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Merton Schools Reorganisation Web Site

An Interactive Qualifying Project
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Sponsoring Agency: Merton Department of Education, Leisure, and Libraries


Submitted to:

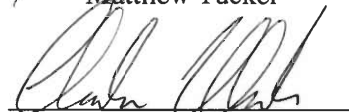
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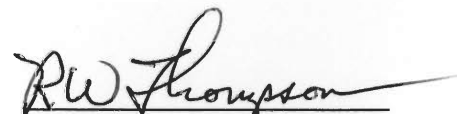
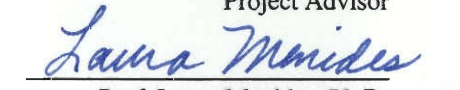

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Abstract

The Department of Education, Leisure, and Libraries of the Borough of Merton, had requested this project to determine how best to inform Merton parents and school staff about the School Reorganisation Project scheduled for September 2001. Data compiled through surveys and focus groups were used to determine the informational needs and wants of these groups. The results were analysed and used to implement an informative, user specific web site that was publicised through school newsletters and posted flyers.

Executive Summary

There were many people affected by the reorganisation of Merton schools, including parents, school staff, and children. Our task was to provide answers to their questions as well as many other concerns that were expressed. Through the use of a questionnaire and focus groups, we were able to determine the questions and concerns of the different groups affected by this change. Once these concerns were assessed, we were able to address them with the help of an informational web site.

In September 2001, the London Borough of Merton was undergoing a change in its school system. Where once was in place a three-tier system of first, middle, and high schools, the Borough was changing to a two-tier system of Primary and Secondary schools. The main reason for this change was to better accommodate the British National Curriculum of four Key Stages. Other reasons included raising standards and bringing Merton in line with surrounding London Boroughs who were already using the two-tier system.

The questionnaire we developed was sent out to parents, headteachers, governors, and school staff to determine the information needs of each of these groups. Pupils were not contacted by the questionnaire because we thought it to be too formal and did not expect to receive useful feedback if we had sent it to them. The purpose of this questionnaire was to determine what these different groups already knew about the schools reorganisation and what information they required. This questionnaire also asked about the groups' internet access as well as how helpful a web site would be for disseminating information about the reorganisation. Out of total of 2644 surveys sent to schools, we received 154 replies, giving us a 5.8% return rate.

From this questionnaire, we were able to determine what kinds of information to put into each section of our web site. Parents showed an overwhelming concern about the admissions process and also wanted to be able to read about their child's new school. Headteachers and governors generally wanted to know about the Private Finance Initiative and how long building work would be happening in their buildings. School staff expressed concerns about losing their jobs and the disruption to pupils during the transition period. These were all concerns that we addressed in the appropriate sections of the web site.

The informal focus groups that we conducted with two groups of pupils had the same goal as the questionnaire. Through these focus groups, we wanted to learn what pupils knew and did not know about the reorganisation and what they wanted to know. These topics ranged from information about their new school to the reasons behind the reorganisation. We also observed their internet behaviour to get a better idea of how to set up the pupil section of the web site. The general consensus seemed to be that in order for the pupils to better understand the reorganisation, we needed to use a lot of pictures and simple wording.

Once our web site was complete, taking into consideration all of the concerns expressed by the respondents to our survey and the pupils in our focus groups, it needed to be tested by potential users. User tests were conducted with Merton Civic Centre employees and a group of Gorringe Park Middle School pupils to determine if we had met all of the potential users' needs. Some of the employees were parents or school governors. We wanted to be sure that all of the information made sense and that we had not missed anything. Once these tests were complete we were able to make changes to the web site and put it online (a copy of the whole web site can be seen in Appendix 2).

To ensure that the people of Merton would benefit from our web site, we had to inform them of the existence of our web site as a means of getting information about the reorganisation. We did this through school newsletters and flyers. We sent newsletter articles to each school to be put in their newsletters publicising the web site and also posted flyers around the Merton Civic Centre and local libraries.

The overall result of our project was the creation of a user-friendly informational web site that addressed many of the questions and concerns expressed by the people in Merton affected by the schools reorganisation. We hoped that this would continue to be a helpful place for people to go who were in search of important information about this change and that, as a result, people would be more informed.

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1.0 Introduction

In order to increase the performance of their pupils and better accommodate the British National Curriculum, Merton officials decided to adopt the school structure favoured by many of its neighbours (ELL, 2000, p. 4). At the time our project commenced, Merton schools were divided into three tiers: first, middle, and high school. After the reorganisation, it would consist of only Primary and Secondary tiers.

The officials of the Borough of Merton realised that many of the concerns within the community stemmed from a lack of information related to how these changes would affect Merton residents (ELL, 2000, p. 20). Merton officials instituted a campaign to disseminate the necessary information throughout the community. These methods, including such things as the distribution of 26,000 leaflets, had fallen short, and the Merton Council felt that an informational web site would take a large step in bridging the information gap.

To that end, The London Borough of Merton Department of Education, Leisure, and Libraries (ELL) requested that we, a group of Worcester Polytechnic Institute students, in fulfilment of our Interactive Qualifying Project, create an informational web to inform parents, school staff and pupils about schools reorganisation. The ELL felt that the additional means of disseminating information was needed since many people simply ignored leaflets and mailings, and the Department wanted a simple way to inform people of changes that were occurring regarding the reorganisation.

Our goal for the project was to create a user-friendly, informational web site that would keep residents of Merton updated about the progress of the reorganisation project. To reach this goal, one of our objectives was to determine the informational needs of the potential user groups. These groups included parents, school governors, headteachers,

school staff, and pupils. In addition to determining the user groups' informational needs, we determined how to meet each group's internet usability and navigational needs as well.

We determined that, in order to obtain this goal, our method should consist of two distinct phases. The first phase was of the compilation of data. We decided not only what information related to the reorganisation project was relevant but to whom it was relevant as well. We collected these data through the use of a mail survey, interviews, and observations as well as consultation with our sponsor agency.

Once we compiled the data and determined which user groups would benefit from it, we moved to the second phase, which was the implementation and promotion of the web site itself. Using what we learned about web usability through our Literature Review and the information we collected during the first phase, we constructed a web site that was accessible, navigable, and, above all, informative, to every user group. We then tested the prototype web site with some of the user groups to ensure that it was usable at an intuitive level and that each user group's informational needs were satisfied.

In order to be effective, the community had to be made aware of the web site upon its completion. Promoting the web site involved everything from school newsletters to flyers posted in public buildings. The site would be useless if people in the borough were not cognisant of its availability.

The most important result of this project was an increased understanding of the school reorganisation within Merton and, as a result, less resistance to it. This web site tells users exactly what to expect during the transition phase of the reorganisation.

This goal was the primary objective of the Merton Schools Reorganisation Team as well. But further than that, they needed a medium of communication that was easily

updateable and adaptable. When we completed our part of the project, we left behind the framework that allowed the agency to utilise and expand the web site after we left.

2.0 Literature Review

Established in 1965, the London Borough of Merton is one of London's 32 boroughs (Merton, England, 2000). Located in Southwest London, Merton covers over 9300 acres of land and is composed of four townships: Mitcham, Morden, Raynes Park, and Wimbledon. The Merton community is comprised of a very diverse group of individuals who vary immensely in age, economic standing, religion, and social status (London Borough of Merton, 2000). These differences, as well as United Kingdom law, have made it necessary to consult the public before making changes in Borough policies, such as reorganising the school system, because of the people's diversity and their potential to express a wide range of views on all issues.

The Borough of Merton acts as the Education Authority for the residents that live within Merton's borders (ELL, 2000). At the time of our project, Merton, unlike most places in the United Kingdom, operated on a three-tier school system. In order to make the organisation of the schools compatible with the new National Curriculum, Merton officials decided to change its educational system over to a two-tier system to match those of the other boroughs. This change, Merton officials believed, would help pupils to achieve the Standard Assessment Test (SAT) results that were more comparable to results obtained by pupils in other boroughs statistically equivalent to Merton.

2.1 Merton's Reorganisation Project

At the heart of the Merton Schools Web site project was a reorganisation of the community's school system. At the time of our work, Merton schools were organised in a three-tier structure of first, middle and high schools (ELL, 2000, p. 3). The aim of the reorganisation project was to adopt the new two-tiered system of Primary and Secondary schools that was already in use in many of Merton's neighbouring boroughs. The project was the largest and most expensive the Borough has undertaken, costing roughly £40 million (ELL, 2000, p. 2).

2.1.1 Overview of the Merton School System

In 1967, a committee established to evaluate the Merton education system called the Plowden Committee recommended that the Borough implement a three-tier system of schools. The Borough heeded the recommendation and the new system was phased in starting in 1969. The result was a schools structure consisting of first, middle, and high schools (ELL, 1999, p.4).

In Spring 2001, there were 32 first schools with nurseries for pupils aged 3 to 8 years, 12 middle schools for 8 to 12 year olds, and 7 high schools for 12 to 16 year olds. Of these, there were two girls' community high schools and two boys' community high schools (ELL, 2000, p. 3). In addition, there were three Special schools for children with moderate learning difficulties or behavioural problems (ELL, 1999, p. 3). To facilitate the reorganisation, 13 of the 60 Merton schools closed, 4 new ones opened and 11 schools

underwent a significant change of character. A significant change of character involved combining First and Middle School age groups into one building to form Primary Schools (Ofsted, 2000, p. 9).

In comparison to school systems of similar demographic makeup, Merton schools generally have been within the national average in National Curriculum tests of reading, writing, and mathematics (Ofsted, p. 9). Attainment rates (number of pupils performing at expected levels on standardised national tests) at Key Stages 2, 3 and 4, however, have been poor compared to similar boroughs as well as national averages (ELL, 1999, p. 5).

In 1998, 24,322 children attended Merton Schools (Ofsted, 2000, p. 8). Of these 32.1 percent were from minority groups, the two largest being Black African and Black Caribbean (5.4 and 4.8 percent, respectively). Approximately one hundred different languages are spoken in Merton schools, although the number of children with English as an additional language is lower than the Outer London average.

2.1.2 Why the Reorganisation Is Needed

The Central Government, each year, compares school systems of communities that are economically and demographically similar. Out of its six closest “statistical neighbours”, Merton has finished last in recent studies (ELL, 2000, p. 4). As a result, many parents have lost confidence in Merton schools. In 1999, twenty-three percent of pupils left the Merton school system at Year 7 (age twelve) and enrolled in Secondary schools in neighbouring boroughs where a two tier system was already in place (Ofsted 2000, p. 5). In this way, Merton Schools lost many of their top pupils and, consequently, rated poorly on assessment test results.

Part of the reason for this exodus was that the British National Curriculum was developed assuming a two-tier system (ELL, 1999, p.5). The National Curriculum specifies four Key Stages of academic development and assesses pupils' progress at the end of each stage (ELL, 2000, p. 4). The problem was that, with a three-tiered system, the second stage was broken up between first and middle schools. The same situation applied to the third stage, which was broken up between middle and high schools (ELL, 2000, p. 4). In this way, the consistency of two of the stages was compromised. A study done by the LEA found that teachers had a tendency to repeat the first part of the stage that had been covered the previous year in a different school (ELL, 2000, p. 4). This was an inefficient use of time.

Miles Mizon, headteacher in the community of Bradford who was undertaking a similar reorganisation project, said, "The National Curriculum is really designed to fit a two-tier system, and I believe that pupils will benefit from only having to change schools once" (Bradford, 2000, p. 4).

Mr. Mizon's last point has been corroborated by educational research, which concludes that, when children are forced to change schools, they regress slightly (ELL 2000, p. 4). In this way, as well, Merton pupils would benefit from fewer environment changes.

Because schools reorganisation would be happening over a number of years, children would not have to change schools more often than they normally would under the three-tier system. Each of the younger children would finish the school that they were in and then apply to a Secondary school. Older children already in high school before the changes would also finish the school they were in at the time. Other than those children at closing schools, all children would only have to change schools once.

The primary goal of the project was to improve standards in Merton Schools (ELL, 1999, p.5). The reorganisation was part of a three-pronged strategy to meet this goal. The strategy, as specified by the Merton Department of Education, Leisure and Libraries, was as follows:

- I. Setting out four priority areas for raising standards in the LEA's three year Education Development Plan (EDP) with challenging targets for each school.*
- II. Putting in place, in partnership with schools, a rigorous and comprehensive school self review mechanism and a Support and Monitoring Framework, which promote and support the raising of achievement.*
- III. Changing from the current three tier system of First, Middle and High Schools to a two tier system of Primary and Secondary schools with children changing school only once at age 11.*

(ELL, 1999, p. 5)

The LEA has identified fourteen objectives for the project. All of which were instrumental in improving the quality of education in the borough. Among these objectives were improving attainment rates, preserving the continuity of each Key Stage (especially 2 and 3), maintaining small class sizes and improving support for Special Education (ELL, 1999, p.5).

2.2.3 Concerns Within the Community

Many Merton residents were uncertain about how the reorganisation project would affect their lives. The Merton Schools Reorganisation Team recognised this and launched an awareness campaign (of which this project was a part) to combat the problem. First, however, we had to identify residents' concerns.

The primary concern of Merton parents was, of course, their children (MRP, 2000). Parents needed to know, in great detail, how the reorganisation will affect their children's lives. Many children had to be displaced from the schools they already attended to be placed in new schools. That is to say, part of the new process required that children apply to a Primary school. This was confusing to some parents since many of their children already attended First Schools that were becoming Primary Schools. Many parents felt that their children should not have to apply to schools that they already attended. Issues such as these seemed tedious and unnecessary to many parents. However, they were essential to ensure that pupils were equally distributed among the schools.

The possibility that their child was going to be displaced from his or her school raised another concern with Merton parents. They were concerned that their children's education would not remain consistent from one school to the next (MRP, 2000). According to the schools reorganisation informational web page, "The staff and governors at schools which will close are working with support from the Local Education Authority to make sure there is continuity of education" for every pupil. To help facilitate this, some teachers whose schools were closing were moved with their pupils.

Another concern was staffing (MRP, 2000). There were some initial concerns about having to reduce the number of teachers in the Borough. Since Merton schools as a whole would still be teaching the same curriculum to the same number of pupils just in a different format, the same number of teachers would be needed. In fact, additional teaching staff was needed due to expanded nursery provision. Also, schools reorganisation required some schools to be closed and some existing ones to be modified. Parents expressed their opinions on which schools should remain in use and which should

not in several of the numerous consultations the Borough made with the people of Merton regarding the schools reorganisation (ELL 2000, p. 5).

In the LEA's initial project proposal, there were a number of three-form entry Primary Schools recommended (ELL 2000, p. 5). The number of forms of entry is related to class size. In a one-form entry school, for example, one class of thirty pupils enters the school at age five. In a two-form school, two classes of thirty pupils enter. Many parents were opposed to the proposed three-form schools.

Another point of concern with the initial proposal was the legal nature of some schools' transition. Although the school system's overall curriculum would remain unchanged, many individual schools would undergo significant changes of character. For example, a number of Middle schools would become Primary schools. Also, some of these middle schools would be amalgamating with first schools to become Primary schools. Originally, the transition method proposed was "closure and reopening" (ELL 2000, p. 5). This required that each changing school close over the summer term and re-open in the fall as a new school. Some parents recommended that this method be replaced by the "significant change of character method" which allowed the schools to retain their legal identity during the transition.

2.1.4 The Private Finance Initiative

"It is intended that the building work required for the reorganised Secondary schools will be incorporated into a Private Finance Initiative public private partnership contract (Badcoe, 2001, p.1). Under this contract a private company or consortium will be responsible for designing and building or refurbishing the premises required, and for raising the funds to pay for this work, and then for managing the buildings and sites for a

period of 25 years. The Council will pay the private contractor a monthly fee for providing and managing the premises over the life of the contract. Schools will continue to be responsible for educational services and other pastoral and community activity.”

“In June 2000 the DfEE approved this approach for the Secondary schools, and allocated special funding to support the cost of the scheme to the Council (Badcoe, 2001, p. 1). This approval authorises the Council to proceed with the procurement process, which involves selecting the private contractor and agreeing the details of the contract.”

“PFI procurement is on a negotiated basis (Badcoe, 2001, p.1). This means that the Council sets out its requirements for the type of premises required and services to be delivered in the form of an ‘output specification’. Consultation with governor and teacher representatives of schools on the output specification for this project is being conducted via the Output Specification Development Group. Bidders are asked to make proposals for how they will meet these requirements. There then follows a series of discussions, and evaluation of the proposals, to choose the best bidder, and further negotiations to sort out the details of the contract. The final contract will specify full details of the design and building work to be undertaken to each of the schools, and all of the services to be provided, including the staffing and other resources, and the systems, procedures, and management arrangements which the contractor will use. This process gives the Council, and staff and governors of individual schools, plenty of opportunity to examine, influence, and ultimately satisfy themselves about the detail of these arrangements. However, it also means that the procurement process takes longer than traditional tendering does. The theory is that it should produce better services, and it may also result in faster design and construction phases.”

There have been three organisations selected who will be putting forward proposals to bid for the contract: Discovery Schools Consortium, Jarvis, and New Schools Consortium (Badcoe, 2001, p.2). “These three organisations visited each of the schools on a number of occasions to see the buildings and to have meetings to discuss individual school requirements. They submitted proposals on 23 February, and discussion and evaluation will follow in March, April and May. Representatives of each of the schools will participate in the evaluation process, which will culminate in the summer with the selection of the ‘preferred bidder’ who will negotiate with the Council on the details of the contract.”

“It is planned for the contract to be finalised in December 2001, following all of the internal and external approvals that need to be obtained (Badcoe, 2001, p.2). These will include formal consultation with governing bodies to ascertain whether they are willing to proceed with the contract. Subject to all of the necessary approvals, the contract will then start in March. This will mean that the successful bidder will take over the management of the school sites, and begin construction works.”

“However, PFI procurement is a protracted and difficult process, and often subject to delay, so that there is a risk that the timetable will slip (Badcoe, 2001, p.2). Even if the contract is signed on the target date, it is almost certain that all of the building work to all six schools will not be finished. Bidders are required to make proposals for the management of the transition to ensure that any disruption is minimised both before and after September 2002, and that adequate accommodation is provided throughout. The Council and schools will need to be satisfied with these arrangements before any contract can be signed. It has been made absolutely clear to bidders that it will not be

acceptable for schools to resemble building sites at any time during the transition” (Also See Appendix E for more information).

2.1.5 What Has Been Done Thus Far

The schools reorganisation project was an enormous one of immense scope whose implementation required an intensive consultation process with the Merton community (ELL, 2000, p. 4). The Merton LEA, in conjunction with Merton headteachers and officials in the Roman Catholic Diocese and Church of England Diocese, made the decision to appoint a Citizen Jury for further consultation (ELL 2000, p. 4). The Citizen Jury was made up of Merton residents and was chaired by an independent education expert, Professor Eric Bolton.

In September 1998, the LEA initiated a major public consultation campaign (ELL 2000, p. 4). They distributed some 26,000 leaflets to Merton parents and set up informational tables in public areas such as libraries and supermarkets. Over three thousand parents responded to this initial consultation, highlighting some key concerns. Using these new data, the LEA revised their proposal and launched yet another consultation. After receiving those responses, the proposal was finalised and sent to the Secretary of State for Education and Employment on May 26, 1999. In June of 2000 the Secretary of State for Education and Employment approved the proposal in full.

2.1 Surveys

In order to assess the kinds of information that Merton residents wanted to know concerning the school reorganisation, it was imperative to conduct a survey. A survey is a method used by many social science researchers, and a well-planned survey can produce very useful data. Every aspect of a survey must be carefully planned and contemplated in order for the researcher to generate reliable data (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982, p. 1). Issues such as the survey sample, the types of questions, and the format of those questions must be decided upon. If all of these aspects are inspected thoroughly, then the researcher will have developed a survey that can generate a wealth of information.

When designing a questionnaire, there are a few different kinds of questions that the researcher can ask (Czaja and Blair, 1996, p. 54). There are introductory knowledge questions and opinion questions. The order and format of these questions is crucial to the production of non-biased and accurate data from the survey.

2.2.1 Survey sample

It is first important to define the population that will be surveyed. The population is simply the group that is intended for study (Czaja and Blair, 1996, p. 113). If this group is not clearly defined, though, there may be ambiguity in the final results. The population must be decided in terms such as age, gender, education, and any other means of classification.

From the defined population, a sampling frame must be determined. A sampling frame is defined as the resources with which the researcher will narrow down the selected population into a survey sample (Czaja and Blair, 1996, p. 116). The sampling frame could be information such as Census data, telephone books, or compiled databases of names and addresses from public agencies. Sampling frames, though, must be evaluated on their usefulness because they do not always indicate the population as a whole. For instance, in a telephone book for an area there are residents who have unlisted numbers, residents who are listed twice and also businesses listed. These specific cases could lead to discrepancies in the survey data.

Next, the researcher must develop the survey sample from the sampling frame. This sample must be a group within the population that will adequately represent the population as a whole (Czaja and Blair, 1996, p. 126). The size of this survey sample is integral to the accuracy of the survey.

Once the sample size is determined, the next step is to select that sample from the larger population (Czaja and Blair, 1996, p.145). One way to choose this sample is through stratified sampling. This process is accomplished by taking the eligible population and determining the subgroups within this sample.

2.2.2 Knowledge Questions

Once the survey sample is decided upon, the questionnaire can be designed in agreement with that survey sample. When designing a questionnaire, Labaw (1985, p. 132) recommends that the first questions to be asked should be introductory questions, which should allow the respondent to gain rapport with the researcher and reduce the

threat to the respondent. Labaw also suggests that these questions be in an open-ended format. This type of question allows the respondent to introduce his or her thoughts instead of feeling constrained by a closed question.

Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p. 112) suggest the questionnaire begin with knowledge questions. In contrast to Labaw's opinion, they advise that these questions be of a closed format, but that they should by no means threaten the respondents. Knowledge questions allow the researcher to further interpret the opinions of the respondent, by first assessing the respondent's knowledge of a certain topic. These questions should be placed before any opinion questions so as not to bias the respondent. Either of the methods proposed by Labaw or Sudman and Bradburn could be used in a survey, depending on the context of the survey.

A few items to consider when writing a knowledge question are the level of difficulty, the level of threat, and the use of yes or no questions (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982, p. 89). When assessing the purpose of the question, another item that needs to be assessed is the level of difficulty that is needed for the question. There are many easy ways to make a question more or less specific. An example given by Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p. 110) is if a respondent is asked, "Have you heard or read about the trouble between Israel and the Arab nations in the Middle East?" according to a Gallup Poll, ninety-seven percent of respondents will answer "yes." Whereas if the respondent is asked, "Have you heard or read about the recent Sinai Disengagement Pact between Egypt and Israel?" only fifty-nine percent of respondents answer "yes."

Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p. 112) suggest that easier knowledge questions should be used for current issues and harder questions for long standing topics. In addition, the order that these knowledge questions are asked should to be taken into

account. They also recommend that easier questions be placed first so the respondent will not be apt to quit the survey in the beginning stages. Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p. 111-112) rated knowledge questions from easiest to most difficult as open questions, multiple choice or dichotomous questions, detail questions, qualitative questions, and numerical questions.

Another important point to consider is the threat the respondent feels from a question. One way suggested by Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p. 113) to reduce threat is to start the question with a generality such as “Do you happen to know...” or “Can you recall offhand....” These generalities allow the respondent to feel that other respondents might also be unable to answer the question, therefore, not making him or her feel uncomfortable if he or she does not know the answer. Another suggestion they give is to include the possible answer of “I don’t know.” Of course, some surveys may call for the respondent to guess, so one possible way to start the question could be, “Your best guess....”

Another caveat of questioning relates to yes or no questions. If there is a long series of yes or no questions, the respondent is likely to guess. To reduce this possibility, Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p.89) suggest that other questions related to the topic also be asked to test the respondent’s knowledge. According to Labaw (1985, p.134), this could be avoided by asking open-ended questions to supplement any yes or no questions.

2.2.3 Opinion questions

After the knowledge or introductory questions should come opinion questions. These make up the essence of the survey. As it is for knowledge questions, there are specific guidelines to follow when creating opinion questions.

There is a certain format to all opinion questions that allows the questions to be unbiased and give readable results. Czaja and Blair (1996, p. 63) recommend, “using closed questions as much as possible”. If respondents are not given alternatives, then they may make up their own answers and interpretation of the question (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982, p. 140). For these given alternatives, it is very important to contemplate the wording, to avoid misinterpretation.

Labaw (1985, p. 132) states that open-ended questions “are indispensable to a thorough understanding of complex issues and topics.” Labaw feels that open-ended questions are no longer used because of the cost to surveying companies of coding the results of so many possible answers. Despite the cost, Labaw (1985, p. 133) supports the use of open-ended questions with the statement: “I have found that a well-written open-ended question can eliminate the need for several closed questions, and that subsequent data analysis becomes clear and easy.”

Labaw (1985, p. 134) defines three main uses for an open-ended question: to clarify a closed question, to learn more about the respondent’s strength of feeling about a subject, and to allow the respondent to define an indefinite term. Labaw (1985, p. 151) also states that, “The most obvious solution...is to use open-ended and closed questions in immediate combination. The closed questions give statistical count, and the open ended questions give the meaning of the statistical count.”

Another important criterion is whether a question is unipolar or bipolar. It is important to ask the respondent whether they “favour or oppose” a situation instead of just “favour” or “oppose” (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982, p. 137). The latter allows bias to be added into the question. The same applies with phrases such as “allow or forbid” and “satisfied or dissatisfied.”

Other types of questions to avoid are double-barrelled questions, which have more than one topic introduced in the question and agree or disagree questions, which are very surface layer questions. According to Czaja and Blair (1996, p. 73), double-barrelled questions, “do not reflect bias or the researcher’s preference; rather, they are structurally flawed.” Their suggestion in most situations is to make one double-barrelled question into two questions.

For example, if a question asked, “How much do you think the faculty and the teaching assistants of WPI aid or impair your learning?”, the reader may not be able to answer that question if he or she has conflicting feelings about the faculty and the teaching assistants. Instead, there should be two questions asking, “How much do you think the faculty of WPI aid or impair your learning?”, and “How much do you think the teaching assistants of WPI aid or impair your learning?” With these two questions, the respondent is now able to distinguish between the two groups and can answer without confusion.

It is also important to look at the actual words used in each question. It is important to use words that cannot be misconstrued by the respondent. Labaw (1985, p. 158) warns against “generic” words and defines them as, “words with broad meanings. “Generic words appear to be universally interpreted in the same way, but in fact they are interpreted in widely different ways by important clusters and subgroups of the general

public.” Some examples of generic words that she gives are “honesty,” “moderate,” quality,” “convenience,” and “family planning.” Various groups could easily interpret each of these words differently.

Sometimes it is important to measure the “strength” of a respondent’s attitude toward a topic. There are a few different avenues that Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p.125) suggest for accomplishing this task. First, the researcher may apply magnitudes of strength as an option for the respondent. Second, two questions may be employed: one that asks about the topic, and one that asks the strength of the respondent’s feelings on that topic. Last, a series of independent questions that together can measure the degree of the respondent’s attitude could be used.

When assessing the strength of a respondent’s feelings, Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p. 141) suggest to the researcher that he or she “include the middle category unless there are persuasive reasons not to.” This middle category could be the choice of “no opinion.” On the contrary, Czaja and Blair (1996, p. 69) suggest that if given the choice, most people will choose the answer of “no opinion,” but if they are not given the option, the researcher will find that they are leaning one way or another, which will give the researcher useable information.

2.2.4 Pre-testing

Before designing the final survey questionnaire, it is important to pre-test the survey to find out if the respondent is misconstruing the meaning of questions intended by the researcher. Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p. 140) suggest that researchers, “should do a considerable amount of pre-testing and examine different ways to phrase

alternatives.” Pre-testing allows the researcher to know how respondents interpret questions.

Czaja and Blair (1996, p. 22) suggest two different methods for pre-testing. One is termed a “think aloud”, which is a one-on-one session where the researcher supplies the questions and the respondent interprets them. The second method is a focus group, which would include six to eight people. It is important that all of the people present have a common thread. These similarities alleviate threat and allow for unbiased answers. In the pre-test, Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p. 122) advise that it is appropriate to display a question and then ask the testing subject, “What is your understanding of the meaning of this question?”

From a pre-test, any misconstrued words or unclear questions become apparent. After any revisions are made, a second or third pre-test may be needed. Czaja and Blair (1996, p. 20) warn that any researcher should expect many drafts. The interpretation of the questions is imperative to the success of a survey, so the questions should be pre-tested until there is no ambiguity among test subjects.

Czaja and Blair (1996, p. 19) also propose that, “borrowing questions from other research studies is acceptable, even encouraged.” The employment of previously used questions, though, should not be used under the assumption that these questions are infallible and that they do not need to be pre-tested.

2.2.5 Administering of the Survey

There are three main methods of administering a survey: mail, telephone, and face-to-face. We chose to do a mail survey because we could reach a large number of

people in a shorter amount of time and also because the respondents could answer at their own convenience. These two factors, we believed, would give us a larger response rate.

When giving a mail survey the first item that a respondent should receive is a cover letter or introduction letter (Czaja and Blair, 1996, p. 33). The letter should preferably come before the survey. For an electronic survey, this introduction could be done through an email to the survey sample. These introductory letters give the respondent the needed background to familiarise him or her with the survey.

For the cover letter, Czaja and Blair (1996, p. 33) state that it “should state the purpose of the survey, who is the sponsor or who is collecting the data, who is to complete the questionnaire, an assurance of confidentiality, and when to return the questionnaire (usually within 10 days).” The cover letter should also include contact information that will allow the respondent to call with any questions that he or she has about the questionnaire.

For a mail survey there are some important considerations (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982, p. 265). It is first important to consider the order and context of the survey. Most respondents will read the whole questionnaire before filling in the answers, so Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p. 265) advise that the order of the questionnaire is not entirely important unless it is concerned with questions that cannot be answered without a question preceding it.

Another important topic to take into consideration is that of skip instructions. Skip instructions tell the respondent to skip certain questions that do not apply specifically to him or her. These instructions can be confusing to the respondent in a self-administered questionnaire. Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p. 265) caution that, “only

the simplest skip instructions should be used when necessary to avoid asking inapplicable questions.”

Also to be taken into consideration when giving a mail survey is the use of open-ended questions. Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p. 266) advise that similar to skip questions, open-ended questions “should be used rarely or avoided.” When needed, though, it is suggested that open-ended questions not be used at the beginning of the questionnaire, to alleviate any threat to the respondent. In contrast to Sudman and Bradburn’s opinions, Labaw (1985, p. 151) suggests instead using open-ended questions with closed questions for more well rounded information. This idea seems to allow for the widest range of answers, but it leaves more in-depth analysis of the survey results.

The last important topic is the length and the appearance of the questionnaire. A questionnaire for a low-salience topic should be kept relatively short, less than four pages (Sudman and Bradburn, 1982, p. 267). Also, the format of the questions should be kept vertical as compared to horizontal in order to reduce the number of wrong answers caused by confusion.

Above all, though, a mail survey should be kept as simple as possible (Czaja and Blair, 1996, p. 34). Respondents that assess the survey as being too difficult or too time-consuming will just not answer the questions. Also, even if a contact number is included in the cover letter, it has been found that less than 1% of respondents will actually call with questions, instead they are more likely to leave questions blank or not complete the survey at all.

There are both advantages and disadvantages of a mail survey (Czaja and Blair, 1996, p. 34). A mail survey can be favourable to the administering agency because it is less expensive than either a telephone or face-to-face survey that can be high in labour

costs. It also allows respondents to answer on their own time and consult any personal documents they may need to answer a survey question.

One disadvantage with a mail survey is the idea of response bias (Czaja and Blair, 1996, p. 36). There may be a subgroup of the survey sample that is more likely to respond to the survey, which may lead to an unrepresentative majority in the survey results. Also, because of its self-administering nature, a mail survey may be easily misinterpreted by the respondent and produce incorrect data.

2.2.6 Analysis of the Results

Once all of the data are collected from the survey sample, they must be interpreted. First, the knowledge questions need to be assessed to reveal the respondent's comprehension of the items asked about in the survey. Next, all of the data from the opinion questions need to be correlated to the information that is generated from the knowledge questions. After each of these steps, a final report can be created that encompasses all the data.

2.2 Focus Groups

One of the main problems we were faced with in this project was defining exactly what information was needed on our web site (Nielsen, 1999). This web site needed to be accessed by a wide range of user groups each wanting different information and presentation. An excellent way to learn what types of information users want in a web site is through the use of focus groups. Although focus groups are not a traditional

method of collecting information, they are slowly becoming a widely used and accepted method.

When planning a focus group there are four basic steps to complete: planning, recruiting, moderating, and analysing (Morgan, 1998, p. 4).

2.2.1 Planning

The planning phase is essential to the success of a focus group and each step of the process must be carefully planned (Morgan, 1998, p. 10). In planning a focus group, there are a few important decisions to be made:

1. Define the purpose and desired outcomes of the focus group
2. Determine who the participants will be
3. Develop a timeline for the focus group
4. Set the locations, dates, and time for the sessions
5. Design the analysis plan

Each of these decisions are equally important because without knowing this basic information, planning for the other phases of the project can be very difficult.

The next step in planning a focus group is to plan the recruitment phase (Morgan, 1998, p. 10). This is done once it is clear what information is desired from the focus group sessions. It is crucial that recruitment planning is not ignored. If the selection of the focus group members is not planned ahead of time, the focus groups may be

unsuccessful and will result in a lack of useful data. When planning the recruitment phase, the following actions must be taken:

1. Define the target population
2. Define sub-groups within the population
3. Decide on the proper composition of each group
4. Develop a recruitment screening method
5. Determine how to ensure attendance

The final phase that must be part of planning a focus group session is to plan the analysis phase of the project (Morgan, 1998, p.132). This phase is also very important part of conducting a successful focus group session. The way in which data is organised and quantified is very important. In this phase the following need to be performed:

1. Design the analysis plan
2. Define the data to be generated; field notes, tapes, etc.

A carefully planned focus group has the greatest chance of successfully producing the data that are needed.

2.2.2 Recruiting

The selection of participants for a focus group is a very fastidious process (Morgan, 1988, pp. 44-48). Many different factors must be considered when selecting

the group. In order to encourage good group interaction, the members must be comfortable discussing the given topic in front of other members of the group. To facilitate this, focus groups are often composed of 6-10 people with some sort of common factor between them. Each group should be composed of a variety of opinions in order to give members something to discuss. If most members feel the same about a given topic, there is less possibility that valuable interchanges will take place.

2.2.3 Analysing

There are two basic methods generally used when analysing focus group data (Morgan, pp. 64-69). Ethnographic summaries rely primarily on transcripts of group discussion. On the other hand, content analysis relies heavily on numbers to represent data. There are many arguments offering reasons to use either form of analysis. But, the most effective method is one that combines the two methods in Morgan's opinion. With a mix of quantitative and qualitative information, a researcher may be able to gain a more accurate picture of the groups he or she is analysing. Groups are the fundamental unit of analysis, and a compilation of data should start with the analysis of two or three groups. Having two people working separately to analyse the same groups may provide two processes of discovery that lead to different, or in the best case, duplicate conclusions.

2.3 Web Site Design and Usability

One of the goals of our project is to disseminate information to the people of Merton about the upcoming changes in the school system. Because this information needs to be timely and easily updated, ELL staff decided that a web site would be an effective solution. A web site also has the advantage of containing separate sections for each group of people that will have different information needs.

When creating our web site, the most important things to take into consideration were the needs of each user group (Dreyfus, 1998, pp.2-3). Even if the site has wonderful content and graphics, they would be of no help to the user if the site is difficult to use. Therefore, the site's usability was a primary concern. When a web site is "usable", its objects or systems are obviously useful for a particular purpose, and how to use those objects or systems is also obvious. It involves freedom of choice by users at all levels, employs internet technologies that are independent of the user's computing platform, and contains pages that are easy to navigate no matter the level of technical expertise the user has.

Before creating a usable web site, the designers must determine what the needs of the users of the web site are (Rowland, 2000, pp.2-4). They need to examine what the users will expect from the site, how these users feel about the subject of the web site in general, and what their motivation will be for visiting the site. Also important is to determine user goals and the types of people who will be using the web site. Designers need to know how comfortable users are with technology, what their level of expertise is,

how much the user already knows about the subject of the web site, and any special needs users might have that will need to be addressed.

2.3.1 The Home Page

The home page is the first impression the user gets of a web site, and so usability is key on this page (Nielsen, 2000, pp.166-68). The home page should tell users where they are and what they can do. It should contain a large prominent logo or the name of the company, school, etc. Although this is a good place for any news to be placed, it should be left small because most people are looking for something specific rather than what is new with a company or school. The home page should also include a list of the top levels of a “hierarchical directory” which users can click on to get to other pages in the site. Navigation is a top priority on this page since users will need to get to many other pages from this starting point. Studies done by Jared Spool and colleagues (Nielsen, 2000, p. 164) showed that people have trouble finding a specific page from the home page. The subjects of this study were given the task to find a job on a specific site, starting from the home page. Only 42% of the subjects completed this task. This is another reason why navigation is so important.

2.3.2 Content

The content of the web site is its most important feature. Nielsen (2000, p. 22) has suggested that a good web site is 80% content and 20% everything else. The content should take up at least half of the page space. Usability studies have shown that users,

upon entering a web site, look immediately in the main content area of the page and scan it for useful headlines (Nielsen, 2000, p. 101). Therefore, designers work to present content in a way that appeals to users. The language should be succinct, using 50% fewer words than the same information in print, because research shows that reading from a computer screen is 25% slower than from paper. Users, therefore, do not want to have to read a lot of text. To make the text even easier to read, the information should be divided into more manageable sections, such as small paragraphs, subheadings, or bulleted lists. If there must be long text on the page, it should be split into multiple links of short pages that do not require scrolling.

According to Nielsen (2000, p. 126), good content is useless if it is not legible. To ensure word legibility, certain fonts should be used because they are easy to read on all types of computer monitors. Also, the use of all capital letters in text is not very easy to read because users read it 10% slower than text not in capital letters due to the fact that it is harder to recognise the shapes of words and characters.

The last thing for designers to take into consideration when creating the content of their web site is its language (Nielsen, 2000, p. 112). Although, humour and metaphors may make a web site more interesting, they must be added with caution. Metaphors should not be used at all because some people might take them literally, losing the message that the web site is trying to convey. Humour can be used, but the designer must be careful to ensure that users do not misinterpret the humour to be fact. Puns that international users may not understand also should be avoided.

2.3.3 Navigation

Navigation is an important feature of web sites, in that it answers the questions, “Where am I?”, “Where have I been?”, and “Where can I go?”(Nielsen, 2000, pp. 129&191). Users need to know where they are relative to the whole Web as well as relative to the site’s structure. The location relative to the site’s structure is usually given by highlighting where the current page is in the scheme of the entire site. Including a “Back” button is also important so that the user can find pages that he or she has already viewed.

2.3.4 Linking

One option of navigation is to include links within the page (Nielsen, 2000, pp. 55&195). There are three types of links: embedded, structural, and associative. Embedded links, or hypertext links, are underlined text that indicates that there is more information on a specific topic. These are useful when a user is scanning the page for relevant information because they give the user’s eye something to rest on. To avoid a user’s confusion, text that is not a link should not be underlined. Structural links are links that point to other levels in a site. A designer should place the same structural links on all pages with specific link name so that the user can move freely within the site at all times. A typical place for such links is to one side of the page. Associative links are links that refer the user to other sources that may cover a similar topic to the one on the page. Sometimes these links are called “See Also” lists.

2.3.5 Graphics

Although graphics are good for the aesthetics of a web site, they should be kept to a minimum because they increase download time (Nielsen, 2000, p. 135). This is especially true on the home page because a user has not gained enough interest in the site yet when they are looking at the home page. If the home page has too many pictures and takes too long to download, the user is likely to go to another site.

Pictures that must be included in a page are icons (Nielsen, 2000, p. 146). Although animation slows download times, it has been shown that icons are much easier to understand when they are animated. A study done by Ron Baeker, et al. (Nielsen, 2000, p. 146) showed that comprehension of a set of icons increased from 62% to 100% using animation. Examples of such animation would be an eraser tool that actually looked like it was erasing something. However, not all icons should be animated because they do not all need to be animated to be understood, and too much animation can be distracting to the user.

2.3.6 Searching

Many web sites require the use of a search feature (Nielsen, 2000, pp.12, 224). This is especially important for users that have specific information they want to acquire from the site. Nielsen (2000, p. 227) found that more than half of users are search-dominant. This means that they go straight for a search button when they enter a site rather than following links around it. Since the search feature is so important to so many users, there should be a search button or box on every page in a site. The search button

or box should be placed so that it is easy to find on the page; such as at the top or bottom of the page, so that it is not overlooked.

2.3.7 Testing Usability

“The most successful web sites are those that not only respond to user feedback, but actively seek it out” (Fleming, 1998, Ch.2). A designer may know how his or her web site works, but the user does not, and to get accurate feedback on the quality of a web site requires user feedback.

Nielsen’s (2000, p. 1) opinion is that data about a user’s behaviour are more valuable than data about how a user thinks he or she would behave, which would be indicated in a survey. One way to observe a user’s behaviour is to create a prototype of the web site and conduct a user test. A user test is conducted so that the designer can “watch users and see what they like, what they find easy and where they stumble” in order to improve the web site’s usability.

Once the prototype is created, the designer must conduct a user test (Fleming, 1998, Ch. 2). One of the advantages of a user test is that it does not require many testers. Several focus groups can be conducted about the prototype to discuss good and bad points about the site. Examples of good points could be easy navigation or good information content, while a bad point may be poorly organised information. It is usually helpful to ask the users to perform specific tasks on the site to see if the site is user-friendly and if all of their information needs are met. To determine changes that should be made in the site, the designer would look for repetition of remarks or observations.

2.3.8 Web Sites for Other Cultures

Designers that are creating web sites for international use or for use in another country must be aware of cultural differences when designing the site (Radosevich, 1997). Being aware of certain laws and customs when creating a web site is helpful so as not to offend any of the site's potential users.

According to Lynda Radosevich (1997), a designer must first be aware that different countries have different tastes in styles. Images of certain gestures that could be perceived as rude or offensive (e.g. waving or pointing) should be eliminated from the web site's design. Also, the designer must be aware of the connotations of some colours in other cultures. For example, in America, white is a symbol of purity, while in Asia, white is a symbol of death. A designer must also be careful when using symbols. A simple "X" can mean an item is selected in one country, but not wanted in another. The language used in the site's content should be internationalised as well, to maintain its clarity. Acronyms, idioms, and jargon only found in the United States should be removed from the content.

In order for the people of Merton to get the information they need about the changes in the school system, our web site had to be usable for all of the different groups that were looking for this information. Our goal of disseminating the information people indicated that they wanted to know would not have been met if people could not use our site. Therefore, we paid special attention to the site's usability. People will need to be able to find specific information on our site, and when they find it, it needs to be presented in a way that is organised, succinct and easy to understand.

3.0 Methodology

The goal we had for this project was multifaceted. First, we needed to determine what types of information different groups of people needed to know about the changes in the Merton school system. The second part of this goal was to present information in a way that targeted each group's needs and could also be easily updated, as more information became available. To achieve our goal of assessing the informational needs of the people of Merton, we implemented several different strategies. First, we needed to establish what information the predetermined user groups needed, using a survey sent to a random selection of people from the identified groups of school staff, school governors and headteachers, and parents. We also set up informal focus groups in Merton to assess the information needs of the pupils and also to determine how they interact with the internet.

The next stage of our project was the creation of a web site, which was intended to provide the people of Merton with the indicated information of interest. During the creation of the web site, a prototype was developed and tested with a series of user evaluations. These evaluations gave us feedback on the usability and information content of our developing web site. Lastly, we publicised the web site so that the people of Merton were aware of the available resource.

3.1 Surveys

To determine what information the residents of Merton will need on our informational web site, we first conducted a mail survey. The identified sample for this survey was provided by our liaison, similar to the survey sample used in past surveys completed by the Schools Reorganisation Team. There were many previously identified groups such as school staff, school governors, parents, pupils, and also members of the Roman Catholic Diocese and Church of England Diocese that needed information about the changes in the school system. Because the survey was more geared toward adults, and not pupils, it was decided that the survey would only be administered to parents and staff of the schools. Pupils were considered through another method, informal focus groups, apart from the survey.

The survey subjects were contacted through a mail questionnaire that was sent by courier to the selected schools to be sent home with pupils or handed out to school staff. This method allowed the respondents to answer at their own convenience within a specified ten-day time period and then return it to the school. Respondents were more likely to respond to the survey because of this factor (Czaja and Blair, 1996, p. 34). We wanted the survey to reach the largest group possible and also to have a high response rate in order to assure our data were as accurate as possible.

Developing the questionnaire required constant editing and close examination of discrepancies such as double-barrelled questions, threats to the respondent, and the use of generic terms. Each question was carefully read by our entire group, our liaison, our

faculty advisors, and our pre-test group to make sure that the respondent would not misinterpret the meaning of the question.

For our questionnaire, it was important to ask some introductory questions that gave us some background information on the respondent. These questions were significant because they allowed us to identify the respondent as a member of one of the subgroups (parent, headteacher, school governor or school staff). Knowing each respondent's subgroup later helped us to determine the relevant information for each section of the web site.

Next, we thought it would be helpful to ask some knowledge questions. These knowledge questions were intended to give us a background on the general awareness that the residents of Merton have about the reorganisation, and more specifically that of each subgroup. Following the advice of Labaw (1985, p. 151), we mixed closed and open-ended questions together in order to get a broader picture of the knowledge of each respondent concerning the reorganisation. When constructing the open-ended questions, we avoided asking questions posing threats to the respondent.

In order to make the respondent feel comfortable answering knowledge questions that they may or may not know, we followed the advice of Sudman and Bradburn (1982, p. 113) and started questions with phrases such as, "Can you recall offhand...", and, "Do you happen to know...", to begin the open-ended questions. Also at the advice of Sudman and Bradburn, we did not use long strings of yes or no questions.

The core of the survey involved opinion questions about the reorganisation and about interesting topics. First, we asked each respondent his or her opinions on the schools reorganisation plan. Then, we wanted to find out what each respondent wanted to know in order to apply this to his or her particular section of the web site. After much

consideration, it was decided that this line of questioning could be accomplished in a less formal manner.

We compiled a long list of topics that we thought might be important to different groups of respondents, and we gave those respondents the opportunity to rate all of the topics according to their interest in each. For each topic it was important to affirm that the question was not double-barrelled. If these statements contained two ideas, it would create ambiguity as to whether the respondent actually wanted to learn about one of the topics, or both of them.

The last line of questioning for the survey asked the respondents questions specific to web sites and the internet. One item we wanted to know was how useful they felt a web site would be for this information. Also, we wanted to find out the address of any other web site that the respondents felt was a well-developed web site so that we could use it as a guide for our own web site.

After the first draft of this questionnaire was made, it was reviewed by each member of the group and carefully critiqued. Each question was evaluated in terms of the standards that were ascertained through our research. Then, after more revisions, Professor C. Peet reviewed the questionnaire for more constructive criticism prior to going to London. After his suggestions were employed, we next tested the survey on an audience more similar to that of the final survey.

We pre-tested the survey with the many employees at the Merton Civic Centre, which not only allowed us to receive feedback from people who are knowledgeable about the reorganisation, but also from possible residents of Merton and parents of pupils in Merton. An electronic mail was sent to the employees asking if anyone would be interested in taking our survey and giving us feedback. The pre-test that was sent to

those showing interest was preceded by a cover letter that informed the respondent of his or her role in the survey process. Each respondent was given a copy of the survey and then asked to answer it and make comments on any questions that they felt were unclear or needed corrections. We received fourteen responses all with helpful comments and suggestions. After this pre-test was finished, a final questionnaire was prepared for distribution, by making some of the changes suggested by the pre-test respondents.

For the mail survey, we sent 5000 copies of the final questionnaire to nine schools (See Appendix D). After consultation with our liaison, we learned that Merton schools typically had a low response rate to surveys. We wanted to get at least 250 surveys back to get accurate results, which was 5% of the total number of surveys we planned on sending out. This, we learned, was a typical response rate for surveys sent to Merton schools. We determined that nine schools would have about 5000 combined pupils, teachers, headteachers and other school staff. These nine schools included three first schools, three middle schools, and three high schools and three of the nine total were Catholic schools or Church of England schools. The schools in each of the subgroups were picked randomly from a list of 60 Merton schools.

In choosing our survey sample, the different subgroups (parents, headteachers/governors, and school staff) were not weighted according to their respective percentages of the total combined number because the survey results from each of these groups were not combined. These groups were considered separately when these results were applied to the creation of the web site because each group had its own section of the site.

Accompanying the surveys, there were two cover letters. One cover letter was to the headteachers that gave instructions for them to administer the survey to the parents

and staff of their schools (see Appendix B). The other cover letter, attached to each questionnaire, was for the respondents to explain the importance of the survey and instructions for filling it out (see Appendix A). The Merton Schools Reorganisation Team distributed the mail surveys to each school through a courier service that would deliver a packet of surveys to each of the nine schools and pick them up when they were completed.

3.2 Interviews

We conducted a number of interviews while in London. We needed to get a broader background of some of the important information that would be included in our web site. We also wanted to get an idea of how people actually felt about the reorganisation.

We interviewed Penny Badcoe, who is the Private Finance Initiative, or PFI, Procurement Consultant for the Reorganisation Team. Her job is to deal with the negotiation process of the PFI. From this interview, we gained a needed background of the complex issues surrounding the PFI.

We also conducted an interview with the headteacher of Gorringe Park Middle School. He showed expressed interest in our web site and asked to meet with us to discuss our project. His insights were very helpful and started to give us a well-rounded picture of the reorganisation and how it will affect schools. He also gave us many good suggestions for the web site and invited us back to conduct focus groups with his pupils.

3.3 Pupil Focus Groups

To gain a better understanding of what information the pupils of the Merton schools needed, we determined that informal focus groups would be a more effective way to reach them than the survey. The reason for this being that the survey was not geared toward pupils, and it would be better to be able to judge the pupil's reactions and also to view how they use the internet.

These focus groups were conducted at Gorringer Park Middle. There were two different groups of pupils. One group was 5 pupils all from Year 4 (8 and 9-year-olds) and the other group was 6 pupils from Year 6 (11-year-olds). Each session started out by introducing ourselves and telling the pupils the purpose of our visit. The next step was to sit with the pupils and talk to them about the reorganisation and learn how much they actually know about the reorganisation. Lastly, we went into the computer room and had each of the pupils show us web sites of interest to them.

Both of these focus groups were very helpful and the pupils all raised very interesting points. We gathered that there was a lack of knowledge about the reasons behind the reorganisation and the application process. There was also expressed interest shown in our web site having information and pictures provided for each school. The pupils were very co-operative and volunteered to help us when it came time to test our web site.

3.4 Web Site Implementation

Once the information needs of the public were determined, we needed to disseminate this information in a way that was easy to update and specific to certain groups of people. The Merton Schools Reorganisation Team decided that an educational web site would be an excellent next step to achieve this goal. The Schools Reorganisation Project is an ongoing process in the Borough of Merton, one that will have new information being generated at all times. The best way to get this updated information to the public would be a method that would inform people of the changes that are taking place as they are happening.

Other means such as flyers and town meetings have been used to get this information out, but these means do not offer up-to-date information. The information that is sent out in a flyer may already be old news by the time it is created and mailed out. Also, to keep people informed about all of the changes that are taking place, many separate mailings of these flyers would have to be done, which costs the Borough a lot of time and money. The creation of this web site was essential to provide all of the updated information that Merton residents might need at any particular time.

The first step in building our web site was to develop a basic design rationale that would comply with the British Framework for Information Age Government Web sites and would also co-ordinate with the existing Merton Council web site template. We had to use this template as a basis for our web site because the Council was in the process of creating its own new web site. Our site was completed before the new Merton Council web site and the web technicians needed to be able to transfer the information in our site

to the new Merton Council site after we were gone. The only way in which they could do this easily was to transfer everything from the old template to the new template and it was for this reason that we used the old template. Along with co-ordinating with the Merton Council web site template, the basic rationale of our web site was also consistent with what we had learned about web usability through our research. This rationale included site colours and typefaces as well as the page layout itself.

Once this layout was approved by our liaison, Mrs. Susie McKenna, and the webmaster, Mr. Spencer Gasson, we started applying this basic rationale to the actual coding of the web site. It was at this stage of the process that we began to introduce the site content. The presentation of information was a key concern at this phase. Information was organised in a logical and accessible manner. For example, users should not have to look very hard to find information of interest to them. This was achieved partly by dividing the site into clearly defined sections for each user group. In this way, users know immediately where to go to find information that is specific to their needs.

The nature of this web site was dynamic and always changing as more information about the schools reorganisation was added. The aim of this web site was to present users with timely and up-to-date information. It was essential that the staff at the sponsoring agency be able to update the web site on their own after we completed the project. To aid the staff in this process, we utilised current web technologies to make the web site easy to update. Also, we created a manual that would help anyone in the ELL Department that may want to add to or change our web site (See Appendix K). Unfortunately, we were unable to add any interactive applications, such as discussion boards or electronic mail response, to the web site because of the lack of staffing to deal with such an undertaking.

Once the initial web site was approved by our liaison and the webmaster, it was tested on a sample group. A series of user tests conducted with adults and pupils on a prototype of our web site gave us a clear indication of where we had or had not met our users' usability needs. We then revised the site based on this new information. When the site was completed, approved by the agency, and tested, it was ready to be put on the internet.

3.5 Publicising the Web Site

Although the web site was on-line and accessible, it was of no use to the community unless they knew about it. Publicising it was an important part of our project and was essential for us to reach our goal of informing Merton residents about schools reorganisation. This task was accomplished in traditional ways such as posting flyers around the Merton Civic Centre and in local libraries. We also talked with each of the headteachers in order to find out how he or she reaches the parents of his or her school. From the headteachers, we received deadlines and permission to use their school newsletters and notice boards to publicise the web site and sent individual newsletter articles when our web site was complete. The reason we decided to use these methods rather than a community meeting was due to time constraints and also our survey response. Most respondents replied that written pamphlets would be the best way of getting information out to them. A web site and newspapers were also strong preferences, whereas community meetings and telephone calls were the least preferred methods.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Many data were produced through our survey and informal focus groups. From our pre-test survey to our final user tests, we were able to obtain data that brought us closer to conclusions about what Merton parents, pupils, and school staff needed to know about the schools reorganisation.

4.1 Pre-test Survey Results

It was first important to pre-test our survey before we sent out our final survey to the parents, pupils, and staff of the schools. The survey was sent out through email to the employees of the Merton Civic Centre. The audience was a diverse group of Merton residents and workers in the Merton Community. Most of the respondents had a basic understanding of the Schools Reorganisation. This knowledge was helpful to our testing process because it allowed us not only to get a British insight into our survey, but also some insight from people that might know more about the reorganisation than the average resident.

From the pre-test, we received feedback on many aspects of our survey. The suggestions made on the 12 surveys we received ranged from changing the layout to adding more room for respondents to answer questions, to changing words so that they were in correct UK English. There were also many helpful comments concerning questions that seemed unclear to the readers or ones that called for asking the respondent to enumerate their ideas.

4.2 Final Survey Results

From these preliminary tests, we were able to create our final survey that was sent out to Merton parents and school staff (a copy of which is in Appendix A). From the original 5000 that were supposed to be sent to the nine schools, only 2644 were actually distributed. Two of the nine schools told us that they never received the surveys and two others told us that they did not receive them until it was too late to distribute them. We were unsure of the legitimate reason for these mistakes because there were headteachers who told us that they did not receive the surveys, but the courier service said that they had sent surveys to all nine schools. In the end, we had 154 surveys returned to us, giving a response rate of 5.8%, which is low, but better than our anticipated 5%.

4.2.1 Survey Results in General

Of the 154 responses we received, 119 were parents, 10 were school governors and 24 were school staff. School staff included 4 headteachers, 6 teachers, supply staff, site staff, a bursar, 2 administrative officers, a lab technician, a design technology technician, 2 classroom assistants, a youth worker, a special educational needs co-ordinator, and an Ethnic Minority co-ordinator.

4.2.1.1 General Knowledge About the Reorganisation

The survey first asked a group of knowledge questions to help us learn how much the Merton parents and school staff already knew about the reorganisation. An analysis of the survey questionnaires that were returned showed that 93% of the 154 respondents felt that they were either somewhat informed or well informed about the reorganisation (See Figure 4-1). This assertion by the respondents was usually accompanied by correct answers about the reasons behind the reorganisation. Only 9 parents out of 119 total and 3 school staff out of 24 total felt that they were not informed at all and one member of school staff and one parent gave no answer.

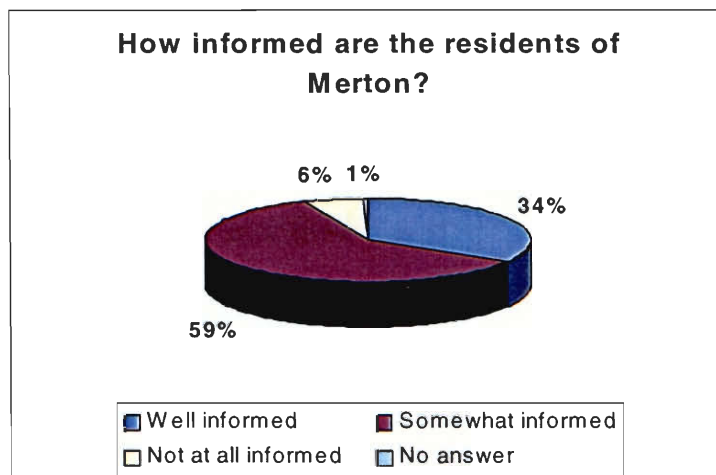


Figure 4-1: How informed are the residents of Merton about Schools Reorganisation?

About 55% (85) of the 154 respondents answered correctly the year that the reorganisation would be completed, and 58% of these respondents also answered with at least one correct rationale behind the reorganisation. One interesting point was that most people felt that the major reason behind the reorganisation was to bring the Borough of Merton “in line with neighbouring boroughs.” This answer was repeated almost

verbatim in 38 responses. It was obvious that throughout the course of the reorganisation process, there had been some sort of document (a leaflet or newsletter, perhaps) that has used those terms to rationalise the reorganisation. It may have been that people had read about the reorganisation, and had memorised what they read, but that did not necessarily mean that they understood the information. This was, in fact, one reason behind the reorganisation, but it was not the most important reason and it became apparent that we might need to clarify that in our web site.

Also, 56 respondents (about 36% of the total response) provided no answer when asked about the reasons behind the reorganisation, and 50 of those 56 respondents that did not answer were parents. However, we do not know if those 56 people who did not answer actually did not know the reasons or if they just chose not to answer. Nine people provided wrong answers about the reasons behind the reorganisation. Of those school wrong answers, 5 were from parents and 4 were from school staff. Some of these wrong answers were, "To save money by closing schools", "Travel problems", "Easier organisation of SATs", and "Economic".

4.2.1.2 Internet Access of Respondents

Because our project's main goal was to create a web site to inform the people of Merton about the schools reorganisation, one of the questions in our survey asked whether the respondent had access to the internet. It was important for us to know if people would actually have access to our web site. Overall, 78% of our 154 respondents had access to the internet (See Figure 4-2). In addition to knowing the extent of the internet access of the total number of respondents, we also wanted to know the internet

access for each group so that no one group would have a greater weighting in the percentages. The internet access of each group will be elaborated in Sections 4.2.2.1, 4.2.3.1 and 4.2.4.1.

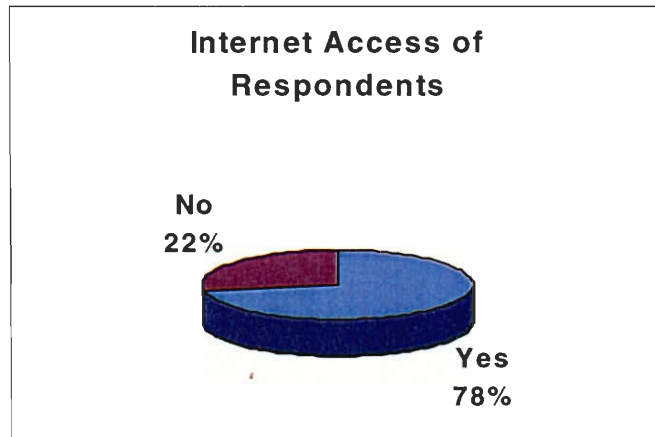


Figure 4-2: Total respondent internet access

4.2.1.3 How Respondents Prefer to Be Informed

Although it was important to know how many of our respondents would have access to our web site, it was more important to know if they thought that a web site would be helpful in offering information about the reorganisation. Respondents were asked to rate how useful they believed a web site would be, on a scale of 1 to 5, with a '1' being most useful and '5' being least useful. Out of our 154 total responses, 75 people rated its usefulness as a '1' or '2' and 33 people rated it as a '4' or '5', with 22 people rating it as a '3', and 4 respondents did not answer (See Figure 4-3). In other words, at least half of our respondents thought that a web site would be at least somewhat useful in getting out information about the reorganisation.

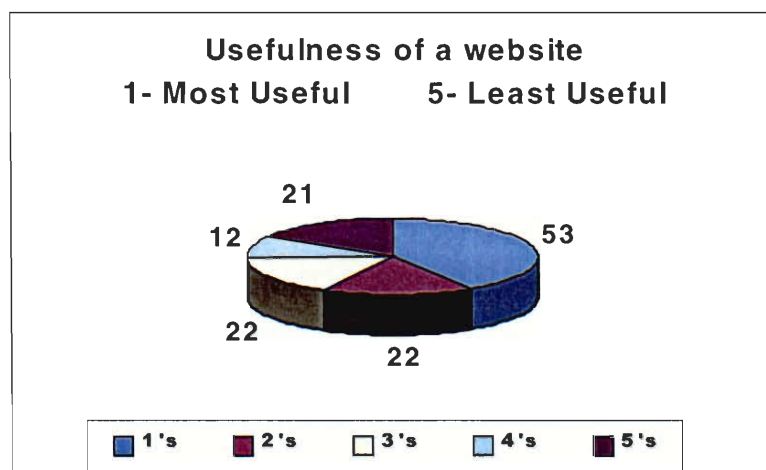


Figure 4-3: How useful would a web site be for information about the reorganisation?

In addition to our web site, we also wanted to know what other ways people would want to be informed about the reorganisation. We asked respondents to rate a list of different ways to disseminate information from '1' to '3', with '3' being least useful and '1' most useful. From our survey data, we learned that most of the respondents wanted to be contacted by written pamphlets, newspapers, or a web site. Telephone calls were not the way that people wanted to be contacted. An overwhelming 84% (129) of the total 154 respondents preferred to be contacted by written pamphlets, while 38% (59) wanted to be contacted by newspaper and 35% (54) wanted to be contacted through a web site. Also, 41% of respondents did not want to be contacted through telephone calls. Community meetings had almost an equal number of respondents rating them as somewhat useful or not useful at all and postings in community buildings were rated as somewhat useful (See Figure 4-4).

Some other suggestions made by one or two respondents that were not shown on this graph were meetings for headteachers and letters mailed home to parents. Some respondents that rated the 'other' category as one of the most useful means of getting out

information did not specify what that other method was. There were also many respondents that did not rate one or several of the choices, as seen by the number of ‘no answers’ in the chart (See Figure 4-4). Perhaps, this was because respondents did not understand the rating system or did not want to take the time to rate all of the choices.

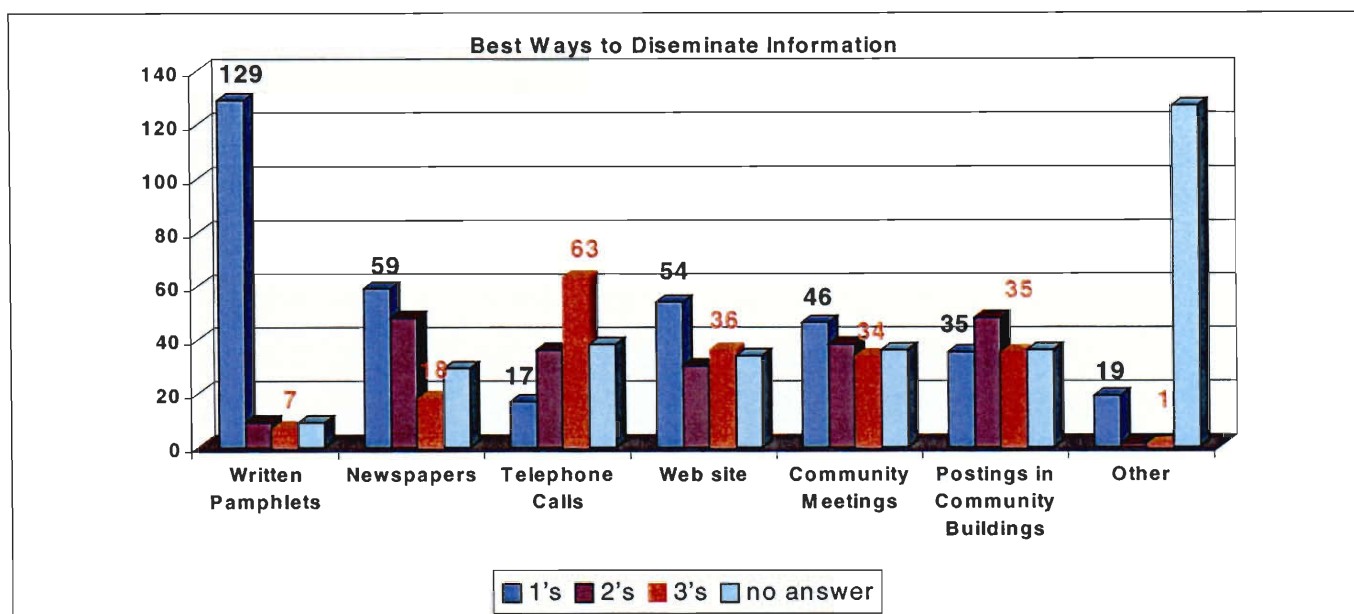


Figure 4-4: Best ways to disseminate information

4.2.1.4 The Major Concerns of Respondents

After analysing the major concerns that each group had expressed in one of the open-ended questions, it was obvious that many people were worried about similar subjects such as disruption to pupils and the morale of the teachers. One of the most frequently expressed major concerns was the disruption to pupils, which was expressed by 2 governors or headteachers, 15 parents, and 4 school staff. Another frequent answer was building work, which was also expressed by 19 respondents, 3 of which were governors or headteachers, 9 of which were parents and 7 of which were school staff. Also, respondents were worried about staff morale and many respondents asked how the reorganisation would affect their pupils.

Other frequent comments from respondents were about their lack of confidence in the high schools. Respondents expressed concerns about the “diabolical standards” of the high schools and also about the lack of 6th form college in the high schools (See Appendix H). These concerns were raised by 11 parents, 2 governors or headteachers, and 4 school staff members.

There was also a list of topics about the reorganisation, which the respondent could rate according to his or her level of interest in each, on a scale of 1 to 3, ‘1’ being very interested and ‘3’ being not interested at all. The main topics of interest, not separated by group, were the affects on children, a timeline of the reorganisation, the admissions process for pupils, building work, a school list, and printable forms and applications. Topics that were not of much interest to respondents were how to become a governor and PFI information for governors of Secondary schools (See Figure 4-5). We analysed this question for all respondents to determine if we should have certain topics on the web site that would not be specific to any one group and could be included in all of the sections. This question will also be analysed for each separate group in Sections 4.2.2.4, 4.2.3.4, and 4.2.4.4.

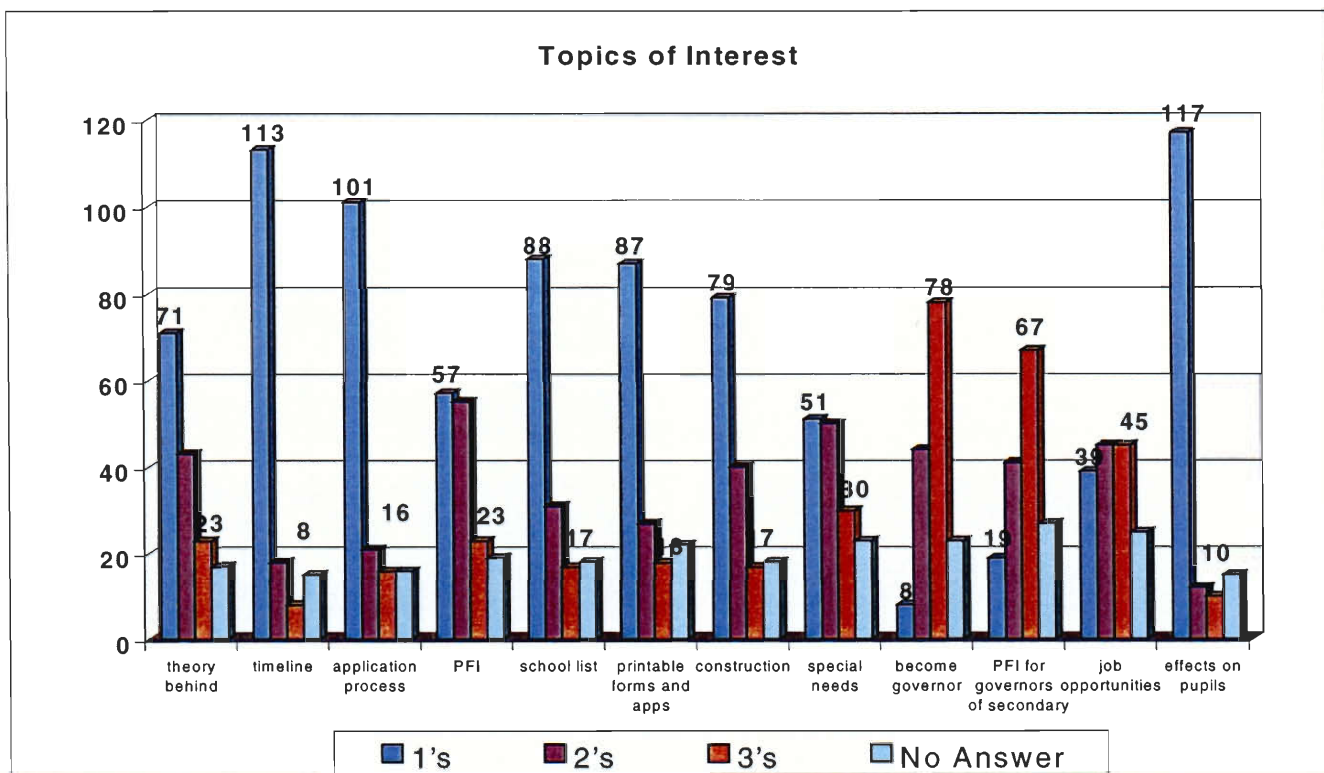


Figure 4-5: Reorganisation topics of interest for all respondents

4.2.2 Parents

Parents were the main target group for our web site because it was the parents who needed to make sure that their children were ready for the schools reorganisation. We received 119 surveys from parents out of a total of 154 respondents, which was about 77% of the total response. Most parents considered themselves somewhat informed or well informed. Only 9 parent respondents felt that they were not at all informed about the reorganisation (See Figure 4-6). The fact that the parents felt themselves informed was shown by the number of correct answers regarding the year of completion and reasons behind the reorganisation.

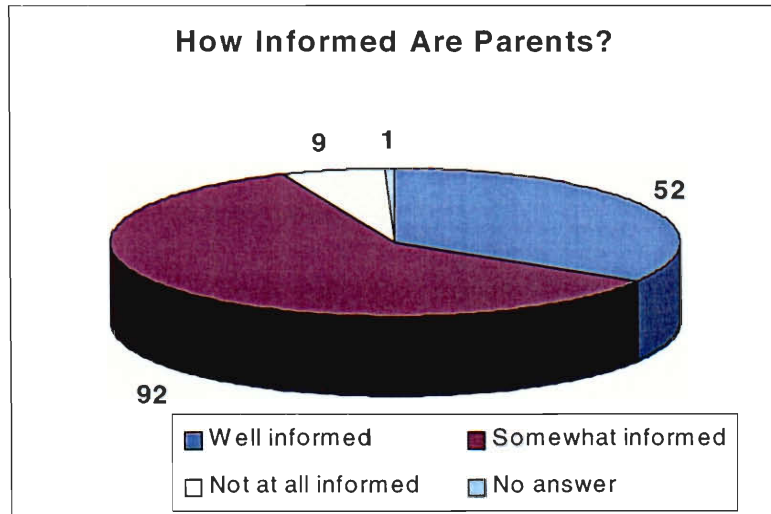


Figure 4-6: How informed are parents about the reorganisation?

4.2.2.1 Parents' Internet Access

One of the first things we wanted to know was how many of the parents that responded had internet access. This was important because we needed to know how many of this most important group would have access to our web site. Of the 119 parents that responded, 79 (about 67%) had access to the internet (See Figure 4-7). Of the parents that had internet access, 70 (about 59%) accessed the internet from home, 5 from school and 21 from work (See Figure 4-8). Also, 50 of the 79 parents accessed the internet a few times a week or every day and 16 accessed the internet once a week. The other 7 parents answered 'other' for how often they access the internet. Some of these answers were "seldom" and "very rarely" and the others did not answer (See Figure 4-9).

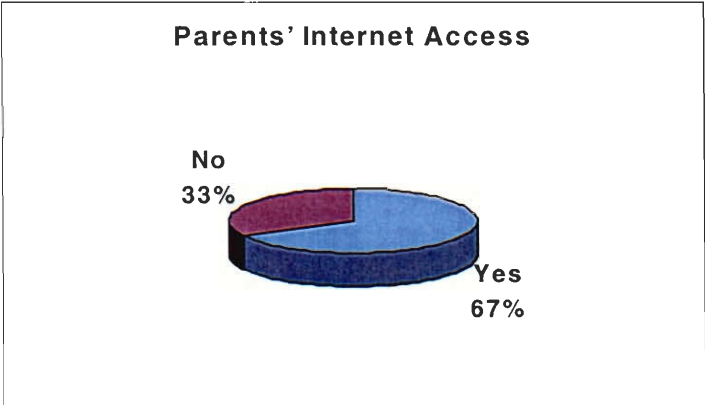


Figure 4-7: Do parents have access to the internet?

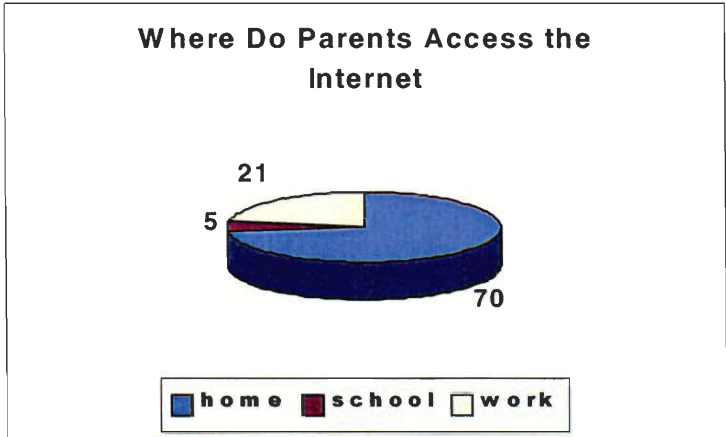


Figure 4-8: Where do parents access the internet?

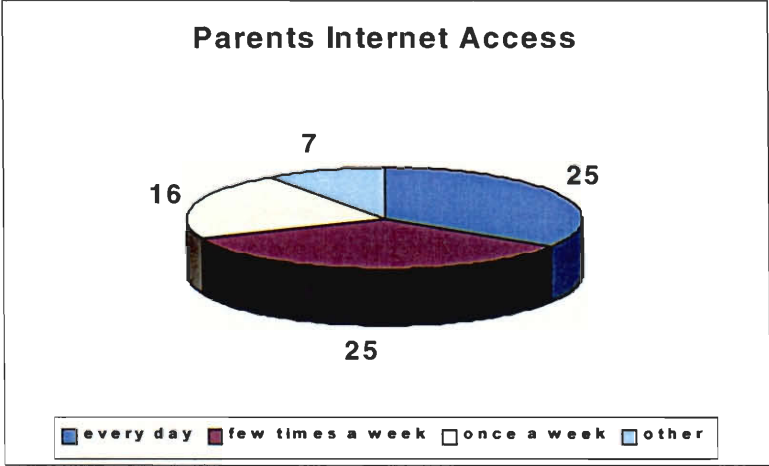


Figure 4-9: How often do parents access the internet?

4.2.2.2 Web Site Usefulness for Parents

Although we knew that 67% of parent respondents had access to the internet and used it a once a week or more, it was more important that we knew if they thought a web site would be helpful in getting out information about the reorganisation and perhaps what other ways would also be helpful. Parent respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of a website to disseminate information about the reorganisation on a scale of 1 to 5, with '1' being most useful and '5' being least useful. There were 71 respondents out of 119 total that thought that a web site would be at least somewhat useful (an answer of '1', '2', or '3'). This number represents about 60% of the total number of respondents. The other 40% of respondents consisted of 22% that thought a web site to be not at all useful and 18% that did not rate its usefulness(See Figure 4-10).

It is interesting to note that not all respondents that answered that they did not have internet access did not answer the question about the usefulness of a web site. There were 5 respondents with internet access that did not answer this question, and 17 that had no internet access that did not answer. There were, in fact, some parents who did not have internet access, but that thought that a web site might be useful. There were 7 respondents that did not have internet access, but still rated the usefulness of a web site as a '1', '2' or '3' (See Figure 4-11).

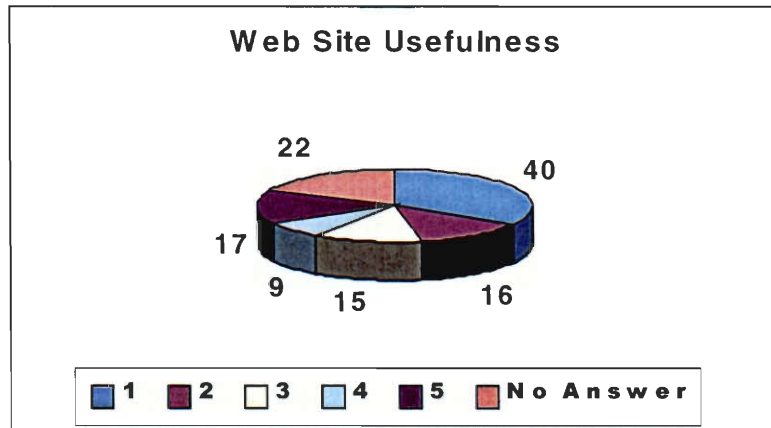


Figure 4-10: How useful would a web site be to get out information about the reorganisation to parents?

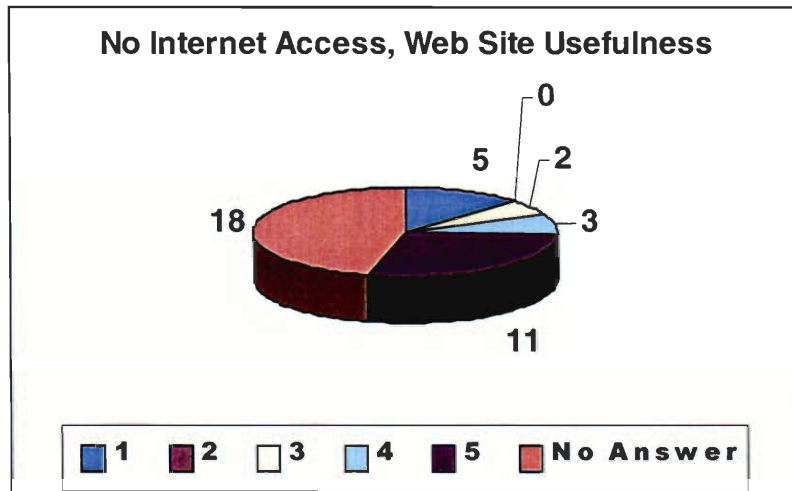


Figure 4-11: How Useful would a web site be to those parents who do not have internet access?

4.2.2.3 Other Methods to Supply Information to Parents

When asked to rate other methods of being informed about the reorganisation, parents preferred written pamphlets to any other method. Respondents were asked to rate each method on a scale of 1 to 3, with '1' being most useful and '3' being least useful. Of the 119 total parent respondents, 102 rated written pamphlets as one of the most useful

methods of disseminating information. This seems ironic since the reason we were creating a web site was because the Schools Reorganisation Team felt that written pamphlets were being ignored. Newspapers and a web site, although far behind written pamphlets, were the other top choices, with 49 and 43 respondents, respectively, rating these as most useful methods. The only method that parent respondents rated as least useful was telephone calls, with 46 respondents rating this method as least useful. Community meetings and postings in buildings were rated as somewhat useful with 66 and 69 respondents, respectively, rating the method as a '1' or '2' (See Figure 4-12).

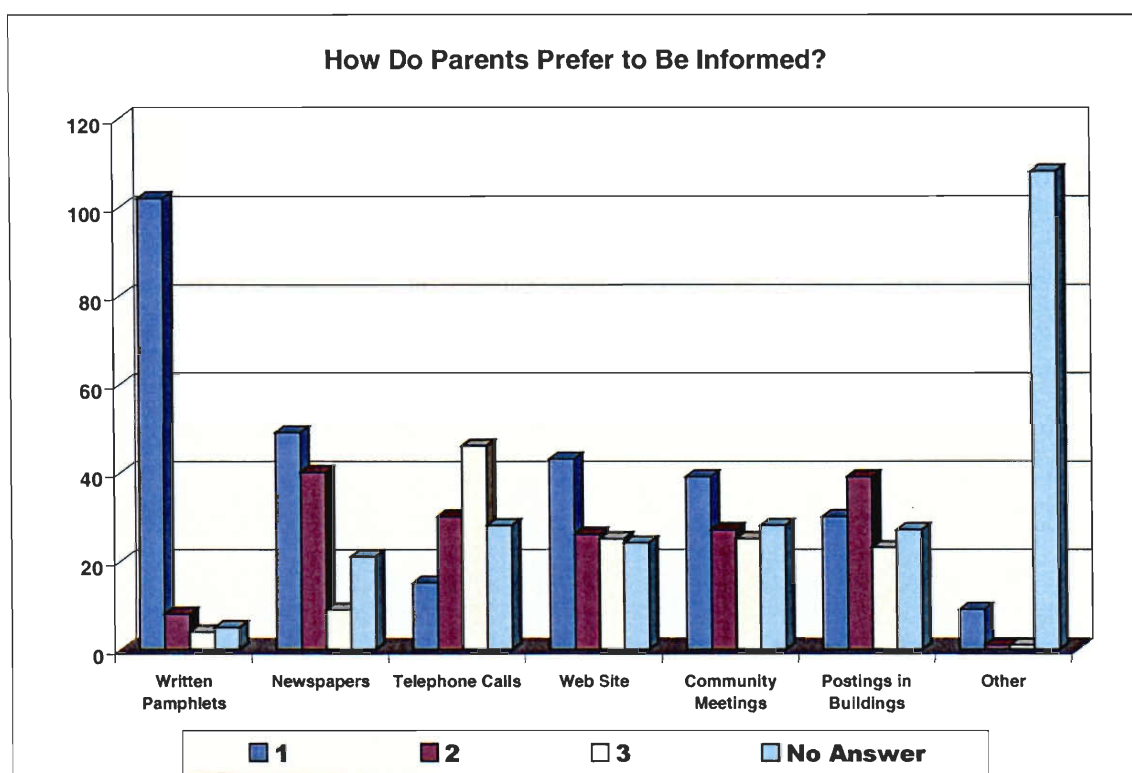


Figure 4-12: How do parents want to learn about the reorganisation?

4.2.2.4 Parents' Major Concerns

The next important thing that we wanted to learn from parent respondents was the type of information that they would want on a web site about schools reorganisation. We

gave respondents a list of possible topics and asked them to rate each as to their importance to the respondent. They were asked to rate each on a scale of 1 to 3, with '1' being most interested and '3' being not interested at all. Of the 119 parents that responded, 97 of them rated the effects on children as one of the most important topics.

Other topics that were rated as being most important were a timeline of the reorganisation (with 91 respondents rating it as a '1'), the admissions process for pupils (with 89 respondents rating it as a '1'), a list of schools (with 74 respondents rating it as a '1'), printable forms and applications (with 73 respondents rating it as a '1'), and the theory behind the reorganisation (with 64 respondents rating it as a '1'). An update of building work to be done at schools was also rated as an important topic. Some of the topics that were rated as 'not interested at all' by parent respondents were becoming a school governor and PFI information for secondary school governors. Most of the parents that responded thought that PFI was at least somewhat important (with 80 '1's or '2's), as was also the case with special needs education (also with 77 '1's or '2's). Job opportunities were ranked as one of the least important topics with 74 '2's or '3's. There was an average of 16 respondents that did not rate each topic because we believe that there were some respondents that only rated those topics that they thought were important (See Figure 4-13).

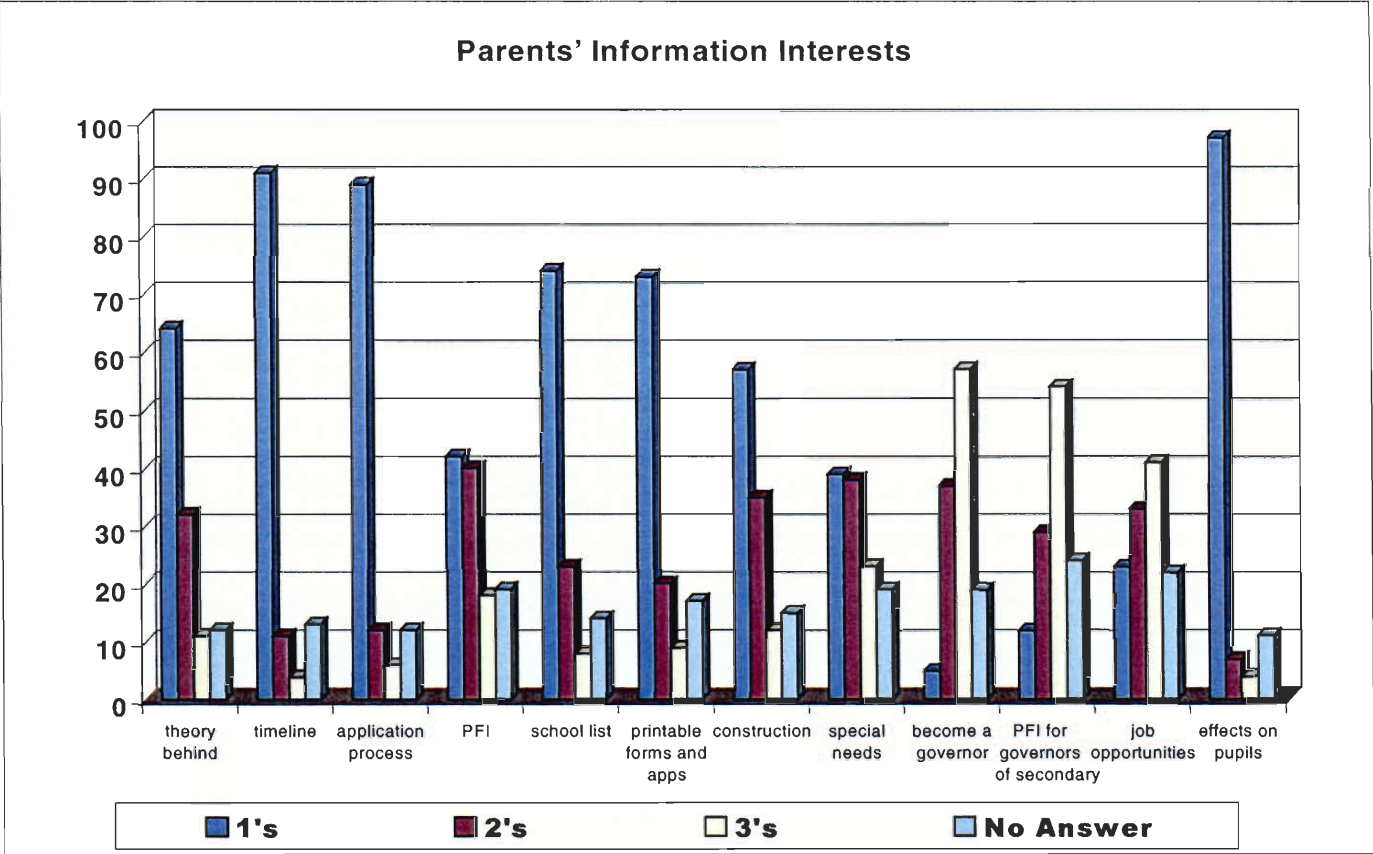


Figure 4-13: What do parents want to know about the reorganisation?

4.2.3 School Staff and Headteachers

The category of school staff included employees in positions such as headteachers, teachers, supply staff, site staff and classroom assistants. We had representatives from each of these positions as well as several others represented in our survey (See Table 4-1 for a list of all school staff respondents).

Post	Number of Respondents in Post
Supply	1
Class Teacher	5
Bursar	1
Design Technology Technician	1
Ethnic Minority Co-ordinator	1
Headteacher	4
Special Support Assistant	1
Laboratory Technician	1
Head of RE Exam Section	1
Caretaker	1
Groundsman	1
Administrative Officer	2
Librarian	1
Classroom Assistant	1
Youth Worker	1
Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator	1

Table 4-1: School Staff Respondent Posts

Of the 24 school staff members surveyed, only 3 respondents considered themselves not informed at all about the reorganisation. There were 20 respondents that felt that they were either somewhat informed or well informed about the reorganisation. The respondents that answered that they were at least somewhat informed about the reorganisation supplied correct answers about the rationales behind the reorganisation. One respondent chose not to answer the question (See Figure 4-14).

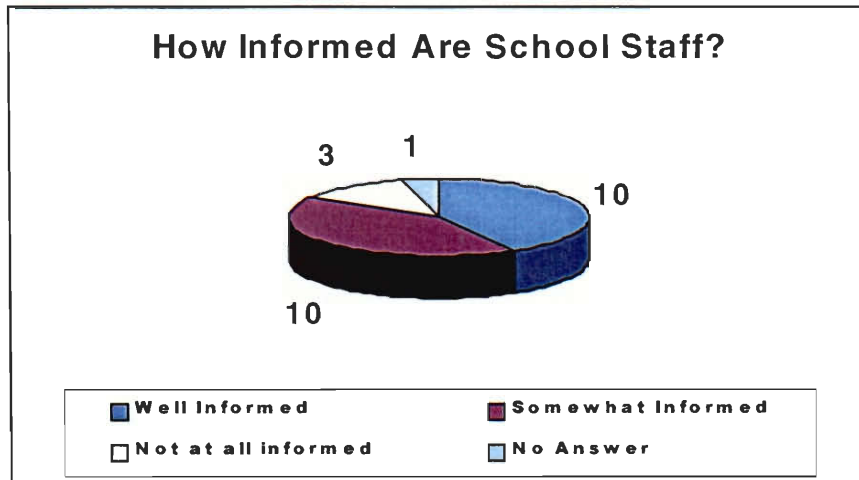


Figure 4-14: How informed are the school staff members about the reorganisation?

4.2.3.1 School Staff's Internet Access

Since we were building a web site for the purpose of informing school staff about the reorganisation, it was important to find out whether school staff actually had access to and used the internet. Of the 24 respondents, about 87% said that they had access to the internet (See Figure 4-15). Of that 87%, which was 21 respondents out of the 24, 14 accessed the internet at home, 6 accessed the internet at school, and 4 answered that they accessed the internet at work (See Figure 4-16). Another detail that pleased us was that of the 24 school staff respondents who had access to the internet, 16 of them accessed it at least a few times a week. One respondent accessed the internet only once a week, and 3 respondents replied to the other category with responses such as “never,” “very seldom,” and “when I get the time” (See Figure 4-17).

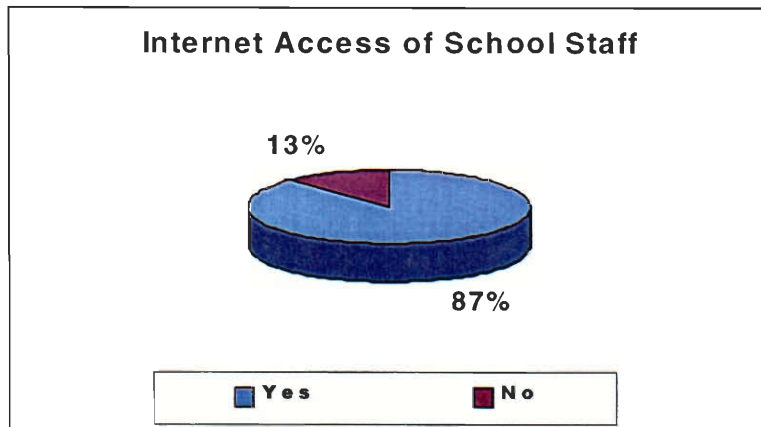


Figure 4-15: Do school staff and headteachers have access to the internet?

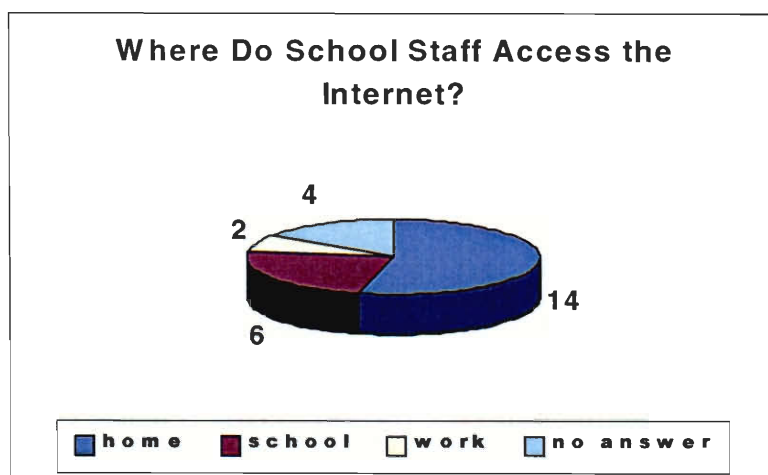


Figure 4-16: Where do school staff and staff and headteachers access the internet?

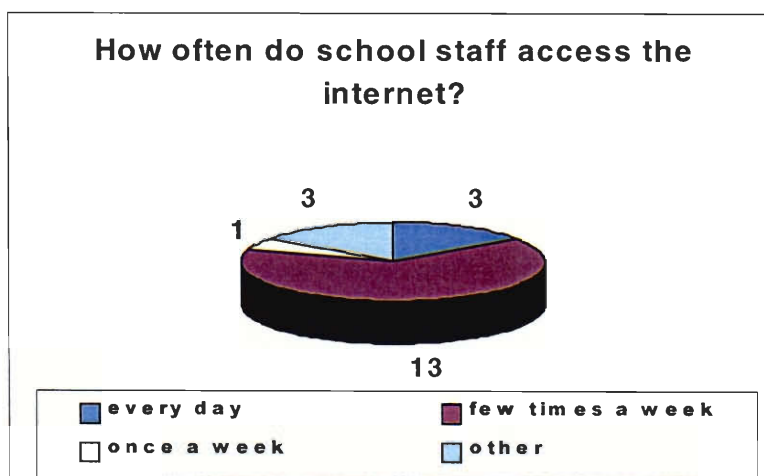


Figure 4-17: How often do the headteachers access the internet?

4.2.3.2 Web Site Usefulness For School Staff

Since we found that such a large number of school staff had access to and used the internet, it was important to compare that number to those respondents that would find a web site useful. Respondents were asked to rate the usefulness of a web site for disseminating information about the reorganisation on a scale of 1 to 5, with '1' being very useful and '5' being not useful at all. Of the 24 respondents, only two did not supply an answer, who were two of the respondents who did not have internet access. The other two were respondents who had internet access, but felt that a web site would not be useful at all, perhaps because they felt other methods, such as written pamphlets, perhaps, would be more helpful. Only 4 respondents answered with the number of '3,' which could signify their lack of opinion either way or an opinion that a web site would be somewhat helpful. A majority, though, of 13 respondents (who rated it as either '1' or '2') replied that a web site would be useful (See Figure 4-18).

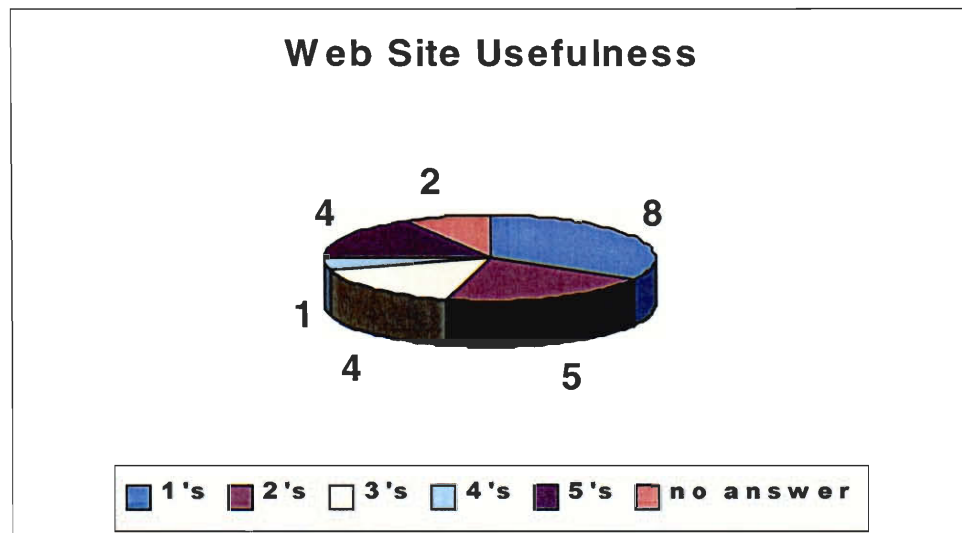


Figure 4-18: How useful would a web site be to get out information about the reorganisation to school staff and headteachers?

4.2.3.3 Other Methods to Supply Information to School Staff

Although most school staff and headteachers thought that a web site would be at least somewhat useful to inform them about the reorganisation, there were other methods that they preferred over a web site. About 75 % (18 out of 24 school staff respondents) preferred written pamphlets compared to 29% that preferred a web site or newspapers to disseminate information about the reorganisation (See Figure 4-19). So, although a majority of the school staff and headteacher respondents thought that a web site would be helpful, they preferred to receive information through written pamphlets. The 'other' category was the preferred method chosen by the same number of respondents as the web site and newspapers, which was 7. Some of the other methods listed were meetings for headteachers and letters sent to one's home address. However, a majority of the school staff that rated 'other' as most useful did not specify what those other methods were.

As with parents, school staff and headteacher respondents also did not want to be contacted through telephone calls. Of the 24 respondents, 13 rated this choice as a '3', being least helpful. Other means they did not prefer were community meetings, with 8 '3's, and postings in buildings, with 10 '3's (See Figure 4-19).

Respondents seemed somewhat neutral about using newspapers to disseminate information about the reorganisation. While there were 7 respondents (or 29%) that rated this method as most useful, there were also 7 that rated it as least useful and 4 (or 17%) that rated it as somewhat useful. However, there were also 6 respondents that did not rate this choice (See Figure 4-19).

School staff and headteachers, as a group, left many of the choices blank, as shown by the large number of “no answer”’s (53 in all) (See Figure 4-19). From what we gathered, respondents were only rating those choices that they preferred and not those that they did not prefer. This lack of rating could be due to respondents misreading the question or just not rating all of the choices.

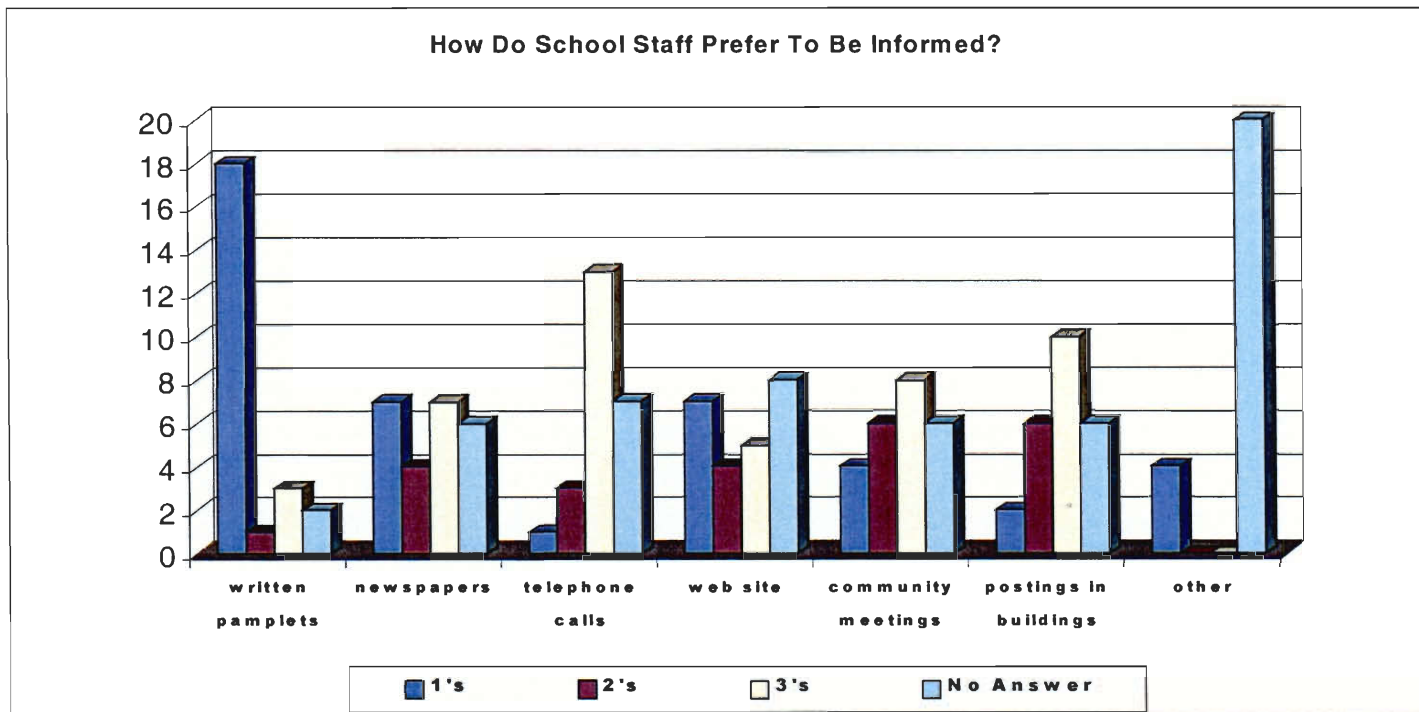


Figure 4-19: How do school staff and headteachers want to learn about the reorganisation?

4.2.3.4 School Staff and Headteachers' Major Concerns

Perhaps the most important information that we wanted to receive from school staff and headteachers from our survey was what concerns this group had about this reorganisation that would significantly affect the schools for which they worked. This was essential information to know in order for us to create the school staff section of our web

site. We needed to know what types of information this group wanted regarding the schools reorganisation and how important they felt each topic.

In a list of possible topics, respondents were asked to rate each topic by their amount of interest in it on a scale of 1 to 3, with '1' being very interested, '2' being somewhat interested and '3' being not interested at all. Of the 24 school staff and headteacher respondents, 15 of them rated a timeline of the reorganisation, 12 rated building construction, and 13 rated job opportunities as most interesting (See Figure 4-20). Another topic showing much interest was the effects on children, with 12 respondents rating it as very interesting (See Figure 4-20). This large interest in job opportunities was not shown in the parents group, mostly because it was school staff that was going to be displaced from their posts during the reorganisation. Many parents were, however, somewhat interested in job opportunities (with 57 respondents rating this choice as a '1' or '2'), perhaps because there were some parents that were also school staff.

Other topics that school staff and headteachers were interested in were PFI information (with 22 at least somewhat interested), special needs education (with at least 15 somewhat interested), and a school list (with 14 at least somewhat interested) (See Figure 4-20). Topics such as becoming a governor, the theory behind the reorganisation, printable forms and applications and PFI for secondary school governors had mixed results, but most respondents felt that this topic was somewhat interesting. There was only one topic that respondents showed no interest in at all and that was how to become a school governor (See Figure 4-20).

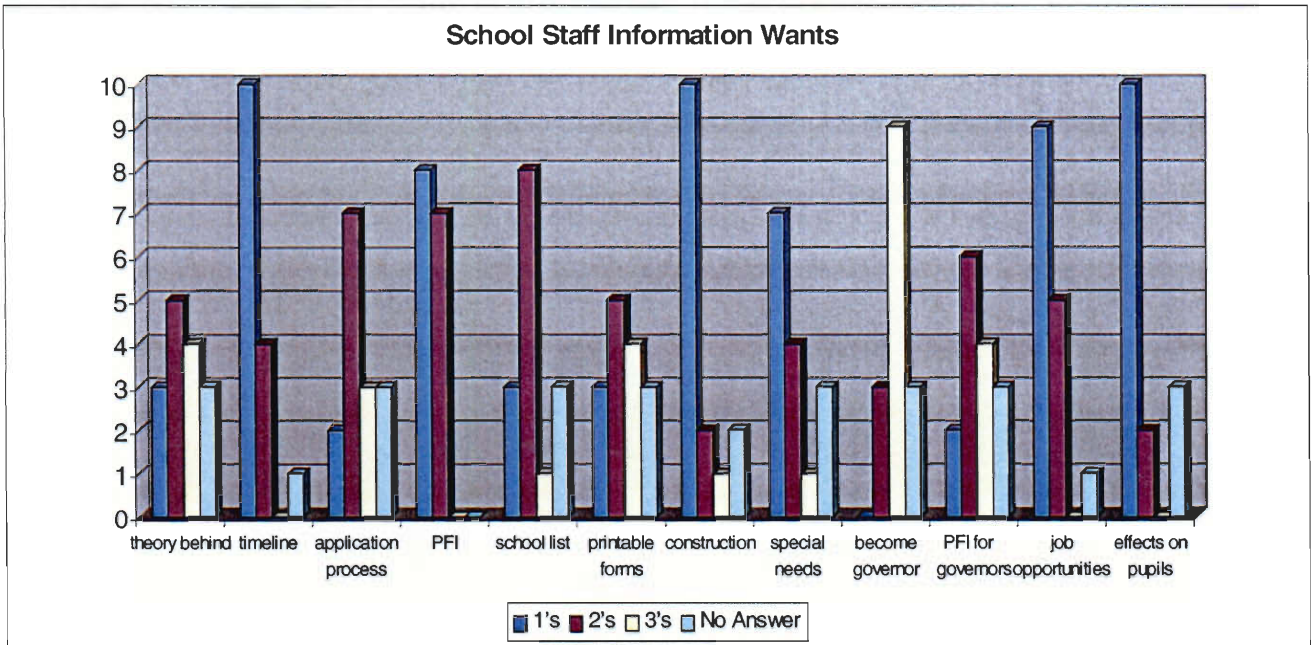


Figure 4-20: What topics do school staff and headteachers want to know about the reorganisation?

Other major concerns expressed by several school staff and headteachers in one of the open-ended questions of our survey were job security and building work completion. Two respondents from this group had concerns about teacher morale and excessive work burden during the reorganisation.

4.2.4 School Governors

Although we had very few responses from school governors, 10 in all, their opinions were still valuable to the creation of our web site. Our presumption that school governors would be well informed about the reorganisation was shown to be true for the 10 respondents. There were no respondents that felt themselves somewhat or not at all informed (See Figure 4-21). These respondents showed that they were in fact well informed by providing correct rationales behind the reorganisation and the correct date of its completion.

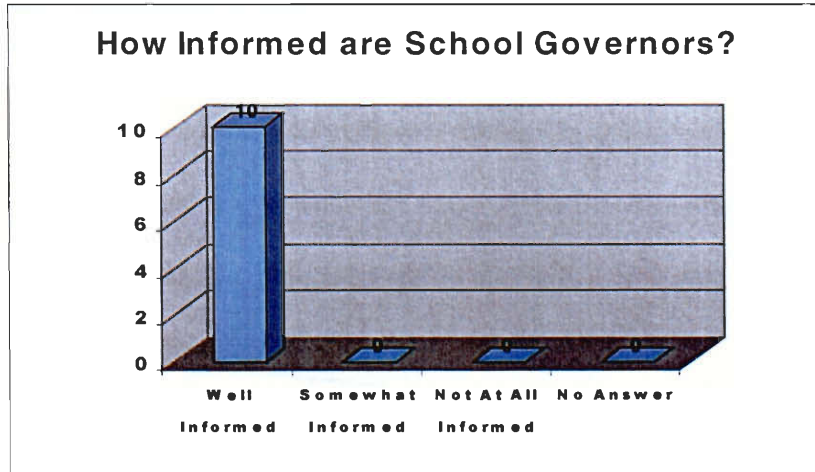


Figure 4-21: How informed are school governors about the reorganisation?

4.2.4.1 School Governors' Internet Access

From the three school governors that responded we wanted determine about how many school governors throughout the Borough had internet access, so that we could know how valuable our web site would be to this group. Although nine of these respondents had internet access, this could not necessarily be applied to the whole Borough (See Figure 4-22). Nine respondents accessed the internet from home, two from school, and three from work and all who could access the internet accessed it a few times a week or more (See Figures 4-23 and 4-24).

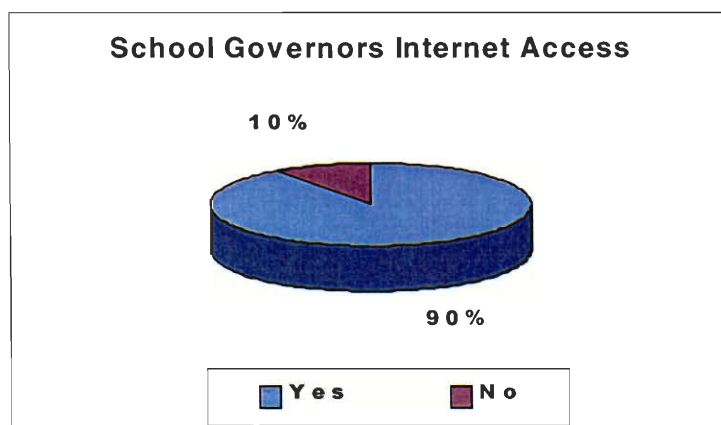


Figure 4-22: Do school governors have access to the internet?

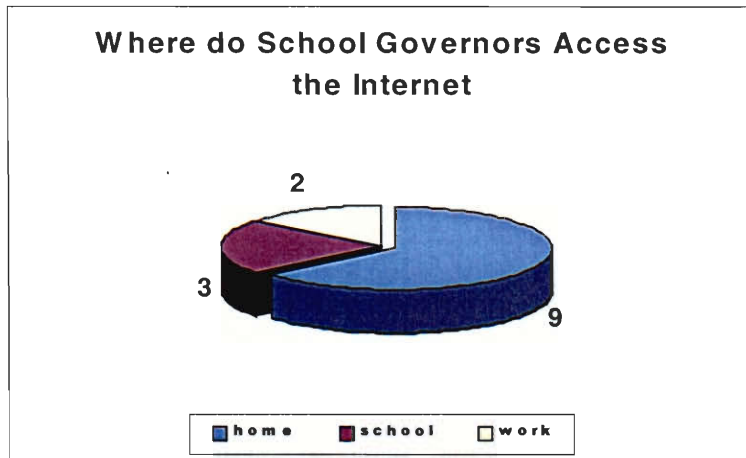


Figure 4-23: Where do school governors access the internet?

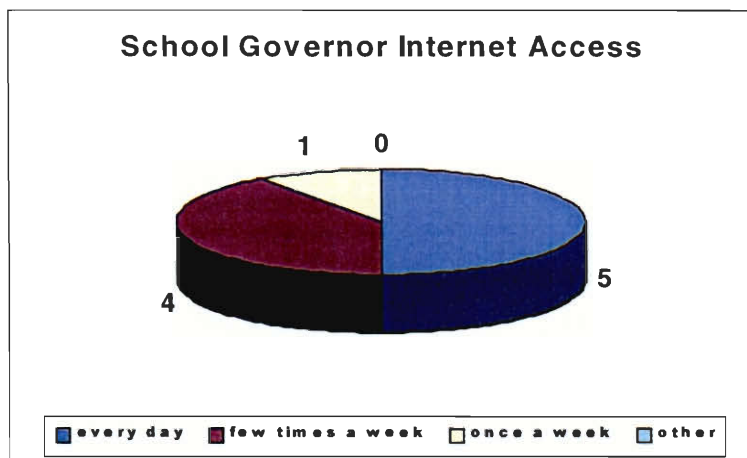


Figure 4-24: How often do school governors access the internet?

4.2.4.2 Web Site Usefulness for School Governors

School governor respondents were also asked to rate the usefulness of a web site on a scale of 1 to 5, with '1' being most useful and '5' being least useful. Unfortunately, although school governors had access to the internet, they did not find that a web site would be very useful in informing them about the reorganisation. Two out of three respondents rated the usefulness as a '4', which is not very useful. The other respondent rated it as a '2', which is somewhat useful (See Figure 4-25). This could be because they

already felt themselves to be well informed, or it could be because they thought that other methods would be more helpful.

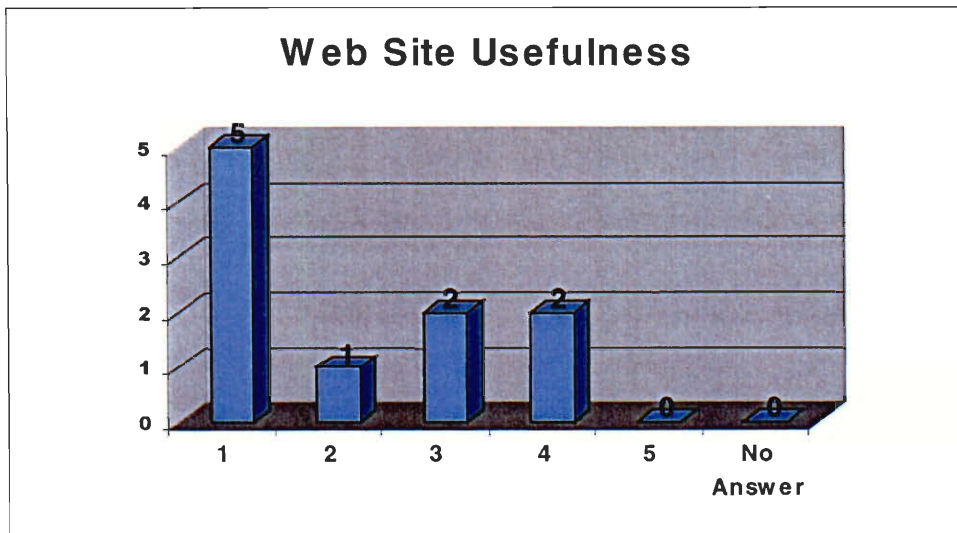


Figure 4-25: How useful would a web site be to get out information about the reorganisation to school governors?

4.2.4.3 Other Methods School Governors Prefer

From our lack of data from school governors, we did not receive much feedback about preferred methods of getting information out about the reorganisation. One result that coincided with data from other groups was that two of three school governor respondents preferred to be informed by written pamphlets. Two out of three respondents thought that telephone calls would be somewhat useful, which we found interesting, since the other groups all preferred not to be informed in that way. The other methods were all rated differently by each respondent and so no generalisations could be made (See Figure 4-26).

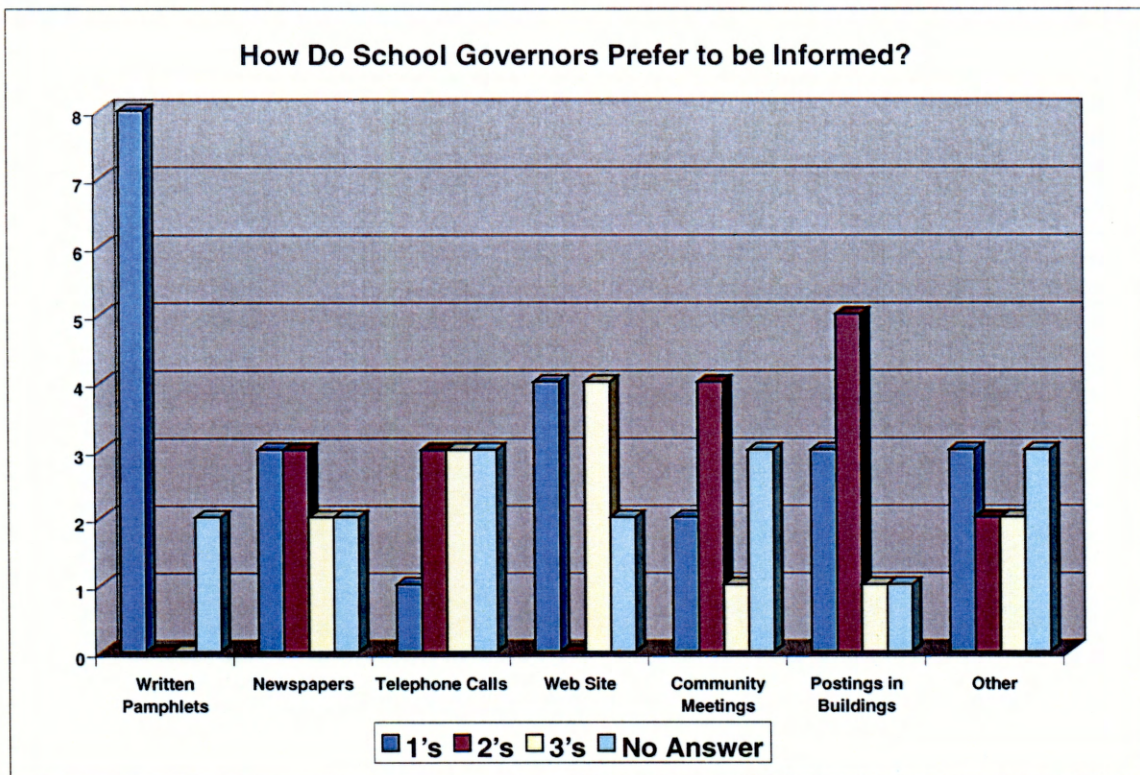


Figure 4-26: How do school governors want to learn about the reorganisation?

4.2.4.4 Major Concerns of School Governors

We asked school governor respondents to rate topics about the reorganisation on a scale of 1 to 3, with '1' being very interested and '3' being not interested at all. From this question, we did not get too many useful results because of the low number of respondents. However, two out of three respondents were very interested in several topics. These were a timeline of the reorganisation, the application process, a list of schools, printable forms and applications, construction, and the effects on children. The other topics in the list had mixed results, with each respondent providing a different answer or not answering at all. There was at least one respondent that did not rate most of the topics. Again, reasons for this could be misunderstanding the question or respondents only rating those topics in which they are very interested (See Figure 4-27).

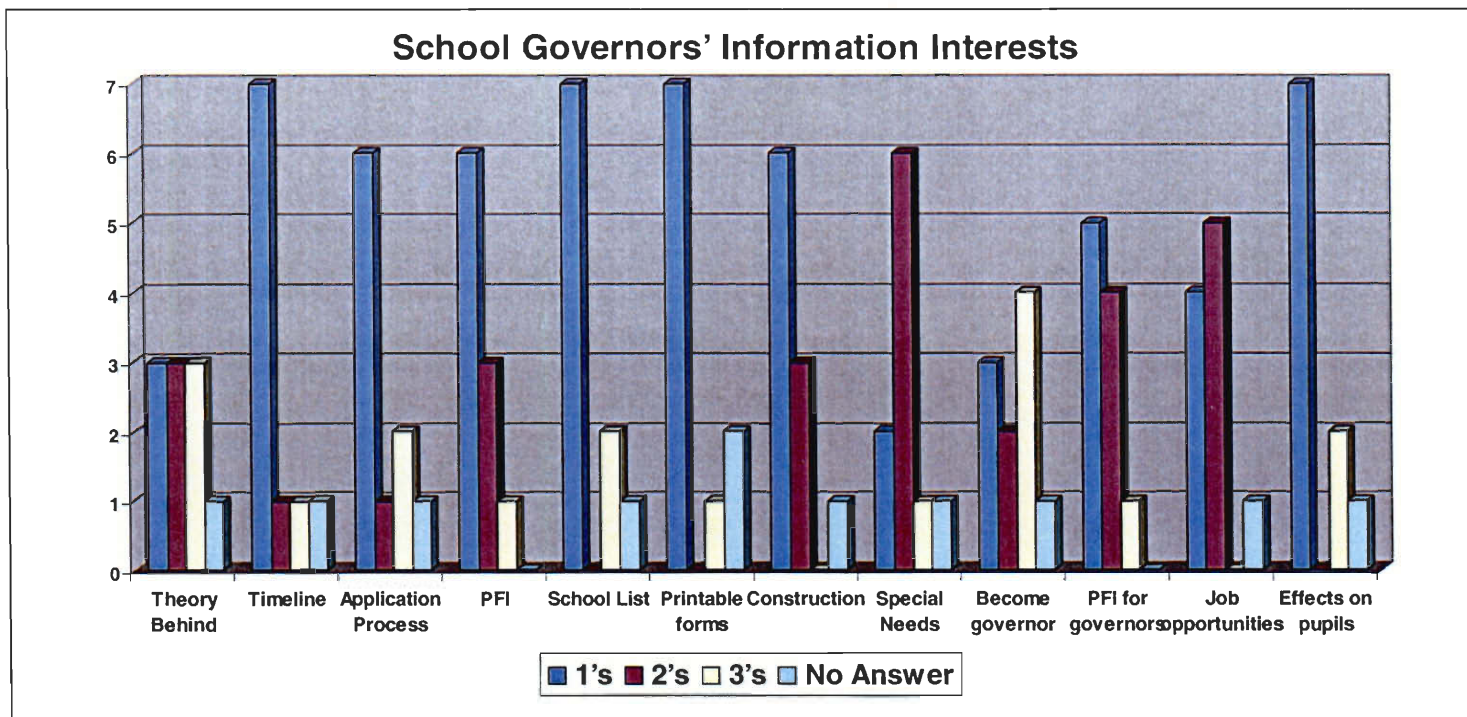


Figure 4-27: What information do school governors want to know about the reorganisation?

4.3 Interviews

In order to obtain more background information concerning the reorganisation, we conducted several interviews. These interviews gave us an insight that reading printed information could not provide. Most importantly, we asked the questions that were not answered by written reports. Second, interviews also allowed us to learn the disadvantages of the reorganisation and concerns of those affected by it that are not always publicised in written documents or written in survey responses. The interview we conducted with a headteacher gave us some insight into the concerns of headteachers regarding the reorganisation. Also, the knowledge we gained about the PFI, through an interview with Ms. Penny Badcoe, helped us to address this topic tactfully in one of the sections of our web site. Another person we interviewed in order to ensure that we

addressed a topic correctly was Mr. Robert Arrowsmith from the School Admissions Office.

4.3.1 Interview with Ms. Penny Badcoe

In order to gain knowledge about the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), which is a very controversial topic for the schools and site staff, we interviewed Ms. Penny Badcoe, the PFI procurement consultant. With a secure knowledge of the process of the PFI, explained by Ms. Badcoe, we were able to address the topic without offending anyone that connects to our web site. PFI, in general, will affect the Secondary schools and is a scheme by which a private company is contracted to do any building work that may be required to accommodate new pupils and manages any maintenance of the facility. This raised concerns because of the control that the private company will have over the Secondary school buildings and site staff. However, there were many benefits to this scheme as well. Normally, when the Borough undertakes such a large project, its cost is taken out of one year's budget. By contracting a private company, the cost is spread out over the 25 years of the company's agreement. The detailed information that we gained from this interview was elaborated on in our background section.

4.3.2 Interview with Mr. Alan Coode

We conducted another interview with Alan Coode the headteacher of Gorringe Park Middle School in Mitcham. Upon our arrival at Gorringe Park Middle School, we were given a tour of the building. The abundance of computers and internet technology

was very impressive. Mr. Coode was very interested in our web site and also gave us a headteacher's insight into the schools reorganisation. Some concerns that he raised included lack of classroom space and funding for construction. He seemed excited to be getting a younger range of children added to his middle school, but he also realised that younger children take up more space because they are not able to sit still as long as older children and need to be managed in smaller groups. This change means that he will have fewer classrooms available for his older pupils. Also, as the transition takes place, he will have year 7 pupils in the building at the same time as the nursery and reception age children for one year until the year 7 pupils are moved to the secondary school.

Consequently, there will be even less room for pupils during the transition. There will be no rooms added to this school, and he was having problems getting any building work needed to accommodate new children, such as toilets suitable for younger children and more storage space for bookbags, because of budget constraints.

Another issue he raised was that his middle school generally had very successful test scores. He noted that it was in the middle schools where pupils are doing well and that the high schools aren't accomplishing enough, which was where the real breakdown in education happens. So really the schools reorganisation was affecting the first and middle schools to a great extent when the problem is really in the high schools.

He also gave us some good suggestions for the web site. He recommended the idea of making a map so parents could click on different areas of the map to find a new school near them. He offered us the opportunity to conduct an informal focus group with his pupils concerning the reorganisation and our web site.

4.3.3 Interview with Mr. Robert Arrowsmith

On 13 February 2001, Kerri Dagesse and Theresa Green met with Robert Arrowsmith, who worked with admissions for all of the Borough schools. We interviewed Mr. Arrowsmith in order to gain a better understanding of the application process for the transition period of the reorganisation. The application process that the pupils must go through is very complex and confusing. Our main goal was to be able to explain this application process in very clear terms.

Mr. Arrowsmith brought with him an informative chart that showed the admissions schedule for each pupil for the next five years (See Appendix G). He did not have particular dates for application deadlines, but instead gave us months that could be changed to specific dates as the application deadline drew closer for each group. With his help, we were able to explain to parents and pupils, who had to apply for a new Primary or Secondary school and when, since every year had to apply at different times. Also, we were able to explain to parents where to return completed applications and what to do in the event that someone does not get accepted to his or her first or second choice school (All of this information is outlined in Appendix G). With Mr. Arrowsmith's help, we were confident that we could clear up any confusion about the transition application process.

4.4 Inset Day Visits

In order to gain a better understanding of some of the concerns expressed by those affected by the schools reorganisation, we each went with a member of the

Reorganisation Team to spend a day (19 January 2001) observing question and answer sessions at various schools. These sessions were part of Inset Day, which is a day where pupils do not attend school, and instead teachers have a day of education and training. The day involved both teaching and non-teaching staff and gave us some useful information about the issues these groups faced regarding their jobs during and after the reorganisation.

4.4.1 Mrs. Susie McKenna

Kerri Dagesse spent a day with Mrs. Susie McKenna, our liaison and the Schools Reorganisation Personnel Adviser. This was a day of question and answer sessions regarding the reorganisation at two Merton Schools. There were many topics discussed, ranging from staff displacement to interview techniques.

The first school visit was to Wimbledon Chase Middle School in Wimbledon, where a large number of administrative staff from various schools in the area gathered for an Inset Day. By observing this question and answer session, we gained valuable insight as to the concerns of school staff regarding the reorganisation.

One of the main concerns the staff expressed was that they might not be able to get a new post once they have been displaced. We learned that there were more positions available in the two-tier structure than people and so the staff should not worry. Since they would all have to reapply for a post in the reorganised structure, they expressed concern that there was not enough application information available. This was addressed by Mrs. McKenna, but was not addressed on our web site because the application process ended before our site was complete.

Other concerns were how salary protection, temporary positions, and maternity leave would be affected by the schools reorganisation. They wondered if their salaries would remain the same once they had moved to their new posts and whether maternity leave and temporary positions would go into the pool of posts for which to apply. The answers to all of these questions were “yes”. The staff’s salaries would be protected from one post to the next as long as the staff member applied for posts in his or her substantive grade. For example, a headteacher could not apply for a post as a teacher and expect to keep the same salary if there were still headteacher or other posts on the same level available. Maternity leave and temporary positions would go in the pool, just as any other post. These positions could be applied for just like any other, but they would both be only temporary positions.

The second half of the day involved an interview training session at Bushey First School also in Wimbledon, one of the closing schools. This training session was offered to all staff, as they would all have to go through interviews when they applied for a new post. The school staff at Bushey First School expressed concerns that they had not gone through an interview in many years. This training session offered many tips on interviewing as well as an interactive section where the teachers practiced interviewing each other. Through these sessions, teachers learned to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and how to address them in an actual interview. They also learned how to dress and how to behave during an interview to make a good impression. Although the interview process was completed by the time our web site went up, we thought that including some interviewing tips on the web site would be helpful to those who were not placed or who were unhappy with their placement.

4.4.2 Mr. Richard Stanley

Charles Ulrich spent the day attending two sessions at Malmesbury First School. Mr. Richard Stanley, a Merton Borough School Effectiveness Inspector, ran these sessions. This session was to address concerns raised by both teachers and support staff about combination of Malmesbury First School and Malmesbury Middle School during the reorganisation. Throughout the day many different concerns were raised.

The first session of the day was the longer of the two and was for the teachers of these two schools as a refresher in the application process all of the teachers would be going through over the next few months in order to prepare for the schools reorganisation. Each step the teachers would have to go through was described and explained. Once this was done, a short refresher course on interviewing techniques began.

During an interview practice session, Charles had a chance to speak with two teachers about the reorganisation and their concerns regarding it. One of the teachers spoken to was an older woman who had been teaching in Malmesbury for over 25 years. Her concerns mostly had to do with the fact that she had to re-interview for a job she had been secure in for many years. She was concerned because she had not been to a job interview since she was originally interviewed for her current teaching position long ago. The other teacher Charles spoke to was a younger woman just out of school and fairly new to the teaching staff. Her main concern was whether her lack of experience would be a disadvantage during the process. Although she felt confident in her abilities, she was worried about losing a job to a more experienced teacher such as the other teacher that was present.

The second session was for school support staff and went over the same things as the first session, but in relation to school support staff. One of the major concerns of this group was the fact that some of them would be displaced because of the new combined school, as well as concerns over the fact that many of them have also not interviewed for a job in many years. The second session ended pretty quickly once these concerns were addressed by Mr. Stanley.

Overall the mood at these sessions was positive, and the staff seemed to be ready to approach the reorganisation. However, an underlying sense of discomfort could not be totally ignored. The staff that were to receive a position in the new school, as well as those who would be going to other new schools, would know by the end of March 2001, and would still need to work together for the next year or so as the transitions were taking place. Concerns about morale and relations among the staff members after this process was complete were in the forefront of most people's minds and was a major concern for the headteachers.

4.4.3 Mrs. Josephine Mahaffey

Theresa Green went to a teacher inset meeting with Mrs. Josephine Mahaffey, Head of Schools Reorganisation. The inset was for four Roman Catholic schools in the Borough of Merton. The Roman Catholic schools are undergoing a similar schools reorganisation to the other schools in the Borough, but there are also many differences. The Roman Catholic pupils did not have to re-apply for admission into the schools that they already attend.

The inset education for the Roman Catholic schools, held at Merton's Professional Development Centre, was more geared toward preparing teachers for incorporating younger and older pupils into their school programmes. There was one middle school and three first schools represented. The middle school that was present, St. Catherine's Roman Catholic Middle School, was one of the closing schools because of demographic changes.

In the morning, there was a training session that gave guidance to help the staff teach younger children. The benefit of this session was aimed at the middle school teachers, who, since their school was closing, would be moving to a new primary school, possibly teaching younger children, and at the very least having younger children in their building. The afternoon training session was aimed at teaching pupils in Years 6 and 7 and preparing them for their SAT's. There was also an informational meeting concerning some behaviour problems that may arise with the new younger children and teaching to pupils of all levels.

Theresa had the opportunity to speak with one of the teachers at lunch and ask questions about the reorganisation. She was an older woman who had been teaching at the same school for about 20 years. She gave an insight into the disruption that the reorganisation would cause. She was afraid that classes would become overcrowded, that building work would not be completed on time, and that teachers would lose their jobs. It was obvious that the teachers from St. Catherine's were more tentative about the discussion being held that day. They sat off to the side, by themselves, and were not very active in the session. Because their school was closing, the teachers would have to re-apply and may have to apply for posts at different schools.

The teacher from the lunchtime discussion also provided a brief history and description of the school system that is in place in Merton. She mentioned that Merton was originally a two-tier school system, but was changed to a three-tier system in the 1960's. She thought that the original change allowed for older children to be set apart from the younger children and that this was good for the pupils. She did think it was necessary to have this reorganisation to a two-tier system in order to make the schools congruent with the National Curriculum, but she also had an adverse opinion of the National Curriculum. She thought that the National Curriculum limited teachers and forced them to teach to a lower denomination than they used to in the past.

Despite the problems that the teacher felt were stemming from the National Curriculum, it was this teacher's opinion that the biggest problem was with the high schools. However, she felt that the problems with the high schools and with pupils transferring to surrounding boroughs did not stem entirely from the break in Key Stage 3. She felt that many high school aged pupils were leaving because there was no sixth form college included in the high schools. A sixth form college is an optional two years at the end of high school offered to those pupils that do well on GCSE exams. These two years are intended for those pupils that plan on going on to a university education after high school. In Merton, pupils must go to a separate sixth form college instead of these two years being incorporated into the high schools. She thought that middle school aged children would still leave Merton for other Boroughs despite the change to a two-tier system because of the separate sixth form college. She believed that for Merton to be competitive, they would have to make this step to include a sixth form college in the Secondary schools.

4.4.4 Mrs. Sue Watson

Matthew Tucker spent the day with Mrs. Sue Watson who worked with our liaison, Mrs. Susie McKenna, as a Personnel Adviser for the Schools Reorganisation Project. During the course of the day, he met with a group of teachers and administrative staff at a closing first school and sat in on meetings between the three Private Finance Initiative (PFI) bidders and the site managers who were in charge of maintenance at each of the nine high schools in the Borough.

The meeting at the closing school was a general question and answer session where the teachers were given the opportunity to ask questions of Mrs. Watson. It was an excellent opportunity to get a more personal insight into the reorganisation from the teachers' perspective. Many concerns of which we would otherwise be unaware came to light. For example, one teacher was concerned that, although she would most likely be able to find a new position at another school in Merton, she may not have the ability to travel there. She had been teaching at the same neighbourhood first school for ten years and her commute involved only walking across the road. Travel across the Borough would come at greater expense, which she could not afford.

Matt also got a good overview of the application process for teachers at closing schools. The LEA has instituted a "Double Ring Fencing" method for placing teachers. Headmasters will try to fill any open positions in their school first from the pool of teachers already in place at their school, but who will be displaced by the reorganisation. The remaining positions will be filled from the Borough-wide pool of displaced teachers.

From the PFI meeting, Matt was able to give us a completely new perspective on the reorganisation. The site managers from each of the high schools in the Borough were

given the opportunity to ask questions of representatives from each of the three private corporations bidding for the PFI contract. One surprising observation made was that many of the maintenance staff were confident that working conditions would significantly improve under the PFI. Instead of taking orders from headteachers who knew very little about site management, they would be working for a large corporation whose entire business was centred on effective site management. They would have better access to equipment as well as support staff.

However, there were some concerns as well. Currently, the Borough provides housing on school grounds for many of the maintenance staff. The successful PFI bidder may not necessarily have to continue to provide this housing. This is a fairly complicated issue and was far from resolved in these preliminary half-hour sessions the site managers had with each bidder. As one manager put it, "I don't care whether I come out my door and go right to work or if I come out my door and go left, as long as I come out my door."

4.5 Pupil Informal Focus Groups

On 8 February 2001, our group went to Gorringe Park Middle School, in Mitcham, to conduct informal focus groups with two groups of pupils. These focus groups were helpful in determining what pupils wanted from our web site. The first part of our focus groups involved a group discussion about the reorganisation with the pupils to determine what they did or did not know. In general, both the older and younger pupils did not seem very well informed about the changes that would be taking place in their school. The second part of our focus groups was to observe the pupils' computer behaviour and to ask them questions about their internet preferences. From these focus

groups, we learned that middle school age pupils would like to learn about the reorganisation through pictures and easily understood language rather than lengthy complicated text.

4.5.1 Group 1 – Year 4

Our first group, the Year 4 pupils, who were 8 and 9 years old, were very tentative to speak to us at first. There were 3 boys and 2 girls in the group. We first approached the subject of the reorganisation and the effects that it would have on them as pupils. For this younger group, the effects of the reorganisation were minimal. All of the pupils were under the impression that they would remain at Gorrington Park when it became a Primary school, which may not be true since pupils' parents will have to re-apply for school in September of 2003.

These younger children were interested in learning about topics such as having the same teachers or their friends staying at the same school with them. We also asked them whether or not they knew that their parents had to apply for them to go to school and they weren't sure. It became apparent that this may be an important issue that we need to cover on our web site.

Most of all, the pupils were not completely sure why the schools were reorganising. In our attempts to explain the reorganisation to them, there was much confusion, so we realised that we would need to explain the reorganisation with the help of pictures and using very simple terms.

The next step in our focus group was to see how the pupils used the internet and get some feedback for our web site. Theresa Green and Kerri Dagesse brought them all to one of several computer suites in the building and asked them what they wanted from

our web site, and also for them to show us their favourite web sites. The most requests we were given for our web site were for games and pictures. Since games are not relevant to the purpose of our web site, we decided to take their suggestion of using a lot of pictures instead. The need for pictures was also reinforced while we were watching them surf the internet. As they looked through different pages that were generated by the search engine, if the page had too much text and not enough pictures, the pupils would immediately find a new page.

4.5.2 Group 2 – Year 6

The group of Year 6 pupils consisted of 6 children, with 3 boys and 3 girls. These older pupils, aged 11, were more willing to divulge information and readily participated in the discussion once they settled in and became comfortable talking to us. When asked about reorganisation, the Year 6 pupils did not seem concerned about it at all. They did know more about the reorganisation process than the younger pupils, however. It seemed to be common knowledge that their school would be changing to a Primary school, and they were not intimidated by this change. When asked if the process of suddenly becoming the youngest pupils in school again when they shift to Secondary school bothered them, the pupils replied saying that it was nothing new, and that they have all experienced being the youngest pupils in a school before.

These older pupils, however, did seem a little naive to the real reasons behind the reorganisation. The pupils thought that the main reason for the reorganisation was reducing the number of times pupils had to change schools throughout their education. Although that was part of the reason, it was not the major reason why the schools were reorganising. When we tried to explain to the children how the Key Stages do not fit well

into the current three-tier school system, one pupil replied, “that sounds complicated.” This statement brought us to the conclusion that we had to devise a simple way to explain the reorganisation to the younger audience of our web site.

After opening up the session to the pupils’ questions, Matt Tucker and Charles Ulrich moved on to a different computer suite with them. They asked them all to browse the web and show them a few of their favourite web sites. They seemed very excited about the extra chance to browse the web a bit and proceeded to browse to multimedia rich sites such as wwf.com and digit.co.uk, a Walt Disney children’s television show site. As was noticed with the younger pupils, sites with a lot of text were basically ignored, and only those with pictures, videos, and games managed to catch their attention.

4.6 Web Site User Testing

After a large portion of the web site was finished, it was very important to test the web site to ensure that it was easy to use, and that we did not miss anything in the content sections. We asked a group of potential users to look at features such as navigation, grammatical errors, and information content.

4.6.1 Adults

In order to test the web site with adults, a group that represented parents and school staff, we sent out an email to a list of 16 Merton Civic Centre employees that had completed our pre-test survey. We chose these people because of time constraints and it would be the quickest way to get feedback on our web site. In addition to being Civic Centre employees, these people also represented parents and school governors. Our

liaison, Mrs. Susie McKenna, Mrs. Sue Watson, and one of the webmasters, Mr. Len Buckley, also tested the site for content and grammar. We received many helpful suggestions from 5 of the 16 employees, such as correcting spelling mistakes and incorrect phone numbers. Our liaison recommended that we format the web pages so that they could be read when printed out. One person also suggested that we might offend people if we listed closing schools as “awaiting information”. Also, we received some positive comments about our web site such as, “I think this is a good resource for people to use. I particularly liked the school level info and the borough map with school location. It would be nice if you could get photos and statements of all schools. Is this work in progress? It would be nice to have such a decent website for the education dept in general, I think that is being sorted out, however I would be very keen to see school by school information also included in this website.”

4.6.2 Pupils

To test our web site with pupils, we decided that an effective way of doing this would be to go into a school and ask a group of pupils to use our web site. On 26 February 2001, Kerri and Theresa went to Gorrings Park Middle School and showed the web site to a group of 5 Year 4 pupils. They introduced themselves and also explained that they were there to show them the new schools reorganisation web site.

They started by having the children go to the pupils’ section of the web site. Then they asked them to navigate through the site and give them their opinions. They were pleased to hear them all reading the content of each page and not just looking at the pictures and moving on to the next page. They seemed to understand our explanations

and diagrams that described how the reorganisation would work and the reasons behind it. One pupil even remarked, “It’s quite good.”

One remark of constructive criticism was that the links to the schools pages were not easily accessible. In the section about the effects of the reorganisation, only a few of the years had links to the school pages, so we made links in all of the year pages. The pupils seemed very interested to see the pages for all of the schools. They searched through not only Gorringe Park’s page, but also many other schools.

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

After the analysis of all the data that we have collected, we have made conclusions concerning the survey and the informal focus groups that we conducted, which led to the final content of our web site. Also, we have included some recommendations for the Merton Schools Reorganisation Team for the future.

5.1 Conclusions

Many of the conclusions we came to were based on our survey results. It was from this survey that we were able to determine the contents of our web site and also what other means of disseminating information about the reorganisation might be useful. From the standpoint of our potential pupil users, our conclusions were based on informal focus groups.

5.1.1 Final Survey

The final survey led to many conclusions about the effectiveness of our methods of conducting the survey. Our largest problem was obviously the lack of response, which could be attributed to a few factors. First and most importantly, was our lack of control over the distribution process. The final survey was passed through so many hands, that it was inevitable there would be a problem somewhere. First, the survey went to our liaison, then to the printer, to the courier, to the headteachers, to the staff, to the pupils, and via the pupils to parents. Then for all of those survey questionnaires to be returned to

us, either the reverse of the chain had to be used or the survey questionnaires could be returned directly to the Civic Centre.

We tried to trace down the largest break in the chain and discovered that only 5 of the nine total schools that were supposed to receive the survey said they received it on time, 2 schools' headteachers said that they received the survey too late to distribute it, and 2 schools' headteachers said that they did not even receive the survey. Although we believed these problems to be linked to the courier service, they ensured us that all of the nine schools received our survey. The only explanation could be a lack of co-operation on the part of the schools. The surveys may have been misplaced or thrown away.

The next problem was that of the 2644 surveys that actually reached the schools, only 154 were returned to us. The factors surrounding this disproportionate return could be attributed to lack of co-operation among respondents. We received surveys with derogatory comments related to the reorganisation, our survey, and how the Schools Reorganisation Team was wasting their money. These responses came from school staff and parents alike, which means that a lack of co-operation could have come from either group (See Appendix H).

First, the headteachers could have decided to not emphasise the importance of our survey, or could have decided to not send the survey out to all their staff and to certain classes. Next, the teachers of each class could have decided not to pass the survey out to their pupils. And in the last step of the chain, pupils could have not actually given the survey to their parents. Then if parents finally received the survey, a lack of co-operation on their part could have led to our small number of responses.

The very complicated and multi-stepped process that was used in our survey distribution was plagued with obstacles from the outset. Unfortunately, this was the only

method that was feasible at the time to our liaison and ourselves because of time constraints on our part, and also because the schools were going through a very busy time getting prepared for the reorganisation. The last thing that our liaison wanted us to do was to upset parents and teachers even more than they already were about the reorganisation by intruding on their valuable time.

Since we realised that our data might be skewed because of our lack of responses, we have taken all responses tentatively. We included all the information that was available to us that groups asked for on the web site. Also, we included information that the Schools Reorganisation Team thought would be suitable.

Another situation that was appropriate to address in our survey, was the ratio of responses from each subgroup in comparison to that subgroup as a whole throughout the Borough. Our response from parents was 77.3% of our total response, from school staff, 15.6% and from the school governors, 9.7%. Since our response ratio from our survey sample was approximately similar to that of our sample framework, this is one area of our survey process that turned out positively.

5.1.2 Web Site Content

Many issues needed to be dealt with in the creation of our final web site. In order to decide the information content of the web site and how it would be organised, we combined survey data with literature provided by our liaison, Mrs. McKenna. A survey was used to obtain an opinion from parents and school staff regarding the information content of their specific sections of the web site. For the pupils, a different approach of informal focus groups was used to gauge their concerns.

5.1.2.1 Parents

The deciding factor in the information that would be provided for the parents was supplied through the survey. From the survey, it was found that many parents felt that they were either somewhat informed or well informed about the schools reorganisation. However, almost half of the parent respondents did not supply a correct rationale behind the reorganisation and so we included a link to a page that described the reorganisation and the reasons behind it. Also, from the survey, we found that there was a list of issues that were of interest to parents. Most of these topics were addressed in our web site. As discussed earlier, the most important information parents wanted on our web site was information related to the effects of the reorganisation on their children, including the reorganisation admissions process. Based on this assessment, we decided that we would include two main sections related to pupil based information. One page was designed to help parents understand the admissions process that their child would have to participate in during the reorganisation, while the other attempted to address any foreseen effects that reorganisation would have on pupils.

Another topic that parents wanted to be informed about was updates about any building work being done to the schools. Included in the parents section was a link to a construction pages for both Primary and Secondary schools. The Secondary Schools' building work was subject to PFI and so that page also explained the PFI process that would lead up to any building work.

5.1.2.2 School Staff

Similar to the parents, all of the school staff was reached through a survey. Through this survey, we were able to get input from various staffing groups such as teachers, headteachers, and maintenance staff. From these groups, the survey questionnaires were analysed and all of the topics of interest for these groups were identified. From our survey results, we determined that school staff were not as well informed about the reorganisation and so we included a link to the schools reorganisation description, as we did for the parents' section. We found that the school staff's major concerns were in the areas of job displacement and effects on children. They also expressed interest in topics such as a timeline of the reorganisation, building work, and job opportunities. We took this feedback into consideration when creating the school staff section of our web site.

To ease some worries about job displacement, we included information on interviewing techniques and a page to which job opportunities could be added. We also provided a link to a page that outlined some possible effects on children and suggestions for easing some of these effects. A list of key dates in the application process that may apply to school staff members was included. We also supplied a link to a page where a schedule of building work for both Primary and Secondary schools was given.

5.1.2.3 Headteachers/Governors

As can be seen from the data collected from the 10 school governors that responded, the concerns of governors were very similar. Of course, this similarity could

be indicative of all the school governors, but also, it could be very skewed in relation to the rest of the school governors in the Borough due to such a small response. In response to this dubious situation, we included information on the school governors' section of the web site, which they did not necessarily deem worthy, but that, with the help of our liaison, we decided could be pertinent information.

Although all of the school governor respondents felt that they were well informed about the reorganisation, the limited number of responses could not give us an idea of how many governors in the Borough were actually well informed. Therefore, we included a link to an 'About the Reorganisation' page. The limited information we did receive pointed to the fact that the school governors were mainly interested in the same things as school staff, such as the effects on children and a timeline of the reorganisation.

In the school governor and headteacher section of the web site we chose to include information about headteacher assignments, the PFI and a few support links that gave information regarding stress management. Because 70% of school governors expressed interest in a school list, a link to the list of schools and the map showing the schools was also included.

5.1.2.4 Pupils

In order to decide the content of the pupil's section of the web site, we used informal focus groups to ascertain what concerns pupils had and also to determine what pupils liked about web sites. From the data we collected from our informal focus groups, we were able to conclude what topics were of interest to pupils and also how these specific topics should be addressed.

We found that the pupils were interested in the reasoning behind the schools reorganisation and were also confused about the application process. We also knew that we needed to address the reasons in terms that they could understand, with the inclusion of many pictures. In the pupil section of the web site, we included two specific subsections, one about the reasoning behind the reorganisation, showing the correlation between key stages and years using simple pictures. The other subsection was about how the reorganisation will affect the pupils and gave them a link to the schools list page so that they could read about their new school, which was also something they expressed that they were interested in.

5.1.2.5 Schools

The schools pages were sent to us by the headteachers of 60 out of 63 schools. The other schools that did not send pages have pages that contain information supplied by our liaison. Each school page included about three paragraphs, but since each school was different, there was some variety in the format of the school pages. For the most part, each school had a paragraph about the school, a paragraph about the effects that the reorganisation would have on the school, and a recruitment paragraph.

The purpose of the recruitment paragraph was two-fold. Since all of the teachers at schools that are undergoing a significant change of character needed to re-apply for positions in the schools, the recruitment paragraphs were to let teachers know about the job opportunities at that particular school. The second reason for the recruitment page was when schools reorganisation was finished, our web site would become a recruitment web site for each of the schools.

5.1.2.6 Other content

Many respondents of the survey asked for a timeline of the reorganisation and also for printable applications and form. Since the reorganisation is such a complex process, we realised that a timeline would not be a feasible item to include on the web site. Instead, we gave specific information and dates concerning the admissions process, key dates for the school staff, and an outline of the building construction. To have printable applications and forms online was also deemed unfeasible. When it is time for a pupil to re-apply to a school, the school that they attend will handle passing out all the needed forms and also collecting those forms. We didn't want to confuse the process by adding more forms and applications that could potentially be confused to our web site.

5.2 Recommendations for the Future

One of our important roles while we are working with Mrs. Susie McKenna and the Schools Reorganisation Team was to try to obtain an objective view of the reorganisation and the methods parents, pupils, and school staff would like used to inform them about the reorganisation.

From our research, we have concluded that the Reorganisation Team should look into possible future means of informing the public about this huge transformation that was about to take place. After interacting with parents, school staff, headteachers, and pupils through conversation, interviews, focus groups and our survey, we got the impression that many people were concerned about the reorganisation. These concerns possibly stem from a lack of information provided about the reorganisation. Although many respondents to our survey felt at least somewhat informed about the reorganisation,

there were still many concerns expressed and topics they were interested in learning about.

Our recommendation for future surveys of a similar nature to ours would be to try a more direct route for the survey. Possibly taking the surveys directly to the headteachers at each of the schools in order not only to ensure their delivery, but also to stress the importance of the survey to the headteacher. An even better suggestion would be to mail the surveys directly to parents and school staff. Unfortunately, this option was not available to us because we were not privy to a mailing list that included these groups.

Another recommendation for the Schools Reorganisation Team would be to send out more written pamphlets about the reorganisation. Although the Team was under the impression that people were not reading their written pamphlets, a large majority of respondents to our survey strongly indicated that these would be the most useful source of information. In contrast, there was a very strong response against the use of telephone calls. Newspaper articles and the web site were responded to more in favour than in opposition as good methods to distribute information. Postings in community buildings and community information meetings were responded to approximately equally for and against. Therefore, pamphlets and possibly newspaper articles and a web site would be the best ways for the Schools Reorganisation Team, and possibly other services throughout the Borough, to reach the community.

Finally, in order for the web site to be useful to the Merton Community, it must be kept up to date. There are a few pages that will need to have the content updated at regular intervals. It is important that the building dates are changed to reflect any deviation from the original schedule. Survey respondents were very concerned about the disruption that building work would cause and also that building work would be

completed on time. Any phone numbers should be checked at least every six months to ensure correct information.

In the pupil's section, there is a page where pupils may click on their year in school to see how the admissions process will affect them. Obviously, when the next school year starts, this information will be incorrect. To remedy this, all the information from the sections will have to be moved to the next school year. Included in Appendix K, there is a maintenance manual that explains how to change any content of the pages.

Our goal was to address the needs of the Merton Community and to leave behind a useful, informative, and updateable web site. We feel that we have achieved this goal and hope that our contribution to the reorganisation process is beneficial in providing the information that the Merton Community needs.

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Appendix A – Cover Letter for Survey Sent to Parents and School Staff

22 January 2001

Merton Department of Education, Leisure, and
Libraries
Civic Offices, 10th floor
London Road
Morden, Surrey
SM4 5DX

Dear Sir or Madam,

As you may know, over the next few years the Merton Schools will undergo a reorganisation that will put in place a two-tier system of Primary and Secondary schools to replace the current three-tier system. This change will affect many Merton residents including parents, pupils, teachers, and other school staff. Merton's schools Reorganisation Team strives to keep the public informed about this project. As part of this informational campaign, we are currently developing a web site to provide up-to-date information over the internet.

The enclosed survey is designed to determine what concerns you may have in relation to this project. It is you that we hope to benefit with the site and, in order to do that, we must know what issues are important to you so that we may address them.

Please complete the survey and return it to your (or your child's) school by 6 February. If you have more than one child, you may have received the survey multiple times. In this case, you need only complete one of them. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to contact us on the telephone at 8545-3777 or through email at ed.wpistudent@merton.gov.uk. We will be happy to answer any questions you have. Thank you for your co-operation in this survey.

Best regards,

Kerri L. Dagesse
Theresa C. Green
Matthew D. Tucker
Charles C. Ulrich

Merton Schools Reorganisation Web Site Team

Appendix B – Cover Letter Sent to Headteachers

22 January, 2001

Merton Department of Education, Leisure, and Libraries
Civic Offices, 10th floor
London Road
Morden, Surrey
SM4 5DX

Dear Headteachers,

Enclosed you will find a survey being conducted by the London Borough of Merton Schools Reorganisation Web Site Team. Our team based with the schools reorganisation and we are students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in the United States. Our survey is intended to assess the types of information parents and your school staff want regarding the reorganisation on the web site we are creating.

This survey is being sent to all the Headteachers in Merton. It would be greatly appreciated if you could distribute it to your parents, teaching staff, and non-teaching staff so we can obtain the views of those affected by the change in the schools.

As our time for this project is short, we are asking that the parents and staff return the survey to their respective schools no later than 10 February 2001. This speedy response will ensure that all of the results of the survey are considered during the creation of the web site. We kindly ask you, the Headteacher, to return the survey via our courier on 12 February 2001. Thank you for all your time and help.

Regards,

Kerri Dagesse
Theresa Green
Matthew Tucker
Charles Ulrich

Appendix C – Survey Sent to Parents, Headteachers and School Staff

ABOUT YOU

1. Which category would best describe your role in the Merton Schools community?

Parent
 School Governor

School Staff
 Other (please specify) _____

2a. If you answered **Parent**, how many children do you have in Merton schools, and in what year are they?

2b. If you answered **School Staff**, what is your post?

ABOUT SCHOOLS REORGANISATION

3. Did you know that the Merton school system was reorganising?

Yes

No

4. Do you happen to know during which calendar year the reorganisation is scheduled to be completed?

Yes (please specify) _____

No

5. Do you feel well informed about the school reorganisation?

Well informed

Not at all informed

Somewhat informed

6. Can you recall offhand any of the major reasons behind this reorganisation? If so, please list below:

7. Please select which means would best be used to inform you about the schools reorganisation. (Rate each statement on a scale of 1, 2, or 3. 1 being helpful, 2 being neutral and 3 being not helpful at all)

Written Pamphlets
 Newspapers
 Telephone Calls
 Web Site

Community Meetings
 Postings in Community Buildings
 Other (please specify) _____

8. Which topics regarding schools reorganisation are you most interested in? (Rate each statement on a scale of 1, 2, or 3. 1 being very interested and 3 being not interested at all)

The theory behind schools reorganisation.

The status of any building work that will take place in preparation for the school reorganisation.

A timeline that clearly explains the school reorganisation.

Information on how the requirements of pupils with special needs are being met.

A clear explanation of the application process for pupils.

How to become a school governor.

An explanation of the proposed Private Finance Initiative funding arrangements for the secondary schools.

PFI information for governors of Secondary schools.

A list of all the schools with information regarding each school.

Job opportunities for school staff.

Easily printable copies of any forms and applications you may need.

A clear explanation of the effects this reorganisation will have on the children of Merton.

9. Do you have any major concerns about schools reorganisation? If so, please specify.

10. Can you think of any other topics concerning schools reorganisation that you are interested in?

SCHOOLS REORGANISATION AND THE INTERNET

11. Do you have access to the Internet?

Yes

No

If you answered **yes** to the above question:

11a. How often do you access the internet?

Every day

A few times a week

Once a week

Once a month

Other _____

11b. Where do you generally access the internet?

Home

School

Work

Library

Other (Please Specify) _____

12. If a web site were created for information concerning the schools reorganisation, would you find it helpful? (Please rate on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being most helpful)

1 2 3 4 5

13. Are there any web sites that you find in general easy to use? If so, please specify.

Appendix D – Distributed Surveys

List of schools and the number of surveys that were supposed to be sent to them:

Bishop Gilpin First School: supposed to receive 312 surveys – said they never received

Poplar First School: received 221 surveys – sent back all responses

Sacred Heart First School: received 200 surveys – sent back all responses

Gorringe Park Middle School: supposed to receive 600 surveys – said they never received

Priory Middle School: received 540 surveys – sent back all responses

St. Matthew’s Middle School: supposed to received 240 surveys – said they did not receive until February 15th – did not distribute

Rutlish High School: received 840 surveys – sent back all responses

Raynes Park High School: received 840 surveys – sent back all responses

Bishopsford High School: supposed to receive 1204 surveys – said they did not receive until February 7th – did not distribute

Total number of surveys sent out: **5000**

Total number of surveys actually received: **2644**

Total number of responses: **154**

Appendix E – Interview with Ms. Penny Badcoe

In general, what is a PFI?

When the government hires into the private sector to get money for public projects. The job of the private contractor is termed DBFO or design, build, fund, and operate. This is applicable in many situations, for example, prisons, libraries, government offices, social services, and schools. The contractor is paid an annual sum for provisions such as cleaning, electric, maintenance, etc.

The role of the government body is only to specify the end result, and not the steps in between. For example, when construction will take place in the schools, the LEA will only specify the basic end result, and the actual design of the buildings etc will be left up to the contractor. These plans will be approved along the way though. So there are broad specifications, then proposals, and approval along the way.

How will you pick the private company for the job?

Through a negotiation procurement.

Define procurement.

The procurement is the agreement that defines who gives service and under what conditions. There are two types of procurement, discussion and negotiation. Merton will use negotiation. The negotiation procurement is less adversarial and allows for both sides to make compromises. A negotiation process takes longer than discussion, about 2 years. This process consists of many proposals and negotiation among the bidders and us in order to reach our goals and that of the workers at the schools.

What is Merton's process for this negotiation procurement?

There will be 3 companies allowed to submit proposals on the 23rd of February. These proposals will be negotiated and will lead to either 2 or 1 groups to give their best and final offers in May. These offers will be submitted to the council in June and then the contractor will be picked in July.

Will there be different contractors for different schools?

No. There will be one contractor for all the secondary schools. This will allow for consistency among all the schools.

How will the final balance of power end up with the contractor and the schools and the LEA?

The contractor will take care of the building for the LEA, but the LEA is responsible for the teaching and education.

What are some advantages of the PFI?

It gives the LEA the “opportunity to gain more control” throughout the schools. For example, there will be standardised catering, employment of site staff, and policies concerning school maintenance.

What is a major concern among the schools for this change?

In the past, the schools were given a lump sum of money by the LEA. This freedom allowed many schools to take money that was intended for maintenance of buildings and put the money toward different applications. Now all the schools will still be given a lump sum, but they will have to “give” a set amount of the money back to the LEA for payment of the private contractor. This policy means that schools will have to allocate money differently than in the past, which causes some dispute. So the schools are getting better buildings, but they will have to pay for it.

Appendix F – Interview with Mr. Alan Coode

Our interview started out with a tour of Gorringe Park Middle School. The extensive amount of computers and internet technology was very impressive. He was very interested in our web site and had some concerns about the reorganisation.

Do you have any ideas for our web site?

He suggested that we make a map so parents can click on different areas of the map to find a new school near them.

What concerns do you have about the reorganisation?

He was worried about space in the school and funding. He seemed excited about adding a younger range of children added to his middle school, but he also realised that younger children take up more space which means that he will have less classrooms available for his other students. Also, as the transition is taking place, he will have year 7 students along with the nursery and reception age children which means he will have even less room for pupils. There will be no addition of rooms for his school, and he is having problems getting any construction he might need done because of budget. He is afraid that he will not get the construction he needs in time or in the amount he wants because of bureaucracy within the council.

Do you feel that the reorganisation will actually help the level of education throughout the Borough?

His middle school has very successful test scores and he feels that it is in the middle schools where students are doing well and that the high schools aren't accomplishing enough. So really the reorganisation is effecting the first and middle schools when really the problem is in the high schools.

May we come to your school to talk to pupils about the reorganisation?

He offered to let us conduct an informal focus group with groups of pupils about the reorganisation and also invited us to test our finished web site with his pupils.

Appendix G – Admissions Calendar

The timeline below shows the events that will take place each school year. For example, in the September 2001 school year, a new reception class will start. The pupils who start Year 2 and Year 3 in September 2001 will apply for a new Primary School in January 2002. The pupils that begin Year 4 will have already applied for a new Primary School the previous year and will start at that new school in September 2001. Pupils in Year 6 and Year 7 will apply for a new Secondary School in the Autumn of 2001. Finally, pupils in Year 8 will have already applied for a new Secondary School in the previous year and will begin at their new Secondary School in September 2001. Each subsequent year is read the same.

September 2001

New Reception class starts

Current **Year 2** applies in January for new Primary School

Current **Year 3** applies in January for new Primary School

Current **Year 4** starts at a new Primary School

Current **Year 6** applies in Autumn for new Secondary School

Current **Year 7** applies in Autumn for new Secondary School

Current **Year 8** starts at a new Secondary School

September 2002

New Reception class starts

Current **Year 2** applies in January for new Primary School

Current **Year 3** starts at a new Primary School

Current **Year 4** starts at a new Primary School

Current **Year 6** applies in Autumn for new Secondary School

Current **Year 7** starts at a new Secondary School

Current **Year 8** starts at a new Secondary School

September 2003

New Reception class starts

Current **Year 3** starts at a new Primary School

Current **Year 6** applies in Autumn for new Secondary School

Current **Year 7** starts at a new Secondary School

September 2004

Current **Year 6** applies in Autumn for new Secondary School

Current **Year 7** starts at a new Secondary School

September 2005

Current **Year 6** applies in Autumn for new Secondary School

Current **Year 7** starts at a new Secondary School

Appendix H – Final Survey Comments

Problems and concerns expressed by respondents:

“Logistics”

“Re-allocation of space in schools”

“Teaching/pupil readjustment losing valuable teaching time – the new children will be ‘guinea pigs’”

“Upheaval”

“Lack of financial support for schools.”

“My eldest son is having trouble settling at this school, to change again is going to be hard, they should have done this sooner.”

“Quality of teaching for newly created classes and the subsequent lack of appropriate resources, lesson plans, facilities, and stimulation for that specific age group.”

“How will we be sure that the present teachers will be sufficiently experienced in teaching different age groups?”

“Will there be enough places [at schools] for some degree of choice?”

“Will the child in any way be affected in terms of his/her education?”

“Older children with younger children – Bullies etc.”

“Merton appears to need more secondary school of higher standard. The majority of Merton children attend secondary schools in Kensington or public/private schools.”

“Lack of information about when I should apply for places for my children.”

“That the Age of Transfer is completed on time and has enough funding.”

“How it will affect the children? Will their education be as the same level as it is in the middle school? Children have a good opportunity to reach high grades in the middle schools. Will their grades be as high?”

“Teachers may not have experience dealing with old kids as schools like Poplar had no older children before. What kind of training is available for teachers in terms of dealing with olds and teaching old kids? How could they make sure that standard is raised rather than lowered?”

“Middle Schools will not be equipped and experienced to provide nursery places.”

“6th form colleges at secondary schools.”

“Keeping class size down.”

“Time being given for the children in the vanguard of change to adjust.”

“If this is to happen, my concern is for my 2 children to be in the same school.”

“My son is in year 4 from 8:40 to 3:30 at Wimbledon Chase. When and if my daughter goes there in 2002 will she be there the same time or less time like her current primary school 9-3? What happens about my son’s timetable and all the lunch-time clubs at Wimbledon Chase? And what about the specialized teaching staff at Wimbledon Chase? Will they leave in year 2002, be too expensive or what?”

“Disruption for children facing having to change schools.”

“[I have a problem with] the re-application process, although I understand that this is done to give parents a chance with older children currently in middle school or to apply for a school closer to home.”

“My main worry now is traffic especially where schools are located in residential estates and where that school will become bigger and therefore the volume of traffic in that area. I live too far for my children to walk to their school, and have no option but the drive them and as it is, it is difficult find parking safe enough and close enough. The school behind my home is closing and my situation gave rise to my

children now attending a school further from home. Can Merton provide transport for children living within the borough but further than walking distance?"

"The merging of schools and how the new school will cope with an increase in numbers, varying ages, and how they will organise classrooms and play space (Bushey Middle- there is not a great deal of outdoor play area)."

"Disruption to children as a result the changes; impact on children during building works, general lack of space for children as a result of the changes and larger schools."

"Disruption to staff meaning some good staff may leave Merton schools."

"Impact on staff – is it expected that any teachers will leave as a result of the changes. Now are teachers concerns being addressed to ensure that they stay motivated and stay with Merton school?"

"Applying for places."

"Disruption to pupils."

"Bushey Primary - that proper investment/changes won't be made and that parents and children at Bushey Middle/First haven't been listened to properly."

"Buildings investment with no strings attached."

"School funding that mirrors all the pupils lost in schools such as Bushey to across the border, etc. thus weakening PTA fundraising, school fund contributions, etc. which have affected/curtailed pupils activities and unsettled communities."

"Placement of teaching staff and the effects on teacher morale."

"Redeployment [of teachers] and early retirement opportunities."

"My job security and possible changes."

"Disruption to working area."

"Additional workload for existing staff."

"Lack of support from borough."

"Only that my younger children will get a place in the same school as older sibling."

"I am concerned about the building works: 1. Health and safety issues, and 2. Being completed on time"

"How it will effect my children, ie. Building work, standards etc."

"We need to clarify to parents the fact the we have to re-apply for places."

"The standard of education provided by secondary schools and their location."

"Lack of 6th forms on schools."

"What percentage of children will not get 1st choice of school."

"Impact of child's education if unsettled by need to change schools."

"Before/After - school childcare clubs for each school."

"Impact on school holiday clubs due to building work."

"Continuity of PTA, staff during transition."

"How to compare results pre/post reorganisation."

"Will there be extra assistance with new year 4 children (the guinea pig year) and staff who will be doing the new year first?"

"Facilities in primary schools - will they cover the new needs of pupils from day one (ie. Sept 2001) or will they have to wait (bigger desks, toilets, personal storage areas, changing rooms for girls separate from boys, etc)?"

"Many schools are becoming primary schools but is the standard of education going to be kept - eg. Like Wimbledon chase. Or are they not going to bother what results they get for their school."

"If my child is happy and settled at school, will she be uprooted if she is nearer to an alternative school due to a recent move at home?"

"Returning to school in September 2002 with building work in progress."

“As it's my younger daughter's last (and most important exam) year, I am concerned how the reorganisation will affect this.”

“Lack of completion of building by September 2002.”

“Further loss of year 6 and 7 children.”

“Staffing - will all the present teachers be kept or will this mean changes.”

“The vast increase of the intake at Raynes Park High School which I fear will lead to a lowering of standards.”

“What effect it will have on my child as an individual.”

“Will there be a sixth form once the changes have occurred in line with other boroughs.”

“My concerns are that my elder child will be starting his GCSE courses. Concerned about disruption and teaching.”

“Delay in concluding the PFI process means disruption to operations of schools just when 'big bang' takes place in September 2002.”

“I would like it all to go as smoothly as possible like all parents. Also that all teachers are considered in their posts, and encouragement given to keep children and staff enthusiastic.”

“How will it affect my job?”

“The disbanding of functioning schools - especially those with beacon status.”

“The monitoring of the stress this is putting on senior management through and the initiatives undertaken to combat this.”

“Building works going on during teaching.”

“Overcrowding whilst new rooms set up.”

“Some teachers unplaced.”

“Better, fuller curriculum at KS4 and 6th form for school.”

“The effect on my son's education.

“How it will affect the schools ability to provide a safe environment and high standard of education.”

“My children's school is large enough already, yet plans are in place to make it larger. Funding for resources.”

“Primary schools with reception and years 4,5,6 will appear as two separate entities.”

“Redeployment of staff - bad for morale.”

“Teacher time for physical reorganisation of classes.”

“Will the building work affect the children?”

“Disruption caused by the need for building work during school time - on top of long periods of earlier building work.”

“Adequate provision of toilets etc. for large numbers of pupils in schools clearly designed for very much smaller numbers.”

“The possibility of 'Asset Stripping' by PFI Bidders and loss of land available to schools.” “Retention of Pupils in borough.”

“The disruption of school sites.”

“Correlation of Primary Places vs. secondary.”

“Disruption and teacher dissatisfaction and resultant move away from the borough.”

“Staffing arrangements. At present no clear indications of what these will be.”

“Excessive work burden in lead up and after for teachers and admin.”

“Parents moving children to be educated out of borough.”

“Disruption to students' education for next 'n' years.”

“How will some of the smaller first schools cater for almost double the number of children?”

“All children in middle schools currently have access to specialist areas and equipment, ie. Purpose built gyms, science labs and cookery rooms. Will this be catered for in the Primary schools?”

“My main concern is that we have a good choice of schools, hopefully within easy reach. I would not wish to be channelled to one school that I felt was not appropriate simply for a geographical reason.”

“That schools will not be given the funding and support they need through the changes. How will reorganisation improve secondary education in Merton? No sixth forms in Merton.”

“Creating huge schools with large number of pupils in any given school. Must be detrimental to the children.”

“I am concerned about the disruption it presents to my children. Also that they and teachers must re-apply to their positions at school.”

“Not convinced that physical needs of children is being addresses in small first schools soon to become primaries.”

“Allowing church schools to set own criteria will negate the purpose of the reorganisation in some areas.”

“Majority of parents do not realise that their children have to re-apply for schools. Hasslemere & newspaper coverage has caused a panic.”

“Details of work the children are currently doing.”

“Limited high schools???”

“Do the children have to be adjusted to lower class when reorganisation takes effect.”

“Will the curriculum change?”

“Will there be sufficient funds for resourcing”

“Will my choice of schools be area restricted.”

“Will Merton retain it teachers?”

“The efficiency of the LEA in monitoring contracts under PFI.”

“The building work as deterrent to potential year 7 pupils.”

“Stress on teachers and heads.”

“Early change to secondary school from year 7.”

“Need 'A' levels.”

“Choice of schools.”

“No 6th form in schools and 11 year olds travelling across borough to school.”

“Disruption of exams in high school.”

“The reorganisation may not be conducive to uninterrupted learning.”

“How will it affect our children? How will they be managed?”

“Building work that will take place in preparation for school reorganisation might cause any disturbance of study circumstance”

“How does it fit with the overall education system, i.e. A levels.”

“I am sorry that children in our borough will not have the opportunity to go through 6th form and A levels at their chosen secondary school unless they go to the Catholic schools.”

“Jobs for teachers in closed or closing schools.”

“Some schools have major building work, how will this be done?”

“Children in schools that were 1st schools becoming primary-lack experience and expertise in dealing with older children. I have concerns about sizes of play grounds/buildings can be enlarged but how many schools will enlarge playgrounds.”

“I am aware of special needs bases but have no information of how these will function. Will they differ from the original units in any way?”

“Affecting children’s schooling during works to schools. Class sizes?? Children adjusting to new system.”

“To havoc of rebuilding, lack of info on building, lack of info outside base.”

“Buildings not being ready on time”

“One of my sons is currently in Year 3 of his first school. He will remain one of the oldest in the school until he reaches secondary school. I would like to know how he will be helped, or how I can help ease him through that transition, being 'top' of the school for so long - no transitional stage.”

“There is apparently no extra money to pay for equipment for the new classes to be built on the first schools - old equipment will be shared out - not a good start?”

“Will there be sufficient science labs and computers available in the first schools that will be taking in older children?”

“Teachers morale - if all the teachers are supposed to reapply for jobs, I am at university myself and am considering teaching, and the PGCE when I finish but I will be watching the situation in Merton carefully before applying for a job here.”

“My concern is with closing schools where staff morale is low due to uncertainty. Also closing schools with very few pupils is also difficult - keeping team spirit.”

“My son will be the "guinea pig" as his is the first year of staying on in a Primary school.”

“Is school adequate in terms of building, educational input, space, etc.?”

“What sort of disruption will building works cause?”

“No worries because my children are in high school.”

Suggestions made for our web site:

“Progress reports of all aspects, you have identified a timeline in #8. This will have milestones and these should be monitored and highlighted.”

“A clear explanation of the application process for pupils. A list of all schools with information regarding each school such as their background, general information, etc.”

“A list of all schools academic results to be listed on the web site.”

Concerns expressed about a web site:

“Currently, we do not have access to the internet. Whilst I acknowledge the importance of the internet as a means of information, it is of *absolutely* no value as a means of information you *are not* connected or do not own a computer. It is a useful asset but it should not replace other *forms of information!*”

“We have no computers at home!”

“I would find it helpful but *not* if a web site is at the expense of funding a wider ranging project or if it takes expertise away from more traditional methods eg. leaflets.”

A concern expressed directly to us:

“Whilst wishing you success in your future – I am sure you cannot understand our needs unless you too are parents with a great deal of uncertainty whether your

children will receive a decent and stable education over the next four or five years. I'm petrified."

Positive Comments:

"It is process which will benefit to children."

"I was one of the Jury members which sat for 2 weeks to debate and then vote on the current two tier system in adjoining boroughs being implemented into this borough."

Particularly negative comments:

"Waste of paper used on surveys like this. – taxpayers money."

"Is it going to improve the diabolical standards within higher education with the borough?"

"I lack confidence in the secondary school. How will they improve?"

"Extra work for already over burdened teaching and administrative staff!"

"There is nothing a two tier system can offer that a three tier system has not. You will spend infinitely more money then you save, cause unnecessary upheaval and achieve NOTHING."

"When are you going to put money into educating children instead of wasting it on this rubbish?"

"Will there be sufficient staff for the schools after reorganisation - how do schools propose to deal with the possibility of having to use supply staff which undoubtedly is not beneficial for children's long term education."

"It was difficult enough working out what school to apply to before the reorganisation (given that there aren't enough places in school) let alone now."

"A very valuable opportunity to create an adequate secondary school in Merton was missed."

"LEA appears to be working at half the speed of individual schools and has not thought through possibilities of parental choice affecting school rolls and admission."

"LEA instigated reorganisation to improve coherence of key stages of curriculum. Have seen little evidence of co-ordination by LEA of schools' equipment, resources, staff expertise for subjects, particularly first and middle schools."

Appendix I – Publications Email to all the Headteachers

The letter below is a copy of the email that was sent out to each individual headteacher.

Mr./Ms. (Insert Headteacher Surname),

Here is an article that we wrote in order to publicise our new website. We would greatly appreciate it if you include this in your next newsletter to your parents and staff. Thank you very much for your co-operation.

WPI Merton Schools Reorganisation Web Site Project

Kerri Dagesse
Theresa Green
Matt Tucker
Charles Ulrich

We are Kerri Dagesse, Theresa Green, Matt Tucker and Charles Ulrich four students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) who are working with the Merton Schools Reorganisation Team on the development of a web page for the reorganisation project. WPI is a science and engineering university located in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA and this project will fulfill our degree requirement for an Interactive Qualifying Project (IQP). The IQP is designed to demonstrate the role that technology plays in society.

This particular project will use current internet technology to help the Schools Reorganisation Team to establish an informational website for the Staff, Parents and Pupils of Merton's schools. The goal of the site is to address any concerns of Merton's parents, pupils, and school staff.

Look for a link to this web site in early March on the Merton Council web page at <http://www.merton.gov.uk/schoolreorg/index.html>

Appendix J – The Web Site

Primary Pages

“Primary pages” are comprised of all pages in the top level of the Schools Reorganisation web directory. Below is a brief description of each of these pages:

Main Page (index.html)

This page provides a starting point for the user from which all other pages of the site may be accessed. It gives a brief description of the Reorganisation Project and the purpose of the web site. We’ve also included a secondary navigation box entitled “places to start” which provides links to a few of the more useful general information documents.

About the Reorganisation (about.html)

This page answers the three most basic questions users will have related to the reorganisation: “What is the reorganization?”, “Why is the reorganization necessary?”, and “How will the reorganisaton help?”

About this Page (about_page.html)

This page provides information about the authors of the website and links to both the WPI homepage and the “About the WPI Projects Program” on the WPI website. It also discusses briefly how the website should be navigated.

Contact Us (contact.html)

This page provides information for users wishing to contact the Merton Schools Department as well as Admissions. There is also an email form for users wishing to communicate electronically.

Schools

Although this section does not have a link in the main navigation, it is linked from the main page of the website as well as the front page of every sub-section. Every school in the borough has it’s own page which includes a description of the school, it’s address and phone number, and, where available, a photograph. Users may select the school from a drop-down list by name or use an interactive map of the borough to select one by location.

Parents

This section caters specifically to the concerns of parents. We have provided information specific to their child based on their child’s age as well as a Frequently Asked Questions, admissions guidelines, building construction information and a number of other documents. We’ve attempted to address most of the concerns we’ve identified through our research.

Pupils

In the pupils section, we've simplified the reorganisation by using a metaphor in such a way that children will be able to understand the basics of the project. We've also provided information specific to each age group that will be affected by the reorganization.

Staff

The staff section provides information specific to school staff. This includes information about the application process for staff being displaced, interviewing and stress management.

Governors and Headteachers

Here, we've posted information pertinent to headteachers as well as the governing bodies of the schools. Pages related to headteacher assignments, private finance initiative, and stress management all been included (among others).

Although each section contains mainly pages specific to each group, pages which could be useful to multiple groups have been cross-linked between sections. In this way, users may find pertinent information contained in other sub-sections quickly and easily.

The pages included below are a sampling of each section of the web site.



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Contact List for Council Services

Councillors

Press Releases

Best Value Performance Plan

Merton High Schools Citizenship Project

Tackling Youth Drugs Misuse

Merton Schools Reorganisation



merton schools reorganisation

This webpage was developed by a group of students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in conjunction with the Schools Reorganisation Project. WPI is located in Worcester, Massachusetts, USA and the page was developed as part of the students' Interactive Qualifying Project.

The website has been divided into sections for each group that will be affected by the reorganisation. To navigate, click the links near the top of the page that pertain to the group or groups you fall into. The house icon will always take you back to the Reorganisation's homepage and the envelope icon will take you to the contact page.

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Merton Schools Reorganisation



merton schools reorganisation

[places to start](#)

[about the reorganisation](#)

[frequently asked questions](#)

[about your school](#)

Over the next year, the Local Education Authority of the London Borough of Merton will be converting from a three tier system of first, middle, high schools to a two tier system consisting of Primary and Secondary schools. This reorganisation is designed to help raise education standards in Merton and bring them in line with those of neighboring boroughs.

The Schools Reorganisation is a project of immense scope, affecting Merton parents, teachers, school staff and, of course, children. This web site has been developed to act as a resource for these members of the community. Answers to many of your questions may be found within these pages. For information about how to use this site, click [here](#).

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Merton Schools
Reorganisation



merton schools reorganisation

[printable version of this page](#)

what is the reorganisation?

The London Borough of Merton is changing from a three tier system of First (5 to 8 years), Middle (8 to 12 years), and High (12 to 16 years) schools to a two tier system of Primary (5 to 11 years) and Secondary schools (11 to 16 years).

The Secretary of State for Education and Employment approved this new system in April 2000. During the academic years 2001/2002, 2002/2003, and 2003/2004 a gradual transition will take place to ensure that no child currently attending a Merton school will have to change schools more often than he or she would under the current school system.

why is the reorganisation necessary?

Ofsted reports show that the standard of education in Merton is generally good, but test results of Merton schools are still not in line with those of neighbouring Boroughs. Merton's neighbouring Boroughs all follow a two tier educational system. This inconsistency could be partly attributed to the break up of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 results from a three tier system.

how will the reorganisation help?

The reorganisation will help to improve the educational standards by remedying a few key problems. The British National Curriculum breaks students' educational development into four "Key Stages". Currently, pupils now study part of Key Stage

2 in first school and then move to a middle school to complete Key stage 2. The same problem happens in Key Stage 3 when students move from middle school to high school. When the new two tier system is instituted, pupils will no longer have to switch schools in the middle of Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. This new organisation will allow for continuity in the education of the pupils.

Children switching schools fewer times (two as opposed to three) will also help to improve standards. Studies show that each time a child is forced to change schools, he or she often regresses slightly. This may be attributed to many factors. Children, can be distracted from their studies because they are focused on re-adapting themselves to their new environment, new teachers and new classmates.

Also, the new schools system will give parents 43 primary schools to choose from, including church schools, for their child aged 5. Before the reorganisation, there are only 37 first schools. A greater number of schools may mean that children will be able to attend schools closer to their homes, making it possible for parents to walk with their children to school. As an added benefit to parents, since schools will be catering to a broader age range of pupils, children will be able to attend the same schools as their siblings for longer periods of time.

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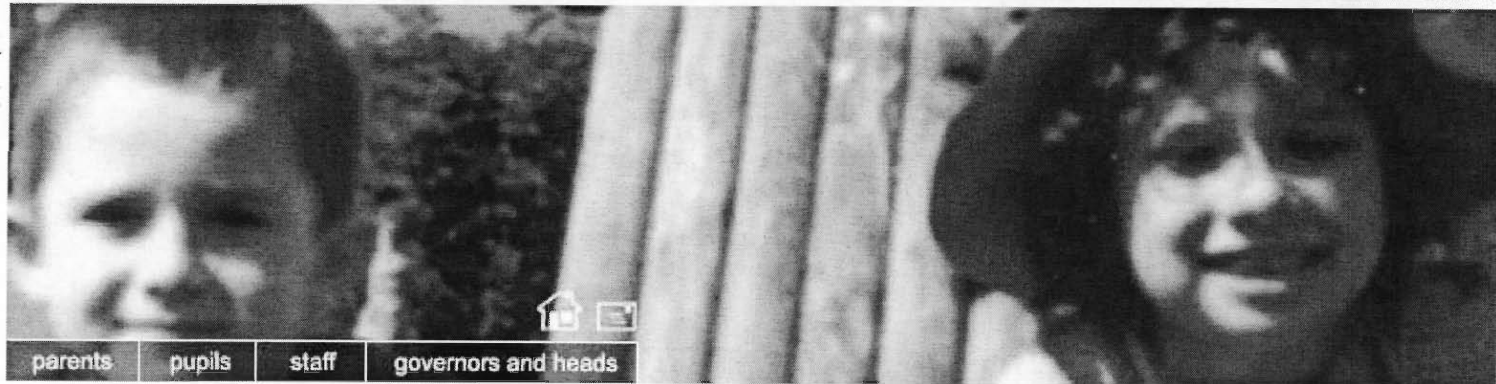
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[Merton Schools Reorganisation](#)



information for parents Frequently Asked Questions

[printable version of this page](#)

Some commonly asked questions regarding schools reorganisation in Merton:

- [When will these changes take place?](#)
- [Why do I have to apply for a Primary school place for my child during the transition period?](#)
- [Will there be building work at my child's school?](#)
- [When will first schools becoming primary schools start accepting older children?](#)
- [When will the middle schools becoming primary schools start accepting younger children?](#)
- [When will the high schools become secondary schools?](#)
- [What is happening to amalgamating schools?](#)
- [My child attends a school which will close at the end of the Summer term in 2002. Will his/her education be affected?](#)
- [What will happen to school staff?](#)
- [How do I apply for a place in a Nursery during the transition period?](#)
- [How do I apply for a place for a rising five year old?](#)
- [How do I apply for a place in a Primary school during the transition period?](#)
- [How do I apply for a place in a Secondary school during the transition period?](#)
- [What should I do now?](#)

Q. When will these changes take place?

A. The change to a primary and secondary school system will be phased in over 3 years, September 2001/2002, September 2002/2003 and, 2003/2004. From September 2001, for the first time, parents of children in first schools will be able to apply, if they wish, for a Year 4 place at the school their child already attends.

Children starting in Reception in September 2001 will be the first children in the new system who do not have to go through an application process in the middle of the primary school phase.

Q. Why do I have to apply for a Primary school place for my child during the transition period?

A. Some parents have asked why their child cannot simply stay on at their first school which is becoming a primary school without making an application for a place. This is because if all children stayed on in their first schools there would be no children going into middle schools becoming primary schools which would then close.

In addition, some first schools will close and others will reduce in size. We need middle/primary schools as well as first/primary schools to be able to offer a wide choice and proper geographic spread of schools. Merton wants every family to have a primary school within a mile of their home; most families will have a primary school within half a mile of their home. This is why there have to be carefully managed transition arrangements across the Borough.

Q. Will there be building work at my child's school?

A. Most schools will require some building work or adaptations to the existing buildings. The programme of building work will be discussed with the Head Teacher and every effort made to minimise disruption. The health and safety of the children is of paramount importance and measures will be put in place to ensure that children are not put at risk.

Q. When will first schools becoming primary schools start accepting older children?

A. First schools becoming primary schools will have a Year 4 for the first time in September 2001 (with the exception of Wimbledon Park and Bishop Gilpin First schools which had a Year 4 intake in September 2000 to meet special circumstances). The children in Year 4 in September 2001 will become Year 5 in September 2002 and Year 6 in September 2003. There will be no Year 5 or Year 6 intake to first schools becoming primary schools in September 2001, 2002, or 2003.

Q. When will the middle schools becoming primary schools start

accepting younger children?

accepting younger children?

A. Middle schools becoming primary schools will have an intake of Reception children for the first time in September 2001. These children will continue through the school until they leave at age 11 to go to secondary school.

The middle schools becoming primary schools will open nursery units in September 2002.

Q. When will the high schools become secondary schools?

A. The high schools will become secondary schools in September 2002 when two year groups of children will start, one year group into Year 7 and one year group into Year 8.

Q. What is happening to amalgamating schools?

A. Where there are two schools on the same site, both schools will close and one new school will open in September 2002. The schools which share a site and will be treated in this way are Malmesbury First and Malmesbury Middle, Tudor First and Morden Farm Middle, and Alfred Mizen First and Greenwood First. Governing Bodies have already been appointed to the three new schools, until the school opens they are known as temporary governing bodies. The temporary governing bodies of the three schools have made appointments to the position of Head. The Head Teacher designate of each new school will work with the temporary governing body to appoint the rest of the staff during school until the new school opens in September 2002.

Where they have not already done so, the temporary governing body is likely to work with the community to decide on a name and uniform for the school. It is likely that any new uniform will be phased in over time.

Q. My child attends a school which will close at the end of the Summer term in 2002. Will his/her education be affected?

A. The staff and governors at schools which will close are working with support from the Local Education Authority to make sure there is continuity of education for your child. If you have a specific question regarding your child please contact his/her school.

Q. What will happen to school staff?

A. Merton will endeavour to ensure that all staff know where their position will be in the new school system in the 2000/2001 academic year. Most of the staff appointed to new positions will take up their post in September 2002, however a few will move before or after that date to accommodate class changes as part of the transition arrangements. As Merton's schools will be teaching the same number of children the same curriculum, but in a redistributed pattern, we do not anticipate any redundancies among staff. Indeed, Merton is likely to require more teachers in the new structure than we have now. Merton conducted

a skills audit in the Autumn Term of 1999 and has used this information to specify a large programme of training for teaching and support staff.

A wide range of teaching and development opportunities for staff commenced in the Summer term 2000 and will continue throughout the transition period.

Q. How do I apply for a place in a Nursery during the transition period?

A. You should register at the school you would like your child to attend when he/she is between 18 months and 2 years. The school will then send you an application form and admissions booklet relating to your child's year of entry at the appropriate time. The earliest a child can enter the nursery is the term after his/her third birthday. The Council produces a booklet on nurseries which sets out the schools available and the number of places in each nursery and the date when applications have to be returned. The booklet also sets out the admissions criteria. You will be sent a letter advising you whether or not you have obtained a place at your first preference school.

Q. How do I apply for a place for a rising five year old?

A. You should register at the school which is your first preference for your child to attend. You should register when your child is around 3 to 4 years. The school will send you an application form and admissions booklet relating to your child's year of entry at the appropriate time. The Council will produce a booklet for admission to first or primary school which sets out the schools available and the number of places in each school and the date when applications have to be returned. The booklet also sets out the admissions criteria. Church of England and Roman Catholic schools deal with their own applications.

You will receive a letter advising you whether or not you have obtained a place at your first preference school.

Q. How do I apply for a place in a Nursery during the transition period?

A. You should register at the school you would like your child to attend when he/she is between 18 months and 2 years. The school will then send you an application form and admissions booklet relating to your child's year of entry at the appropriate time. The earliest a child can enter the nursery is the term after his/her third birthday. The Council produces a booklet on nurseries which sets out the schools available and the number of places in each nursery and the date when applications have to be returned. The booklet also sets out the admissions criteria. You will be sent a letter advising you whether or not you have obtained a place at your first preference school.

Q. How do I apply for a place in a Secondary school during the transition period?

The middle or primary school your child attends will issue a booklet which sets out the schools available and the number of places in each. You should complete an application form, contained in the booklet, at the appropriate time and return it to the school your child attends.

As soon as the allocations have been finalised you will be advised, at the same time as all other parents, of the result of your application. The letter will be sent to you through your child's current school.

Q. What should I do now?

A. Make sure you understand how the changes affect your family. Look at the Transition Arrangement information and make a note of when you will need to make an application for a place in a primary or secondary school for your child. The transition arrangements are rather complex and you may need to make an application at a time you would not do so currently. For example, during the transition period children in first schools will not all apply for a place at the end of Year 3, some will apply for a place at the end of Year 2 and, two year groups of children will start in secondary school in September 2002.

Some current first and middle schools becoming primaries will increase in size and some will decrease in size. Make sure you read the admissions booklet and are aware of how many places each school will have for the year group you are applying for and consider the admissions criteria.

The booklet and application form will clearly show the closing date when completed forms should be returned.

If your child already attends a Merton first becoming primary or middle becoming primary school the booklet and application form will be given to him/her to bring home to you in the academic year prior to your child's transition arrangement.

If you are unsure about how to apply for a place for your child please ask your child's school or contact School Admissions at the Civic Centre on 020 8545 3262.

If you have questions or concerns on other issues related to schools reorganisation please contact the schools reorganisation team on 020 8545 4867.

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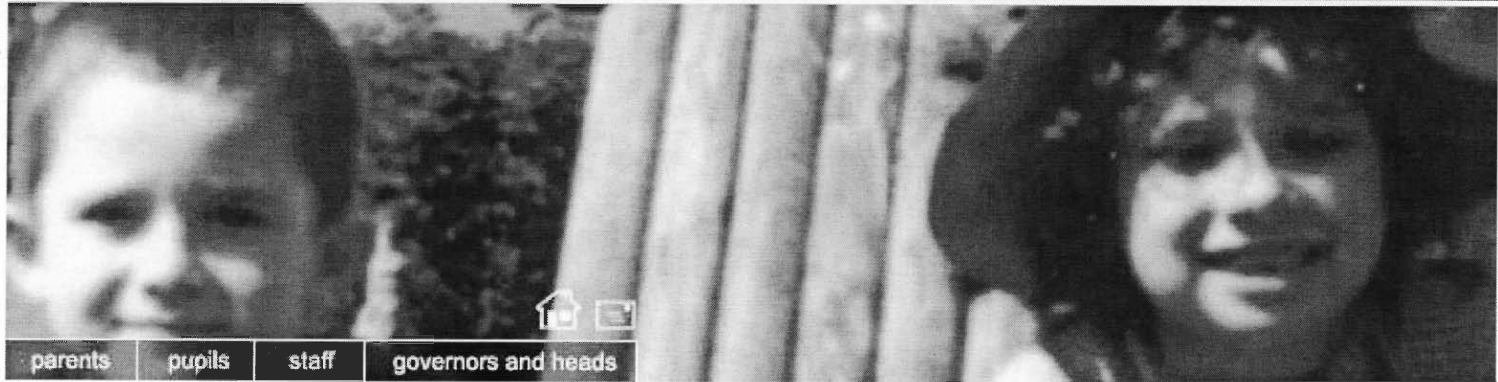
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your pupil

pages of interest

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[the pupil application process](#)

[how the reorganisation will affect your pupil](#)

This page is designed for parents and school staff that want to know more about how the Schools Reorganisation will affect their pupils.

Click on any of the links to find out more.

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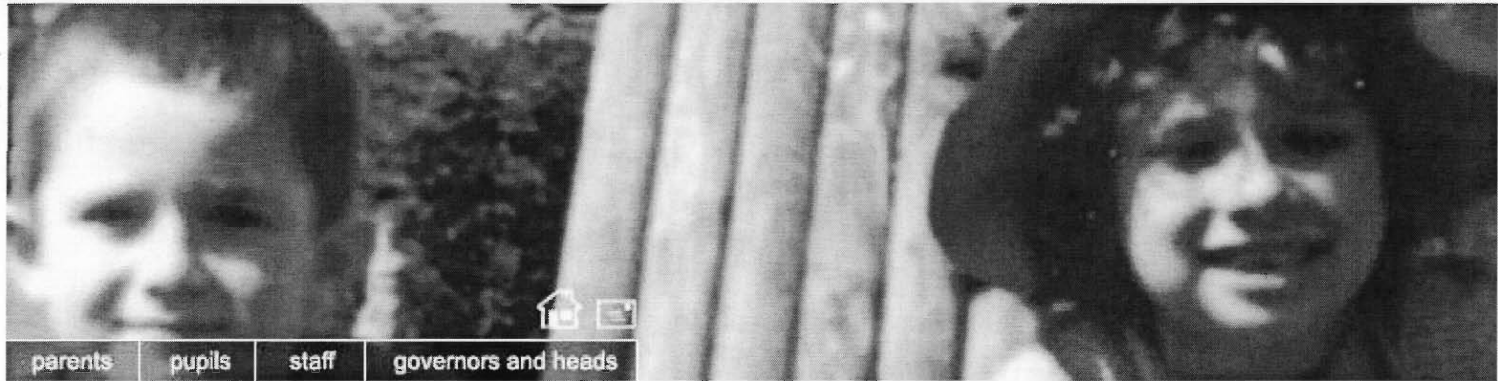
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your child

At some point in the next 5 years, all students will need to apply for a place in either a primary or secondary school. For step-by-step instructions outlining this process, select your child's birth date below. (THIS DOES NOT APPLY TO ROMAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS)

my child was born between

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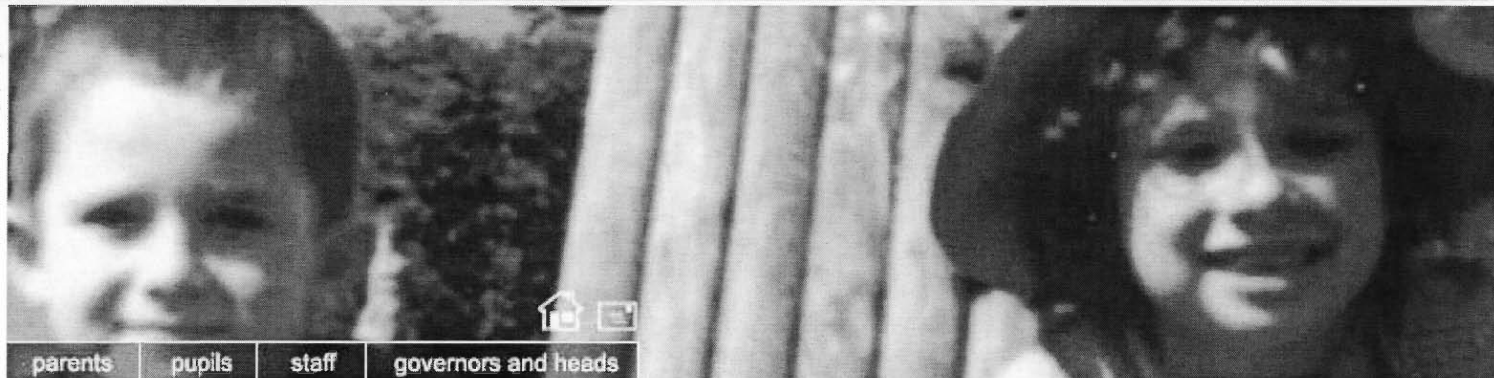
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the effects of the reorganisation

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Following Schools Reorganisation Merton will have:

- New buildings and/or improved facilities in most schools, including a new mixed secondary school in Mitcham, following major rebuilding
- More ICT facilities per pupil
- PFI initiative in place for servicing and maintaining schools, providing greater opportunities for community use of school buildings
- A two tier education system in line with neighbouring Boroughs enabling Merton to retain more pupils in-borough
- A sound system to build and improve standards across the board

In achieving this Merton will have:

- A 3 year transition period to minimise disruption to pupils and staff
- An admissions process whereby pupils will not change schools more frequently than previously
- Planned placement procedures to provide staffing stability and help retain

existing staff

- A full programme of staff development and re-training to enable staff to meet changing needs and demands
- An agreement with contractors to ensure building works are carried out during school holidays wherever possible.

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pupils



governors and heads



schools information

Every school in Merton will be affected by the reorganisation in some way. Here, you can find information specific to each school in the borough. Whether you are looking for information about the school your child currently attends or are looking for potential new schools, you may find this page useful.

find a school by name

find a school by location





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Edgehill Road
Mitcham
Surrey CR4 2HZ

Phone: 8640-4795

Beecholme First School is a two form entry school situated on the Mitcham / Streatham border. Beecholme is a single storey building set within extensive grounds. The school is very multicultural in character with children from Sri Lanka, India, and Nigeria. Our recent OFSTED report recognises the marked improvement in results over the last year and commends the quality of relationships within school, which contributed to it being a very happy community.

By September 2003 the school will have developed into a one form entry Primary School. Plans are already afoot to develop the curriculum and the school's provision for older children. Plans include a residential school journey for Year 4.

The staff and parents are excited about the changes ahead. We believe we offer a firm foundation to schooling that we can now extend throughout the primary range.



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gorringe park middle school

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Gorringe Park is a co-educational school for pupils aged 8-12 based in Mitcham, with a well stocked library well resourced classrooms and a structured curriculum it is the most improved school in the Borough.

Following reorganisation Gorringe Park will become an all through form entry Primary.

Gorringe's latest Ofsted report said, "there are good standards of attainment, very good behaviour and ethos for learning, good quality teaching across the school and strong leadership and management."

Sandy Lane
Mitcham
Surrey SM4 2YA

Phone: 8648-1451

Website:
www.gorringepark.merton.sch.uk



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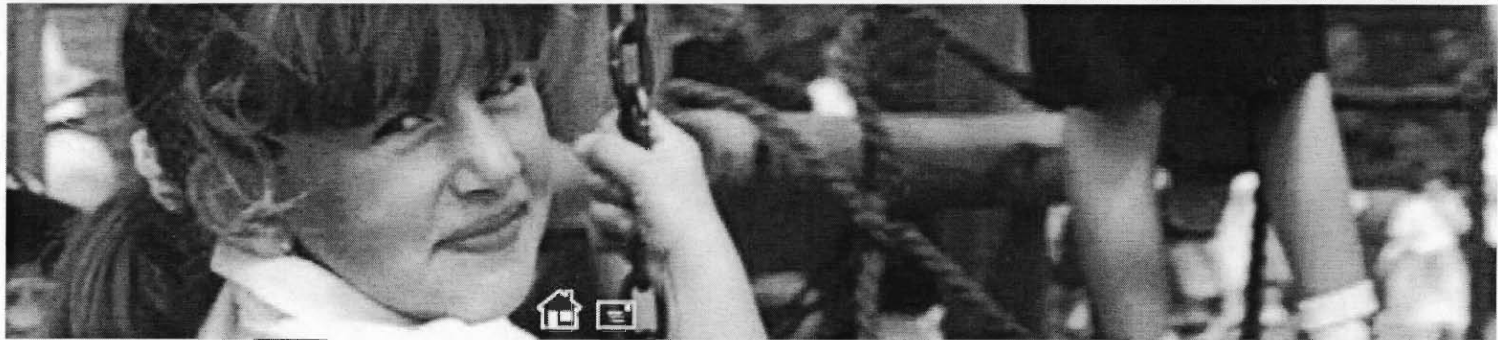
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raynes park high school

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no photo available

Raynes Park School is a co-educational comprehensive school situated in Merton. The school is popular with an increasing number of parents having made the school their first choice.

Following reorganisation Raynes Park will become an 8 form entry Secondary school with 1200 pupils.

The schools aim is to create a caring, challenging and secure environment where all pupils develop academically and socially so that they are prepared to take their places as responsible citizens within society.

Bushey Road
London SW20 0JL

Phone: 8946-4112



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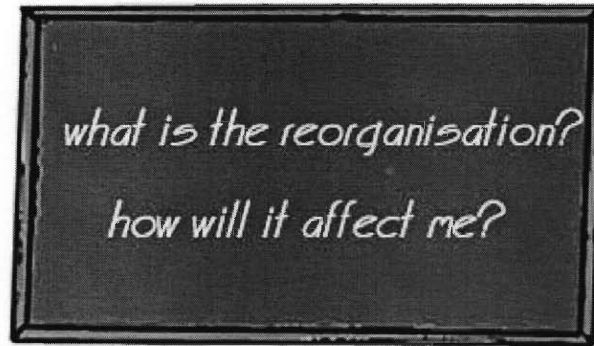
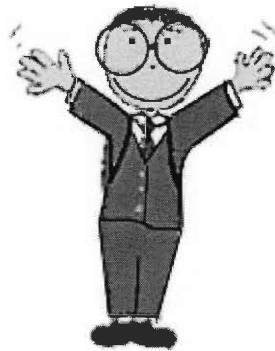
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how will the reorganisation affect me?

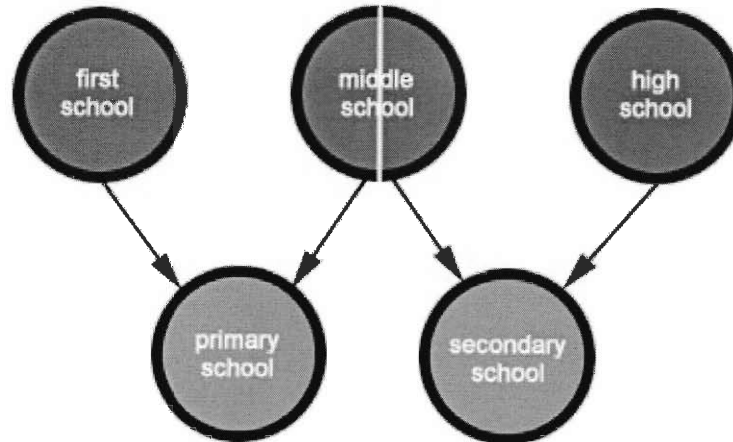
By the year 2002, Merton's schools will change from having three different types of schools (first, middle, and high) to having two types of schools (Primary and Secondary). This means that all the years that used to be in First school will now be in Primary school and all the years that used to be in High school will now be in Secondary school.

So, what about the Middle schools? Well, half of the years that were in Middle School will now be in Primary school and the other half will be in Secondary school. Look at the picture to see what we mean.

Click [here](#) to find out why the reorganisation is happening.

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the reorganisation for pupils



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why is the reorganisation happening?

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The reason that the reorganisation is happening is that the people who are in charge of the schools, along with your teachers, want to give you the best education possible. They think that by switching to Primary and Secondary schools, you will have a better experience while you're in school and learn more as well. So what makes them think that?

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- You'll have to switch schools less.
[\(Click to learn more about this\)](#)

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- Key Stages work better in Primary and Secondary schools.
[\(Click to learn more about this\)](#)

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you'll have to switch schools less

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With only two types of schools, you'll have to switch schools less often. Which means that you don't have to get used to a new school with new teachers and new classmates as often. The more comfortable you are in school, the better you learn!

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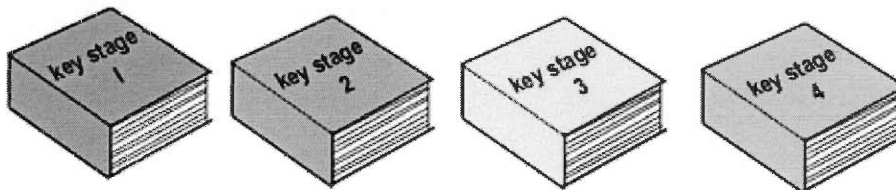
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Another reason is that Primary and Secondary schools work better with something called the "British National Curriculum". Basically, the British National Curriculum is a way to make sure that every pupil in every school in England is learning about the same thing at about the same time.

The way it works is that all the stuff you learn while in school is broken up into four "Key Stages". You can think of the Key Stages as four books that you have to read:



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Now think of each type of school as a box to put books in:

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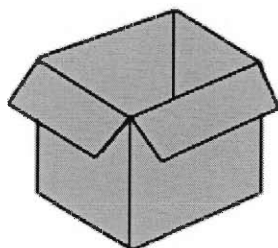
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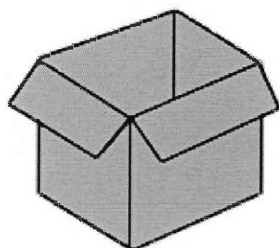
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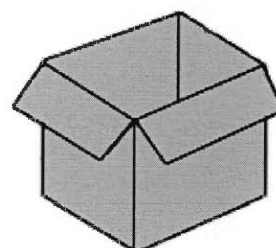
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first school



middle school



high school



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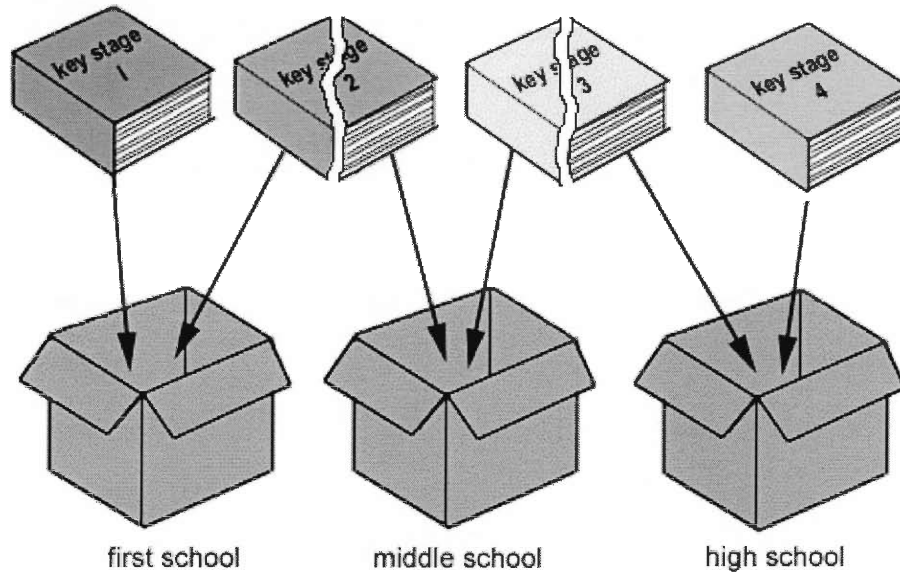
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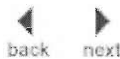
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key stages work better in primary and secondary schools

Now we have to divide up the four books and put them in three boxes just like your teachers have to divide up the four Key Stages and put them in three types of schools. Putting four books in three boxes is hard! To do it evenly, we'd have to rip two of the books in half:



It's pretty hard to read a book after it's been torn in half. It's also pretty hard to learn a Key Stage after it's been torn in half too. So how can we change it so we don't have to tear any of the books? Go to the next page to find out!



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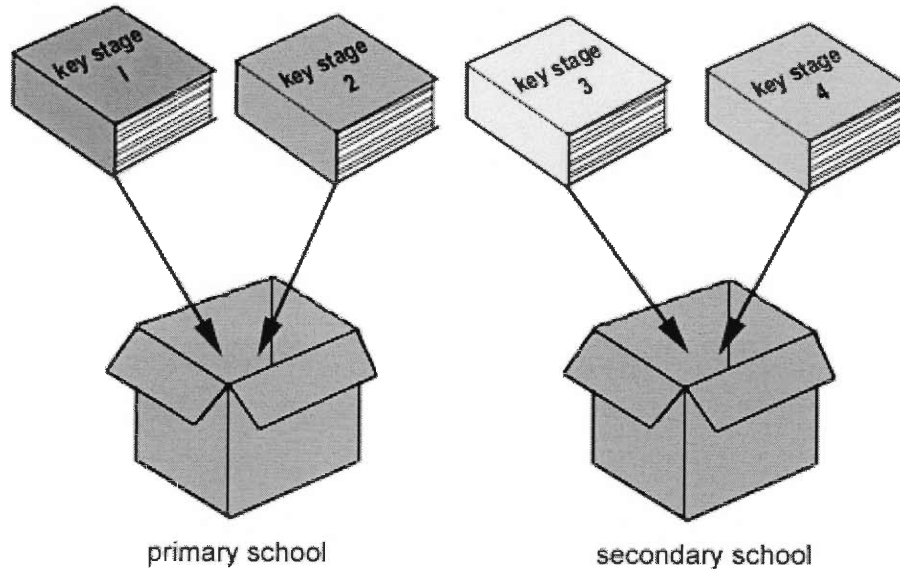
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key stages work better in primary and secondary schools

If we have only two boxes, we can put two books in each one just like if we have two types of schools (Primary and Secondary), we can put two Key Stages in each:

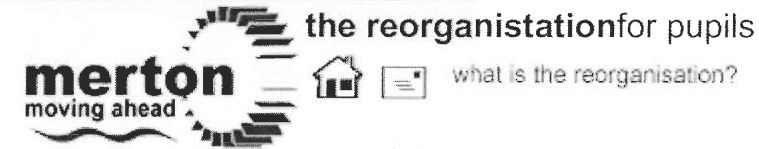


It's a lot easier to read two books out of one box and then read two books out the other box than it is to read half a book out of one box and then have to go to another box to finish it. With two schools, you can finish your key stages in the same school. You'll never have to switch in the middle!



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year 1

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Next year, you will apply for a new primary school (there are a bunch of them to see them all, click [here](#))

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Once you get accepted into a new primary school you will start Year 3 at your new primary school in September of 2002.

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year 2

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Next year, you will apply for a new primary school (there are a bunch of them to see them all, click [here](#))

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Once you get accepted into a new primary school you will start Year 4 at your new primary school in September of 2002.

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Then, when you get to Year 6, you will apply for one of the new secondary schools and you will start there in September of 2005.

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year 3

Local Community Information

You probably already applied for a new primary school and will be finding out which primary school you are going to. To see a list of all schools click [here](#).

Contact List for Council Services

You will start at your new primary school in September of 2001 (next school year).

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Then, when you get to Year 6, you will apply for one of the new secondary schools and you will start there in September of 2004.

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year 4

Local Community Information

You stay at your middle school until you get to Year 6 and then you get to apply to a new secondary school. To see a list of all schools click [here](#).

Contact List for Council Services

You will start at your new secondary school in September of 2003.

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year 5

Local Community Information

You stay at your middle school until you get to Year 6 and then you get to apply to a new secondary school. To see a list of all schools click [here](#).

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You will start at your new secondary school in September of 2002.

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year 6

Local Community Information

You stay at your middle school until you get to Year 7 and then you get to apply to a new secondary school. To see a list of all schools click [here](#).

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You will start at your new secondary school in September of 2002.

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year 7

You have probably already applied for a high school. To see a list of all schools click [here](#).

In September of 2001 you will start at your new secondary school.



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information for school staff

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This page is designed for school staff and has links to information designed specifically for you. Just click on any of the links to find out more about the reorganisation and what the reorganisation committee is doing to make this process easier for you.

Depending on the status of your school, you may have to re-apply for positions either within your own school or within other schools from the LEA. Here, you'll find useful information related to the application process.

Also, you can find out about the changes that will be made to your school and information for the pupils at your school.

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key dates for the application process

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The application and interview process will be completed by the week of 2 April 2001 for teaching and support staff posts.

Key Dates of the Second Ring Fence that may apply to you:

2 March 2001 - School Staff applications submitted to the LEA

7 March 2001 - Applications distributed to GB's for shortlisting

Week of 12 March 2001 - Shortlisting information to LEA

19-21 March 2001 - Interviews for teaching posts MA3 and above (starting with most senior posts)

22-26 March 2001 - Interviews for teaching posts MA2 and MA1

29 March 2001 - Closing date for reception post applications

30 March 2001 - Closing date for nursery post applications

27-30 March 2001 - Interviews for MPS teaching posts and support staff

Week of 2 April 2001 - Any outstanding interviews. LEA monitors and



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interviewing tips

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We realise that interviews can be a daunting process and especially if you have not been interviewed for a significant amount of time. Here are ten helpful tips for any interview:

- 1.** Start with the Personal Specification. This document describes the knowledge, skills and abilities needed to carry out the job. Try to guess what the questions might be from it and ask others to help you with this.
- 2.** Prepare answers for the questions you have identified and if you find any gaps in your knowledge, research the information.
- 3.** Practise speaking your answers
- 4.** Think about what you do when you are nervous. Whatever it is, identifying it is halfway towards controlling it.
- 5.** Aim to arrive a few minutes early.
- 6.** Listen to the questions carefully and take time to pause and think about your answer.
- 7.** If you have difficulty answering a question, the panel will prompt you. This gives you another chance and there is often a clue in the question.

- 8.** Make sure you supply evidence that you meet the personal specification.
- 9.** If you get stuck on a question, ask if you can leave the question and come back to it.
- 10.** Be confident!

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stress management

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The Schools Reorganisation Committee realises that reorganisation is a difficult and stressful process for staff and are offering support for teaching and support staff.

Plans For Stress Management:

- Dedicated telephone advice line for all teaching and support staff. This will be provided by the Teachers' Benevolent Fund. It will be staffed by trained professionals who will be familiar with the issues pertinent to Merton. This line is totally confidential!
- Review of the training needs survey outcomes carried out in Spring 2000 to ascertain the level of requirement for stress management training
- Supply of information to schools on other providers of stress management training
- Giving school staff access to individual confidential counselling sessions via the Occupational Health Service

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This page is designed for headteachers and governors and has links to information designed specifically for you. Just click on any of the links to find out more about the reorganisation and what the reorganisation committee is doing to make this process easier for you.

Depending on the status of your school, many of your staff may have to re-apply for positions either within your own school or within other schools from the LEA. Here, you'll find useful information related to the application process.

Also, you can find out about the changes that will be made to your school, your school staff, and information for the pupils at your school.

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new headteacher updates

[printable version of this page](#)

Headteacher/Deputy Headteacher Post Updates (for September 2001):

Paulette Braithwaite - New headteacher designate of Eastfields/Rowan Secondary School

Marion Pretlove - Acting headteacher at Malmesbury First School will be the new headteacher at Malmesbury Primary School

Gill Bonner - Acting deputy headteacher at Malmesbury Middle will be the new deputy headteacher at Malmesbury Primary School

Gill Wilson - Acting headteacher at Morden Farm Middle School and Tudor First School will be the new headteacher at Aragon Primary (amalgamation of Tudor First and Morden Farm Middle)

Jane Down - Acting deputy headteacher at Tudor First will be one of the new deputy headteacher at Aragon Primary School

Mike Freeman - Acting deputy headteacher at Morden Farm Middle will be one of the new deputy headteachers at Aragon Primary School

Viv Tombs - Acting headteacher at Alfred Mizen First School will be the new headteacher of the Alfred Mizen/Greenwood Primary School

Dilys Coy - Acting deputy headteacher at Greenwood First will be one of the new deputy headteachers at Alfred Mizen/Greenwood Primary School

Sally Arthery - Acting deputy headteacher at William Morris Middle will be one of the new deputy headteachers at Alfred Mizen/Greenwood Primary School

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about the pfi

[printable version of this page](#)

The Secondary Schools Private Finance Initiative Project

It is intended that the building work required for the reorganised secondary schools will be incorporated into a Private Finance Initiative public private partnership contract. Under this contract a private company or consortium will be responsible for designing and building or refurbishing the premises required, and for raising the funds to pay for this work, and then for managing the buildings and sites for a period of 25 years. The Council will pay the private contractor a monthly fee for providing and managing the premises over the life of the contract. Schools will continue to be responsible for educational services and other pastoral and community activity.

In June 2000 the DfEE approved this approach for the secondary schools, and allocated special funding to support the cost of the scheme to the Council. This approval authorises the Council to proceed with the procurement process, which involves selecting the private contractor and agreeing the details of the contract.

PFI procurement is on a negotiated basis. This means that the Council sets out its requirements for the type of premises required and services to be delivered in the form of an "output specification". Consultation with governor and teacher representatives of schools on the output specification for this project is being conducted via the Output Specification Development Group. Bidders are asked to make proposals for how they will meet these requirements. There then follows a series of discussions, and evaluation of the proposals, to choose the best bidder, and further negotiations to sort out the details of the contract. The final contract will specify full details of the design and building

contract. The final contract will specify full details of the design and building work to be undertaken to each of the schools, and all of the services to be provided, including the staffing and other resources, and the systems, procedures, and management arrangements which the contractor will use. This process gives the Council, and staff and governors of individual schools, plenty of opportunity to examine, influence, and ultimately satisfy themselves about the detail of these arrangements. However, it also means that the procurement process takes longer than traditional tendering does. The theory is that it should produce better services, and it may also result in faster design and construction phases.

To find out more about the bidders, click [here](#)

For a timetable of the PFI process, click [here](#)

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support for governors

What support is being offered to governors?

The LEA is providing training to governors via its central programme. Support and advice is available through the Governor Support Team and the Schools Reorganisation Team. If you have any questions or would like some advice, contact Sandra Hickey on (020) 8545 3923 or Jane Wilson on (020) 8545 4058.

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training opportunities for headteachers and governors

Training opportunities for head teachers and governors:

2 May 2001 - Primary head teachers and deputies - further information forthcoming

Contact Pauline Hoare on (020) 8545 4066 for other training opportunities.

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merton schools reorganisation

Please feel free to contact us with any concerns you may have regarding the reorganisation process.

Department of Education, Leisure, and Libraries
For general questions about the reorganisation:
020 8545 3276

Use this form to submit your questions electronically.

Your Name:

Your Email:

Subject:

Your Message:

Appendix K – Web Site Maintenance Manual

MERTON SCHOOLS REORGANISATION WEBSITE
Maintenance Manual

26 February 2001

Kerri Dagesse

Theresa Green

Matt Tucker

Charles Ulrich

About this Document

This document is intended as a guide for non-technical staff who may need to update existing pages of the Schools Reorganisation web site. Such updates could include correcting dated information on specific pages of the site, adding information, or otherwise modifying content on those pages. For more extensive maintenance, please contact the Web Development Team.

Terms Used in this Document

Browser – A browser is the program you use to navigate websites on the internet. The most commonly used browsers are Netscape Navigator and Microsoft Internet Explorer.

HTML – HyperText Markup Language. HTML is a programming language used to create web pages. Every web page is actually a page of HTML code. Your web browser looks at that code and interprets it as the words and images you see when you call up the page. For an example of this, most browsers have a “view source” option that will let you see the actual HTML code behind the web page you are viewing. Look for this menu option or consult your browser’s help system for details.

URL – Universal Resource Locator. This is the “address” of a webpage. For example, <http://www.merton.gov.uk> is the URL of Merton’s webpage. Every web page on the internet has a unique URL. The URL of the page you are currently viewing is always displayed in the Address Bar of your browser.

Tag – Tags are pieces of HTML code that are used to format text on the page. They are always surrounded by “less than” and “greater than” symbols (< and >). For example, the tag would cause the text following it to be displayed in boldface and the tag would specify the end of the bold faced text.

Step 1: Obtain the Page

Before editing a page, you must first obtain a copy of it. To do this, use your browser to navigate to the desired page. Make a note of the URL.

Contact the IT department and request that a copy of the page be emailed to you. Use the URL to specify the page when speaking to IT. When you receive the page, it will usually come as an attachment to the email. Save the attachment to an easy to remember location on your computer (for details about how to do this, consult your email client’s help system).

Step 2: Modify the Page

Open Notepad (Start Menu > Programs > Accessories > Notepad). Go to the File menu and select Open. Navigate to the location you saved the web page and open it. What you are now looking at is the HTML code for the page you are modifying. Most of it may not make sense to you. However, we’ve included markers on every page to indicate where the actual content of the page begins and ends. They look like this:

<!--BEGIN CONTENT-->

<!--END CONTENT-->

Either scroll through the code to find the BEGIN CONTENT marker or use Notepad's "Find" feature to search for the text "begin content". When you locate this marker, you should recognize the text after it as the content on this page.

You'll notice that each paragraph is preceded by a tag that looks like this:

<P ALIGN="justify">

The P means that you are at the start of a new paragraph. The ALIGN="justify" means that the new paragraph will be justified.

Editing the Existing Content

If you are simply making a few changes to the information that is already there, just modify the text as you would normally and save the page.

Removing Content

To remove content, simply highlight it, delete it, and save the page. If you are removing an entire paragraph, make sure to remove the <P ALIGN="justify"> tag as well.

Adding Content

To add a new paragraph, create a new <P ALIGN="justify"> tag where you would like to insert the new text. Following the tag, enter the new tag and save the page.

Step 3: Update the Page

Now that you have made the changes to the page, send an email to IT including the page as an attachment. Make sure you specify the original URL of the page so that IT will know where to put it.

Step 4: Verify the Changes

Once IT has updated the page, use your browser to navigate to it and make sure the changes you made are reflected in the page.

Step 5: Have a Cup of Tea

Nice work.