

Bedford Borough School Organisation review

Potential Impact on Central Bedfordshire Schools

1. Background

- 1.1 Bedford Borough are consulting on a proposal to re-organise the structure of educational provision across the Borough to move from a 3 tier system of schools based on a 5-9, 9-13, 13-18 system of Lower, Middle and Upper schools respectively to a two tier system based on 5-11 Primary and 11-16/18 Secondary.
- 1.2 It is proposed that the changes are effected in two stages, commencing with Stage 1 in September 2013 and Stage 2 in September 2014. However each of the stages will be phased over a two year period to give a gradual transition from one system to the other; hence Stage 1 will be completed in September 2014 and Stage 2 in September 2015.
- 1.3 Therefore, by 2015 all Bedford Borough Schools will have become either Primary or Secondary schools based on the enlargement of the current Lower schools to become Primary, the lowering of the age range of the Upper Schools to become Secondary and the closure of the Middle schools. (the only exception to this is at Lincroft Middle which would become an 11-16 Secondary feeding into Sharnbrook at 16+).
- 1.4 The net effect of this would be a proposed reduction of 16 schools in total from 74 to 60 but with an increase of 3 Forms of Entry at Secondary level from 65FE to 68FE and an increase of about 6FE at Primary level from 68.5FE to 74.4.

2. Impact on Central Bedfordshire Schools (Assuming no change to structures in Central Bedfordshire)

- 2.1 In terms of the impact this may have on Central Bedfordshire schools, using the data from the "Pyramid Organisation Diagram" and a desk-top analysis of pupil and school data, the proposals would appear to impact upon the Sandy area and the North Western part of the Authority, although there would be other areas affected where parental preference currently plays a part. The majority of the proposed changes which would have a major impact fall into Bedford's Stage 2, so would commence in September 2014. In particular:

(i) *Sandy*

Presently, pupils from Moggerhanger and John Donne Lower Schools transfer to Alban Middle which is proposed for closure and thence they transfer to Sandy Upper. Alternative places would need to be provided for these Lower School pupils at Sandye Place Middle.

Sandye Place Middle has an Admission Number of 150 (capacity 600) and at Jan 2009 had 461 on roll with an average year group size of about 120. In comparison, the combined numbers at Moggerhanger and John Donne total about 21 per age group so could be accommodated at the Middle school.

However, presently some pupils from Wilden, Great Barford, Roxon, and Willington (all Bedford Borough) also attend Alban Middle, some of whom then transfer to Sandy Upper.

The proposed removal of these pupils would reduce the intake at Sandy Upper by about 0.5 FE based on current trends and would have a detrimental effect upon Sandy Upper which (apart from Northfields) is the Authority's smallest upper school. Currently the school has a capacity for 1009 students and about 780 on roll (i.e. 23% surplus capacity) and recent intakes have reduced from 7-8 FE to 6. With a further reduction, there may be concerns over the long term viability of such a small Upper school in terms of its ability to offer a wide and varied curriculum, particularly Post 16 and in terms of 14-19 (Bedfordshire SOP 2008).

It is also understood that there is concern in neighbouring Cambridgeshire over the impact that re-organisation in Bedford may have on the village college in south Cambridgeshire.

(ii) *North West*

The impact here would be on the area currently served by Wootton Upper School which serves the parishes of Cranfield, Houghton Conquest, Lidlington, Marston Moretaine plus Stewartby and Wootton. Similarly, the school gives priority to students attending Holywell (Central Beds) or Marston Vale (Bedford Borough).

In terms of Lower Schools affected, this would include Church End, Houghton Conquest, Shelton and Thomas Johnson which feed into Marston Vale and Cranfield which feeds into Holywell along with Wootton Lower (Bedford).

Bedford Borough proposes to close Marston Vale Middle which, in turn would displace pupils from Church End, Houghton

Conquest, Shelton and Thomas Johnson. Similarly, the Borough propose to convert Wootton Lower School to become a Primary, thereby removing these Bedford Borough pupils from Holywell Middle.

Holywell Middle is currently operating at capacity at just over 4FE. The net effect of the loss of Wootton Lower would be a reduction by about 1.5 - 2FE. The closure of Marston Vale would displace about 3FE of Central Bedfordshire pupils hence there would be a net requirement for central Bedfordshire to accommodate an additional 1 – 1.5 FE at Middle school level.

Geographically, Houghton Conquest could look towards Alameda Middle which has limited spare capacity for about 0.5FE , but this would still require additional places (about 1FE) to be provided at Holywell.

At Upper school level this would require Central Bedfordshire to accommodate an additional 5 – 5.5 FE given that Holywell currently feeds into Wootton Upper school. The nearest Upper school is Redborne which has limited spare capacity with a current NOR of 1377 against capacity for 1484 and could not accommodate the displaced pupils. Similarly, geographically this would be difficult from the Cranfield/Shelton area.

The alternative would be for there to be an arrangement with Wootton to admit the Holywell pupils at age 13 into the school. Whilst not ideal, this has worked in other locations. The alternative for Wootton could be to lose the Central Bedfordshire pupils and be an unviable Secondary school. However, this may also result in some of the parents/pupils deciding to transfer from Holywell to Wootton at age 11, thereby placing undue pressure upon the Middle school in terms of its viability.

A final alternative for Central Bedfordshire would be to consider whether it should consider a similar re-organisation of this part of the Authority to match the proposed pattern of provision in Bedford through the creation of Primary Schools feeding into the newly designated Wootton Secondary.

The analysis does not take into account the approximately 1000 new homes designated to be provided at Marston (480), Cranfield (371) or Houghton Conquest (120). Similarly, no assumptions are included over the Wixams development which straddles the boundary between the Authorities at Elstow.

(iii) Impact on other Central Bedfordshire Schools

The only other Upper school potentially affected is Samuel Whitbread which currently admits about 0.5 FE from Bedford,

(John Bunyan) which is proposed as an Academy in 2010 and is in Stage 1 of the Bedford proposals

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The proposed reorganisation of schools in Bedford will have an impact upon Central Bedfordshire and its ability to meet its needs. In the East of the Authority there will be a mixed impact upon the Sandy area which will potentially result in the loss of some pupils from the Upper school but which is already under pressure as a result of falling numbers.
- 3.2 In the North West, there will be a considerable impact upon schools in both Authorities.
- 3.3 The following action is being taken at officer level:
- Meetings will be held with the affected schools as soon as possible to validate and comment on the assumptions made in this document.
 - More detailed discussion will be held between the two Authorities.