

ARCHDIOCESE OF CARDIFF
GOVERNING BODIES OF ST. HELEN'S CATHOLIC JUNIOR
AND ST. HELEN'S CATHOLIC INFANT & NURSERY SCHOOLS

Proposal to create a 308 place Primary School through the establishment of a new Catholic Primary School created by the amalgamation of St. Helen's Catholic Infant and St. Helen's Catholic Junior Schools following the closure of both schools.

Formal Consultation period:
25th January 2016 to 18th March 2016

Purpose

This report is published in line with the requirements of the Schools Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 and the School Organisation Code, July 2013.

BACKGROUND

The Consultation explained the proposal of the Archdiocese and the governing bodies of St. Helen's Catholic Infant and Junior Schools to create a new Catholic Primary School by amalgamating the two schools.

The consultation process followed Welsh Government guidelines and was an opportunity for local people to learn about the proposal and for the Archdiocese and governing bodies to hear the views of all those with an interest so that they can be taken into account before decisions are made.

THE PROPOSAL

The consultation outlined a proposal to create a 308 place Catholic Primary School through the amalgamation of St Helen's Catholic Infant and St Helen's Catholic Junior Schools.

The school would provide 44 places per year group, which is the same number of places currently provided by the two existing schools. The capacity of the school would be 308 places. The Primary School would, therefore, be no larger or smaller than the two existing schools in terms of the number of places available for children. The amalgamated school would also have a nursery class providing the same number of places currently provided at the infant school.

The proposal is to close both St Helen's Catholic Infant and St Helen's Catholic Junior Schools from 31st December, 2016, with a new Primary School operating on the existing school sites from 1st January 2017, providing for children from age 3-11.

All children on either school roll would transfer onto the roll of the new Primary School from 1st January 2017.

METHODOLOGY

The consultation on the proposal was undertaken with prescribed consultees contained within the *School Organisation Code 2013*. A range of individuals and groups were asked for their views on the proposal including:

- Staff (teaching and non-teaching at St Helen's Catholic Infant and St Helen's Catholic Junior Schools
- Governors and parents/carers of children attending St Helen's Catholic Infant and St Helen's Catholic Junior Schools
- Pupils of St Helen's Catholic Infant and St Helen's Catholic Junior Schools
- Vale of Glamorgan Council
- Vale of Glamorgan Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP)
- Vale of Glamorgan Children and Young People's Partnership and Learning and Skills Partnership
- Community/Town Councils
- Communities First Partnership
- Constituency and Regional Assembly Members (AM)/Member of Parliament (MP)
- Local Councillors
- Rheini dros Addysg Gymraeg (RHAG)
- Welsh Language Commissioner
- Trade Unions
- Neighbouring Primary and Secondary Schools in the Vale of Glamorgan
- Directors of Education in all neighbouring authorities
- Central South Consortium Joint Education Service
- Further and Higher Education Institutions
- Vale of Glamorgan Council
- Welsh Government Ministers
- Local Police and Crime Commissioner
- Diocesan Directors of Education
- Estyn
- Vale of Glamorgan Transportation Department
- Other Catholic Schools in the Vale of Glamorgan
- Catholic parish communities in the Vale of Glamorgan

The consultation ran from 25th January, 2016, to 18th March, 2016.

Formal consultation was conducted through a consultation document and accompanying response form, distributed to prescribed consultees and published on the websites of the Archdiocese of Cardiff and St Helen's Catholic Infant and St Helen's Catholic Junior Schools on 25th January, 2016.

A joint meeting was conducted with the governing bodies of St Helen's Catholic Infant and St Helen's Catholic Junior Schools at St Helen's Parish Hall, Barry, on 25th February, 2016. Drop-in sessions were conducted with parents on 3rd and 5th February at St Helen's Catholic Infant and St Helen's Catholic Junior Schools respectively to enable parents to attend, meet representatives and share their views. These sessions were attended by the Director of Schools for the Archdiocese and senior Council officers. Staff meetings were held at St Helen's Catholic Junior School on 25th January, 2016, and at St Helen's Catholic Infant School on 27th January, 2016.

The publication of a consultation document is central to the process prescribed by Welsh Government for school reorganisation. The consultation document outlined the changes being considered, the rationale for them, details of the consultation exercise and incorporated an individual response form.

RESULTS OF CONSULTATION WITH PARENTS, STAFF AND OTHER KEY STAKEHOLDERS

32 consultation responses were received providing the following responses:-

11 respondents support the proposal

20 respondents do not support the proposal

The negative responses included additional questions raised in respect of the proposal, and these have been addressed under the next Section.

ISSUES RAISED DURING MEETINGS AND IN WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS WITH RESPONSES (R)

STAFFING

- Staff will have been trained to work in either the Foundation Phase or Key Stage 2 and will need to retrain in order for them to work in a different phase.
- R: All teachers in both the Infant and Junior Schools will have been trained as Primary School teachers prior to their qualification. Staff working in any Primary School setting will undertake regular and on-going professional development throughout their careers, which will cover training in the different phases of primary education as well as themes and topics, and leadership and skills development, as appropriate.

- Some staff have chosen to specialise in a particular phase of education such as Foundation Phase and would not want to work in Key Stage 2.
 - R: In many Primary Schools, there will be some staff who specialise in particular phases and spend most of their career teaching or providing support within that age group. Other staff will welcome the opportunity provided by an all-through Primary School to be able to work across different phases, with the appropriate training and support.
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- There is a lack of security of employment if two schools amalgamate.
 - R: As the proposed amalgamation would mean that the new school would continue to use the two existing sites, there is likely to be little or no change to the current staffing numbers. The number of pupils will remain the same and there will be a requirement for administrative staff on both sites. The new single governing body, which will include staff and parent members from both the Infant and Junior Schools, will confirm the staffing structure of the new school.
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- Teachers will need to attend more training courses which will increase costs.
 - R: Teachers in any school setting need to undertake regular professional development. There will always be times when there may be a need for increased amounts of training, for instance, when new initiatives are introduced, such as the Literacy and Numeracy Framework, or the forthcoming changes to the curriculum as a result of the Donaldson Report. Amalgamating two phases of education would not, in itself, lead to more training but should enable the single training budget to be utilised more effectively.
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- Staff will need additional travel time to attend INSET sessions.
 - R: The two school sites are not far apart and the new senior management team would schedule INSET sessions at times and locations that would cause the minimum amount of inconvenience to those attending them.
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- Support staff dealing with Additional Learning Needs pupils will have to work across the two sites.
 - R: Those staff supporting children with particular needs would continue to be working with those children in and around their designated classrooms or teaching areas. There would not be frequent movements of children between the two sites.
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- Early identification of pupils with additional learning needs will be reduced by having one SEN teacher. .
 - R: Much of the early identification of pupils with additional learning needs will take place during nursery and Foundation Phase. The new Headteacher and governing body would therefore target resources and staff accordingly.

- Movement of staff between phases will mean that expertise will not be used effectively
- R: In deploying staff, a Headteacher will always want to take account of relevant expertise, the need for further training and support, the views of the staff concerned and the needs of the school.
- It is believed that support staff in the two schools may be on different pay scales which would be unethical in a single school.
- R: The new governing body would have to investigate this. If this was the case, the governing body would draw up an action plan to harmonise pay scales over an agreed timescale to ensure minimum disruption to staff concerned.
- Greater flexibility and efficiency in the use of staff will mean fewer staff.
- R: There will be one group of staff employed across the two sites by a single governing body. As in any school, staff will be deployed to ensure maximum effectiveness in terms of school improvement, taking into account their experience and expertise, along with their interest in working in particular roles and phases.

EDUCATION OUTCOMES AND STANDARDS

- If a Deputy Headteacher has to spend more time out of the classroom because there is only one Headteacher across the two sites, this will have a negative impact on the quality of learning.
- R: Even when a Headteacher is covering a single site, he or she will be out of school on a regular basis to attend meetings, case conferences, etc. it is part of the standard terms and conditions of a Deputy Headteacher's employment that he or she deputise for the Headteacher whenever necessary. A certain amount of management time will be built into the Deputy Headteacher's job description to reflect the needs of the leadership team. As key a member of the leadership team, the Deputy Headteacher always has a role in monitoring and evaluating standards of learning and teaching in the school. This would not change with amalgamation.
- The Foundation Phase will lose vital support staff and resources. The priority will become the Junior School and the Infant School will suffer through lack of focus.
- R: The governing body and senior leadership team of the new school will ensure that there is an appropriate focus on school improvement across both the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2. The Local Authority and Central South Consortium will hold the governing body to account and will expect it to focus on improvement across the whole school.

- It will be difficult for subject leaders to have an overview of their curriculum area over two sites.
- R: The new Headteacher and Senior leadership team will ensure that there are opportunities for staff to meet for shared briefings and INSET. These sessions, along with appropriate use of ICT, will help staff to maintain an overview of their particular curriculum areas.

CARE, SUPPORT AND GUIDANCE

- How can a single Headteacher give care and support across two sites as he or she needs to know every pupil and to deal with parents' issues immediately?
- R: the proposed new school would have 308 pupils on roll, plus a nursery. There are many Primary Schools that have at least 420 pupils on roll, at which the Headteacher knows every pupil my name. No Headteacher spends all his or her time in school and so would not be available every minute of the school day to respond 'immediately' to parents. Headteachers and governors ensure that the senior leadership team is structured so that there is always a senior member of staff available to deal with urgent situations. Headteachers who operate across more than one site organise their time to ensure that they are available on each site to meet with parents as appropriate. The Headteacher of the most recent Infant/Junior School amalgamation in the Vale of Glamorgan (Dinas Powys Infant and Much Junior Schools) spends time on each site every day and ensures that parents of pupils in both phases can meet with her when necessary.

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

- How will staff having difficulty with a pupil be supported if the Headteacher is not on site?
- R: In any school, there will always be times when the Headteacher is off-site for a variety of reasons. The Headteacher and governing body will ensure that the senior leadership team is structured in such a way that enables staff to access support when dealing with difficult situations.
- Staff will not be able to see a single Headteacher as often as they currently see the two acting Headteachers.
- R: The new Headteacher will organise his/her time to ensure that he/she is available to meet staff for briefings and other meetings as required. Other members of the senior leadership team will be on site to offer support and advice at times when the Headteacher is not available.
- How will the new governing body be appointed?

- R: Under Welsh Government regulations, a temporary governing body is established in order to plan for the opening of the new school. This governing body operates alongside the governing bodies of the Infant and Junior Schools, which continue to oversee the separate schools until the time they are closed.

The temporary governing body is made up of representatives from the two existing governing bodies and makes arrangements to appoint a Headteacher for the new school. Once the Headteacher is appointed, he/she will work with the governing body to confirm the staffing and leadership structure for the new school as well as making decisions on policies, uniform, school session times and term dates. When the new school opens, a new governing body is established, which, again, includes governors drawn from both the former Infant and Junior School communities, along with newly elected parent governors. At this time, the governing bodies of St Helen's Catholic Infant and St Helen's Catholic Junior Schools are formally dissolved.

- If the Headteacher is covering two sites, the leadership arrangements will be weaker and unclear.
- R: The governing body and the Headteacher will draw up a senior leadership structure, which will be explained to staff and parents so that there is clarity about the arrangements. The Headteacher will organise his/her time to ensure that it is divided appropriately between the two sites.

FINANCE AND RESOURCES

- Staff won't be able to share facilities or know what resources are available.
- R: The senior leadership team will ensure that resources are appropriately catalogued so that information on what is available can be shared with all staff. Subject leaders will alert all staff of the availability of new resources when delivering INSET sessions.
- How long will the 'split-site' allowance be paid?
- R: For as long as the school is operating on two sites.
- There will be better management of school funds.
- R: There will be a single budget provided by the Local Authority and any grant funding, such as the Pupil Deprivation Grant or Capital Repairs and Maintenance Programme, will be given to the new school for the governing body and senior leadership team to allocate according to need.

SITE ISSUES

- The physical constraints of both sites will mean that pupils and staff in the two Phases will not be able to come together.

- R: It should not be difficult to bring both sets of staff together for INSET sessions and other meetings. On those occasions when it is necessary to hold whole school events, these could be arranged at off-site locations such as the local Catholic High School.
- Timings of school session times across the two sites will need to be different in order to allow parents to be able to pick up their children in a timely manner.
- R: This will be a matter for the temporary governing body to determine but there is no reason why there shouldn't be staggered start and finish times across the two Phases.
- Amalgamation will only work if a single school is built on one site.
- R: Many schools operate successfully across more than one site. It would be the responsibility of the governing body and senior leadership team to ensure that appropriate arrangements were in place.

GENERAL ISSUES

- Transition will be better/Transition will remain the same.
- R: Pupils should notice little difference on the transfer from the Foundation Phase to Key Stage 2. The process will be easier for parents who will no longer need to apply for admission to the Key Stage 2 phase.
- How have recent amalgamations, such as the one between Dinas Powys Infant and Murch Junior Schools, been received?
- R: Meetings have taken place with the Headteacher of the new Dinas Powys Primary School, which also operates across two sites. The school has been commended for establishing a successful whole school ethos, with high expectations for all. Operational arrangements are working well across the two sites and the Headteacher and governing body are very positive about what the amalgamation has achieved thus far.
- How will any uncertainty created by the pending amalgamation be minimised?
- R: The temporary governing body, along with the new Headteacher will need to draw up an action plan for the amalgamation. Regular updates will be provided for staff, pupils and parents on the progress of the plan.

ESTYN

The conclusion of the response from Her Majesty's Inspectors of Education and Training in Wales was as follows:

The proposer provides useful information about the provision and performance of the current schools and evaluates well the impact of the proposal on pupils, parent and the community.

It has made detailed reference to the most recent Estyn reports and the national categorisation information. It includes a general discussion of the standards currently achieved by pupils for the Junior School and a limited discussion of the standards currently achieved by pupils for the Infants School. It seems likely that the proposal will at least maintain the standards of education provision and outcomes for pupils in the area.

LEARNER VOICE

Meetings were held with pupils from both schools.

Comments made by children were as follows:-

- I think that this should happen because it will be easier for the parents to drop their children at school.
- More hard work for the teachers as they will have to learn the different ways of working to link the schools together.
- Don't want the name to change, like the school being called Juniors.
- Keeping us separate and different prepares us well for transition.
- Keeping the juniors completely separate from the infants is a good thing as it makes her feel special to be in a different school with a different Headteacher and different ways of doing things.
- We should amalgamate because it would unite us all as one and that this is a better arrangement for everyone.
- It would be complicated for one Headteacher to oversee two separate schools.
- It would be nice to be known as one school as we do things together.
- It would be helpful for parents who have children in both schools to be doing the same things such as dress up days and fund raising.
- If we join together with could share things more easily.
- Will the teachers all agree on everything? There will be more teachers to decide things.
- Why do they want us to change to a Primary School? Is it because it is a shorter name?
- Will we have to change our book bags I like the logo?
- Why do we need a new Headteacher? Where will she live?
- Will we have a new school with a football pitch?
- I will be sad because I like our school.

MAIN POINTS RAISED AT THE JOINT MEETING ORGANISED BY THE GOVERNING BODIES OF ST HELEN'S CATHOLIC INFANT AND JUNIOR SCHOOLS ON THURSDAY 25th FEBRUARY 2016 ARE AS FOLLOWS:-

- The Geographical distance between the two sites:
 - Difficult for pupils and families to feel a sense of community and belonging with two sites and a traveling Headteacher
 - Difficulties for the Head and other staff who will have to travel between the two sites
- Current sites cannot accommodate all pupils together for assemblies/acts of worship – no culture of belonging or community
- More likely to get a new single site school if the schools remain separate:
 - ('Won't the LA say, 'Let's do something about this' if we remain separate?')
 - Linked to annoyance that other amalgamation proposals in the Vale have been linked to new single site school proposals.
 - ('I would be totally supportive of the proposal if it was linked to a new school')
- Concerns linked to not knowing senior staff structures in the new school.
 - ('How can we make a decision if we don't know whether there's going to be a non-teaching deputy headteacher? – 'you are asking us to make a leap of faith')
 - Concerns about the impact on classroom teaching if a teaching deputy is constantly pulled out of class.
- Concerns about movement between the phases and the different skills required for infants and juniors
 - ('Will it impact on standards if teachers have to move between phases?')
- Concerns about the impact on children's well-being if staff are more stretched in a new structure and not able to work as closely with children and their parents.
- Concerns about ALN, LAC and other vulnerable pupils: ('Will these children get the same level of help if there is a cut in support staff, e.g., reducing from 2 SENCOs to 1 SENCO?')
- Concerns that the proposal is mainly about saving money, not about what's good for children. In particular concern that the saving of a Headteacher's salary doesn't go to the school but is monies from the LA that do not get allocated when there is only one Head.
- Concerns about job losses amongst staff.

- If there are savings from a restructured work force, it can be spent on helping children.
- It is possible for Headteachers of primary schools to know all pupils - it begins in the Nursery.
- Smaller schools create more pressure for staff because there is less flexibility and less options. Larger schools can be more flexible and work can be shared out more widely.
- It will be easier to achieve a better learning continuity for all children if it is one school.
- For those staff who would like more experience, particularly in terms of preparation for school leadership, one school provides greater opportunities for a range of responsibilities.
- There is growing financial pressure on all schools. One large school will be better able to weather the storm compared to two small schools ('Better to amalgamate now when it can be done calmly than later when it is an emergency.')
- Possibly more likely to get a new school in the future if it is one primary school rather than two separate schools.