

Building new schools in the current economic climate.

- **Two thirds of current projects are behind schedule**, with some being held back by more than 2 years (Daily Telegraph 13.10.08).
- Government architecture watchdog found **80%** of designs for Secondary School buildings for the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme were **sub-standard**.
- Jim Knight, Schools Minister said "While the Government is committed to rebuilding or refurbishing every secondary school, the **Tories have pledged to slash our school building programme by £4.5 billion**. This would mean cancelling one in seven future building projects – a total of 360 schools." Michael Gove, Shadow Schools Minister, has confirmed that a Conservative Government is unlikely to commit to BSF funding. Given that a general election is likely within 24 months, the funding for rebuilding The Purbeck School is threatened.
- BSF is dependent on Private Funding Initiatives (PFI) to meet 50% of costs and is facing serious problems finding partners. The Times reported that **large numbers of projects are put on hold due to difficulties with PFI deals with big banks**. The Partnership for Schools agency blamed challenging economic circumstances for forcing it to borrow £300 million from the European Union because funding from banks has dried up. Indeed, Tim Byles, head of PfS, admitted that by Christmas 2008 no banks had been willing to invest in the school program. We are in a recession and the banks are in financial trouble. Where will the PFI money for future projects come from?
- John England, Head of Raising Achievement for DCC has admitted that the entire Purbeck reorganization is in "**jeopardy if the BSF funds are not forthcoming.**"
- Mr England offered the opinion at a meeting with staff and governors at Swanage First School that the "newly created school in Swanage would undoubtedly be outstanding." Is he not aware that buildings alone do not make an outstanding school? In fact one of the first schools built through BSF, Sandon High School, Stoke-on-Trent **failed** its Ofsted inspection.
- A report by Pricewaterhouse Coopers found rebuilding projects had led to a **decline in standards** in some schools. Is this why 3 newly formed primary schools in Blandford occupy the three lowest positions (82nd, 83rd, 84th) in Dorset performance tables (2007) for aggregate scores? Anecdotal evidence from parents of affected children and a Daily Echo report suggests the Blandford reorganization was chaotic and led to cramped conditions, inadequate temporary accommodation and low morale for both teachers and pupils.
- DCC has a poor track record in managing its finances and keeping a cap on spending. Queen Elizabeth School, Wimborne is **£20 million pounds over budget**. Dorset County Council has admitted that "committing to this sum will therefore have a significant effect on the County Council's Capital Program." The over-spend must be met from within DCCs budget and **not** from Government funding.
- The anticipated cost for reorganizing Blandford and Shaftesbury pyramids was woefully inadequate - the costs ran over so much so that DCC needs future BSF funding to complete the building projects in these areas (as identified in DCCs expression of interest for Wave 8 BSF funding).
- The budget for converting to two-tier system in Shaftesbury, involving just one middle school, was £30 million and overspent. In Purbeck the reorganisation involves 18 schools (including 4 middles). Can we be confident that the LAs estimated the £50 to £75 million capital cost required is adequate?
- A report to DCC Cabinet meeting Feb 2009 states '**by 2011-12 our borrowing is expected to be in excess of 100% of our net budget requirement**, with an annual servicing cost of about 9% of the net budget requirement. **The prudential regime requires the Authority to ensure that the borrowing is affordable**'.
- Councils entering into the BSF programme do so on the understanding that the **funding gap between the cost and the funds provided will be met by the local authority**. Given DCCs poor track record on overspending and the current economic climate, can they be trusted to deliver their proposals at no expense to local tax payers?

So will standards and results improve with reorganisation?

National research indicates that a move to 2-tier neither raises nor reduces standards but there are examples locally of situations where a move to 2-tier has been accompanied by a reduction in standards.

Note: There are no performance tables for 2008.

Blandford:

- The newly formed Blandford St Mary's Primary School seems to be doing well and appears at position 14th out of 84 in the 2007 Key Stage 2 performance tables for Dorset (incidentally still 7 places behind Sandford).
- Conversely, all of the other Blandford schools are listed **below Swanage and Wareham** Middle schools in these tables with Downlands, Spetisbury and Milldown in Blandford occupying the **lowest 3** places (82nd, 83rd, 84th respectively) in the tables for aggregate scores.
- Mr England, Head of Raising Achievement, is quoted as saying the 2007 CVA results (which measure progress from Y2 to Y6) had Purbeck performing below the national average. This is true for Bovington Middle which skews the aggregate score for the whole of Purbeck. However, Swanage and Wareham Middle Schools' performance is broadly average (with further gains made in 2008), while Sandford had the 13th highest CVA in the County. Once again, Downlands, Spetisbury and Milldown lie at the bottom end for CVA.

Shaftesbury:

- Motcombe and Shaftesbury Primary schools are in the bottom 25% of schools in Dorset for CVA (2007)
- **Shaftesbury Primary** was the first Dorset school to **fail an Ofsted** inspection and to be placed into 'special measures' in December 2007. Its second monitoring visit in October 2008 stated that the school's progress since 2007 is satisfactory.

KS3 value added:

- In Blandford the CVA scores from KS2 to 3 were exactly the same for 2004 (pre - 2 tier) and 2007 at 101.4.
- In Shaftesbury KS2 to 3 CVA went down from 102.0 in 2004 to 100.8 in 2007.

No improvement there!

GCSE results:

There is a general improvement but it was along similar lines to The Purbeck School, with Purbeck consistently achieving slightly higher results.

%A-C incl. Eng/Ma	2004	05	06	07	08
Blandford	46	45	49	45	50
Shaftesbury	46	45	41	44	49
Purbeck	47	49	50	49	51

A/AS levels:

The average point scores for **Blandford** have **DROPPED** by 49 points between 2006 and 2008.

For **Shaftesbury** they've **dropped** by 28 points. While in **Purbeck** they've **RISEN** by 93 points.

Shouldn't the future education of our children be at least as good as or better than in the current system?

The 14 – 19 agenda and raising standards at KS4.

The Local Authority's assertion that Purbeck School requires more pupils per se to sustain an adequate 14 - 19 curriculum (including a range of GCSE options) is flawed. What is needed is a 'wider' not 'taller' pupil structure and close collaboration with other educational institutions. I don't believe that filling the school up with younger kids will in itself improve results and provide a better and broader education.

- **Option choices are determined by the size of year groups** and adding extra children in KS3 (Years 7 and 8) would not increase the size of KS4 year groups at The Purbeck School.
- Taking in extra children in KS3 will enable is **cross-subsidisation to KS4**. That is, using funds intended for pupils in years 7 and 8 to subsidise smaller groups at KS4 and to permit minority GCSE subjects and vocational courses. **This will result in larger class groups for younger KS3 pupils**. John Nash has publicly admitted that this is the intention.
- Cross-subsidization at the expense of KS3 will not be the key to delivering the 14 – 19 curriculum. Rather, Purbeck School will need to **collaborate and form partnerships with other educational establishments**. And working as a consortium with other schools and colleges, it will be able to reduce costs in other ways.
- With the 14-19 curriculum and specialist schools status, a broader variety of learning options will be available across a range of institutions. Links have already been forged so that Purbeck pupils spend some of their time at Kingston Maurward College. Such links will need to be further developed for a successful curriculum.
- Purbeck Pyramid has begun a **compressed KS3** (completing it in Years 7 and 8 so that pupils may embark on KS4 earlier). If Middle Schools are retained, pupils will be ready to begin GCSE and vocational diploma studies as soon as they transfer to The Purbeck School in Year 9. This will allow Purbeck to focus specifically on creating more personalized learning for its pupils – a key government agenda. **A positive move that would enable pupils to continue to do well at KS3 in their Middle Schools.**

The necessary size of a Secondary school

The authority's argument that Purbeck NEEDS to be bigger is flawed too if you look at how other schools (of similar and indeed smaller size) are able to manage. If they can do it, why can't Purbeck?

- Shaftesbury and Blandford schools have been part of the reorganisation to two tier education but are still about the same size as Purbeck is now (before reorganisation). **Note that there is only a difference of 10 pupils between Shaftesbury and Purbeck for 2014**. If Shaftesbury can manage with that number of pupils, why can't Purbeck?

Projected pupil numbers:

Blandford School:	Shaftesbury School:	Purbeck School:
2007 – 1203	2007 – 992	2007 - 1176
2008 – 1182	2008 – 1023	2008 - 1194
2011 – 1153	2011 – 1075	2011 - 1156
2014 – 1225	2014 – 1060	2014 - 1050

I have taken the figures from the Dorset For You schools database (by the way - the figures differ for Purbeck from those in the consultation document! Who knows which ones are accurate?)

- **Sturminster Newton** (a small Dorset town with less than half the population of Swanage) has retained its own Secondary School which has a good Ofsted report and very good GCSE results, above the national average. It is a **small but successful school** with 607 pupils in 2008 and 564 projected for 2014.
- The **National Association for Small Schools** and **Human Scale Education** both provide evidence that many **small schools are financially viable**, can offer the broad curriculum needed and the vast majority outperform large schools in all areas.
- Ofsted found Fairfield High School, Hertfordshire, to be "outstanding in everything it does." The Conservative council has recently rescinded a decision to merge the 367 pupil school following public outcry.

- **David Cameron** offers Conservative support, stating in his own article in the Yorkshire post, “**Small schools will provide better relationships between pupils and teachers and a more nurturing environment to help the emotional development of children.**”
- In American cities there are initiatives to split up 2,000-pupil high schools into "boutique" colleges of no more than 400, where the teachers can get to know each student. In this country, **36 schools are being split into smaller units** for a project funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and co-ordinated by Human Scale Education.
- Brislington Enterprise College in Bristol became the first “schools within a school” design to open under the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. The aim of the approach is to **break up traditional large secondary schools into smaller units**, with their own classrooms and staff. Supporters of the philosophy believe it **allows pupils to build closer relationships** with teachers and make **better academic progress** as they **do not get lost in the system**.

Extensive research in the USA shows the benefits of smaller structures in education to be that:

- student behaviour is more positive
- student academic achievement is higher
- student attitudes towards school are more positive
- **levels of extra-curricular participation are higher** (*our Middle schools are better at involving pupils than Purbeck*)
- school attendance is better
- students have a greater sense of belonging
- teacher satisfaction is greater
- inter-personal relationships between staff and students are more positive
- parents are more likely to be involved and play a constructive role in their children's education

This is an opportunity for DCC to be innovative in providing educational excellence in the 21st Century!