



Which way forward for
Island education?



WHICH WAY FORWARD FOR ISLAND EDUCATION?

Information for parents

Introduction

In the 2005 local elections, proposals to abolish the Island's Middle School system were rejected and the new council has committed to retaining the existing system. However, there are problems with the way in which our education system works and in order to address these, we have made a number of proposals, upon which we would welcome your opinion.

During March the Isle of Wight Council held a series of consultation meetings at various locations across the Island, to hear the views of staff, parents, pupils and other members of the local community about the proposals for the future of Island education. Every meeting was well attended and a range of views and opinions were gathered, together with those of education staff and the business community at separate meetings. Further consultation is taking place with representative groups of children and young people and a quantitative survey among a cross section of 400 parents will also be undertaken before the end of March.

Although information has been readily available via schools and the council's website, we want to make sure that all parents, including those without internet access have as much information as possible about these proposals, so that you can share your views with us in an informed manner. We have put together this short factsheet, which answers many of the questions raised by parents in the consultation so far. We hope that you find it useful.

Don't forget, you still have time to let us have your views. Details of how you can send in your written comments can be found at the end of this factsheet. More information is also available on our website www.eduwight.iow.gov.uk which is also linked from the front page of www.iwight.com.

Why are we even considering changing our education system?

It is a well known fact that the performance of pupils on the Island decreases once they reach Key Stage 4 and take their GCSEs.

Pupils who took GCSEs last summer were 11.3% below national average. Those same pupils who took Key Stage 3 tests in 2004 were 3% below in maths and 6% below in English.

These results have only changed marginally over the last few years. Several independent reports have been published, all indicating the need for change and inspection reports continue to point at a failing educational system. We cannot afford to let this situation continue. We have made a commitment to raise the standards of education on the Island, to make sure that your children have the best possible start in life. We need to consider how we can make that happen.

So what are we proposing and how did we arrive at these proposals?

In 2006 the LSC (Learning & Skills Council) which is responsible for funding post 16 education, made a proposal that we should close our high school sixth forms and open a single sixth form facility at the Isle of Wight College. The Council's Policy Commission consulted between September and December last year, with education professionals, parents and pupils, to determine whether this would be a good for the Island. The overwhelming response was not in favour of centralising resources in this way. Although the LSC proposal was about sixth form education it had implications for the system generally and views received from participants in that consultation supported the need for change in 14-19 education, with some interesting opinions on how this could be achieved. The Commission noted this evidence together with information regularly provided by the government about changes taking place at a national level to education for 14-19 year olds and drew up three proposals with officers to recommend for consultation. In February, council members agreed to consult on these options and reject the LSC offer.

Our proposals can be collectively summarised as follows:

To unite the current 14-19 institutions so that they are better able to deliver the Government's new 14-19 agenda, provide better access to A level subject choices and improve Key Stage 3 results and therefore the eventual GCSE results by extending middle schools to include year 9.

These proposals have one common objective. They each attempt to address the following problems:

1. Inadequate collaboration between the current high schools and the Isle of Wight College, which has led to a more restricted subject choice for A-level students than should be the case for an area of our size
2. How to allow our students access to the new 14-19 curriculum when it is phased in between 2008 and 2013, at which point we want to offer better facilities that will allow vocational and academic subjects to be taught under the new 14-19 diploma.
3. How to improve poor GCSE results which research has shown may be linked to poor Key Stage 3 results.
4. Lack of accountability for the test result at the currently shared Key Stage 3 (the final two years of middle school and the first year at high school cover this Key Stage). We have identified this as a principal cause of the poor key stage 3 result.
5. How to keep our community-based learning intact, namely small primary schools and our middle schools.

The three options, each of which we think has the potential to do this, together with our view of the advantages and disadvantages for each are as follows:-

Option 1 – Single 14-19 Educational Corporation

What is it?

- This would govern and manage the Isle of Wight College and the high schools as one body
- It would deliver **14-19 (including GCSE and A level)** for the whole Island.
- As now, it would operate at several sites across the Island
- It would also offer internet based learning

How will this achieve our objectives?

1. Collaboration would be a central role of this new body and no one school or college will be able to opt out of the arrangement
2. All 14-19 students would have access to all parts of the new institution thus increasing their subject choices
3. When the new 14-19 Diplomas are available this structure would allow us to offer these by combining academic and vocational courses from the various parts of the new corporation
4. It would provide an institution for the Island that could offer the International Baccalaureate

What are the possible disadvantages?

1. This is only possible if a new act of parliament is passed, so it may be possible to move to this more inclusive structure in the future
2. Could be seen to restrict student choice of institution as there would be no other options available on the Island post-14
3. Students may have to travel post-16 to attend various centres depending on their subject choices
4. Some existing high schools may have to be closed or replaced

Option 2 – Single 14-19 Educational Trust

- Creates a single Trust that would govern or manage the high schools as one body, which is legally different to the corporation in option 1 but practically similar for students
- The main difference for students would be that the Isle of Wight College would not be able to formally join in this arrangement and would remain with its own governance and management
- Collaboration with the college would have to be voluntary but with the single trust this should not be a problem as collaboration would be between just 2 institutions rather than the existing six.
- This would create a group of 14-19 institutions or what we have termed 'learning centres' in one 'Trust'
- Single trust governance would have one governing body
- There would be an executive leader - one super-head with management teams at each site
- It would be similar to the current system in as much as it would be operated from several sites across the Island

How will this achieve our objectives?

1. Collaboration will be a central role of this new body and no one school will be able to opt out of the arrangement
2. All 14-19 students **will** have access to all parts of the new institution thus increasing their subject choices
3. When the new 14-19 Diploma are available this structure **will** allow us to offer these by combining academic and vocational courses from the various parts of the new trust and through collaboration with the Isle of Wight College
4. It would provide an institution for the Island that could offer the International Baccalaureate
5. Cooperation between the schools in the trust and the middle schools would be better managed

What are the possible disadvantages?

1. It could be seen to restrict student choice of institution as there would be no other options available on the Island post-14
2. Students may have to travel post-16 to attend various centres depending on their subject choices
3. Some existing high schools may have to be closed or replaced

Option 3 - Voluntary Collaboration between 14-19 centres

- This would mean a continuation of the current situation
- The College would retain it's own governance
- Schools would be linked in an agreed federation across a number of sites
- Possible single governance
- Individual schools would determine their own direction

How will this achieve our objectives?

1. All 14-19 students **should** have access to learning centres thus increasing their subject choices
2. When the new 14-19 Diploma are available this structure **should** allow us to offer these by combining academic and vocational courses from the various schools that agree to collaborate with the Isle of Wight College
3. There would be a choice of legally different institutions to choose from

What are the possible disadvantages?

1. Unless schools actually choose to collaborate student choice of subject will not improve
2. Some areas may decide to opt out of the arrangements reducing the effectiveness of the overall provision
3. Students may have to travel post-16 to attend various centres depending on their subject choices
4. Some existing high schools may have to be closed or replaced

Linked Proposal – To Extend Middle Schools to include Year 9

Firstly, at the moment, Key stage 3 is currently split between the middle schools and the high schools. Pupils start in a new environment, trying to adjust to new teachers and often new classmates at the same time as trying to complete a crucial stage of their learning. There is also a lack of accountability between the middle and high schools for these results as neither is responsible for effectively completing that phase. Results consequently suffer.

- This option would be implemented in addition to options 1, 2 or 3.
- It's sole purpose is to bring together the three years of the standard Key Stage 3 which is currently taught during the last two years of middle school and the first year at high school
- Currently some schools are operating a condensed version of Key Stage 3 which takes just two years and is taught in the middle schools but this has disadvantages and may not improve eventual GCSE results
- Because some students are not ready to take their Key Stage 3 tests until they are in Year 9 the high school still has to take some responsibility for a Key Stage they do not actually fully teach
- Extending Year 9 would not be unique to the Isle of Wight. It is already operated successfully in Leicestershire where Key Stage 3 and GCSE results are far better than ours and in excess of the National Average
- The experience of Leicestershire would be drawn upon to help us build a successful middle school year 9 model.
- Year 9 students would be treated differently to the other pupils in the middle school and would be given more responsibility and special facilities
- We would not envisage mixing Year 9 students with Years 5 & 6 and the current model of separation used by some middle schools would be extended to ensure that this was so.
- Year 9 students could then be selectively used as role models and mentors for the younger pupils.
- GCSE-style teaching would be employed with taster courses and visits to acquaint students being offered, to ease the eventual transition to GCSE at the new 14-19 centres.
- Many of our smaller middle schools are struggling to remain viable particularly in the light of falling pupil numbers. The addition of year 9 will help them to continue to offer a well financed and broad curriculum, with the specialist teachers that are needed to ensure standards are maintained
- Although in the long-term it is difficult to predict what will happen this should help to ensure that school closures are kept to a minimum

Frequently Asked Questions

Middle schools aren't equipped to deal with advice on options/future pathways, are they?

Training, resources and support will be given to middle schools to be able to provide that advice and support to pupils. The age range of the new middle school will enable them to access government funding available for secondary education. The new 14-19 learning centres will also be required to work closely with the middle schools, providing taster sessions so that pupils can get to know their prospective teachers and their subjects to ease the transition into their next phase of learning. This already happens between some middle and high schools but inconsistently.

How will those children with special educational needs fare under these changes?

Special educational needs of year 9 children will be met as they are now, the only difference being that they will be in an environment that they will have grown used to since they transferred there at age 9. Their SEN (Special Educational Needs) teachers will be used to them and there should be an improvement in the ability of the system to cater for their needs. Through careful planning these pupils will be assisted in making the right choices for learning, which will enable them to succeed

But what about the age range, pupils aged eight/nine will be mixing with 13/14 year olds, should I be worried?

No. This is similar to many schools on the mainland with even wider age ranges. They have lots of measures in place to ensure that children come into contact with each other in a managed and appropriate way. Separate playgrounds for example but mixed assemblies. There has been lots of evidence that this can also have a beneficial effect on pupils at either end of the age spectrum in terms of mentoring roles, which build the confidence of both older and younger pupils.

How will middle schools be able to accommodate Year 9 pupils?

There will be an extensive building modification programme should middle schools be required to take in Year 9 pupils. In terms of current provision, there is only one middle school where the site cannot expand. With regard to all other middle schools, there is an excess of capacity, although individual schools may have reached their current admission numbers. However, currently there are reducing numbers entering primary schools (as a result of lower birth rates on the Island) and by 2009 this will be impacting on our middle schools.

What difference will any of these proposals make to my child's education on the Island?

Schools on the Island are not able to offer the breadth of academic and vocational courses to 14-19 year olds. Although there is some informal collaboration between high schools, not all children on the Island are given access to the same opportunities for studying. Schools can decide how they wish to operate and students need to fit into that system. Our proposals mean that the interests of students will be considered individually and this will broaden choices to students who will have access to a range of options for studying across the whole Island and in both academic and vocational areas.

What will happen if we just carry on as we are?

Unless schools are able to organise themselves and collaborate with each other on a scale that has not previously been seen, then we will not see sufficient improvements in

standards to justify a continuation of the current methods. In this case the Learning and Skills Council will have the right to ask the Secretary of State to intervene and possibly impose their centralised sixth form on the Island. This will have the effect of making our high schools unviable and will lead to a much bigger reorganisation and school closures.

Isn't it all down to whether the teacher is effective? Why can't we just get better teachers?

We have already got many talented, motivational and inspirational teachers in our schools today. However, recruitment is seen as an issue that is not currently addressed. We intend therefore to employ a recruitment officer who will lead a concerted effort to recruit new teachers to the Isle of Wight. The experience of Leicestershire under their 14-19 system is encouraging and we expect that recruitment will become easier in the future.

But how will the changes help raise standards?

They will ensure that at 14-19, students will be able to choose a learning pathway that is best suited to their interests, abilities and skills and in which they receive the right level of support and ultimately are more likely to succeed. Nonetheless these proposals need to work in conjunction with other measures to ensure that standards of education are maintained from Key Stage 2 onwards. This is why, alongside these options we are proposing to move year 9 from the high schools into the middle schools and introduce much closer collaboration between primary schools and middle schools at Key Stage 2.

So if any of these options go ahead which of the high schools will close?

No decisions have been made on any potential closures of high schools. This depends on the final option that is chosen and strategic decisions that will be made at the next stage of consultation. Keeping schools close to the communities will be an important priority and consultation with communities on the implications for their school will be undertaken. One thing is certain. School closures under these options will be far less widespread than they would be if a reorganisation to a 2-tier system was implemented.

How is the Council going to afford these plans?

If the Council approves a proposal then finding financial support will be one of the key tasks officers will be charged to undertake during the summer. This will include consultation with schools and other key partners. Obtaining further funding and making better use of existing resources to provide teaching centres fit for the 21st century will be a priority depending on the option that is chosen. £30.5m has already been secured from the government to rebuild Cowes High School under the One School Pathfinder Scheme.

Some teachers have claimed these changes reduce their career prospects and limit recruitment opportunities. Do we risk losing high numbers of teachers?

The evidence from Leicestershire is that career opportunities are not limited for teachers who work in 14-19 institutions at the moment. Following the introduction of the Government's 14-19 agenda in 2008, more and more authorities will be developing 14-19 institutions and nationally career opportunities for those with 14-19 experience will grow. In any event in the short term career opportunities will remain as they are now. If our proposals are implemented then specialist Key Stage 3 and 4 teachers that currently work in high schools will have the opportunity to teach in middle schools too. The experience from Leicestershire indicates that we should not lose teachers but that teachers will be attracted to work here.

What impact will this have on primary schools?

There is no direct implication for Primary Schools within these proposals. However, while standards at the end of Key Stage 1 are good we will work with Primary and Middle Schools to improve further standards at Key Stage 2.

How will pupils and staff travel between sites?

Pupils may not need to travel extensively. In some cases specialist staff will move between sites and there will also be extensive use of ICT enabling students to access learning materials from their 'home learning site'. Because of new block teaching arrangements, already being taught in some of our schools, teachers are likely to be deployed for whole days at the least and for a number of weeks at the most, at a particular school, thus avoiding wasted time travelling for individual lessons between schools throughout the day. As a result of the 2006 Education Act, the authority has to publish a travel plan for all school provision. Transport between the learning centres will be an integral part of this travel plan, which will be in place for September 2008.

So what happens next?

The consultation period will last until 30 March 2007. Officers will then compile all of that evidence and prepare a report to put before council members on Monday 23 April for a final decision.

If the council decides to pursue one of the proposed options, the council will then need to undertake more formal consultation within the statutory processes required which will involve consultation with parents, pupils and staff on a school by school basis. This will provide the information necessary for the council to prepare a full implementation plan.

If the council decides not to pursue one of the proposed options, it can do one of a number of things including extending the consultation period to allow for further discussion about the current options. Request the policy commission spend time considering the issues raised to form new proposals.

If any of the proposals go ahead, how quickly will they be implemented?

Whatever proposal is adopted, an implementation plan and discussion with stakeholders will take place during the summer term. The implementation plan would then be published in September 2007. If school organisation changes are required then the necessary statutory process will begin from October 2007. The earliest the new system would begin full-time is from September 2009.

If I want to make my views known, how do I do that?

You can send in your views about the options and any points of concern you wish the council to address, or suggestions concerning their implementation in writing to:

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Or by e-mail to chris.mathews@iow.gov.uk **By 30 March 2007.**