

Parsons Down Partnership Building and Refurbishment Project

Frequently Asked Questions

Introduction

Parsons Down Partnership of Schools is embarking on a building project to rationalise our use of underused school buildings by focusing all teaching and learning in a refurbished and improved Junior School building. The project will also significantly improve the provision of play space and natural areas on the school site.

To help parents and carers, staff and interested members of the public understand more about our project we have prepared these Questions and Answers which we will add to if further questions are sent to us.

Why is this happening?

The demand for school places for young children has been falling for some time across the whole of Thatcham. This is because the population in Thatcham is aging and fewer children are being born. The pace of house building in Thatcham has also decreased markedly, meaning new families with children needing school places are not moving into the area at the same rate they once were. Virtually all schools in Thatcham are facing a situation where they cannot fill all the places in their reception classes.

Falling pupil numbers matter because if a school does not fill all the places it can offer its income to pay for teachers, support staff, buildings and other running costs falls significantly because the funding it gets is on the basis of pupil numbers on its roll. As each year goes by and a school gets smaller the income falls but some costs are fixed and still have to be paid. This would mean less investment in the teaching of pupils and taking measures such as integrating two different age groups together in one class (called vertical integration).

At Parsons Down Partnership we recognised this challenge and working with West Berkshire Council, and following a public consultation, it was agreed to reduce the size of the schools from three forms of entry (90 pupils) each year to two forms of entry from September 2020. However, following a further analysis of demographic trends in Thatcham by the Council in the summer 2020 and considering the actual demand for places this year a further decision was taken by the Council (in discussion with the Schools) to reduce the Parsons Down Partnership intake of pupils to one form of entry a year (30 pupils) from September 2021. This will better match demand and supply for school places for the School and will put us on a sound financial footing and able to plan for the future much better than we can now.

The consequence of this decision is that in the future we will only need to occupy a single refurbished 'Junior' school building and the infant school and early years buildings will be surplus to requirements.

What are the benefits of this Project?

Currently we are operating across three buildings – Early Years, Infants and Junior School buildings. As our numbers fall, we will not need the Early Years and Infants buildings and to retain them would be very uneconomic. We will make savings on expenditure on rates, cleaning, heating and power, administration, maintenance and other running costs by focusing on one school building. Moreover, our school leaders will not have to manage the schools split across three sites, enabling them to make much more productive use of their time. Children will benefit from having a smoother transition between the early years, infant

and junior phases of their education as they will not have the added challenge of moving to a completely different building.

What will happen to the Infant School building?

Once work on the refurbishment and improvement of the current Junior School building has been completed and the Infant school building vacated it will be demolished to make way for an new multi-use games area (MUGA) which will be used by the pupils and potentially by the community out of school hours (although it will not be flood lit). The remainder of the area will be given over to a new wildlife and wildflower area which will be a wonderful new educational resource for the children as well as great boost for wildlife. Our presentation document on this website shows where the MUGA and wildflower areas will be located.

Where will Early Years children be taught?

The refurbishment and improvement of the Junior school building includes the provision of new refurbished classrooms for early years pupils and an exciting new outdoor classroom/play area specifically for them. The classrooms are located facing Lower Way and the outdoor teaching and play areas will incorporate some of the grassed area on Lower Way immediately outside the current school boundary. Have a look at the drawings showing what we will provide in this area in our presentation document on this website.

What will happen to the Schools entrance points?

The majority of the current access points to the school will be maintained. You will still be able to access the site via Paynesdown Road, Lower Way and Herons Way. However, we will no longer be able to use the Ashbourne Way gate.

What will happen if demand for school places in Thatcham starts to grow again?

Demographic change impacting on the demand for school places does not take place quickly. If in the longer term it becomes apparent that more school places are needed in the Parsons Down catchment area, then the Council has said it will invest in the school to ensure demand can be met and the current plans allow for this to happen.

What is the timing for all of this work?

The work will be split into three phases –

Phase 1 – April 2021 to September 2021 (estimated)

Works to improve the Junior School comprising internal alterations and the provision of a new early year's external play and teaching area including a new canopy over part of the area.

Phase 2 – September 2021 to December 2021 (estimated)

The infant school building will be demolished, and a new Multi-use Games Area and wildflower meadow will be provided.

Phase 3 – To be undertaken in 2022/2023

Demolition of the Early Years buildings when they are no longer required.

How will it affect my child?

As with any building project, there will be some disruption to the day to day running of the school. Safety is paramount and careful consideration has been made to ensure that pupils, staff and the community are safe. This will be continually monitored and reviewed.

In Phase 1, due to start in April 2021, children will continue to be taught in the Junior School building but some areas will be closed off to staff and pupils to keep them safe. We will try and minimise the disruption to pupils and give you as much advance warning as we can. Phase 1 is due to be completed at the end of August 2021 ready for the start of the new school year. It is our plan to accommodate as many of the pupils in the Junior School building as we can from September 2021 and our current plan is that 11 out of the 13 classes will be in the Junior School building with 2 classes taught in the current Early Years Foundation Stage building.

In Phase 2, the Infant School building will not be used and will be prepared for demolition. The area will be sealed off, made secure and will be out of bounds. 2 classes will be taught in the Early Years Foundation Stage building and will have access to the outdoor space, playground and field as well as the Junior School building.

In Phase 3, September 2022, it is anticipated that all pupils will be accommodated in the Junior School building.

We are unable to confirm which year groups and areas will be affected at this moment but as soon as this is confirmed affected year groups will be told.

What will happen to the land that the School will no longer need?

At the completion of the project the Schools will no longer have need of the playing field to the east of the infant school and the current site of the Early Years buildings. As a consequence of this the land will revert to the control of the Council and they will take a decision about its future use.

How much will the project cost?

The current Council budget provision for this project is £2.3m approximately. The actual cost may well vary from this current estimate.

How can I find out more about this project?

On the school website we have put a public presentation which has been prepared by the building project team. Please email your questions to - nicola.lang@westberks.gov.uk