

Broom Valley Infant and Junior Schools - proposed 'amalgamation'.

Meeting with parents of pupils attending Broom Valley Infant and Junior Schools held on Monday, 17th March, 2008.

Present: David Hill, David Light, Graham Sinclair and Martin Harrop of the LA, together with approximately 6 parents, governors and staff.

Staff from the LA introduced themselves. David Hill welcomed everyone to the meeting before explaining the background and purpose to the proposed 'amalgamation'.

This would be achieved by closing the Infant School and expanding and changing the age range of the Junior School from 7-11 to 3-11 years.

He then spoke about existing and future pupil numbers, the financial implications and the advantages and possible disadvantages that could be brought about by any 'amalgamation' of separate Junior and Infant Schools. A summary of this information had already been circulated to all and it included the timetable which would be followed if it was agreed to publish statutory proposals. If the 'amalgamation' was finally approved, the implementation date would be 1st September, 2008.

Questions and comments were then invited. These were as follows:

How many previously proposed 'amalgamations' have not gone forward or been agreed?

There has been just one, which related to some technical issues and where the 2 schools were about 0.5 mile apart.

(It is important to say at this point that the 'amalgamation' is not being proposed because anything has gone or is going wrong at the 2 schools. If a new school was being built within the Authority, it would be a through Primary rather than separate Infant and Junior schools).

What is the definition and how would we know that it was a successful amalgamation?

All kinds of things contribute to 'successful' schools. This isn't a 'deficit' model as these are already successful schools. Research throughout the world suggests that continuity is likely to lead to better attainment. We will be looking towards a 'new' school rather than simply welding 2 schools together.

What support is available?

The SIP (School Improvement Partner) will challenge and support with a particular emphasis on the 'amalgamation'.

The H/T of Redscope Primary (previously amalgamated) will be joining discussions at the school and offering advice from the benefit of experience.

Is there a possibility of pupil numbers exceeding 60?

No. Although numbers born in the catchment area can be quite high in some years, rates of attrition and the ability to limit numbers to 60 through the admissions criteria via a tie-breaker mean that the number will not be broken. There is a possibility, however, that this may mean in some years that some pupils from within the catchment area may not gain a place in the school.

What would happen, if it did not go ahead, in terms of recruitment of a replacement H/T for the Infants – timescales would be very short?

The LA does have emergencies from time to time and all possibilities would be looked at (e.g Deputy H/T, another H/T from a Rotherham school or a recently retired H/T on a temporary basis).

A lot would depend on the extent of any opposition to the proposals.

There would have to be a strong educational reason for this not to go ahead.

In the recent past, if there was a comment or objection on/to the proposal in response to the statutory notice then the decision would have passed to an independent group (SOC). If that group had not come to a unanimous decision then the decision would have passed on to the Schools Adjudicator. This would have lengthened the process and also have raised more doubt as to the outcome.

You have mentioned that there will be no financial savings for the Authority, but could there be some savings made in the future after the schools have ‘amalgamated’?

No. (Some background was then given to previous funding regimes within the Council). The Authority could previously have reprioritised and used any savings on H/T salaries to, for instance, spend on resurfacing roads. However, all school monies are now ring-fenced to be used on schools expenditure and so the money stays within the schools sector.

After 4 years there will be only one Deputy Head, but shouldn't there be one for each of the 2 Key Stages?

Possibly, but this will be a matter for the H/T and Governing Body to consider. The 4 years simply relates to the period of protection for the school. Decisions on staffing structure will be made by the school.

Will the organisation of the Key Stages (in terms of buildings used) stay as it is?

It will for the time being, but may change in the future. Could, for instance, educate Y2 within the present Junior school building.

Is there any external expertise available to help the school or money within the budget?

The Primary Advisory Team and the H/T at Redscope Primary (as previously mentioned) could offer advice and expertise – free of charge. Governors could also make decisions to spend some of the school's budget if they so wished. The Authority does not wish to impose a model on the school and governors – it is for them to make a decision on the best way forward in that respect, but advice from the LA will always be available, if requested.

How is it going to be monitored?

There will be quality assurance procedures put in place as there would be at any other school, but these could be more frequent/focussed on the amalgamation.

Very confident, although not complacent, that things will work well here with the H/T and governing body in place.

What period would you be looking at before you could judge whether the ‘amalgamation’ has been successful or not?

Would look at it in ‘bite size chunks’, but would say that we should have an overall idea of how it has gone after about 5 years.

Why can't the schools start working towards it now?

They can and should move steadily forward in partnership.

There were no further questions and the meeting was closed.