

St Benedict's RC VA Middle School and St Aidan's RC First School, Ashington

Consultation

3 May 2016 – 21 June 2016

Two options for the organisation of St Benedict's RC VA Middle School and St Aidan's RC First School within the Ashington partnership are being consulted upon. The Federated Governing Body of both schools is consulting on Model A and Model B.

The options under consultation are:

Model A:

Close St Benedict's RC VA Middle School with effect from 31 August 2017;

Extend the age range of St Aidan's RC First School from 1 September 2017. The school would become a primary school and would educate children up to age 11. The school would occupy the existing St Benedict's site.

Model B:

Make no changes to the current arrangement of St Benedict's RC VA Middle School or St Aidan's RC First School within Ashington.

The Governing Body named above would like to find out what you think about the options outlined in this document and also whether you have any alternative ideas.

WHY IS CONSULTATION ON CHANGING THE ORGANISATION OF SCHOOLS TAKING PLACE?

Introduction

Discussions have recently taken place between both schools about whether the current system of school organisation enables the best possible outcomes for all children. From these discussions, it has become clear that the federated governing body of both schools believes that an organisational restructure of the schools could achieve better outcomes for pupils. As pupils transfer mainly to St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy, Bedlington at the end of Year 8, they too (the school) have been involved in discussions and believe that an organisational restructure could achieve better outcomes for pupils.

As a result, two options for organisation have been proposed that would change the number and type of Roman Catholic schools in the area.

Rationale for Model A –

Close St Benedict's RC VA Middle School with effect from 31 August 2017.

Extend the age range of St Aidan's RC First School from 1 September 2017. The school would become a primary school and would educate children up to age 11.

Since September 2015, one federated Governing Body manages St Benedict's and St Aidan's. However, apart from these shared Governance arrangements, the schools are entirely separate and have their own budgets. The Governing Body has financial challenges and curricular challenges in relation to St Benedict's. Pupil numbers have been falling for a number of years, as can be seen from Table 1, and are expected to continue to do so.

The Council's pupil projection data is also showing that numbers will continue to fall in the foreseeable future.

Table 1 – St Benedict's RC VA Middle School

January	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	Total
2014	44	52	60	60	216
2015	44	43	51	58	196
2016	36	45	43	49	173
2017 est	38	36	44	43	161
2018 est	35	38	36	44	153
2019 est	35	35	38	36	144

A school's budget is based on the number of pupils it has on roll, not on the size of the buildings it has to manage. The Governing Body is finding that the costs of maintaining its school buildings in relation to heating, lighting, cleaning and maintenance are increasing every year, while its overall budget is reducing. This means that every year, there is less money available to spend on educational resources, which include staffing.

However, these financial challenges are made more difficult for the Governing Body as St Benedict's has pupils from KS2 and KS3. The pupils in Year 7 and Year 8 require specialist teachers. The falling roll and subsequent decreasing budget make it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain specialist teachers and effectively deploy them. As a result of the financial situation, the Governing Body believes that they need to consult on the proposal to change the number and type of the schools.

Schools across the whole of the Catholic partnership of schools, including those in Ashington, Bedlington and Cramlington, have been discussing whether the current system of organisation of schools is achieving the best possible outcomes for all of the pupils in the area. The schools in the Catholic partnership are aware of the real improvements in pupil achievement that have taken place in school partnerships elsewhere in the county since reorganising to a primary/secondary (two-tier) system of education, for example in Blyth and Cramlington Partnerships.

The vast majority of pupils in this country are educated in schools organised within the primary/secondary system, which matches the National Curriculum system of Key Stages. The National Curriculum framework is as follows:

- Early Years - Nursery to Reception class;
- Key Stage 1 (KS1) - Years 1 and 2;
- Key Stage 2 (KS2) - Years 3 to 6;
- Key Stage 3 (KS3) – Years 7 – 9;
- Key Stage 4 (KS4) – Years 10 and 11.

In a primary/secondary system of organisation, pupils are educated in their primary school from the Early Years stage up to Year 6 when they are 11, and then have one school transfer to secondary school when they join Year 7 in the year that they become 12. Some of the advantages of this system of education are that the primary schools are responsible for all of the Early Years, KS1 and KS2 and therefore are better able to plan and deliver the curriculum over that time. Similarly, the secondary schools receive pupils in Year 7 and are responsible for the whole of KS3 and KS4. This means the secondary schools have two years to teach and assess pupils before they make important choices in Year 9 about which GCSE courses to choose; this places the secondary schools in a stronger position to advise their pupils on the best choices for them.

In the three-tier system, children change school at the end of Year 4 in their first school to join middle school. They then leave middle school at the end of Year 8 to join high school. This means they have two periods of transition; a change half way through KS2 and again part way through KS3.

All of the community schools in the Ashington partnership moved to a two-tier system in September 2015 and the only two schools in Ashington which are not part of a two tier system are St Benedict's and St Aidan's. The Catholic schools in Bedlington and Blyth reorganised to Primary/Secondary in 2011 and pupils transfer to their chosen secondary school at the end of primary school. The Year 7 and Year 8 pupils in St Peter's Cramlington, have been taught at St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy since 2007. The majority of similar aged pupils have two years at secondary school before they are joined by their peers from St Benedict's at Year 9. This means St Benedict's pupils join an established cohort who have been taught together for two years and who have had access to extensive specialist teachers and resources.

The Governing Body of St Benedict's and St Aidan's feel that it is now the right time to ask parents, staff and pupils for their views on whether they think the option of a primary/secondary system of organisation across the whole of the Catholic partnership could be the way to improve outcomes or whether the current three-tier system is preferred.

Therefore, the Governing Body have decided to consult all those who could be impacted by any change to the organisation of their schools.

For these reasons, the Governing Body is consulting with parents, staff, pupils and others on the option to close St Benedict's Middle RC VA School from 1 September 2017 and expand St Aidan's RC First School from the same date to take the additional children and relocate onto the current St Benedict's site.

Rationale for Model B –

Make no changes to the current arrangement of schools or current system of school organisation i.e. maintain the status quo.

THE OPTIONS UNDER CONSULTATION

In summary, your views are sought on the following suggested options for organisation of St Benedict's RC VA Middle School and St Aidan's RC First School.

Model A –

- Close St Benedicts RC VA Middle School with effect from 31 August 2017;
- Extend the age range of St Aidan's RC First School from 1 September 2017. The school would become a primary school and would educate children up to age 11.

Model B –

Make no changes to the current arrangement of schools or current systems of school organisation i.e. maintain the status quo.

STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLS UNDER MODEL A AND TIMELINE FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Table 2 shows the current structure and pupil numbers in St Benedict's and St Aidan's and the structure if Model A were implemented:

SCHOOL	CURRENT SITUATION			PROPOSED PRIMARY/SECONDARY MODEL SEPTEMBER 2017		
	Capacity in Sept 2015 (Number on Roll in Sept 2015)	Forms of Entry (FTE)	Planned Admission Number (PAN) 2015	Capacity	Forms of Entry (FE)	Planned Admission Number (PAN)
St Benedict's RC VA Middle School	240 Capacity 174 on roll	2	60	CLOSE		
St Aidan's RC First School	180 Capacity 183 on roll 26 place Nursery	1.4	36	210	1	30

If Model A were approved, the timeline for implementation and the impact on individual pupils would be as follows:

Model A

March/April 2017

- Parents of pupils in Year 4 in St Aidan's First School, who in March 2017 were offered a place in Year 5 for their child at St Benedict's Middle School for 1 September 2017, would be informed that a place would be available for 1 September 2017 in St Aidan's Primary School (as it would be), but that they could apply for a place for their child in another school should they wish to do so.
- Parents who in April 2017 were offered a place in Reception for their child in St Aidan's First School for 1 September 2017 would be informed that a place would be available for 1 September 2017 in St Aidan's Primary School, but that they could apply for a place for their child in another school should they wish to do so.

31 August 2017

- St Benedict's RC VA Middle School would close.

1 September 2017

- All pupils on roll in Year 8 in St Benedict's Middle School on 31 August 2017 will have been offered a place at a High or Secondary School for September 2017 and would transfer to that school as planned as Year 9 students.

- Pupils in Years 6 and 7 who are on the roll of St Benedict's RC VA Middle School on 31 August 2017 would transfer to the roll of St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy as Year 7 and 8 students.
- All pupils in Year 5 in St Benedict's on 31 August 2017 will transfer to the roll of St Aidan's RC Primary School as Year 6 students on the existing middle school site.
- All pupils in Reception Year and Years 1-4 will remain on the roll of St Aidan's but will move to the new site.
- St Aidan's First school will expand to become St Aidan's Primary School and the revised Planned Admissions Number (PAN) will come into effect for all new admissions into St Aidan's Primary School.

OTHER IMPLICATIONS OF THE PROPOSAL

Staff

There would be implications for staff in St Benedict's RC VA Middle school as a result of either of these proposals. Detailed discussions with the Governing Body of St Benedict's and with the Trades Unions are being undertaken about how the staffing implications of the proposals could be minimised and further details will be shared with staff as soon as they are available. It is likely that the Governing Body will need to consider redundancy whichever model is agreed.

Admissions

Should Model A be implemented, all current pupils in St Aidan's and Year 5 pupils in St Benedict's would have a place in the new primary school from September 2017. St Robert's RC First School in Morpeth is a feeder school of St Benedict's, Ashington and both Newminster Middle School and Chantry Middle School in the 3 Rivers Learning Trust. Parents of pupils in St Robert's who want to continue their child's education within a Roman Catholic setting would be able to apply for a place in Year 5 in St Aidan's Primary School. However, any pupils joining the school in Year 5 would have another transfer to St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy or another secondary school two years later.

Early Years

There are no implications for the current Early Years provision. The provision will continue in St Aidan's primary school on the existing St Benedict's site.

School Transport

Transport for individual pupils is always arranged in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy. Should Model A be approved for implementation, journeys to school for some pupils in Years 7 and 8 may be a little longer.

Special Educational Needs (SEND)

There is no specialist SEND provision currently within either of the two schools.

Implications for school buildings

If Model A were implemented, there would be a need to carry out some works at the St Benedict's school site. An initial assessment carried out shows that the costs of this work would be affordable. Now that consultation is underway, detailed buildings costs in relation to both models are being worked up and these will be shared during the consultation process.

Sport and Recreation

If any consultees have any concerns about any potential impact on Sport and Recreation of the options for organisation, these will be addressed as part of the consultation process.

To view the current admission areas of St Benedict's and St Aidan's, or for further information on SEND and Home to School Transport provision, go to the Council's website at www.northumberland.gov.uk and follow the appropriate links from 'Education'.

HOW CAN I MAKE MY VIEWS ABOUT THESE PROPOSALS KNOWN?

Following the review of all feedback received from consultees and in light of the reasons for carrying out consultation, the decision on whether or not to proceed to the next steps in the process will be made by the Governing Body.

The Governing Body would like to hear your views on the options for organisation set out in this document and whether you have any alternative suggestions. A questionnaire is attached to the end of this document for you to complete with your views and return to **The Chair of Governors c/o St Benedict's RC VA Middle School, Moorhouse Lane, Ashington** by **21 June 2016**.

Meetings are being held by the **Governing Body of St Benedict's and St Aidan's during May/June 2016** (see Table 3 for details). The purpose of these meetings is for the Governing Body to present the issues and the reasons for the proposals and to enable staff, parents and other interested parties the opportunity to ask questions and clarify any of the issues raised in this document. It will also be an opportunity for you to express your views about the various proposals. Please attend the meeting for the group that you most associate with. Electronic copies of this document are available to download from both schools' websites at:

www.st-benedicts.northumberland.sch.uk/website

www.st-aidans.northumberland.sch.uk/website

It is also available from Northumberland County Council at:

www.northumberland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

GOVERNING BODY CONSULTATION MEETING SCHEDULE

Table 3 details the dates for meetings

Date	Time and venue	Audience
Tuesday 7 June 2016	5.30 p.m. at St Benedict's school hall	Parents of pupils in both St Aidan's and St Benedict's schools, local residents and parishioners and any other interested parties.
Tuesday 17 May 2016	3.30 p.m. at St Aidan's School	St Aidan's School Staff
Tuesday 7 June 2016	3.45 p.m. at St Benedict's School	St Benedict's School Staff

Following the **closure of consultation on 21 June 2016**, the Chair of Governors of St Benedict's and St Aidan's will prepare a report on the feedback received for the Governing Body. The Governing Body will decide on whether or not to continue to the next stage.

St Benedict's RC VA Middle School and St Aidan's RC First School, Ashington

Response to the Consultation

PART 1- ABOUT YOU

Your name (Optional): _____

Are you responding mainly as a (tick one box only):

Parent/carer:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Governor:	<input type="checkbox"/>
Staff Member:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pupil:	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you ticked any of the above, with which school are you associated?

Are you:

Resident: ☐ Town in which you live: _____

Parish Councillor: ☐ Parish/town council: _____

PART 2 – YOUR VIEWS ON MODEL A

- 1) Do you agree that the closure of St Benedict's RC VA Middle School and the expansion of St Aidan's RC First School to become a primary school on the St Benedict's site on 1 September 2017 would be in the best educational interests of all the pupils who attend or who will attend those schools?

Yes ☐ No ☐

- a) Your reasons for ticking the above
(please continue on a separate sheet if necessary)

b) In your opinion, are there any changes to Model A that would improve it?

PART 3 – YOUR VIEWS ON MODEL B

- 4) Do you believe that there should be no changes made to the current system of education as offered by St Benedict's and St Aidan's i.e. both schools should continue to be organised within the three-tier (first/middle/high system)?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Your reasons for ticking the above. (Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary).

PART 4 – ALTERNATIVE MODELS

- 5) If you have an alternative suggestion to any of the options set out in this document that would deal with the issues raised, please set it out below.

(Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary).

THANK YOU FOR TAKING PART IN THIS CONSULTATION

Now please return your Response Form to: **The Chair of Governors c/o St Benedict's RC VA Middle School, Moorhouse Lane, Ashington NE63 9LR**

Or send your response electronically by email to:
AshingtonCatholicConsultation@northumberland.gov.uk