



**St. Joseph's
Catholic Infant
& Junior Schools**
Birtley



info@sjib.bwcet.com
info@sjib.bwcet.com

Monday 26th June 2023

Dear Parents/Carers,

Possible Rebuild of St. Joseph's Catholic Infant and Junior Schools, Birtley

Introduction:

The purpose of this document is to discuss the proposed changes to the provision at St Joseph's Catholic Infant School and St Joseph's Catholic Junior School, Birtley, which requires the amalgamation of the two schools into a single form primary school, with a Planned Admission Number of 30. In line with legal requirements, the Local Governing Committee (LGC) is carrying out a preliminary consultation on the proposed change.

The consultation period will run for 4 weeks from Monday 26th June 2023 to Friday 21st July 2023. The LGC will consider all comments received during the consultation period. We are consulting with all stakeholders as required by law when considering the amalgamation of two schools and we will also advertise the proposal locally, in order to gather the views of the wider community, including the other schools.

What change is being proposed?

St Joseph's Catholic Infant School currently admits pupils from age 4 to 7 years and St Joseph's Catholic Junior School currently admits pupils from age 7 to 11 years. The Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust (BWCET) in partnership with the LGC are proposing to amalgamate both schools into St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, Birtley. The two schools mentioned have been identified as part of the Government's School Rebuilding Programme, in which there is a possibility that the two schools may be rebuilt as one school – with an approximate opening time of around autumn 2025.

This will make the new school's age range 4 - 11 years.

The proposed change will alter the current admission arrangements:

At present, parents and carers are required to apply for a Reception place, at St. Joseph's Catholic Infant School. Then, should they wish for their child/ren to attend St. Joseph's Catholic Junior School, parents and carers are then required to reapply for a Year 3 school place.

Once the two schools have amalgamated to become one, there will be no requirement for parents and carers to reapply for places at the end of Year 2.

If a child is admitted to St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, there will be no further need for parents and carers to reapply for the Junior School, at the end of Year 2, as they would have had to have done, if the two schools remain separate.

Why is the school proposing this change?

Developing a primary school, as opposed to maintaining a separate Infant and Junior school, can capitalise on, and build upon the strengths of the separate schools, to ensure that pupils' experiences are enhanced - enabling even higher standards of education to be provided.

The main benefits of the proposed merger include the following:

Every school must provide a curriculum which is broad and balanced in content and relevant to all learners' needs. A child's learning journey should be seamless throughout their time in school, building on experiences, skills, knowledge and understanding as they progress, through each year group.

As an all-through primary school, we would be in a stronger position to be able to plan for both continuity and progression in learning - delivering the curriculum in a continuous and coherent way, from the Foundation Stage through to the end of Key Stage 2.

We also recognise the benefits that this would bring to parents and carers, who may have children attending both schools. By becoming one school, we hope to reduce the need for the staggered start and finish times, which are

currently in place to allow our parents and carers time to commute between the schools, when partaking in the school run. We also hope that this will help to reduce congestion in and around Birtley.

At St Joseph's, we are already work operationally as one behind the scenes, but physically, the process to become one school is a change that we cannot undertake until the construction of a new school is complete. The Junior school has an outstanding Ofsted judgement, which is why the controlled closure of the Infants has been planned. However, we recognise that the current Junior school building would not be able to cater for our Infant children. Therefore, a strategic plan to apply for planning permission to deliver a building suitable for all pupils, in line with what our children need, has been drawn up between the DfE, St. Joseph's and the Trust.

As far as the staff and governors are concerned, the operational day-to-day running of the schools is our priority throughout this process - our children's current education and development comes first. The Trust are supporting us with the physical amalgamation process. This is a wonderful opportunity for the community to come together and our improved facilities will benefit every child now and in the future. It is something that our school leadership team, governors, parish and parents have been hopeful to achieve for some years now.

In times of budgetary constraints, it is more cost effective to have one all-through school - rather than two smaller schools. Current measures towards this now include sharing a headteacher, staff and centralising administrative services.

To summarise – the benefits of this amalgamation include:

- Children starting education at the age of 4 without needing to move to another setting after only 3 years.
- The amalgamation will minimise disruption and nervousness for primary pupils and parents - by joining the Infant and Junior schools together to create an all-through primary school.
- Pupils can continually attend the primary school with their younger/older siblings.
- Closer working relationships between the staff working across the age ranges of early years, key stage 1 and key stage 2.
- Improved and enhanced facilities for all pupils.
- There will be no need for reapplication to the Junior school.
- Further access to early support and interventions for those children with additional needs.

Will the proposed change result in any impact on current staffing in both schools?

The LGC cannot foresee any adverse effect on the existing staffing levels as each class will still need a class teacher and the day-to-day operations will continue to be run by the headteacher.

What will the impact be for other providers locally?

The LGC cannot foresee any impact upon other local schools as we do not intend to increase the overall capacity of the school.

What is the consultation process?

This is the first phase of a two-phase statutory consultation process that the school is required to undertake regarding the proposed change.

Phase 1 involves:

Preliminary consultation: 4 weeks from Monday 26th June 2023 to Friday 21st July 2023.

The LGC will consider the responses: Monday 24th July 2023.

Phase 2 involves:

The second statutory phase will involve a drop-in session undertaken by Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust after their consideration of the responses received during the first phase.

Your thoughts for consideration:

Write to the Chair of the Local Governing Committee c/o St Joseph's Catholic Junior School, School Street, Birtley, Chester-le-Street, County Durham, DH3 2PN.

Telephone: 0191 410 2231

Email: info@sjib.bwcet.com

Yours sincerely,

Mrs K. Swaddle
Executive Headteacher
St. Joseph's

Lucie Stephenson
Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Bishop Wilkinson Catholic Education Trust

Michelle Irwin.
Chair of Local Governing Committee
St. Joseph's