

Warley Infant School and Bleakhouse Junior School

March 2020

THE FUTURE FOR WARLEY INFANT AND BLEAKHOUSE JUNIOR SCHOOLS

What is the proposal?

Sandwell Council is consulting parents, staff and the local community on the future of Warley Infant and Bleakhouse Junior Schools. We have proposals which we believe will result in an improvement in educational provision for all pupils in the area by ensuring that resources available to both schools are used in the most effective way to meet the needs of learners.

We have written this for parents, staff and the local community served by the two schools so that you are aware of the proposals and so that you can let us know your views.

There are two possibilities for the future of the two schools:

Either

- **the amalgamation of the schools on 1 September 2020 to form one 2 Form Entry (60 places per year group) primary school operating on the existing sites with a capacity for 420 pupils;**

Or

- **the two schools could remain as they are and continue to operate in the way they do at present.**

This document:

- explains why the possible change is being proposed;
- covers in detail the implications for the two schools;
- includes a response form for your comments.

Before any decision is made we would like to know what you think.

2. HOW YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE CONSULTATION

A letter has been sent to parents/carers of children at the schools and staff, directing them to this document via each school's website:

www.warleyinfants.co.uk and www.bleakhousejunior.school

Hard copies have been circulated to other interested parties, including the local Member of Parliament and Ward Councillors.

Copies are available at either school or by contacting Martyn Roberts, School Place Planning and Capital Manager on tel. no. 0121 569 8341 or email: martyn_roberts@sandwell.gov.uk.

You are invited to express your views on the proposal at an event organised at Bleakhouse Library on 24 March 2020.

Please note that this will be an appointment led event, requiring interested parties to make a booking prior to the event, between the hours of 16:00 – 20:00. This will allow us to manage the process effectively, minimise waiting times and ensure that appropriate officers are available to offer advice and guidance relating to specific matters of interest.

Bookings can be made by telephone or email by contacting the School Organisation and Development Team on 0121 568 6751 or Rachel_hill@sandwell.gov.uk

The closing date for booking an appointment is 17 March 2020.

If you cannot attend, we also welcome your views in writing. Please use the form at the end of this booklet, and return it to either school, or the address on the form, by Monday 6 April 2020. All views and comments must be received by this date in order to be considered by the Council when we decide whether or not to proceed with the proposal.

3. WHY WE ARE PROPOSING A CHANGE

Warley Infant and Bleakhouse Junior Schools are in the Bristnall Ward in Oldbury. Both schools have the capacity to admit up to 60 children in each year group. The current and projected numbers on roll at the two schools (as at January 2020) are given as follows:

Pupil numbers and school buildings

	School Capacity	January 2020 Number on roll	Forecast based on October 2019		
			2020	2021	2022
Warley Infant and Nursery	180	162	180	180	180
Bleakhouse Junior	232	242	240	240	240
Total	412	404	420	420	420

(Warley Infant School has a 52-place part time nursery – nursery figures are not included in the above table)

These figures indicate that both schools will continue to be popular.

The running costs of the two schools are inevitably higher than the costs of running a single primary school. Each school currently has its own management and administrative structures. If we keep the two separate schools a lot of money will continue to be used on management and administration which therefore cannot be spent directly on the education of children.

The Local Authority has previously amalgamated a number of schools in the borough to form all through schools in the interest of providing better educational outcomes for the pupils. The opportunity to consider the option at Warley Infant and Bleakhouse Junior Schools has arisen following the recent resignation of the Head Teacher at Warley Infant School.

4. STANDARDS

The most recent Ofsted inspection reports are available on the Ofsted website.

Warley Infant School:

<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/103963>

Bleakhouse Junior School

<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/21/103934>

School performance data is available on each school's website.

Bringing the two schools together has a number of potential benefits to pupils which can impact on standards:-

- One curriculum and assessment model which focusses on improving pupil outcomes at all key stages.
- Continuity in teaching approaches.
- Shared teacher knowledge on how to support pupils and get the best out of them.
- One set of policies and procedures with a focus on standards.

5. POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF THE PROPOSAL

• **Budget and staffing flexibility**

A single Head Teacher and Governing Board of one school would provide more flexibility in responding to the needs of the school through having a single larger pool of resources than either of the individual schools through the combined teaching and non-teaching staff. Deployment of staff and other resources across both sites of the school will enrich the curriculum delivery and also allow for more flexibility when additional staffing support is required.

• **Management and support structure**

Having just one school would provide a single school management and support structure. Less money would need to be spent on management and administration freeing it up to be spent directly on children and in the community. A revised set of 'whole school' policies and practices would be developed as part of planning the way the new school will work.

• **Continuity of Learning**

At present with the two schools as separate establishments, parents of Year 2 children at Warley Infant School must apply for their children to attend Bleakhouse Junior School, with no guarantee that they will secure a place.

Should the amalgamation proceed, from 1st September 2020 parents / carers of children in Year 2 will no longer need to apply to secure a Year 3 place.

With lots of opportunities for staff and pupils to work together as one school community, movement of pupils from Year 2 to Year 3 would be seamless.

• **Greater breadth of staff experience**

Recent curriculum developments, including new expectations from Ofsted have led to an increase in the number and range of specialist

tasks to be completed in schools. The sharing of these tasks amongst a larger number of staff with a wider range of experience, would mean an improvement in the standard of education that pupils receive. A larger number of staff would enable school leaders to increase extra-curricular opportunities for pupils.

- **Increased opportunities for staff development**

A wide range of teaching and learning expertise is needed in a primary school. The skills and knowledge of teaching staff would be extended. This would benefit the children and support the recruitment and induction of new staff and the retention of existing colleagues.

- **Improving the environment for learning**

The Head Teacher and staff of a single school could plan to use all of the available school buildings and outdoor areas to provide a greater range of educational facilities and activities.

6. POSSIBLE DISADVANTAGES OF THE PROPOSAL

Although we have identified many benefits from the proposal, we recognise that you may have several concerns which need to be considered.

- **Budget implications**

In the longer term the budget for the new school will be smaller than the total amount currently available to both schools combined but the costs will be less as savings will be made from running one school instead of two and from other economies of scale. The overall effect on the new school is expected to be broadly neutral.

This issue is addressed fully in section 10 titled 'Finance' below. Our view is that the final decision on whether to go ahead or not must be made on the basis of giving the children the best chance of a good quality education.

Also, Warley Infants is a school built under Private Finance Initiative (PFI). By amalgamating the two schools the PFI agreement for Warley Infants would transfer to the single school. This agreement, which includes ongoing maintenance and site management costs has another 9 years and 6 months to run.

7. WHEN WOULD THE PROPOSAL TAKE PLACE?

The amalgamation would be achieved by the closure of Warley Infant School, which would take place on 31 August 2020. Bleakhouse Junior School would be expanded to become Bleakhouse Primary School, a two-form entry primary school as of 1 September 2020.

All children currently on roll at both schools and children who have been offered a reception place at Warley Infant School, or a year 3 place at Bleakhouse Junior School will become Bleakhouse Primary School pupils.

8. LOCAL AUTHORITY SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS DURING REORGANISATIONS

There is a School Improvement Adviser attached to each school. The level of support each school gets is determined according to individual need, but is sufficient to support school personnel and to ensure that the school is supported professionally and pastorally. The School Improvement Adviser will be one of the key personnel supporting schools through the reorganisation process if it goes ahead.

The school's Human Resources provider will also provide support to the schools throughout the process and will also provide support to individual members of staff.

9. WHAT HAPPENS NOW?

The consultation period for this proposal ends at 5.00pm on 6 April 2020. The Council will then need to consider the outcome of the consultation exercise and decide whether to proceed with the proposal. The Council could decide not to proceed, in which case both schools would continue as present as separate schools.

If the outcome of this process leads the Council to decide to go ahead with the proposal, it has to publish a legal notice called a 'Statutory Proposal'. This notice, which would be published in June 2020, would formally state that the Council intends to close Warley Infant School and expand Bleakhouse Junior School to a two-form entry Primary School on the existing schools' sites. The notice would explain how and when it would do this and would also give people the opportunity to make formal

representations about the proposals. These representations would need to be made within 4 weeks of the publication of the Statutory Notice.

The Council would consider any formal objections in July 2020. A final decision would then be expected.

The table below shows the likely timeline should approval be given for the proposal to proceed:

DATE	ACTION
18 February 2020	Council Leader and Cabinet Member for Best Start in Life were briefed on the consultation
2 March 2020	Initial consultation begins
6 April 2020	Initial consultation ends
13 May 2020	Cabinet meeting to consider feedback from consultation and whether to publish a Statutory Proposal
1 June 2020	Publish statutory notice
28 June 2020	End of statutory notice and representation period
1 July 2020	Director – Education, Skills and Employment considers outcome of representation period and makes a final decision on the proposal

10. FINANCE

When a school closes, any balance (whether surplus or deficit) shall revert to the Local Authority; it cannot be transferred as a balance to any other school, even where a school is a successor to the closing school.

The combined budget of both schools is currently £2.048million (taking into account the original budget share, Early Years and high needs funding). The budget of any school is worked out on the basis of a School Funding Formula that takes into account the number of children on roll and their pupil characteristics, i.e. prior attainment, English as an

additional language. This means that the budget can fluctuate from year to year as the numbers of children go up or down and the pupil characteristics change.

The table below gives the indicative budget available to the new school following re-organisation. The base budget figure assumes that there will be no change to the School Funding Formula and is based on estimated pupil numbers for the schools as at October 2019. The figures produced in the table assume a minimum pupil funding guarantee of 1.84% in 2020/21 which is within the range stipulated by the government. The government are yet to determine the breakdown of promised increases in future years funding between mainstream schools and special education needs. The authority is therefore unable to predict with any accuracy future year funding for schools at this time.

Ultimately funding will be reduced to reflect the reduced rates and premises costs but it is not currently possible to accurately quantify the size and timing of these savings.

Figures shown in the following table are therefore purely for indicative purposes.

Financial Year		Base budget (£m)	Early Years/High Needs Funding (£m)	Total (£m)
2020/21	1st year	1.939	0.190	2.129

The current Warley Infant School site and buildings were rebuilt in 2004 through a Private Finance Initiative and continue to be managed through a Project Agreement with the main contractor, Total Schools Solutions (Sandwell) Limited.

11. THE SCHOOL BUILDINGS AND OUTDOOR AREAS

The new Governing Board will be responsible for management of the Junior block and would also become responsible for the site and buildings currently managed by Warley Infant School.

12. THE GOVERNING BOARD

The current Governing Boards for Warley Infant and Bleakhouse Junior Schools will continue to look after the two schools until the 31st August 2020.

Representatives of each Board will work together to make decisions on behalf of the new single school. The Local Authority will determine the size and membership of this group. This group will be responsible for ensuring that any action needed to prepare for the opening of the new school is undertaken.

The new Governing Board when established would need to sign a new governors agreement as part of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) deal.

The existing Governing Board compositions and the proposed temporary Governing Board composition are given in the table below:

	Existing composition of Governing Board		Proposed temporary Governing Board structure
	Warley Infant	Bleakhouse Junior	
Parents	3	3	1
Staff (including Head Teacher)	2	2	2
Local Authority	1	1	
Community / Co-opted	6	2	3
Total	12	8	6

13. STAFFING

The number of staff currently employed at each school is as follows:

	Teaching ¹		Non-teaching	
	Full time	Part time	Full time	Part time
Warley Infant and Nursery	8		13	8
Bleakhouse Junior	10	2	11	7
Total	18	2	24	15

The staffing structure of a new 2 Form Entry primary school would be the responsibility of the Governing Board to determine. There will be discussions with relevant trades unions about the staffing process.

¹ Including Head Teacher and Deputy Head Teacher

In the interim, the Head Teacher of Bleakhouse Junior School will provide leadership support to Warley Infant School and determine any other additional arrangements in conjunction with the Joint Management Board. At Warley Infant School the Deputy Head Teacher will be the acting Head Teacher until a final decision on the proposal is made.

CONSULTATION ON THE REORGANISATION OF WARLEY INFANT AND BLEAKHOUSE JUNIOR SCHOOLS
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CONSULTATION RESPONSE FORM;

Are you a:

		Please tick
	At Warley Infant	At Bleakhouse Junior
Parent/Carer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Governor	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Member of staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Member of the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- Do you agree that Warley Infant and Bleakhouse Junior Schools should amalgamate on 1 September 2020 to form a new 2 Form Entry Primary School operating on the existing sites (so that it will be a school with a capacity for 420 pupils)

Yes / No* (*please delete as necessary)

Please add any comments here (and overleaf if necessary)

Signed:

Date:

Please return this form by Monday 6 April 2020 to either school or, if you prefer to: Martyn Roberts, School Organisation and Development, Education, Skills and Employment, Sandwell Council House, Freeth Street, Oldbury, B69 3DE

The information you provide on this form is subject to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulations. Where applicable information entered will be forwarded to the relevant Education / Council sections for action or for a reply to be given.