

## **Penrose and Elmwood Special School Amalgamation**

Consultation with Parents and Staff in November 2020  
Outcome Report

### **1. Background**

In order to enable a move to the new special school for Sedgemoor being constructed at Bower Lane in September 2021, the County Council and the Federated Governing Body of Penrose and Elmwood Schools embarked upon a formal consultation with parents and staff over a number of school organisation proposals.

The consultation was instructed to take place by the Cabinet Member for Children and Families in a decision dated 21 October 2020 (a copy of which is available from the report author).

*Note: throughout this report, the word 'parents' is used for simplicity, although it incorporates all carers, guardians and people with parental responsibility. References to staff include all teaching and non-teaching employees.*

### **2. What were the proposals being consulted on?**

Although the County Council view the two existing schools as amalgamating, one school technically has to close while the other expands its provision.

Therefore, the proposals being consulted on were as follows:

- Penrose Special School to close at the end of this academic year;
- Elmwood Special School's registered capacity to increase to 200 places and the school will extend its age range from 11-19 to 4-19 in order to accommodate existing Penrose pupils;
- Prior to the relocation to Bower Lane, the school's name to change to 'Polden Bower Special School'.

### **3. What were parents and staff asked to consider?**

Parents and staff were asked whether or not they agreed with the above proposals and whether they had any comments to make.

### **4. How could parents and staff have their say?**

We wanted to make it simple for parents and staff to express their views. They could either complete the hard copy form and hand it in at the school office. If they wanted to submit their feedback online, a link to a MS Forms survey was included to and if they had access to a Smart 'phone, a QR code was included. Feedback could be submitted anonymously.

### **5. What was the consultation period?**

The consultation period ran from Monday 2 November 2020 to Monday 30 November 2020 (a total of four weeks).

### **6. What arrangements were in place for Children Looked After?**

There are a number of Children Looked After on roll at the two schools. In each case, the local authority acting as the corporate parent was contacted by the report author. This was Somerset's Virtual School or in the case of children placed by another Local Authority, contact was made with the appropriate Virtual School. No feedback was received from Virtual Schools on this occasion.

### **7. Was the Somerset Parent Carer Forum alerted?**

The report author alerted the Somerset Parent Carer Forum in case parents decided to contact the Forum to discuss the proposals with them. As well as supporting individual families, the Forum will be regarded as a key consultee at the statutory proposal stage.

### **8. Were parents and staff offered any support?**

The letter to parents and staff explained that the coronavirus situation would sadly not allow us to offer parents and carers the opportunity to drop-in and discuss the proposals, as we would normally do.

However, if parents or staff wished to discuss the proposals, either before or after providing their feedback, there was an opportunity for them to provide their contact details and a virtual meeting would be arranged.

## **9. How many responses were received?**

Thirty-six hard copies of the survey were handed in to the schools and thirteen responses to the online survey were received. These responses were all received from parents. There were no responses from members of staff. There are currently 146 students on roll and 130 members of staff.

## **10. How many parents and staff supported the proposals?**

Forty-eight people said they supported the proposals. One person said they did not support the proposals.

## **11. What comments were received from parents and staff and how would the County Council and Federated Governing Body respond to the points raised?**

A number of important issues were raised by parents and staff.

### (i) Places at the New School

One person asked how places would be allocated at the new school. There will be automatic admission to any child currently on roll at either Penrose or Elmwood. There will be no requirement to apply for a place.

### (ii) Transition to the New School

One person mentioned the need to "make sure all children are given extra support and understanding" when moving to the new school. The school will ensure all pupils are given support to transition to the new school.

### (iii) Home to School Transport

One person mentioned that it would be too far for their daughter to walk to the new school. The County Council will automatically check all home to school distances and will contact the parents of any child not currently entitled to help with transport but who will become entitled in September 2021 due to the additional distance to the new school.

### (iv) Future Class Sizes

One person asked about the size of future classes and while this has not yet been determined, it is expected that the school will run twenty classes. The classes would range from four to ten children. It is likely that most will have eight children in them. Decisions about class numbers will be carefully managed by the school.

#### (v) New School Uniform

One person commented on the cost of the new school uniform and this is something that the governing body will be asked to consider.

#### (vi) Name of the new School

Three people commented on the proposed name of the school, with one saying that it was too long and one suggesting that 'special' should be removed from the name.

It has been agreed that the new school shall not include the word 'special'. In other words, the proposal is to name the school 'Polden Bower School'.

### **12. Can parents and staff still discuss the proposals?**

Although the consultation has finished, it goes without saying that the County Council and the two schools will continue to receive and respond to any queries and concerns that parents and staff may have.

A statutory notice will be published in December inviting any member of the public to access a copy of the proposals and submit their views. Parents would be welcome to participate in this formal representation.

### **13. What are the recommendations and next steps?**

There are a number of recommendations arising from the outcome of the consultation.

#### (1) Statutory Notice and Proposals

- The recommendation is to proceed with the publication of a statutory notice on the County Council's and schools' websites that invites members of the public to access a copy of the statutory proposals and submit their representations.
- A copy of the notice will be placed in a visible location on the schools' gates and in the local newspaper.
- Because the statutory consultation stage incorporates the festive period, a six-week period is advised rather than the usual four.
- The statutory proposals will seek feedback on the proposed closure of Penrose and the expansion of Elmwood but will not seek feedback on the name of the new school.

## (2) Consultation Report

- A copy of this report will be made available on the schools' websites and included as an appendix to the eventual key decision paper expected in Spring 2021 alongside the results of the statutory consultation explained above.

### **14. Report Circulation**

#### Elected members:

Cllr Frances Nicholson, Cabinet Member for Children and Families  
Cllr Leigh Redman, Bridgwater South (constituent member for the current schools)  
Cllr David Hall, Bridgwater East & Bawdrip (constituent member for the new school)

#### External partners:

Ruth Hobbs, Somerset Parent Carer Forum

#### County Council officers:

Phil Curd	Nitin Sharma
Debbie Reed	Elizabeth Smith
Mike Keal	Sarah Stabback
Claire Merchant-Jones	

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On behalf of Somerset County Council and the Federated Governing Body

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