

# STEDHAM PRIMARY SCHOOL

School Lane, Stedham  
Midhurst, West Sussex, GU29 0NY

Telephone (01730) 813522  
Fax (01730) 817241  
e-mail: office@stedham.w-sussex.sch.uk  
www.stedham.w-sussex.sch.uk



Headteacher  
Mr Malcolm Meaby

22nd October 2019

Dear Parents and Carers

## The Future Of Stedham Primary School

As governors and staff we are currently focusing all our efforts and energy on securing the future of our wonderful school. We thought, therefore, it might be useful to share our thinking and plans with you ahead of the public meeting this Thursday 24th October.

Stedham Primary opened 140 years ago this year. Since then, it has of course had its share of difficult years, including a consultation in 2008, similar to the current one. Stedham School has survived and thrived through good and bad times. Provided we can keep our pupil numbers healthy and continue to provide an environment for our young learners to thrive, we are convinced that our school will continue to serve our community for generations to come.

## Teaching and Learning

We have two key objectives in teaching and learning for the coming year:

1. To continue to broaden and enliven the curriculum to include drama, music, outdoor learning and Real P.E.
2. To provide individually tailored education to our pupils. This is only possible in a small school with passionate and dedicated teachers who know the children well. Children learn deeply when they are truly engaged and understood.

This emphasis on individually tailored education and an exciting and varied curriculum will of course benefit our children enormously. It will also raise the profile of Stedham School; this, in turn, will increase pupil numbers across all year groups. This is significant because schools receive a payment per pupil in addition to an annual lump sum. So, in order to remain financially healthy, it is important to maintain good pupil numbers.

Our Head Teacher, Malcolm Meaby, is empowering all staff members to be actively involved in taking the school forward; he is encouraging their ideas and helping them to convert ideas into action. It is safe to say that the current atmosphere at school is very positive and collaborative.



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Responsibility Confidence Motivation Creativity Independence

In order to further enhance our pupils' learning journeys, we are also benefiting from the Rother Valley network of schools, with whom we share ideas and resources.

## **The Consultation**

It is fortunate that, although we are currently subject to consultation, the school community is vibrant and the overall mood optimistic. The "Ground Force Day" two weeks ago and our open day on Saturday were testament to this; we would like to thank the staff, the children and FOSS for all their hard work and enthusiasm in making it all happen.

Nevertheless, the consultation is in progress and we do need to make sure that our views are heard. It is extremely important that as many of us as possible attend the public meeting at school this Thursday evening, 24th October at 6.30pm. Please come along and let the County Council officers know why the school is important to you.

As you know, there is also an on-line survey which we would encourage you to fill in. At the start of the survey questions there is a table of information and a link to a document the County Council has described as a School Impact Assessment Report. As governors, we have raised strong objections with the County Council as to the content of the table. We don't think it's a fair reflection of the school. Many of the factors highlighted appear to have been selected simply to build a case for change.

To support you in filling in the survey, here is some information which might help with answering the questions:

**Questions 1 & 2** - are self-explanatory. These questions seek to gather views about the quality of teaching and learning at Stedham. We would encourage you to be as generous here as you are able. In the form of Malcolm Meaby and his staff we believe we have real assets in helping us grow pupil numbers towards capacity.

### **Question 3 - Is This School Financially Viable?**

The school is absolutely financially viable, provided we can maintain healthy pupil numbers. We have a detailed plan in place for achieving this.

Stedham School has been financially stable for decades, always operating within its budget. We will adapt, as necessary, to continue to stay within budget, as we have always done.

The main threat to the financial health of the school is the County Council's Small Schools Consultation, which is discouraging new parents from choosing our school at a time when they are evaluating their options for September 2020. Having said that, we are convinced that we will overcome this challenge and build towards future growth. As governors we are committed and excited as to what the future holds for our school community.

### **Question 4 - What do you consider to be the best option for your school?**

There is a drop-down button called "Options explained" which gives a brief overview. In our opinion, the only two options that are relevant to Stedham are Federation and No Change.

Federation of two or more schools can be beneficial for children and staff alike; federated schools remain on their own site, with their current teachers but they can share other overheads such as

non-teaching staff costs, school trips, wrap around care, training costs. Staff expertise and skills can also be shared between schools and teachers have “parallel” teachers at the other school(s) with whom to exchange ideas and resources.

As a board of governors we believe that collaboration with other schools is a very positive option for Stedham; indeed this is already starting to happen. We would only propose federation if there were clear benefits for the school and following engagement with the entire school community.

We also think that “do nothing” is (for the purposes of the survey response) a good option for Stedham. We have a varied curriculum and a balanced budget. Whilst we are always open to change and improvement, we don’t favour change for the sake of change. Understanding the benefits of any future change is key.

### **Question 5 - Further Views**

Please use this box to explain what Stedham means to you and your family. What would the consequences of closure be for your child?

Example statements about what Stedham means to you:

- Stedham is a fantastic school at the heart of our small rural community.
- Pupils are happy and the staff and governors are engaged.
- Education at Stedham is child-focused and individually tailored to the needs and strengths of every child.
- Stedham School is a caring place in a setting close to home.

Example statements about the possible consequences of closure:

- The potential break-up of established friendships
- Loss of the security and nurturing approach of teachers who know every child
- Travelling to an alternative school has time and cost implications and increased traffic and emission impact on the local area.

You may also wish to express any views you have about the consultation itself. Here are some pointers:

- The timing of the consultation has been poor. It was announced at the end of the summer term just before everyone broke up for the holidays. Also, the public consultation period will run at exactly the same time as the period for choosing schools for September 2020.
- We also know that the decision to include Stedham in the consultation was based on inaccurate information.
- West Sussex County Council has ignored the Department of Education’s statutory guidelines on closure being the absolutely last option.
- The decision to start the consultation was made without due process, scrutiny or proper evidence.

We do hope that this is helpful for you in filling in the on-line survey but as ever, please feel free to ask any of us for further clarification. If you prefer, you could direct any queries to the office.

There is a link to the survey at the bottom of this email and there will be a paper copy of the survey attached to the hard copy of the letter in book bags tomorrow. We would encourage you to help your child(ren) to fill in a paper copy of the survey which can be brought to school to be sent. Please copy the survey as needed for your children or for anyone else you know who may not have access to a computer.

As mentioned above, we believe the decision to start the consultation was fundamentally flawed; furthermore, we believe it to have been unlawful. We have therefore alerted WSCC to our intention to bring a legal challenge. By pursuing legal action we hope that we might be able to remove Stedham from the scope of the consultation. Until a court rules in our favour, it is vital that we all engage in the consultation with passion and vigour. We will keep you updated on this matter but encourage you for now to respond to the consultation by making your views known as loudly and clearly as you can.

Together we will protect our school. Thank you for your on-going support.

Kind regards

David Furlow (Chair of Governors)

dfurlow@acs-schools.com

Celia Billington (Vice Chair of Governors)

cecilie.68@hotmail.co.uk

On behalf of The Governing Board of Stedham Primary School

Link to the Survey:

[https://haveyoursay.westsussex.gov.uk/strategic-planning-and-place/rural-and-small-schools/supporting\\_documents/WS32686%20Proposed%20reorganisation%20of%20rural%20and%20small%20schools%20in%20West%20Sussex%20consultation\\_OSD2.pdf](https://haveyoursay.westsussex.gov.uk/strategic-planning-and-place/rural-and-small-schools/supporting_documents/WS32686%20Proposed%20reorganisation%20of%20rural%20and%20small%20schools%20in%20West%20Sussex%20consultation_OSD2.pdf)