Because the size of each year group ('cohort') is increased, classes are more likely to have fewer age groups in them.
- The larger budget and consequent economies of scale mean that more resources can be targeted to particular age groups
- There is an increased likelihood of high quality recruitment of a Headteacher, teachers and other staff, and governors. Simultaneously, it is likely that a reduced

teaching commitment for the Headteacher will enable her/him to concentrate on leadership and management, including monitoring and evaluation of standards

- There are social advantages for the pupils. They will have more opportunity to play and work with peers, and are less likely to be part of a very small year group.

4. And what about the disadvantages ?

- It may prove more difficult for children to establish a whole school ethos
- It is not so easy to manage two sites
- There are advantages – especially in the sense of a ‘family atmosphere’ to a very small school that may be lost – for example, there could be less interaction with other age groups

Several of these disadvantages are examined in more detail in the sections below.

5. What different models of federation are there?

A. DIFFERENT AGES AND KEY STAGES ON DIFFERENT SITES

This is the obvious model, and the one that we already have in Wiltshire at three schools - Brinkworth Earl Danby's, Kennet Valley and Whitesheet. Reception and Key Stage 1 pupils are educated on one site and Key Stage 2 on the other with their own classrooms, space for assembly, meals, play etc.

This model has the following features:

- Staff are based on one site for their daily work
- Headteacher travelling between sites
- Joint Governing Body, initially established to be representative of each community
- Single budget
- Staff meetings held on each site alternately
- Curriculum coordinators working across sites
- Pupils moved to the other site for particular activities and, on occasion, joint days

B. ONE ALL THROUGH PRIMARY SCHOOL AND ONE PROVIDING FOR RECEPTION TO YEAR 4

In this model, a larger all-through Primary School on one site, with all age groups, and a second site with two classes – a Key Stage 1 class and a year 3 and 4 class, with Years 5 and 6 moving to the all-through Primary. There is a model based on these principles in Mere and Hindon

The advantages of this approach for the smaller school are:

- Continued school provision in a village that might otherwise have such small numbers that its existence is threatened
- Younger pupils able to start in small school, with younger pupils only – virtues that are often stated by parents to lead them to want a small school for their children
- Older pupils educated in classes with less range of ages, and therefore better able to meet the needs of the 9-11 year olds – again, an aspect that is often stated by parents who move their children at the end of Year 4

For the larger school, the advantages are:

- The possibility of organising older children into classes with narrower age ranges

and the advantages for both schools are:

- The economies of scale and larger budget that come from being part of a larger school
- Increased numbers for extra-curricular activities etc
- A larger teaching force with greater range of expertise so that curriculum responsibilities can be shared

There is a perceived risk that the parents of children going to the smaller school will see that their children will go to the larger school in due course anyway, and will therefore send them there from the start, thereby taking pupils away from the smaller school, which will simply close. This will depend a great deal on local factors, and especially on parental support for an arrangement which enables their children start school locally in a small school, and this model offers that.