

## **Crewkerne & Ilminster school structure change proposals**

### **Question & Answer Factsheet – general**

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## 1. Accountability

- Q1. *Who will be accountable if this fails and the local education system is broken further?*
- A. We would be. We can't let this fail, we need a solution to support the education of our young people. This is absolutely about education and the reason that the consultation and the process has various stages as we've got to find the right solution to make sure education provision is at the highest standard that it is now, is able to move forward into the future and provides a high standard of education throughout all stages of the students' academic life. So whether that's early years, it's about having strong first or primary provision it's about taking that all the way through so the young people in this area who are starting school know that they can go all the way through and have the breath of quality education that they deserve. We can't get this wrong we have to get this right for the children.

## 2. Admissions

Q1. *How can the council accurately predict the needs of the local community in terms of birth rates and movement into the area with new developments?*

A. No forecast will ever be 100% accurate as the focus is on future events which are always unpredictable to a degree. However, the local authority uses a number of data sources to predict pupil numbers. These include birth data from the NHS, school census data and new housing trajectory data from the District Council. This forecasting approach is the same as is taken in other local authority areas.

Q2. *What are current intake numbers of each school? How does that compare to proposed numbers? Would this allow present and future Misterton pupils to continue learning within the Federation e.g. at Ashlands so there is a continuity of education, ethos etc?*

A. The forecast pupil numbering has been added to this website. You can view the numbers here. The current intake numbers have been used as the actual numbers in each year group going forward. The model demonstrates that all present and future Misterton pupils could be accommodated in Ashlands, though parents and pupils would have the opportunity to choose another local school.

- Q3. *The proposal suggests two primaries next to each other and just one on the other side of town for Crewkerne. How would this uneven spread of primary places be evened out? Would Ashlands intake reflect the fact it is the only primary serving the north of Crewkerne?*
- A. These proposals would mean that there would be more primary places in the south of Crewkerne than the north. The local authority is required to provide a place within two miles of a child's home address up until age 8 and within three miles over the age of 8. If the local authority is unable to do this, home to school transport must be provided. Due to the size of Crewkerne we expect all schools would be within the two-mile limit.

Q4. *The aim is to not to have schools too empty or too full during the transition. How would this be managed?*

A. The forecast pupil numbering has been added to this website. You can view the numbers here. For schools in Crewkerne and surrounding villages, the model shows a reduction in intake in first schools and an increased intake in the middle school. The reason for this is to smooth as much as is possible the number of pupils in every school. Otherwise the first schools would become too large as they took on additional year groups, and the middle school would take too long to reach capacity.

Q5. *So from 2022 there will be a number of years with only a 10 child intake to the 2 school. Which is not viable to parents with children already in the schools we need security that siblings will be able to attend the school with siblings.*

A. We have admissions process and criteria already with siblings have a preference built in already. We would want to be flexible and wouldn't want families split up. While we can never guarantee school places through the admission system, we would be mindful of the unusual context that might be created by this process and would seek to keep siblings together where possible.

### 3. Consultation process

Q1. *What are the processes through which we can have our voice heard as governors, as parents, as members of the community?*

A. The consultation period is running between 12 November and 11 December, during which time responses to the proposals are invited. During that period there will be a series of consultation events, which anyone will be able to register to attend and ask questions or give views. Details are on our website here: [www.somerset.gov.uk/crewkerne-and-ilminster-strategic-school-review](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/crewkerne-and-ilminster-strategic-school-review)

Q2. *What does the public consultation involve? How will results be published? How much influence does it have?*

A. The consultation involves a 28-day period between 12th November and 11th December, where anyone can give their views on the proposals. When this period has finished, the feedback from consultation will be analysed. This evidence will be presented to the Cabinet member for Education and Transformation who will make a non-key decision whether to stop the process and revert to Cabinet at that point because significant changes to direction are required, or whether to continue to the statutory notices. If the process continues to statutory notices, there would be a further four-week period when members of the public could make their representations, followed by a paper to Cabinet. A report of responses received would be included in Cabinet papers. Cabinet would be asked to consider all the findings and views received, starting with the first informal sharing of proposals with affected parties in early October.

Q3. *Despite the reassurances that this is a fair way to consult on this issue, it discriminates against the poor who might not be able to/can't afford the technology etc to attend a meeting such as this. Running a consultation during a pandemic about such an important issue as a school closure in this way is just wrong.*

- A. This is not the first time that the council has consulted on this issue and face to face meetings were very much a part of the earlier consultation. We know that other forms of consultation can discriminate against families who can't travel, or have work or childcare barriers that mean they cannot attend public meetings in person. No form of consultation is perfect. The online sessions are only one way that members of the public can give their views: responses can be provided by post and will be given equal weight to response given through online sessions or submitted via the website. With regards to access during the pandemic, the council has received nearly 1,000 computers as part of the government initiative to provide online access to children and families and at this point in time 829 have been issued across the county to families that don't have access to technology.

#### 4. Costs

- Q1. *Approximately how much will it cost to implement these proposals?*
- A. It is not yet possible to give a precise cost for change because there are variables that could not be established without further decisions being confirmed. However, initial financial modelling shows that the costs over ten years of the proposed change would be lower than the costs of maintaining the situation as it is currently.
- Q2. *At the start of all this process, it was made very clear that the significant deficit budget at Wadham was the cause of the problem. How is this going to be resolved as there are financial implications for the changes. As I understand, the primary schools will all have reduced pupil numbers and therefore smaller budgets allowed. Why are the first schools being penalised for the debts if the upper school?*
- A. The overspending in the upper school is due to structural factors, not financial mismanagement. The only way that the upper school could deliver within budget would be to make very heavy cuts to the year 10 and year 11 curriculum, drastically reducing the number of GCSEs and other options available to pupils. In the proposed primary schools, the reduced pupil numbers should not result in financially non-viable schools, as long as the schools can match the number of pupils coming into the school with the number of teachers they employ. The proposed model would assure this.

## 5. Covid-19

Q1. *Children have been out of school for 6 months recently, wont this be one more change at an already unsettled time?*

- A. These are only proposals at this stage and no decisions have been made, nor will be made until the appropriate consultation activities have been completed and considered. Any agreed changes would be planned carefully and appropriate support and training provided for staff, where required, to ensure that any transition arrangements for children and young people are as least disruptive as can be achieved. Parents, families and communities will be kept fully informed about progress with any proposals for changes. Support and advice made available through the schools to help children prepare for any significant adjustments. It is hoped that the impact and effect of the pandemic would be behind us.

Q2 *Why are you doing this during COVID-19?*

- A. It's about getting this right for young people and the longer we wait to make that happen, the more likely that there will be a seriously detrimental effect on their education. We know that the coronavirus is creating pressures and stresses, we also know that the longer uncertainty goes on, the harder it is for schools or families to plan and the longer it would take to reach normalcy and stability. It would be very difficult to defend waiting until the pandemic receded and only at that time, when everyone was looking for a return to stability and recovery, to at that point initiate this process.

## 6. Misterton First School specific questions

- Q1. *Will it be Business as usual for Misterton during 2020/21? What will the impact on the school be?*
- A. It is recognised that this is a difficult time for all those connected with Misterton School however this is only a consultation and parents can still apply to Misterton for a place in the normal way. As part of a Federation Misterton will continue to have the support of Ashlands First School. If the Cabinet decided to take forward the proposals, then Misterton would continue to provide great education up to July 2022.
- Q2. *It has been stated that county will work with every parent, family and pupil at Misterton to plan for after 2022? What does that mean in reality?*
- A. The local authority would work with the pupils, staff and parents at Misterton. All pupils currently at Misterton would be offered a place at Ashlands but would equally be free to identify another school and they would be supported in this decision. We would also work with pupils to get their views about their next step and prepare them for the move.

- Q3. *Misterton is mentioned in proposal 4 implying it is part of Crewkerne. However, it is a village school despite being geographically close to Crewkerne. How much consideration has been given to the impact on the village community? How will the council support the local community as there would be reduced footfall in the Misterton community which would impact on local businesses. Has the (Misterton) Parish Council been contacted?*
- A. The impacts on the community of Misterton will be considered in an equality impact assessment. Rural communities require special consideration and the potential social and economic impact of closing schools is understood and never considered lightly. This assessment would be included in Cabinet papers for any decision that is made. Misterton Parish Council has been informed of the proposal and will be kept up to date with future developments.
- Q4. *Have you considered the cost implications for families in Misterton for new uniform, transport to and from school for parents/carers, given that in the current economic climate redundancies are being made and businesses are closing?*
- A. We want to understand the impact on individual families as much as we can, and we would strongly urge families who believe there would be an impact on them to include this information in their consultation response so that this information can be shared with decision makers.

- Q5. *In our previous meeting you said you would work with each family in Misterton to work out what was best for them, in the Q&As online, you are allocating us all to Ashlands that doesn't sound very collaborative? If parents want a village school, they are less like to opt for one of Crewkerne's many Primary Schools, I think it's been overestimated how many will move to Ashlands.*
- A. The numbers that you see in the consultation document are to enable us to show that there would be enough space for every pupil even if Misterton closed. What we can't do is to make assumptions of where families and pupils might want to go. So we've had to make an assumption at this stage only to show that we are able to accommodate all pupils in the area but there is no absolutely no expectation at all that pupils would go to Ashlands. In the proposal we know that there would be additional space in other schools in the town as well.
- Q6. *Will the council be liaising with the community of Misterton, the pre-school, and the businesses.*
- A. As well as publicising this widely in the local press, we are very grateful to the engagement that we have had from local councillors and our early years team is in contact with Misterton pre-school. We have a good relationship with the Diocese and we have been regularly communicating with the parish council so there are a number of key people in organisations that we are in touch with. It would be helpful to hear of any other community avenues that we need to be exploring and other organisations who can help us reach out to people who may have a view on this.

## 7. Options

- Q1. *We would appreciate communication on the rationale behind not investigating the option of an extended secondary on the Maiden Beech site.*
- A. This option has been investigated. That option was not part of the current proposal because there are only enough secondary-aged pupils for one secondary school in the area. Two secondary schools, one in Ilminster and one in Crewkerne, would likely result in two unsustainable schools. Forecast numbers indicate that in 2022 there will be 780 pupils aged 11-16 in the area. Maiden Beech has a capacity of 492. Because of the high cost of development to significantly expand the Maiden Beech site it is not cost-effective to spend money to expand a building in Crewkerne when there is already a building that is large enough in the town.
- Q2. *As raised at the meeting, it feels incredibly unjust that Maiden Beech will receive funding to become a primary School. Several people shared their view of Maiden Beech and held it in high esteem, as a parent it doesn't make sense to not capitalise on their success and give them the opportunity to be a secondary school. It seems under the current proposal, the council have given them no choice, perhaps as a consequence of their earlier independent action?*
- A. The Maiden Beech site is not big enough to become the sole secondary school for Crewkerne and Ilminster. If both middle schools were to become secondary schools and split the 780 pupils, they would be too small and face the same financial problems we see now at Wadham.

- Q3. *Why have other options not been considered? Couldn't Misterton be considered as a primary school?*
- A. This option has been investigated. In the last consultation, people told us that they wanted to keep as many schools as possible and avoid closure. However, if all schools in the Crewkerne area, including Misterton, were retained, this would result in far too many places compared to how many children there would be. The council cannot close Maiden Beech, and it is unlikely the remaining schools could accommodate all the children without this large school. Hinton St George, Haselbury Plucknett and Merriott are significantly further away from Crewkerne. Ashlands is the only school in North Crewkerne and the likelihood is that this will be the location for housing growth. There would be too many spaces in and around South Crewkerne. To reduce this oversupply either St Barts or Misterton could be closed. Misterton is a smaller school and therefore the number of children disrupted by closure would be fewer. Around half the pupils in Misterton live in Crewkerne.
- Q4. *If there is a project running in West Somerset to look at the viability of rural schools, why is this not being offered to Crewkerne and Ilminster schools?*
- A. The Department for Education is funding projects in West Somerset Opportunity Area. This includes thinking about how we support small rural schools to work more flexibly. This is an opportunity for the whole of Somerset, not just the schools in that area. This project does not provide money to schools, it is about trying out different ways of delivering education and capturing the learning from that. If there are opportunities to involve schools from Crewkerne or Ilminster, then we will do so, however, this would not change any of the factors that make this consultation necessary.

Q5. *As Maiden Beech is an academy, do they have more autonomy? Can they refuse to convert to primary and do their own thing? Will this alter the current proposals?*

- A. Yes, as an academy Maiden Beech are autonomous and decide their own admissions. However, the leadership of Maiden Beech and the trust, Bridgwater and Taunton College Trust, are working collaboratively with Somerset County Council and other partners in the recognition that all schools are part of a system and it is in the best interests of pupils and parents if schools work together. While the current proposal may not reflect the preference of every stakeholder, we have been encouraged by the willingness to accept the outcome of the consultation and political decision-making, and work in the best interests of children and the community.

Q6. *Why is there only one option on the table?*

- A. This is not the first time we have consulted on this matter. In the last consultation multiple options were provided. The outcome of that consultation was entirely inconclusive, and no options received general support, including no change. The council is required by law to precede any decision to reorganise by a publication of one clear and definitive plan. It was judged to be most transparent to consult on that plan widely before a decision was taken whether to progress with that statutory stage. The law states that a proposal that is taken to Cabinet must be the same as the statutory notices. By consulting on one option it provides the opportunity for the community to influence what that model looks like or stop the progress of the decision-making process.

- Q7. *The general consensus is people do not want this to go ahead. You are potentially damaging a generation of children's education. What would happen if people start to vote with their feet and move their children so that Wadham loses further students and decide not to transition them there at all?*
- A. We know this is an issue that divides the community. In the previous consultation, none of the many options received general support, including no change. However, it is a reality of political decision-making that it can be more damaging to avoid difficult decisions than to take them. We have already received many varied and constructive responses to this consultation, and remain open and willing to ideas about how to solve this longstanding problem.

## 8. Quality of education

Q1. *Can you clarify if the purpose of these changes are to improve the standard of education in the local area? Can the LA guarantee that these changes will not result in a lowering of educational standards. By that I mean that none of the schools in the local area will receive a lower OFSTED grade in subsequent OFSTED inspections? If this cannot be guaranteed can you explain how these changes meet the stated objective of improving educational standards?*

A. This is about protecting education moving forward. There are never guarantees in life and that is certainly true about Ofsted judgements. Ofsted can change how it inspects, and schools can decline in performance and that is true in any context. What we do know and need to accept is that those who should be focused on curriculum and teaching are spending a lot of time worrying about where the funding is going to come to keep the school going. It is really important that we achieve an outcome that gives those educators peace of mind and the space to focus on quality of education.

Q2. *The proposals state that the current first schools reduce to five classes. How would this look when there are more year groups and less classes? How would a teacher deal with the needs effectively of mixed classes and deliver quality education? How many year groups will EYFS mix with?*

A. All the first schools already mix year groups and mixed age classes are a fact of life in Somerset due to our large number of small schools. Schools do this effectively and are able to take advantage of the opportunities that this offers to locate pupils in the class that suits them. We are aware that some of the first schools are concerned about the transition period in particular, and the risk that pupils numbers changing year to year might result in some mixed classes that create unacceptable workload, such as across Key Stages. We

want to hear about these concerns and would seek to adjust the proposal to mitigate this effect if a decision was taken to progress to the next stage.

Q3. *During the transition will my child be in a class of over 30 in KS2?*

- A. At present a number of the first schools will sometimes already have year groups of over 30 because of their current intake numbers. Schools have managed this successfully in the past to no detriment to pupils. However, if this proposal goes forward we would work with schools to look in detail at each year of transition and we would provide support, for example with transitional funding, to avoid classes or teaching arrangements that were detrimental to pupils or staff.

## 9. School staff

Please note: there is a separate Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) document specifically for school staff which came out of the questions within the school surgery events available on our website here: [www.somerset.gov.uk/crewkerne-and-ilminster-strategic-school-review/#School-staff](http://www.somerset.gov.uk/crewkerne-and-ilminster-strategic-school-review/#School-staff)

The below questions and answers came from the public events.

- Q1. *With restructuring, redundancies are inevitable. What are the projections in terms of redeployment, redundancy etc, for teaching, non-teaching, admin etc?*
- A. At this stage of the process we are unable to provide predictions regarding staffing levels as this will depend on a number of factors which are still to be determined, however, all stakeholders within the area review have agreed to the principle of all reasonable measures being taken to avoid redundancies and to seek to redeploy staff who are deemed to be 'at risk' where possible.
- Q2. *With regards to recruitment, how will "uniformity of assessment and selection criteria across schools" be assured?*
- A. Recruitment processes will be underpinned by safer recruitment principles and will be managed in accordance with the school's recruitment and selection policy as it is currently. Selection criteria will be determined by the specific requirements of the individual posts and where there is commonality of posts across the schools, standardised selection criteria for these posts will be agreed where possible.

Q3. *How much say will the schools themselves have in their own recruitment during the transition period?*

- A. Each school would retain responsibility for the recruitment of staff during the transition period, however, a vacancy freeze would be implemented at the earliest opportunity once a decision to effect the change has been taken place to maximise continued employment for existing staff. Any decisions regarding recruitment during the recruitment freeze would
- B. be taken by School leaders under advisement.

## 10.SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

- Q1. *Has an impact assessment has been carried out which covers the specific needs of children with SEND?*
- A. Inclusion of all students is important. Improving our practice and improving the inclusion of our students is very high on the council's agenda. With a decision as big as this, an equalities impact assessment has to be undertaken. A preliminary assessment took place in October during the original consultation and another more detailed assessment would be completed if the proposals are taken to Cabinet for decision. We have been talking to colleagues who are experts in these assessments. One positive factor is regarding school refurbishments that would need to take place which can help make older buildings compliant under the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Q2. *I am concerned to why the County has not addressed the needs of children with additional needs, SEND, LAC, PLAC, vulnerable children. Children with SEND cannot be forced into large schools where children are set up to fail and for many parents children have come from larger schools?*
- A. Nothing in the proposal would create large school in either Ilminster or Crewkerne. All schools would still be very small compared to similar schools nationally. However, we know that South Somerset has not been as well served with provision for SEND. This is why both Fairmeads and Fiveways, excellent special schools in the area, are currently being expanded. Most pupils with SEND should find a home in a mainstream school. A lot of work is underway to make Somerset a more inclusive county, and parents should hopefully start to see the impact of this over the coming year, regardless of the outcome of this consultation.

- Q3. *As a parent of a dyslexic child, how can you reassure me that when three year groups transfer to Wadham at the same time in Sept 2022, his needs will be adequately supported and not lost in the process of transferring large numbers of children. This could significantly impact on his education and GCSEs.*
- A. We absolutely agree that it is really critical in a complex change that nothing is lost. What is a potential advantage of moving from a 3 tier to a 2 tier system is that there is only one transition to navigate which reduces the chances of children with additional needs getting lost in that transition. There is clearly a higher risk for pupils in a transition which is unlike what happens in ordinary circumstances. We would take care in any implementation activity to put extra focus on this risk and plan carefully to avoid problems.

## 11. Transitions between schools

- Q1. *Under these proposals the educational opportunities and quality of education for years 5 & 6 will be reduced. How are you justifying this?*
- A. Years 5 and 6 would be key years that would see most change if the proposals went ahead. An important part of any implementation is thinking about what it would take to provide the same high quality of provision in years 5 and 6 at primary schools as we see in middle schools. In a staff reorganisation, Year 5 and 6 teachers would likely move from middle schools into new primary schools. These would be the same professionals that are teaching these years now, and therefore talent and expertise would not be lost. One of the advantages of moving to a two-tier system is that it would bring schools in the area into alignment with the majority of schools in the country, and would mean that both KS1 tests and KS2 tests took place in the same school. Evidence suggests that this help educators by allowing them to track performance of pupils compared to schools around the country. This may have a positive effect on standards over time.

## 12. Travel and transport

- Q1. *Has there been a survey of traffic and road/pavement conditions for those children who will need to walk 2 miles to their nearest primary?*
- A. We have asked a road safety auditor from the Somerset Highways to conduct route assessments from Misterton School to Ashlands, so the auditor will walk the route and deem it suitable or unsuitable for a child to walk accompanied as necessary. Due to lockdown and it needing to be done at a realistic time with relation to traffic etc. this is on hold until lockdown is lifted but will resume once they are able to do it in realistic conditions. If a route from a child's home address to the nearest school is deemed unsuitable then travel assistance would always be provided.
- Q2. *Obviously these proposed plans will mean more students will have to commute to Crewkerne from Ilminster. The SCC are supposed to be committed to making Somerset carbon neutral, so are environmental responsibilities just pushed aside when there are financial savings to be made? We are suffering a climate emergency and we should be working towards commuting less, not making changes so more commuting is necessary.*
- A. Climate is one of the biggest issues as a rural county that we face. However, we can't just look at reducing the movement of pupils to and from school but the greenest way possible. This is something going into the new year all of the councils in Somerset will be focusing on re climate change. The fleet of new buses the council have invested in are as green as they can be without being purely electric. Every conversation about transport for schools involves how can we do it in the most climate friendly way. We do however have to make sure the level of children's education is not affected by how we get them to and from school or residential settings.