

CONSULTATION

EXTENDING THE AGE RANGES OF BEDLINGTON WHITLEY MEMORIAL C OF E AND BEDLINGTON WEST END FIRST SCHOOLS

23 April – 12 June 2019



The Council has received a request from the Governing Bodies of Whitley Memorial C of E First School and Bedlington West End First School to carry out consultation on a proposal to extend the age ranges of these schools to become primary schools with effect from 1 September 2020.

This document sets out the reasons behind this request and the implications if it is implemented. We are also asking for your views on the proposal and whether you have any alternative proposals or suggestions that could be considered.

REASONS AND RATIONALE FOR THE PROPOSAL

BACKGROUND

Bedlington Partnership of schools consists of:

- 2 secondary schools (Bedlington Academy and St Benet Biscop High,
- 1 Middle Academy (Meadowdale Academy)
- 8 primary schools (Bedlington Station Primary, St Bede's Primary, Stead Lane Primary, Cambois Primary, Choppington Primary, Ringway Primary, Mowbray Primary, Stakeford Primary)
- 2 first schools (Bedlington West End First, Bedlington Whitley Memorial CE First schools)

The secondary and primary schools are organised within the two-tier system, whereas West End First School, Whitley Memorial First School and Meadowdale Academy remain organised within the 3-tier system. Currently, children on roll at West End First and Whitley Memorial CE First Schools feed to Meadowdale Academy at the end of Year 4.

The majority of children on roll at Meadowdale Academy 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. Since changing from age 13 to 18 high schools to 11 to 18 secondary schools, Bedlington Academy and St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy have operated with two annual intakes of pupils into Year 7 and Year 9 each September. This was to accommodate children moving from both the primary schools at the end of Year 6 and from Meadowdale Academy at the end of Year 8.

However, from September 2020, both secondary academies in Bedlington will remove the intake into Year 9 and will have only one annual intake of pupils into Year 7 from that point forward. The rationale for the removal of the intake into Year 9 is based on the fact that the majority of schools that feed to the secondary academies are now primary schools.

Many parents with children on roll at Meadowdale Academy have been transferring their children to secondary school at the end of Year 6 rather than waiting until the end of Year 8.



This has resulted in a significant reduction in pupil numbers in Years 7 and 8 at Meadowdale Academy. The Governing Body at Meadowdale has been concerned that it will become difficult to continue to provide the broad and balanced curriculum in the long term that is required for their pupils in the light of reduced funding from falling numbers at the academy. The Governing Body believes that the academy has provided well for pupils in Bedlington for many years and has an important legacy within the local area. They therefore decided that efforts to retain its existence should be undertaken.

While the Governing Body did explore the option of extending the age range up of the academy upwards to become secondary, given the well-established 11-18 secondary provision already in Bedlington, they decided in Autumn 2018 to carry out consultation on a proposal to reorganise it to become a primary academy from September 2019.

As a consultee, Northumberland County Council responded to the Meadowdale Governing Body that while the rationale for its proposal was understandable, NCC did not support it on the basis that it would create additional surplus places in the primary phase within the Bedlington Partnership,

and that it would have a de-stabilising impact on Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools, which are local authority maintained schools.

In December 2018, the Governing Body of Meadowdale Academy published the findings from their consultation undertaken earlier in the Autumn of 2018; they also confirmed their decision to continue with the proposal to become a primary school. It was made known in March 2019 that the Regional Schools Commissioner has initially approved Meadowdale Academy to become a 1 form entry primary school with effect from 1 September 2020, but this is now awaiting final approval by Ministers at the Department for Education. This decision is outside of the Council's control.

IMPACT OF MEADOWDALE ACADEMY BECOMING A PRIMARY SCHOOL

The decision to approve Meadowdale Academy to become a primary school will directly impact on Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools. There will no longer be a clear pathway within the 3-tier system for children attending West End and Whitley Memorial as Meadowdale will phase out its Year 7 and 8 provision over time once it becomes a primary school in September 2020.

The Council has a statutory duty to ensure that all children of school age have a school place. The Council is therefore undertaking the consultation to extend the age ranges of West End and Whitley Memorial to explore whether consultees believe this is the most appropriate solution to ensuring there is a clear educational pathway for children in this part

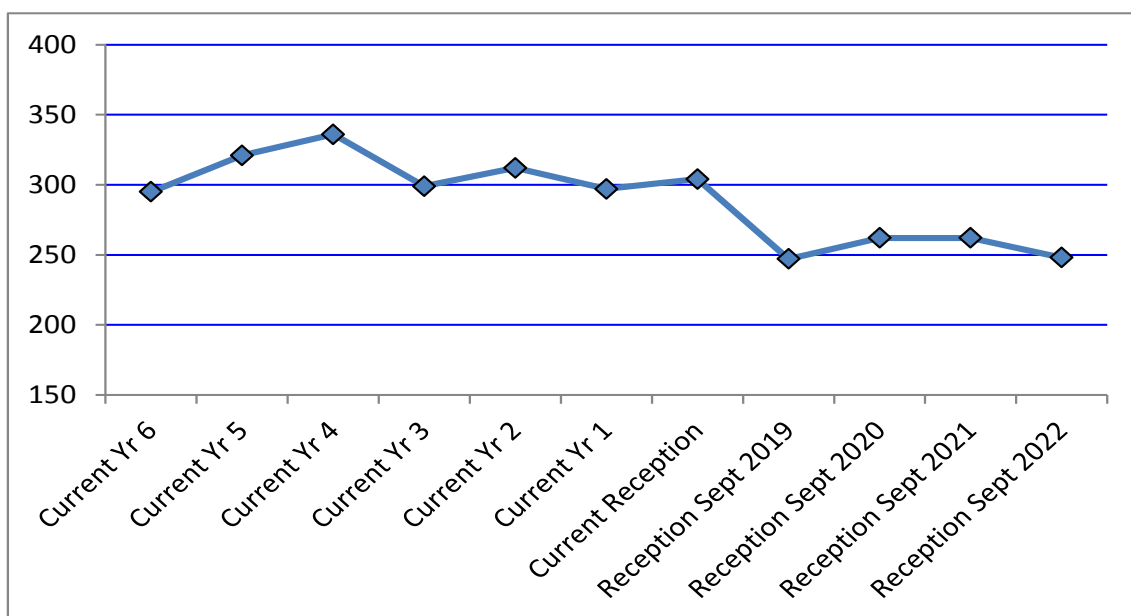
of Bedlington. Part of this solution will also include ensuring there are enough places in Years 7 and 8 in the secondary phase and therefore part of this proposal would include increasing places at Bedlington Academy, who are one of our consultees.

However, just extending the age ranges of the two first schools and creating more places at Bedlington Academy aren't the only considerations with regard to the decision of Meadowdale Academy to become a primary school. From September 2020, there will be more places available to parents in the early years and primary phase in Bedlington should Meadowdale be finally approved to become a primary school. While it is good that parents are able to apply for a place for their child at any school of their preference, if there are many more school places than children available to fill them, this can

create issues for schools in relation to the funding of staffing and resources.

The latest data indicates that while all the first and primary schools in Bedlington together have the capacity to offer 2,165 school places, there are 1,856 children on roll. This means there are potentially 309 (14%) unfilled places currently in these schools. These unfilled places are already forecast to increase year on year due to falling pupil numbers for the foreseeable future. The graph below shows how the number of children being born in the Bedlington area over the last ten years has been falling and how many children are likely to need places in future years:

**Number of children living in Bedlington up to Year 6
(as registered with GPs at Birth)**



There are currently 315 houses approved to be built in the Bedlington area up to 2023, which could produce around 9 children in each primary year

group across Bedlington if occupied by new people moving into the area. In the light of the continuing underlying fall in pupil numbers in Bedlington, it is

not expected that these additional children will significantly increase the number of children requiring places in schools. Indeed, very often new houses are occupied by people who are simply moving in from other parts of the same town, and therefore even fewer children could arise from these houses.

Schools receive their funding based on the number of pupils on their roll and therefore unfilled places have a real impact on the finances of a school.

Currently, schools receive an average of £4,089 per pupil in the primary phase in Northumberland.

Schools still need to pay for building maintenance, heating, electricity and cleaning even when pupil numbers reduce and therefore savings have to be made in other areas; this usually results in cuts to staffing and resources, which then have a direct impact on educational provision.



St Bede's Primary School also located close to West End First School and is popular with parents in the local area and wider partnership. The addition of another primary school in this part of Bedlington will provide more choice to parents of primary age children. Whether or not West End and Whitley Memorial remain as first schools or change to become primaries, there will be increased

competition among schools in this part of Bedlington for pupils in the primary phase.

The impact may also be felt in the wider partnership area, as West End and Whitley Memorial have been popular with parents living outside of their catchments in the past and Meadowdale has a good reputation in the local area. It is also clear that there could be an increase in unfilled places in this area of Bedlington, which could lead to funding issues that would impact on the viability of any of these schools in the future.

THE COUNCIL'S PROPOSALS

Having considered the requests of the Governing Bodies of West End and Whitley Memorial and the potential impact of the change of Meadowdale to primary status, the Council has begun consultation on the following proposals:

- 1. To extend the age range of Bedlington Whitley Memorial CE First School from an age 3 to 9 first school to become an age 3 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2020. The school would also reduce its intake into Reception from 54 each year to 45.**
- 2. To extend the age range of Bedlington West End First School from an age 4 to 9 first school to become an age 4 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2020. The school would also reduce its intake into Reception from 60 each year to 45.**

This consultation will enable your views on the above proposals to be considered by the Council before it makes any decision. It also provides you with an opportunity to put forward

any alternative proposals or suggestions that you may have for consideration, which could provide a solution or help with the issues set out in this document.

HOW WOULD THE PROPOSAL IMPACT ON EDUCATION IN THIS PART OF BEDLINGTON?

Before making a decision about the next steps in relation to the proposal for West End First and Whitley Memorial CE First Schools to extend their age ranges and become primary schools, the Council will review the feedback received from this consultation and will also consider a number of other important factors, including the following:

Admissions arrangements

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 number of available places in Bedlington currently allows for greater parental choice of schools in the local area than in some areas of the county. Key Stage 1 results at the two schools, which cover progress in Year 1 and Year 2 of the national curriculum, are also good and improving.

If the decision was implemented, both schools would reduce the number of children coming into the school to 45 pupils each year. This would have implications for the way in which the schools organise their teaching and learning, including the potential for mixed-age teaching.

Staffing issues

There may be implications for the staff at Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools. Detailed discussions with the Governing Body of the schools and with Trade Unions will be undertaken during consultation about any potential positive or negative impacts and, where necessary, how the latter will be minimised.



As noted, the schools' leadership teams would need to consider how the school would be structured as a primary school and therefore how staff would be deployed within that structure.

Catchment areas

Catchment areas are used by the Council 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 Council allocates a catchment area to Meadowdale as it is currently the feeder school for pupils leaving Whitley Memorial CE and West End First Schools, which are local authority maintained schools.

However, under this proposal, West End and Whitley Memorial would feed to Bedlington Academy at the end of Year 6, with some parents opting to take up places at St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy. From September 2020, if the

Council approved the proposal for West End and Whitley Memorial to become primary schools, they and Meadowdale Academy (as a primary) would serve this area of Bedlington. St Bede's RC VA Primary School serves the wider Bedlington area. Views are therefore sought on whether or not the catchment areas of West End First and Whitley Memorial CE First should remain as they are currently, or whether a primary catchment area should also be allocated to Meadowdale Primary which would include parts of the current West End and Whitley Memorial Catchments.

As Roman Catholic schools tend to serve whole partnership areas they are not allocated a catchment area, but pupils wishing to attend church schools as a preference are catered for within the Home to School Transport policy. Changes to catchment areas could impact on where your child would be offered a school place. In any event, parents would be able to exercise parental preference in relation to alternative schools.

Building proposals

It is likely that the buildings of Whitley Memorial CE First School and West End First Schools would need some capital development to make them suitable for Year 5 and Year 6 children.

Whitley Memorial is a 'voluntary aided' school and therefore any works to the building would be paid for by Government grant, with a contribution from the Governing Body. Any capital works required at West End to make it suitable would be funded by the Council as it is a community school. Work will

be carried out during the consultation period to provide indicative costs for these works. While the buildings and land at Meadowdale Academy are leased on a long-term basis from the Council, any works would need to be funded by Government grant in consultation with the Council as landlord. It is envisaged that an additional 30 pupil places would be needed in the secondary phase of education starting in Year 7 in Bedlington from September 2020 onwards to accommodate the proposed changes. Bedlington Academy and St Benet Biscop Catholic Academy are also consultees and the Council will be seeking their views in light of the predicted impact of the change of Meadowdale Academy to primary status and this proposal.

Home to school transport

As stated under 'Catchment areas', the Council uses catchment areas as one of the means of managing transport eligibility. Therefore, any changes to catchment area may have an impact on the eligibility of some pupils for home to school transport. In any event, transport would be arranged in accordance with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.

SEN/additional needs

There is no specialist Special Educational Needs (SEND) provision currently within Whitley Memorial CE or West End First Schools, although all schools have pupils with SEND. We would also be interested in your views on how these pupils can be best supported at school.

Early Years provision

Whitley Memorial CE First has a maintained nursery for children aged 3 and 4. Early Years provision on site at West End First School includes West End Nursery for 3 and 4 year olds (which is teacher-led and run by the school via community powers), a private early years provider catering for children aged 2 to 4 during school hours and a further private provider which offers out of school hours provision; the 3 providers work in close partnership, including sharing resources. Meadowdale Academy plans to include a nursery from age 3 as part of its provision.

Views on the current arrangement of early years provision at West End First and Whitley Memorial CE First Schools are welcomed as part of this consultation.

The Sport and Recreation implications of the proposal

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

Proposed Structure of Schools for consultation

The table below sets out the current structure of West End and Whitley Memorial CE First Schools and Meadowdale Academy and the proposed structure should the two first schools also become primary schools. It should be noted that Meadowdale Academy will become a primary school (subject to final approval) whether or not the two first schools extend their age ranges.

Proposed Structure of Schools for Consultation

School	Current Situation			Proposed Primary / Secondary Model		
	Capacity in Oct 19 (Number on Roll Jan 2019)	Forms of Entry (FE)	Planned Admission Number (PAN) 2019/20	Capacity	Forms of Entry (FE)	Planned Admission Number (PAN) 2020/21
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
Secondary phase	A further 30 places are predicted to be required in Bedlington at the secondary phase starting in Year 7 from September 2020 onwards following the change of status of Meadowdale Academy to primary.					

*The decision to approve the change of status of Meadowdale Academy has been referred by the Regional Schools Commissioner to Ministers and is awaiting final approval.

Pupil Transition and timeline for implementation

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:

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 September 2021.

1 September 2022 - 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

YOUR VIEWS

The Council and the Governing Bodies of West End First and Whitley Memorial CE First would like your views on the proposal of school organisation set out in this document and whether you have any alternative proposals or suggestions. A response form is attached for your use at the back of this document. The form can either be sent by Freepost or attached electronically to an email – contact details are provided on the form. Alternatively, you can hand in your form to main reception at County Hall.

We are also holding public information events as follows where representatives from the Council and schools will be there to provide additional information and to answer any questions you may have:

Bedlington Whitley Memorial CE First School

Date: 8 May 2019

Time: 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

Venue: Bedlington Whitley Memorial CE First School

Bedlington West End First School

Date: 9 May 2019

Time: 7:00 – 8:30 p.m.

Venue: Bedlington West End First School

Council officers will also hold separate meetings with school leaders, governors and staff. The dates of these meetings will be arranged separately with the schools.

If you have any comments on the proposal for West End First and Whitley Memorial CE First Schools, the website link below will take you to a feedback form where you can register your views.

Alternatively, you can complete the form at the back of this document and either post it to the address provided, or drop it in at main reception, County Hall, or at either West End First or Whitley Memorial CE First Schools receptions.

Comments on the proposal need to be received by **midnight on 12 June 2019**. They will be reviewed by the Council's Cabinet in July. Cabinet will also decide whether or not to move to the next formal stage of consultation.

To register your views, please go to

<http://northumberland.gov.uk/schoolconsultations>

or if you prefer to submit your views in writing, please complete the response form at the back of this document and forward to the address provided.

YOUR VIEWS ON THE EXTENSION OF THE AGE RANGES OF BEDLINGTON WEST END FIRST AND BEDLINGTON WHITLEY MEMORIAL CE FIRST SCHOOLS

If you have a particular association with Bedlington West End First School (parent, staff, member of the local community etc.), please complete Section 1

If you have a particular association with Bedlington Whitley Memorial First School (parent, staff, member of the local community), please complete Section 2

If you are completing Section 1 or Section 2, please continue and complete Section 3.

SECTION 1 – VIEWS ON BEDLINGTON WEST END FIRST SCHOOL EXTENSION OF AGE RANGE

Your name
(optional):

Are you responding mainly as a (tick one box only)?

Parent/carer	<input type="checkbox"/>	Governor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Member of West End First Staff	<input type="checkbox"/>
Resident/ Member of the community	<input type="checkbox"/>	Bedlington Town Councillor	<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff member of other school	<input type="checkbox"/>

None of the above What is your interest in this school?

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Your views:

1) Do you agree that the age range of **Bedlington West End First School** should be extended to become an age 4 – 11 years Primary School?

Yes, I agree No, I do not agree

Please provide the main reasons for your answer:

2) Do you have any further comments or views on the planned age range extension of West End First School?

3) Do you have any comments on the organisation of the current early years provision at the site of West End First School?

4) Do you have any views on how pupils with Special Educational Needs can be supported at West End First School?

SECTION 2 – VIEWS ON BEDLINGTON WHITLEY MEMORIAL FIRST SCHOOL EXTENSION OF AGE RANGE

Your name (optional):

Are you responding mainly as a (tick one box only)?

Parent/carer Governor Whitley Memorial Staff Member

Resident/ Member of the community Bedlington Town Councillor Staff member of other school

None of the above What is your interest in this school?

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Your views:

1) Do you agree that the age range of **Bedlington Whitley Memorial First School** should be extended to become an age 3 – 11 years Primary School?

Yes, I agree No, I do not agree

Please provide the main reasons for your answer:

- 2) Do you have any further comments or views on the planned age range extension of Whitley Memorial First School?

- 3) Do you have any comments on the organisation of early years provision at Whitley Memorial CE First School?

- 4) Do you have any views on how pupils with Special Educational Needs can be supported at Whitley Memorial CE First School?

SECTION 3 – VIEWS ON BEDLINGTON WEST END FIRST AND BEDLINGTON WHITLEY MEMORIAL FIRST SCHOOLS EXTENSION OF AGE RANGE

CATCHMENT AREAS

- 1) Do you believe the catchment areas of Bedlington West End and Bedlington Whitley Memorial First Schools should remain as they are if they become primary schools?

Yes, I agree

No, I do not agree

Please provide the main reasons for your answer:

2) Do you believe there should be a reduction to the catchment areas of West End and Whitley Memorial First Schools to accommodate Meadowdale Academy as it becomes a primary school?

Yes, I agree

No, I do not agree

Please provide the main reasons for your answer:

Submitting your Response Form

You can submit your response form by one of the following methods:

- By Post to the School Organisation Team, Children's Services Group, FREEPOST MP135, County Hall, MORPETH, NE61 1BR
- By email to educationconsultations@northumberland.gov.uk
- By hand - drop your form into the reception at County Hall, Morpeth, NE61 2EF.
- By completing the online form
<https://www.northumberland.gov.uk/Education/Schools/Consultations.aspx>

PLEASE NOTE THE CLOSING DATE FOR RETURNING YOUR VIEWS IS MIDNIGHT 12 June 2019.