

CONSULTATION DOCUMENT
SPECIAL SCHOOL PROVISION FOR PUPILS WITH COMPLEX
LEARNING DIFFICULTIES
THE FUTURE OF SECONDARY CLD PROVISION IN WIRRAL
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Introduction

The Local Authority has two secondary special schools for pupils with complex learning difficulties (CLD). These schools meet the needs of pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many of the pupils have associated needs such as autistic spectrum disorders or physical and sensory disabilities.

Foxfield School and Meadowside School both provide for pupils within the 11-19 age range. Following work undertaken by the seconded consultant headteacher and initial discussions with governors, staff and parents, the schools have approached the Authority and requested that formal consultation is undertaken with all of the relevant stakeholders on a proposal to amalgamate the two schools and create a single new school. This would provide appropriate facilities for 11-16 year old pupils in one building and an age appropriate environment for 16-19 year old students in a separate environment.

What has happened so far?

Meetings have been held with headteachers, staff, governors, parents and pupils at all five schools to gather views on current provision and how it could be enhanced. Consideration was given to the needs of this group of young people and their families over the next ten years and into the future, and the anticipated demands that will be placed upon Wirral's special school provision. A particular focus was on how the schools can best prepare the pupils for adult life, the choices that are available at 16 and 19 and how the special school provision offers a clear route to progress onto relevant local post-school provision.

The Wirral special school headteachers group have worked together to consider all of the different types of special school provision in Wirral, and have set out their view on how this could be developed and improved in the future. The headteachers began by considering the present and future provision needed locally for secondary age pupils with CLD, then extending their considerations to primary provision.

Taking into consideration the quality of the current provision, including the standards of teaching and learning, the accommodation, facilities and the opportunities available to the pupils and their families, there was strong agreement that while the present standard of provision is very good it could be improved further if some reorganisation and changes in accommodation were made.

For Secondary school provision, it was suggested that a specific option for changing the organisation and location of provision should be explored and considered. This is the subject of the consultation being carried out by the Local Authority.

What happens now?

The Local Authority is consulting you on the following option:

Secondary

Combine all Wirral's provision for 11 to 19 year old pupils with CLD into a single special school, with 11 to 16 year old pupils accommodated at the Foxfield building, and 16 to 19 year old pupils at the Meadowside site.

At a later date to consider a newly built 11 to 16 school co-located alongside a mainstream secondary school, and to create new 16 to 19 provision co-located alongside a local Further Education College.

Current Provision

Number on roll

Meadowside and Foxfield currently provide for a combined total of 201 pupils aged 11 to 19 – 136 at Foxfield and 65 at Meadowside.

Within the 201 pupils, 72 are currently aged 16 to 19. While the numbers of pupils in each individual school vary over time, the size of the combined population remains fairly constant.

The projected number of 16-19 year old students across both schools is expected to remain between 70-80 over the next five years.

Standards

Both schools were inspected by Ofsted in 2006/2007 and were each judged to be good with outstanding features.

Range of needs

Foxfield has traditionally provided for pupils with more complex needs including pupils with severe and profound and multiple learning difficulties, and associated difficulties including autism or complex, challenging behaviours.

In the past, Meadowside's population covered a wider ability range of pupils, but over recent years it has become increasingly similar to Foxfield's. There is now little difference between the pupil populations in both schools.

Accommodation

While facilities for 11-16 year old pupils in both schools are sufficient, Foxfield and Meadowside both have difficulties providing suitable specialist accommodation for their post-16 learners.

Areas for improvement

16 to 19

Constraints in both Foxfield's and Meadowside's buildings mean that there are limited 6th form facilities and both sites have some difficulties offering adequate environments for age appropriate vocational and work related learning environments alongside independent living skills teaching areas. Increased numbers of pupils are remaining on roll post-16 because of the shortage of alternative provision in the local colleges.

While the 16-19 curriculum offered in each school is relevant and challenging, the small number of post-16 pupils in each school limits the range of options and opportunities that can be offered within the timetable. This issue will become a growing concern as the work in the Foundation Learning Tier and the new 14 to 19 Diplomas begin to reshape the secondary curriculum offered to pupils in all schools, including Foxfield and Meadowside

Beyond school age – 19 and over

Effective transition and coordination of provision between the special schools and the local Further Education colleges, work place training organisations and adult Social Services is a key issue. Partner organisations suggest this could improve if they had to work with fewer special school sixth forms.

A very high number of students with learning difficulties progress from Wirral schools to out of area specialist residential FE colleges. These college placements are currently funded by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). A lack of a clear progression route into suitable, high quality local post school provision is often a key factor behind applications by students and their parents to these specialist providers. Improved local post school provision for young

adults with learning difficulties, which closely links to the special school sixth form, would offer an improved local route for students with such needs. This could also result in greater efficiencies for the Authority, who take over responsibility for post school provision including FE college costs for this group of students from 2010.

The Learning and Skills Council are currently funding a number of new initiatives that will improve the local opportunities available to young people with learning difficulties and disabilities when they leave school. While substantial progress has been made over the last two years, key issues that require ongoing attention include transition arrangements, partnership planning and joint funding arrangements, and ensuring that clear progression pathways exist between special school sixth form provision and local post school providers. Better partnership planning has now been established between the Children and Young Peoples Department, the LSC, Connexions, Health and Adult Social Services to improve transition and local provision for this group of young people.

Parents taking part in the initial discussions expressed concerns around the transition between school and adult life and the support that is available, particularly regarding the limited availability of local options and choices for further education, employment training and adult care. Students and parents suggested that they would prefer to access local provision rather than out of area provision. There was strong support for improving post-16 choices and opportunities, leading to a better transition into post-school provision.

Extended school provision

Initial meetings show that parents attending were generally positive about the care and education provided in the current school, and that any changes made must build on existing high standards and bring clear benefits for pupils and their families.

Another factor that could be improved, was extended schools provision, including wrap around child care, holiday activities and access to health professionals.

In general, parents, staff and governors at the two schools believed that the pupils of both schools could combine without great difficulty, although a small number were concerned about the lack of choice if a single school was available, rather than two as at present.

The option for change

Special school headteachers believe that all of Wirral's provision for 11-16 year old pupils with CLD should be combined into a single special school. The long term objective is to have newly built accommodation that would be funded from Building Schools for the Future funding that is co-located alongside a secondary mainstream school. In the meantime the present Foxfield building has sufficient space and facilities needed to accommodate the combined population of 11 to 16 pupils.

Headteachers also recommend that a specialist provision for the combined population of 16-19 year old students with learning difficulties should be established on another site that is more focussed on the curriculum, social and independence needs of this group of young people. Initially the present Meadowside site could be used for this purpose with minor modifications, but the medium term objective would be to create new co-located specialist sixth form provision alongside a local FE college.

There is some interest and support within the Learning and Skills Council for creating combined specialist 16-19 provision for Wirral's students with learning difficulties. Initial conversations have also taken place with the Principals of both of the local colleges who are generally supportive of this suggestion.

There are many factors to think about when considering making changes to school provision.

How would the option for change improve provision?

- A single high quality provision for CLD pupils aged 11 to 19 removes uncertainty about which school pupils should transfer to at age 11 and treats all parents and pupils equally with regard to the availability of places.
- 11 to 16 pupils will be taught on one site in a suitable learning environment.
- 16 to 19 provision will be taught on a different site. Clear separation of the sixth form from the main body of the school offers a distinctive, age appropriate provision, focussed on preparing students for the transition to life beyond school.
- Separation of sixth form provision offers an opportunity to consider at this point of transition whether transfer to the CLD school's post-16 provision is the most suitable progression route for individual young people. There are a growing range of options for post-16 pupils in Wirral, and there may be other promising opportunities that would enable the young person to achieve what they would like to do as an adult.
- A combined sixth form would produce a larger group of students, enabling a wider curriculum offer to be made. More options to access courses such as key skills, vocational and life skills can be provided, as well as extending the range of accreditation courses.
- Better sixth form provision with improved links to local FE provision will offer an improved progression route to post-school provision. This could enable more students to access local provision, rather than attending specialist residential colleges away from Wirral.
- Post-school providers of education, training and support suggest that a single 16 to 19 establishment for students with CLD would result in more co-ordinated planning, with improved transition arrangements and continuity of provision.

In the medium to long term -

- Co-location with a mainstream school and college offers more opportunities for students aged 11 to 16 and 16 to 19 to be within inclusive settings and learn and socialise with mainstream pupils. This will create positive opportunities for both groups of young people.
- The costs and logistical issues currently involved in transporting pupils from CLD schools to mainstream sites limit opportunities for students to participate in mainstream secondary schools. Co-location would offer the opportunity to participate to all pupils who could benefit.

Factors to be considered

- Creating a single school would remove the existing choice of secondary CLD provision for parents of Wirral pupils.
- Depending on where they live, some pupils may have longer journeys to school, although we would not expect any pupil to travel for more than one hour.
- As in any reorganisation of school provision, careful planning and preparation would be needed to minimise the effects of the change on young people.
- Both schools currently make good provision with many outstanding features. Changing the provision must maintain and improve on this standard.
- The best aspects of curriculum delivery from both existing schools would be expected to continue in the amalgamated school.

- Pupils at both schools benefit from educational activities in their local community which develop their independence skills. Future co-location should offer the same degree of access to community facilities.
- Staff at Foxfield and Meadowside are very skilled and dedicated, with in-depth knowledge of the pupils and their families. As an amalgamated school on two sites, a staffing review will consider which setting best suits individual staff members. Every effort will be made to ensure that these valuable members of staff are not “lost”.
- Any change to the existing provision made by the two secondary CLD schools would take careful planning and the approval of the Council and the Department for Children Schools and Families. It is likely that if an amalgamation of the two schools was approved then this would not formally happen until September 2010 at the earliest.

Specification of the new amalgamated school

The new school would provide 201 places for boys and girls with complex learning difficulties aged 11 to 19, serving the whole of Wirral.

It would be sited at Douglas Drive, Moreton, Wirral, CH46 6BT (11 to 16) and at Pool Lane, Woodchurch, Wirral, CH49 5LA (16 to 19).

The school would provide extended services where there is demand, including wrap around care, holiday clubs and access to health professionals.

Transport arrangements to the school would be in accordance with the Local Authority’s guidance leaflet for parents.

The Consultation

We understand that amalgamating or closing any school is a difficult and sensitive issue for the whole community. Detailed community, transport and personnel matters will need to be considered before any option could be put into practice.

It is important for you to understand that a decision has not already been made. The Council's Cabinet will want to see the comments made during consultation before making any decision about what happens next.

What the option would mean for children and young people

The main concern would be to place the students in their new setting with as little disturbance to their education as possible.

As the two schools would amalgamate, those young people who transfer to a different site to the one they already attend will move together with other students of the same age group. This has the advantage that young people move with their classmates and friends.

Criteria for the entitlement to free Local Authority transport would not change, and as now, no pupil would be expected to travel more than an hour to school. Depending on the home address of individual pupils, it is possible that in some cases the escort would change, as pickup routes are adjusted to the new arrangements.

What the option would mean for staff

When two schools amalgamate, both schools close and then a new school opens, in this case on two sites. This means all the staff at both schools are made redundant and can be redeployed. The new school will of course need staff, and it is up to the new governing body to make appointments and decide which site and age group is most suited to the skills of each staff member.

Wirral Council has an excellent record on redeployment both for teachers and other school staff.

What the option would mean for school sites

In this option, the amalgamated school would operate from both the existing Foxfield site (11 to 16) and the Meadowside site (16 to 19).

The longer term goal of the reorganisation is to build a new co-located 11 to 16 school with a mainstream school, and to co-locate the 16 to 19 part of the school with a local Further Education College. At this stage, the future of any site that was no longer required as a school would be determined by the Council. There are no plans or planning applications for either site at this stage.

Finding out more

If you want more information about the option, you can find out more on the Internet. Go to www.wirral-mpc.gov.uk , and click on Special School Review. You will find:

- The full Consultation document
- A Review pack of background information about Foxfield and Meadowside
- The Cabinet report and resolution
- How to send your comments to the Director

If you do not have access to the Internet at home, you can go to your local library where staff will help you log on and print out the information.

The full Consultation document and the Review pack are also available for you to read at **your school**, and at the following places:

Libraries

Woodchurch

Moreton

Birkenhead Central

Wallasey Central

Community Centres

Woodchurch Community Centre

Moreton Community Centre

You can also look at these documents at Wallasey Town Hall.

If you want a printed copy, please contact the Asset Management Team, Hamilton Building, Conway Street, Birkenhead, CH41 4FD, 0151 666 4351, or by e-mail at specialreview@wirral.gov.uk.

What happens next?

Step 1. The first step is to distribute the Consultation document and ask for views and comments.

There will be **Consultation meetings** at Meadowside School and Foxfield School, as well as at the primary CLD special schools. The meetings will start at **7 o'clock in the evening**.

Meadowside on Monday, 3rd November 2008

Foxfield on Tuesday, 4th November 2008

The meeting is an opportunity for parents, carers, staff, governors and other people directly related to the school to have their views heard and noted by senior staff from the Children and Young People's Department and the Council's Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning. On-site childcare facilities are available for these meetings, however places must be pre-booked through the school.

A **drop-in session** will also be held. This session will be held between 1-3pm and 5-7pm on **12th November 2008** at **Meadowside School**.

The drop-in sessions are an opportunity for individuals or small groups of parents/carers, staff and governors to find out more information and speak personally to senior staff from the Children and Young People's Department. **To make an appointment to speak to someone at the Drop-in Session, please telephone Meadowside School on 0151 678 7711 .**

People associated with other mainstream and special schools, and members of the public who want to, can **write in with their views**. Anyone who wants to can write and say what they think. The address to write to is on page 11 of this document.

When the Consultation ends, all the views and opinions received in writing and at the consultation meetings will be combined into a report to the Council's Cabinet. Cabinet members will read the report and decide what to do next. They may decide not to go further at this stage. Members might make changes to the option, consider other options put forward as part of the consultation, or they could decide to do more consultation.

Step 2. If the Cabinet decides to go ahead with the option, it becomes a formal proposal.

About competitions

As the proposal for an amalgamation requires a new school to be established, under the Education and Inspections Act the Authority would usually be required to hold a competition to determine who will establish the new school.

Applying for an exemption

The Local Authority may decide to write to the Secretary of State to ask for an exemption from the requirement to hold a statutory competition. If this application is successful, formal proposal notices to close the existing schools and establish the new school would then be published at the two schools and in the local newspaper. There is then a six week representation period when formal written objections and comments can be sent to the Director of Children's Services.

Holding a competition

If a statutory competition is required, the Local Authority will begin by publishing a notice setting out the school's specification, giving bidders four months to express an interest in operating the new special school. The Local Authority can enter its own bid to operate the new school.

All the bidders proposals are then published, and there is a six week representation period when formal written objections and comments can be sent to the Director of Children's Services. A public meeting would also be held.

Step 3. With or without a competition, after the representation period ends, a decision on the proposal to establish a new school would be made within two months either by the Local Authority or in certain circumstances by the independent School's Adjudicator.

Step 4. If the proposal to establish a new school is approved, either by the Authority or by the Adjudicator, it will be put into practice. **The earliest the proposal could take place is September 2010.**

HAVING YOUR SAY

What do you think? Please make sure your response is received by **Friday 19th December 2008**.

You can write on your own, or you can join together with other people to write a joint letter. Your comments can be sent by post, by handing them in at your school or by e-mail. If you find it helpful you can complete and return the **feedback form** on the next page. There is also a feedback form on the Council's website: <http://www.wirral-abc.gov.uk/>.

The postal address for return of questionnaires or written comments is:

Secondary CLD Provision Review

***Secondary CLD Provision Review
Director of Children's Services
Hamilton Building
Conway Street
Birkenhead
CH41 1FD***

Or by e-mail to specialreview@wirral.gov.uk

Please note: To make sure the Consultation is fully open and transparent, all the responses to this consultation will be made available for inspection.

Secondary CLD Provision Consultation Feedback Form

Please let us know the main relationships you have with the school(s) by putting a tick in the appropriate box or boxes. You might be a parent and a member of staff, for example.

School	Parent	Member of staff	Governor	Other person
Foxfield School				
Meadowside School				
Elleray Park School				
Lyndale School				
Stanley School				
Other (please say which one)				

Comments

Please use this space for your comments. You can write more on another sheet if you need to.

Please tell us your name and address, postcode, and e-mail address if you have one. We will not use your personal information for anything other than this consultation.

Name

Address

Telephone

Postcode

e-mail

Please note: In order to ensure that this process is fully open and transparent, other people will be able to read all the responses to this consultation.

Address: Secondary CLD Provision Review
 Director of Children's Services
 Hamilton Building
 Conway Street
 Birkenhead
 CH41 4FD

Make sure your response is
received by:

FRIDAY 19th DECEMBER 2008

E-mail specialreview@wirral.gov.uk