

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

LOCAL EDUCATION AUTHORITY

**CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE ARRANGEMENTS FOR
SECONDARY EDUCATION**

AT

VERNEY AVENUE SCHOOL

APRIL 2003

A CONSULTATION PAPER

1. Introduction

Buckinghamshire County Council's Local Education Authority has produced this document as we wish to consult parents, staff and the local community on the future of Verney Avenue School.

2. The Proposal

We are consulting on a proposal that the school will close with effect from the end of the 2003 Autumn Term (i.e. 31st December 2003).

The proposal forms part of the County Council's strategy for Special Educational Needs, which involves rationalising the current provision of Special Schools to meet predicted needs more appropriately.

The County Council has available to it a number of secondary schools where pupils with Moderate Learning Difficulties can be placed. These include:

Pebble Brook School, Aylesbury.

Furze Down School, Winslow.

Alfriston School, Beaconsfield.

Stoney Dean School, Amersham.

The County Council will work with staff and parents to ensure that pupils at Verney Avenue School are placed in schools where their needs can be appropriately met.

3. Why is the proposal being made?

The need for Moderate Learning Difficulties places in Secondary Special Schools in Buckinghamshire is reducing. This change is not unique to Buckinghamshire and is mirrored across the country. The number of MLD statements of special educational needs that are issued has reduced over recent years as increasingly parents look to place their children in local schools to better meet their child's needs.

Increasingly children, whose needs are such that they cannot be appropriately supported in mainstream schools, have multiple special needs and they require a range of support services that cannot be provided by a school such as Verney Avenue School.

The reduction in the number of pupils at Secondary Moderate Learning Difficulties Special Schools countywide is demonstrated by the figures below:

Year 11	90	Year 9	79
Year 10	79	Year 8	77
		Year 7	77

At Verney Avenue School the reduction in the number of pupils is even more dramatic as shown by the table below:

Year 11	24	Year 9	10
Year 10	10	Year 8	7
		Year 7	5
Total	56		

To enable the school to offer a balanced curriculum to pupils, the County Council needs to allocate funding equivalent to some 85-90 pupil places.

As the school's roll reduces, more funding has to be given to the school that could more effectively fund provision at other Special Schools within Buckinghamshire.

In addition Local Education Authority's (LEAs) have a statutory duty to keep under review their arrangements for providing school places for Special Educational Needs pupils. The DfES have advised LEAs that it is important that education is provided as cost effectively as possible and that action is taken to remove surplus places, especially where there are at least 30 surplus places and more than a quarter of pupil places unfilled (as at Verney Avenue).

4. Why is the proposal being made now?

As outlined in Point 3 of the consultation document there are concerns over the long term financial viability of the school arising from the steady decline in the school's roll over the last few years.

The number of pupils on roll, including the 6th Form, is currently 66. The demand for 6th form provision is expected to reduce as there is an increasing number of alternative providers for post 16 provision.

If the trend in the reduction in the school's roll continued then by September 2003 the number of children at the school will fall to only 33.

By far the largest percentage of a school's budget comes from the number of pupils it has on its roll. As this has reduced, the school has had to spend a higher proportion of its budget on fixed overhead costs and therefore there is less flexibility for the school to meet the curriculum needs of its pupils.

This financial constraint will mean that over time the school will find it increasingly difficult to retain and recruit staff and this will affect its ability to offer a full and balanced curriculum to all its pupils.

The proposal to close the school will mean that additional resources tied up in maintaining Verney Avenue School can be allocated to the Special Schools that the pupils transfer to.

5. What are the advantages of the proposal?

The major educational advantages to the principal groups affected are:

Children

The additional facilities, resources and provision that will be available to them in the schools that they transfer to would enhance their educational opportunities. They will be better equipped to meet the challenges of the “world of work”.

Staff

Staff have to continually update their skills and knowledge in order to keep abreast of developments in their field and to enable them to keep up to date with the latest DfES initiatives. Being part of a larger group will enable them to better pursue continuing professional development activities.

Parents

Parents can be reassured that if the closure goes ahead the needs of their child will continue to be met by the school in which he/she is placed. The additional resources and staffing available at the schools pupils transfer to will provide them with opportunities that will be denied them at Verney Avenue School.

6. What are the challenges the proposal may create?

The proposed closure will present challenges which we believe will be successfully overcome through careful and considered management and through good communication.

For example the LEA and school staff are already working closely to ensure the appropriate placement of pupils and that the arrangements for transport are advantageous.

7. Placement of pupils

The LEA will ensure that pupils will be placed in the school most appropriate to their individual needs. Before pupils are placed in a school it will be possible for visits to be made to the school by both parents and pupils.

The LEA is aware that this is a potentially disruptive and worrying process and will work with all concerned parties to make the process as smooth as possible and to ensure that support is provided to vulnerable pupils.

8. What would happen to the Verney Avenue Campus?

If the decision were made to close the school then this presents an opportunity for the LEA to increase the size of the playing fields at the adjoining Chiltern Gate School as it is currently below the minimum area recommended by the DfES.

It will also mean that some of the buildings currently used by Verney Avenue can transfer to Chiltern Gate. Discussions will take place with the staff and governing body of the school to decide on the best way to proceed.

Any surplus land could then be sold off, subject to the appropriate consultation with the planning authorities and planning permission being granted. A separate response form, with a different response date is attached to this consultation document, as DfES requirements on the disposal of school land require a 10-week consultation period.

9. When would the closure take place?

The Local Education Authority is consulting on a proposal to close the school at the end of the 2003 Autumn Term (31st December 2003).

10. Has the decision to close the school already been taken?

No decision has yet been made to close the school and the LEA will await the results of the consultation before deciding what action to take.

11. Travel Arrangements

Where the County Council consider that the place offered to a pupil is the one that is most appropriate to meet their needs, then in line with current County Council policy transport will be provided.

If the decision is taken to close the school then a number of pupils will have to make journeys to the schools they are placed at and the County Council will take care to ensure that the arrangements are appropriate to ensure pupils well being.

12. Staff consultation arrangements

Meetings for the teaching and support staff have been arranged. There will be an opportunity for all staff to be supported by their association or union representative and the options available will be made clear. The LEA and Governing Body are committed to supporting the school's staff throughout the process.

13. Those who are being consulted

As part of the consultation the LEA is keen to consult as wide as possible on the proposals and the following groups/organisations will be contacted as part of the consultation process:

- County Councillor for Cressex and Frogmoor.
- Governing bodies of those schools directly affected.
- Learning Skills Council (they have responsibility for 6th Form provision within Buckinghamshire).
- Local residents.
- Parents/Guardians.
- Primary Care Trusts.
- Social Care and Young Families Service.
- Social Services.
- Staff at Verney Avenue School.
- Teaching Associations and UNISON.

14. What will happen now?

By publishing and distributing this consultation document we are asking you for your views on the proposal. Please fill in the *proformas* at the back of this document and send them to:

Either
The collection box at Verney Avenue School

Or
Paul Holmes
Acting Head of School Organisation
(Ref Verney Avenue School)
County Hall
AYLESBURY
Bucks
HP20 1UZ

By 9th May 2003

If you prefer not to complete the *proformas* then please write directly to Paul Holmes.

A meeting for all staff will be held at the school at 3.30pm on 8th April 2003.

A meeting will then be held for parents and other interested parties at 7:30pm at the school on the same evening.

All views received will be listened to and recorded. The LEA will consider any responses received to the consultation. In the light of these responses the LEA will decide whether to proceed with the closure of the school.

The LEA will then have to publish Statutory Notices (similar to those you see when someone is applying for planning permission). By law these notices must remain public for two months. The notices are published by being placed in the Bucks Free Press Newspaper. They would be published for a two-month period probably in June 2003.

During this time any elector is entitled to object to the proposals by writing to the Strategic Manager, Children and Young People for the attention of Paul Holmes at the above address.

If there are no objections the LEA is then able to "determine the proposals". This means that the LEA can decide to implement the proposal to close the school.

If objections are received the LEA will have to refer the matter to the independent School Organisation Committee. The School Organisation Committee at its meeting on 10th September 2003, will consider the proposal in the light of the objections received and the outcomes of the consultation exercise, and will then have the power to decide whether or not to close the school.

If the School Organisation Committee were not able to agree on the proposal then the matter would be referred to the Adjudicator, a senior government appointee, who would then decide whether the proposal could go ahead.

Response to Consultation

**PROPOSAL TO CLOSE VERNEY AVENUE SCHOOL
ON 31ST DECEMBER 2003**

1. Do you support the proposal of Buckinghamshire County Council to close Verney Avenue School?

Yes

No

2. Do you have any comments you wish to make on the proposal?

PLEASE RETURN THIS PROFORMA (OR A LETTER IF YOU PREFER) BY 9TH MAY TO:

THE COLLECTION BOX AT VERNEY AVENUE SCHOOL

OR TO

**Paul Holmes
Acting Head of School Organisation
(Ref Verney Avenue Consultation)
County Hall
AYLESBURY
Bucks. HP20 1UZ**

By 9th May 2003

Response to Consultation: Proposal to dispose of part of the Land at Verney Avenue School.

1. If the decision is taken to close Verney Avenue School do you wish to comment on the proposal that after part of the playing field from the school has been allocated to Chiltern Gate School the remainder, subject to the appropriate planning processes may be sold for development?

Yes

No

2. I wish to make the following comments:

PLEASE RETURN THIS PROFORMA (OR A LETTER IF YOU PREFER) BY MONDAY 30TH JUNE 2003 TO:

**Paul Holmes
Acting Head of School Organisation
(Ref Verney Avenue Consultation-School Land)
County Hall
AYLESBURY
Bucks.
HP20 1UZ**

Draft Letter to go to consultees;

Dear

I have enclosed a copy of the Local Education Authority's consultation document on the proposal to close Verney Avenue School (High Wycombe) in December 2003.

We are required to consult with all those parties who may be affected by our proposals and we are genuinely concerned to hear from as many individuals and organisations as possible. Details of where responses should be sent to are included in the document.

If you wish to seek clarification on any of the issues in the document then please contact Andrew Tusting on (01296) 382462 or e-mail atusting@buckscc.gov.uk .

I hope you can respond to the consultation.

Yours sincerely

Paul Holmes