



# Northumberland

## County Council

### CABINET

Date: 9th April 2019

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#### **Proposed consultation on extending the age ranges of Whitley Memorial CE and Bedlington West End First Schools**

Report of the Executive Director of Adults and Children's Services Cath McEvoy-Carr

Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Deputy Leader of the Council: Councillor Wayne Daley

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#### **Purpose of report**

This report sets out a request from the Governing Bodies of Whitley Memorial CE First School and Bedlington West End First School to carry out a consultation on a proposal to extend the age ranges of these two schools to become primary schools with effect from 1 September 2020. A recommendation is set out in this report to request that Cabinet agree to permit an informal consultation on this proposal.

Cabinet may be requested to permit the publication of a Statutory Proposal at a future date following the outcome of consultation.

#### **Recommendations**

##### **Cabinet are recommended to:**

1. Agree that an informal consultation takes place as requested by the Governing Body of Whitley Memorial CE First School on a proposal to extend the age range of the school from an age 3 to 9 first school to become an age 3 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2020;
2. Agree that an informal consultation takes place as requested by the Governing Body of Bedlington West End First School on a proposal to extend the age range of the school from age 4 to 9 first school to become an age 4 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2020;
3. Delegate the decision to undertake any necessary further consultation on the proposal to the Executive Director of Adults and Children's Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children's Services;
4. Note that a further report following informal consultation would be submitted to a future meeting of Cabinet, at which a decision on whether or not to issue a

Statutory Proposal in relation to the proposed age extensions as set out at Recommendation 1 above would be made.

5. Note that neither Whitley Memorial CE First School nor West End First School are listed as rural schools on the DfE's List of Designated Rural Primary Schools 2018 and therefore this legislation would not need to be a factor to be considered by Cabinet in relation to any future decision on the proposal set out at Recommendation 1.

## **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the Council's Corporate Plan 2018-2021, "We want you to achieve and realise your potential".

## **Key issues**

1. Bedlington Partnership is currently a mixed-provision partnership, with the majority of schools now organised within the two-tier system, but with the mini-partnership of West End First School, Whitley Memorial First School and Meadowdale [Middle] Academy remaining within a 3-tier organisation. Currently, children on roll at these two first schools feed into Meadowdale at the end of Year 4, while children on roll at Meadowdale subsequently feed to either St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy or Bedlington Academy at the end of Year 8, according to parental preference and availability of places.
2. Since changing from age 13 to 18 high schools to 11 to 18 secondary schools, Bedlington Academy and St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy have retained two annual intakes each September to reflect the mixed-economy within the partnership i.e. an annual intake into Year 7 and into Year 9. However, from September 2020, both secondary academies in Bedlington will remove the intake into Year 9 and will accept only one annual intake of pupils only into Year 7 from that point forward. The rationale for the removal of the formal intake into Year 9 is that the majority of schools that feed to the secondary academies are now primary schools. Furthermore, data gathered by the two secondary academies over time indicates that the pupils joining them in Year 9 from middle school are not performing at the same expected level as their peers who joined in Year 7.
3. Since the reorganisation of the two secondary academies, a number of parents with children on roll at Meadowdale Academy have chosen to send their children to either St Benet Biscop Catholic or Bedlington Academies from Year 7 rather than staying with the middle academy until the end of Year 8; this has resulted in smaller year groups in the top end of the school. The decision of the two Bedlington secondary academies to remove their formal Year 9 intake from September 2020 will be likely to lead to almost all children leaving Meadowdale Academy at the end of Year 6 as there will no longer be a clear educational pathway into Year 9; there will of course be a significant impact on the viability of the middle academy.
4. The Governing Body of Meadowdale believe that the academy has an important legacy within the local area and decided that efforts to retain its existence should

be undertaken. Whilst the Governing Body did explore the option of extending the age range up of the school to become secondary, given the existing capacity at secondary level, they decided in Autumn 2018 to carry out consultation on a proposal to reorganise the academy to become a primary school from September 2019. As a consultee, Northumberland County Council responded that, while the rationale for the Governing Body's proposal were understandable, NCC did not support the proposal on the basis that it would create additional surplus places at the primary phase within the Bedlington Partnership and would have a destabilising impact on the two local authority maintained first schools in the mini-partnership, i.e. Whitley Memorial CE and Bedlington West End First Schools. In order to broker a solution to the issues facing the schools in the Meadowdale mini-partnership, Council officers suggested that a joint consultation exercise between Meadowdale Academy and the Council on behalf of the two feeder first schools should be undertaken in order that any reorganisation was undertaken in a managed and coherent way for the benefit of parents and pupils.

5. In November 2018, a meeting was arranged between Council officers, the CE diocese, the headteachers and Governor representatives of Meadowdale Academy, Whitley Memorial CE and West End First School, and a representative of the Regional School Commissioner. After much discussion, it was agreed that each school would write to the Director of Education and Skills by Christmas 2018, setting out their preferences for organisation of their school with a view to carrying out a joint consultation. The representatives of Meadowdale Academy also conceded that their proposed implementation date of September 2019 was not achievable and agreed to alter their proposal to implementation from September 2020. They also agreed to review the planned intake into the academy with a view to reducing it to one form of entry (1FE) from 1.5FE as originally consulted upon.
6. In December 2018, the Governing Body of Meadowdale Academy published their report setting out their findings and conclusion from the consultation undertaken earlier in the Autumn. Whilst confirming the Governing Body's decision to continue with the proposal to become a primary school within the report, the Governing Body also set out a commitment to carry out a joint consultation with the Council regarding reorganisation of the schools and academy within the mini-partnership, delaying the implementation of their proposal to September 2020 and reducing the proposed planned admission number of the school.
7. However in early February this year, Council officers were informed that the Headteacher Board of the Regional Schools Commissioner would be considering the proposal of Meadowdale Academy to become a primary school and on 14 February officers were further informed that the academy had indeed been approved to become a one form entry (1FE) primary school with effect from 1 September 2020, although this is subject to final approval by DfE.
8. As the decision to approve Meadowdale Academy to become a primary school will directly impact on Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools, there is now a need to consider the organisation of these schools especially as, from September 2020, there will no longer be a clear, educational pathway for pupils on roll at these schools after Year 4. Furthermore, there are already surplus school places within

the Bedlington Partnership, including in the schools within the Meadowdale mini-partnership and this is likely to be exacerbated as pupil numbers are forecast to continue to fall for the foreseeable future. It should also be noted that St Bede's Primary School in Bedlington also attracts a significant proportion of pupils from the Meadowdale mini-partnerships area. These factors could impact on the viability of these three schools in the future.

9. Informal consultation will enable the views of all parents, schools and the wider community to be gathered and allow for alternative proposals to be put forward for consideration. Cabinet are therefore requested to approve the Recommendation to carry out informal consultation on the proposal for Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools to become primary schools with effect from September 2020.

## **BACKGROUND**

### Proposed Informal Consultation

10. If approved, an informal consultation lasting six weeks, as recommended in Government guidance, would be undertaken. A consultation document would be made available in electronic and paper format (where requested) to relevant stakeholders, including parents, pupils, and staff of Whitley Memorial CE and West End First School and Meadowdale Academy. Any other interested parties, including schools in the wider Bedlington Partnership, would be invited to respond to the consultation. During the six week consultation period, Council Officers and the Governing Body would meet with staff at the first two schools and a consultation event would be held within Bedlington to enable all interested parties to attend.
11. The consultation would focus on a wide range of factors, including:-
  - Reasons and rationale for the proposal;
  - Pupil transition;
  - Admissions arrangements;
  - The home to school transport, and the travel and car use implications of the proposal;
  - SEN/additional needs;
  - Staffing issues;
  - Buildings;
  - The Sport and Recreation implications of the proposal;
  - Catchment areas.
12. Critically, consultees would also be asked if they had any suggestions that would offer alternative solutions to those proposed. Feedback from the informal consultation would be brought back to Cabinet for a decision on whether or not to proceed to the publication of a Statutory Proposal.
13. In particular, consultation would need to be undertaken specifically with Bedlington Academy on whether or not they would agree to the increase of the academy's intake from 5 forms of entry to 6 forms of entry in the future. This would be as a result of Meadowdale Academy removing provision for Year 7 and 8 education at a date in the future to be confirmed. It is not expected that

additional accommodation would be required initially at Bedlington Academy should an additional form of entry be added as there is sufficient capacity within the building.

14. If, as a result of consultation, it is felt necessary to consult on any modifications, the Executive Director of Adults and Children’s Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services would decide on the content and form of any further consultation on the proposal. The outcome of any further informal consultation would then be reported to a Cabinet meeting where, subject to a preferred model being recommended, a decision would then be made as to whether or not to progress to the issuing of a Statutory Proposal, taking into account the outcome of the consultation.

Proposed Model for Consultation for Meadowdale mini-partnership

SCHOOL	CURRENT SITUATION			PROPOSED PRIMARY/SECONDARY MODEL		
	Capacity in Jan 19 (Number on Roll Jan 2019)	Forms of Entry (FE)	Planned Admission Number (PAN) 2018/19	Capacity	Forms of Entry (FE)	Planned Admission Number (PAN)
Bedlington West End First School	300 (257)	2	60	315	1.5	45
Bedlington Whitley Memorial First School	269 (269)	1.8	54	315	1.5	45
*Meadowdale Academy	480 (370)	4.3	128	210	1	30
**Bedlington Academy	750 - not including 6th form (627 - Yr7 to Yr11)	5 (4FE entry into Year 7 and 1FE entry into Yr9)	150 (122 into Yr7 and 28 into Yr9)	900 (not inc. 6th form)	6	180

\*Note 1 - Meadowdale Academy has already been approved to become a 1FE primary school by the Regional School Commissioner with effect from 1 September 2020, although the decision is currently subject to final approval from DfE.

\*\*Note 2 - As a result of the proposed removal of year 7 and Year 8 provision from Meadowdale Academy when they become a primary school, an additional form of entry would be required at Bedlington Academy to accommodate pupils who would have otherwise attended the school in those year groups. It is envisaged that the additional form of entry would

be able to be accommodated by Bedlington Academy without the need for expansion of the buildings initially.

### Standards

14. Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools are both rated ‘Good’ by Ofsted and attract the majority of pupils in their catchment areas, as well as attracting pupils from other school catchments. As noted earlier, the surplus places in Bedlington allow for greater parental choice of schools in the Bedlington area than in some areas of the county. KS1 results at the two schools are also good and improving as demonstrated by Table 1 below:

Table 1 - Whitley Memorial and West End KS1 Performance 2015/16, 2016/17, 2017/18

	KS1								
	Reading			Writing			Maths		
	2015/ 16	2016/ 17	2017/ 18	2015/ 16	2016/ 17	2017/ 18	2015/ 16	2016/ 17	2017/ 18
<b>Bedlington West End</b>	67	88	90	54	80	74	74	92	77
<b>Bedlington Whitley Memorial</b>	67	77	81	48	65	85	58	77	79
<b>Northumberland</b>	78	80	81	70	74	74	76	79	79

### Surplus Places

15. As noted in Key Issues, the number of pupils being born within the Bedlington Partnership as a whole is reducing. This is leading to an increasing number of surplus places in schools, including the three schools in the Meadowdale mini-partnership. The Bedlington Partnership has 13% surplus places as a whole (October 2018 data), which is the joint 6th highest percentage of the 14 partnerships in the county. Across the three schools in the Meadowdale mini-partnership, there are 17% surplus places (October 2018 data). There is the potential that additional pupils may come from housebuilding schemes in the Bedlington area, but these are unlikely to significantly impact on the underlying downward trend of pupils in the area. This proposal suggests that initially Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools should be reorganised as 1.5 FE first schools i.e. with a Planned Admission Number (PAN) of 45 pupils in each new Reception class. However, if pupil forecasts are correct and pupil numbers in the partnership continue to fall, this may require a reduction in PAN at these schools. Furthermore, while the Governing Body of Meadowdale Academy has been approved by the RSC to reorganise to a 1FE (30 pupils per intake) primary school, as an academy outside of the control of the Council, the Governing Body could

raise its PAN if accommodation was available, which would have an impact on the viability of the two other proposed primary schools.

### Catchment Areas

7. Catchment areas are used by the Council in order to ensure that each school has the opportunity to have a viable number of pupils and to manage home to school transport eligibility. As a middle academy, the catchment area of Meadowdale encompasses the catchment areas of Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools. Under this proposal, two primary schools and one academy primary would serve this area of Bedlington. Views are sought, therefore, on whether or not there should be a catchment area developed for the three schools (noting also that Roman Catholic schools are not allocated a catchment area) or whether catchment areas should be limited to local authority maintained schools. In any event, parents would be able to exercise parental preference in relation to alternative schools.

### SEN Provision

8. There is no specialist SEN provision currently within Whitley Memorial CE or West End First Schools.

### Early Years Provision

9. Whitley Memorial CE has a maintained nursery for children aged 3 and 4, while West End First School has on-site early years provision for children from ages 2 to 4. There would be no plans to alter the current early years provision at the two schools as a result of this proposal.

### Implications for school buildings

10. The buildings of Whitley Memorial First School are in the ownership of the Church of England Diocese, while the playing fields are in the ownership of the Council. The Council owns the buildings of West End First School. The buildings and land of Meadowdale Academy are on a long-term lease of 125 years from the Council. The proposal to extend the age range of the two schools to become primary schools would require capital works to be carried out to ensure they were suitable for the whole primary age range. Should approval for consultation be given, indicative costings would be prepared and presented to Cabinet with the outcomes of consultation.

For information, any works required at Meadowdale Academy would need to be funded by the Governing Body or from funding sought by them from the DfE.

### Timeline for implementation

11. If the proposal to extend the age ranges of Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools was approved, the timeline for implementation of the reorganisation of the schools would be as follows:

## Proposed timeline for reorganisation of Whitley Memorial and West End First Schools

### **1 September 2020**

- Pupils on roll in Year 4 in the two first schools on 31 August 2020 would be retained by their new primary schools as Year 5.

### **1 September 2021**

- Pupils in Year 5 in the two new maintained primary schools on 31 August 2021 would be retained as the new Year 6 from 1 September 2017.

### **1 September 2018**

- Pupils in Year 6 in the two new primary schools would transfer into Year 7 at Bedlington Academy or to another school or academy with Year 7 provision according to parental choice.

The Governing Body of Meadowdale Academy has indicated its intention to extend its age range to include additional year groups from Reception to Year 4 (whilst maintaining Year Groups 5 to 8 initially) and to have nursery provision for children from age 3 with effect from 1 September 2020. Given the timeline the Governing Body consulted on during Autumn 2018, it is to be assumed that the last Year 8 class at Meadowdale will leave the school at the end of the 2023/2024 academic year after which the academy will become an age 3 to 11 primary academy. However, this will need to be confirmed.

## Implications for Staff

12. There may be implications for the staff at Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools should this proposal be approved at a future date. Detailed discussions with the Governing Body of the school and with the Trades Unions would be undertaken during consultation about any potential positive or negative impacts and where necessary, how the latter could be minimised.

## Transport

13. As stated in para. 7 above, the Council uses catchment areas as one of the means of managing transport eligibility and, as a consequence, any decisions regarding catchment areas could impact on some pupils. In any event, transport would be arranged in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.

## Rural Schools and the presumption against closure

14. As stated under Recommendations, neither Whitley Memorial CE nor West End First Schools are classified as rural schools under the DfE's List of Designated Rural Schools 2018 and therefore this legislation would not be applicable to any decisions made by Cabinet with respect to this proposal.



## Sport and Recreation

15. Any potential impact on Sport and Recreation would be discussed as part of the consultation process.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None

## **IMPLICATIONS ARISING OUT OF THE REPORT**

<b>Policy</b>	The consultation would be consistent with the Council's policy to review changes to schools in accordance with local wishes and needs.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	Should consultation be approved, indicative costs on the potential funding implications for school buildings as a result of this proposal would be worked up to be presented to Cabinet at a later meeting in order to ascertain whether such associated costs would be affordable.
<b>Legal</b>	The proposed informal consultation complies with legislation.
<b>Procurement</b>	No implications
<b>Human Resources</b>	There may be some implications for staff in Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools should reorganisation be undertaken.
<b>Property</b>	Refer to 'Finance and value for money' above
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	Should Cabinet approved the recommendation to carry out consultation, an EIA would be developed and presented to Cabinet as part of the consultation outcomes report.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	A full risk assessment would be carried out on the project should consultation be approved.
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	This report has considered Section 17 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.
<b>Customer Considerations</b>	The proposals set out in this report are based upon the desire of the Governing Bodies of Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools to consult on a proposal to extend the age range of these schools to become primary schools with effect from 1 September 2020.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	It is not envisaged that this proposal would have a significant positive or negative impact on carbon reduction.

<b>Wards</b>	Bedlington West Bedlington East Bedlington Central

## **CONSULTATION**

This report has been considered by the Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and the Chief Legal Officer.

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

**None**

### **Report sign off**

Finance Officer	N/A
Monitoring Officer/Legal	LH
Human Resources	N/A
Procurement	N/A
I.T.	N/A
Portfolio Holder	WD

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## **Appendices**

None