

## Buildwas Primary School Consultation - FAQs

---

The consultation on the proposal to close Buildwas Primary School with effect from 31 August 2016 runs from Monday 7 September 2015 to Sunday 18 October 2015. This second FAQs document, together with the first list uploaded onto the Shropshire Council website on Friday 18 September 2015, seeks to address the questions that are being raised by consultees during this period, some of which are common to a number of consultation responses. The intention is that these questions, and the answers provided, are put in the public domain – via the Council website - for all stakeholders to have access to, rather than restricting the responses to individual consultees.

The FAQs will be updated and refreshed throughout the consultation period. The final complete FAQs list at the end of the consultation period will be referenced within, and appended to, the report going to Shropshire Council Cabinet on 28 October 2015. It is worth noting that all of the consultation responses - emails and letters in their original form - will be made available to all Cabinet members and will form an important part of the decision making process.

23. I have noted that the number of Shropshire pupils at Buildwas Primary School has been stable despite the uncertainty of having a consultation to close imposed on it. The projections for children in catchment area due to start education in the next two years, based upon information provided through a Freedom of Information request, show that there are sustainable numbers for the future of the school. Do you disagree with this?

**Shropshire Council has acted to support and advise parents to avoid a potential outflow of children. However, there is evidence based on registrations that the number of pupils attending the school (which emerged after the Freedom of Information request), particularly from out-of-area, has fallen.**

**The known children resident in the catchment area and due to start education between 2016 and 2018 shows a gradual reduction - the number of known children is currently forecast to reduce from 9 in 2016 to 7 in 2017, and to 5 in 2018.**

24. In the consultation document you acknowledge that, since an effective Acting Headteacher has been in place, the school has shown clear and defined improvement. With this being the case and given the evident ability of the school and teachers why aren't you supporting the leadership of the school instead of consulting to close?

**The local authority has provided substantial support for leadership and management (including previous and current Acting Headteacher deployment) and teaching and learning in the school over time. The local authority remains committed to ensuring support is provided for the school to ensure rapid improvement. The chair of governors has acknowledged the effectiveness of this support.**

**On 4 June 2015, following the first monitoring visit since the school became subject to special measures following the Ofsted inspection in January 2015, Her Majesty's Inspector, confirmed that:**

**'The local authority is providing an appropriate level of challenge and support to the school through regular meetings and reviews. The local authority adviser knows the school well and has arranged a programme of effective and well-focussed support.....The staff have benefitted from this support.....'**

25. In the consultation document it is stated that changes in leadership have left the school vulnerable and efforts to secure partnership arrangements, for example through federation, have been unsuccessful. Can you please advise on the process and normal lead times for achieving federation status and whether the school has been afforded enough time to secure such an arrangement?

**There is no set timescale for the establishment for a federation. The Department for Education consider that a federation can be established in ten weeks. Locally, a federation between two Shropshire schools is on track to be completed within a period of sixteen weeks. Two school terms would usually provide ample time to establish a federation.**

**In the case of Buildwas Primary School the report prepared for the Portfolio Decision Making Session on 13 July 2015 noted that discussions with four potential partners were brokered by local authority officers, but unfortunately have not progressed to formal adoption of federative working arrangements.**

26. Will Telford & Wrekin children be guaranteed a place in a similar small village school if Buildwas was to close?

**If Buildwas Primary School was to close, an admissions process would be initiated to enable all parents of children at the school to express their preferences for alternative schools. Whether parents were residents of Shropshire or Telford & Wrekin local authority area, they would be able to name up to 3 schools of their preference. Shropshire Council would consider those applications sympathetically in such circumstances and would expect Shropshire schools to accommodate as many applicants as possible at those schools. Until it is known what those preferred options would be, no guarantees could be given.**

27. What guarantees can be offered to parents that Buildwas pupils' education will not be harmed by moving schools and what support can be provided to help children form new friendship groups?

**The local authority is committed to working with school staff to support the pupils in understanding the process and how it will impact on them. If there is ultimately a decision to close the school local authority officers will work closely with the staff at Buildwas Primary School, and the other**

potential receiving schools, so that they can best prepare the children for the move to another school.

In the context that no decision has yet been taken to close the school, there has been a strong and clear steer to parents to stay at the school until the appropriate time (July 2016) which will allow for the change process to be carefully prepared for and properly managed. Pupils would be likely to move with their friends. At that time both the closing school and receiving school(s) would be ready, involved and supported by the Council's Admissions Team and education advisers. Visits and induction days would be an option for smoothing the transfer.

28. Given Buildwas Primary School's excellent results can you provide assurance that alternative schools offered to pupils will have at least as good results and be at least equal on league tables?

The 2014 validated Key Stage 2 test results for the linked primary schools connected to William Brookes School, drawn from the Department for Education's 'School and college performance tables', are reproduced below:

	Level 3 or below	Level 4 or below	Level 4b or above in reading & maths and level 4 or above in writing	Level 5 or below	Average point score	Average level per pupil
Brockton	9%	91%	91%	64%	30.8	5C
Broseley	0%	96%	87%	13%	29.0	4A
Buildwas	11%	67%	56%	22%	28.8	4A
Christ Church	0%	54%	54%	0%	26.9	4B
Church Preen	-	-	-	-	-	
John Wilkinson	0%	96%	96%	48%	31.6	5C
Much Wenlock	0%	73%	64%	23%	28.6	4A
St Lucia's	0%	93%	87%	27%	29.9	4A
Barrow 1618	0%	100%	67%	50%	30.8	5C

The Department for Education's 'School and college performance tables' can be accessed at: <http://www.education.gov.uk/cgi-bin/schools/performance/group.pl?qttype=LA&superview=pri&view=aat&set=3&sort=&ord=&tab=2&no=893&pg=1> .

29. Has the Council carried out a cost comparison between closing and not closing Buildwas Primary School and if so:
- (i) What are the figures (in £'s) for each option and
  - (ii) What impact (in £'s) closure / non-closure would have on Shropshire's Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)?

No detailed comparative cost study has been undertaken at this stage in the process given that the decision to proceed to closure has not yet been taken, but consideration would be around:

- transport costs
- efficient use of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG)
- costs of closing down the site
- capital receipt from sale of building/land
- staff redundancy costs if not redeployed
- costs of disconnecting services/ceasing equipment leases where necessary.

The level of DSG received in Shropshire would not be affected by the closure of Buildwas Primary School if the pupils continue to attend Shropshire schools. For each pupil moving from Buildwas Primary School to a school outside of Shropshire, Shropshire's DSG would reduce by £4,403 at 2015-16 funding rates. It should be noted that the teaching costs associated with these pupils would move with them.

The current level of DSG delegated to Buildwas School equates to £4,482 per pupil. If the school were to close, and the pupils move to other Shropshire schools, the receiving schools would receive on average £3,588 per pupil through their delegated budget, at 2015-16 funding rates. The closure of Buildwas School has the potential to lead to the more efficient use of Shropshire's DSG.

30. Can Shropshire Council provide assurance that responses will be provided to each of the questions in due time to allow these to be digested and for questions to be raised or a response to be given at the public consultation meeting on the 23 September?

The responses to questions received via email to the Buildwas consultation mailbox are being addressed through the production of FAQs which are being uploaded to the Shropshire Council website. For those questions received up until the end of Thursday 17 September 2015, every effort will be made to have the responses uploaded onto the website ahead of the public meeting on Wednesday 23 September 2015 at the Buildwas Village Hall.

The consultation period runs until Sunday 18 October 2015. It is therefore anticipated that the FAQs will be refreshed and updated through to the end of this period, with any new questions arising after the public meeting being addressed using this approach. The final complete FAQs will be included in the Cabinet report on 28 October 2015.

31. Can Shropshire Council provide a clear summary of what would be viewed as evidence during the consultation process that it is the best interests of the students and community to keep Buildwas Primary School open?

The formal consultation process is seeking whatever evidence consultees consider needs to be put in the public domain to help inform the report

**going to the Cabinet meeting on 28 October 2015, when the decision whether to publish a closure proposal will be taken. It will be for consultees to determine what evidence should be put forward.**

**The consultation document presents what are believed to be grounds for formally considering and consulting on a proposal to close the school in August 2016.**

32. What are the criteria that will be used to determine whether to keep the school open or not and what weighting will be attributed to each of the criteria in order for the decision to be made?

**The consultation document provides details on the range of criteria that will be taken into consideration by Cabinet when determining whether to proceed to the new stage of the process, which will be whether or not to publish a closure proposal. This includes, but is not limited to, quality of education, use of resources and access to education. No formal weightings will be applied to the individual criteria.**

33. Can Shropshire Council offer an assurance that the inaccuracies regarding parking arrangements and the busy nature of the B4380 will be rectified in the documentation provided at the public consultation and in the portfolio provided to decision makers?

**Any new information received during the consultation period regarding the content in the consultation document will be referenced in the report going to Cabinet on 28 October 2015, particularly where it is material in securing the required rapid and sustainable improvement in provision and outcomes for the children currently at the school.**

34. With the school now improving, could, as research suggests, the draw of new pupils to the school be increased? What other local rural schools in Shropshire can boast this type of success?

**The evidence from other Shropshire schools that have come out of an Ofsted category shows that, while in some instances pupil numbers increase, there are also examples of them declining. The factors and local circumstances influencing school demographics are complex and vary significantly from one school to the next. While the school is evidencing improvement, it currently remains within an Ofsted category.**

35. Considering the current available vacancies, how can Shropshire Council guarantee that all pupils will have a place in a local Shropshire school?

**If Buildwas Primary School was to close, an admissions process would be initiated to enable all parents of children at the school to express their preferences for alternative schools. Parents would be able to name up to 3 schools of their preference. Shropshire Council would consider those applications sympathetically in such circumstances and would expect Shropshire schools to accommodate as many applicants as possible at**

**those schools. Until it is known what those preferred options would be, no guarantees could be given.**

36. With fewer places available in non-denominational schools, who would have priority for these places and how would this be decided?

**Until parents have expressed a preference for alternative schools, it cannot be anticipated how many children will apply for places and at which schools. If there were to be more applicants than places available in a particular year group at a school, it would normally be necessary to apply the appropriate school's oversubscription criteria to determine who would be eligible for those places. However, in the exceptional circumstance of a school closure, Shropshire Council would work with the alternative schools of preference to accommodate as many pupils as possible.**

37. What SATs evidence do Shropshire Council hold that shows the other local schools are providing at least the same level of academic achievement as Buildwas?

**Details given in the answer to question 28 above apply to this question.**

38. How has the B4380 road, by which the school is located, identified as "busy"? Has a survey of traffic been done on this stretch of road during school hours? Has Shropshire Council compared the volume of traffic on the A458 to the B4380?

**No traffic survey has been undertaken on the B4380 outside Buildwas Primary School and, equally, no comparison has been taken with the volume of traffic any other roads or outside any other Shropshire schools. If the decision is made to proceed to closure the relevant officers in Highway Management will be engaged to provide an assessment on the level of use of the road and any safety considerations in the area.**

39. What contingencies will be put in place in the event of the River Severn flooding and the route over the bridge at Cressage being closed?

**At this stage of the process, and with no decision yet taken to publish a closure proposal, this particular and quite specific issue has not been considered. The focus at this stage is on consulting on how best to secure the required rapid and sustainable improvement in provision and outcomes for the children currently at the school. If the decision is made to proceed to closure the relevant officers in Shropshire Council will be engaged to assess such issues.**

40. Should Buildwas school close, what plans are in place to accommodate increased usage of the road and to make the road safer where it narrows and bends sharply at the River Severn bridge at Cressage?

**At this stage of the process, and with no decision yet taken to publish a closure proposal, this particular and quite specific issue has not been considered. If the decision is made to proceed to closure the relevant officers in Shropshire Council will be engaged to assess such issues.**