

# Secondary Review in West Gateshead

Formal Consultation Summary  
July 2010

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## Introduction

During June/July 2009 the Council informally consulted on a review and reorganisation of secondary provision in the West of the Borough in order to produce a robust plan for addressing demographic trends and parental preferences and removing surplus places.

A consultation document was widely distributed, containing background information and three options for discussion. Eighteen meetings were held involving students, parents, governors, staff, trade unions, councillors and Area Forum. Several thousand written responses were received and it was clear there was no option around which there was general consensus.

At the Cabinet meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2009 it was proposed that the Council's preferred option would be based on developing a positive and inclusive vision of secondary education for the west area that meets the needs of the whole community. This vision would be based on having a single community school that offers the highest quality educational opportunities in state of the art buildings accessible by everyone.

It was further proposed that the vision can best be achieved by retaining and building on the strengths of Ryton Community School, and further developing its offer to the whole community by incorporating the best features and many strengths of Hookergate School. A new building is proposed, on a new site designed to the highest standards of environmental sustainability.

On 8<sup>th</sup> June 2010 Cabinet approved report to cover the statutory proposal to close Hookergate School which included the transition plans for merger with Ryton.

### Summary of the Proposal

- That there should be a single secondary community school that offers the highest quality educational opportunities for 11-19 year olds in the West area.
- The school will retain and build on the strengths of Ryton Comprehensive School and further develop its offer to the whole community by incorporating the best features and many strengths of Hookergate School.
- A new building is to be built on a new site that will be designed to the highest standards of environmental sustainability, reflecting the strong rural character of the area. We expect the new building to be completed by September 2013.
- Existing students at Hookergate will transfer to the existing Ryton School on a phased basis between 1<sup>st</sup> September 2010 and 1<sup>st</sup> September 2012. On 1<sup>st</sup> September 2013 all students will transfer to the new building.
- The catchment areas for the all the primary schools currently linked to Hookergate be included in the catchment area of the new school, together with all of Ryton's existing linked primary school catchment areas.

This report highlights the key findings from the consultation process, reporting on the results of the survey as well as comments made at the different consultation meetings and documents submitted by a range of stakeholders.

## **Methodology**

The consultation process included the following elements: -

### **Questionnaire**

A consultation document was designed to explore and seek comments on the proposals. The document also included a paper questionnaire for return to a FREEPOST address at Gateshead Council. Questionnaires were sent out, through the school network, to the parents, staff and governors at both Ryton Comprehensive and Hookergate Comprehensive. Questionnaires were also given to parents and governors of the primary schools linked to both secondary schools, via schools' distribution arrangements to their parents.

Further questionnaires were also distributed to union representatives, diocesan representatives, admission forum, west area forum, other secondary schools in the borough and the Director of Children's Services in neighboring Northumberland County Council.

The documentation was also available on the council's website, so as to give members of the wider public options, and a variety of ways to respond. The material on the website was identical to that in the consultation document to ensure that online results could be fed into the broader analysis of responses. There were some technical difficulties relating to the website during the consultation period, which only for short periods with minimal impact to acknowledge that a minority of respondents experienced some difficulty in responding we extended the online consultation period to Friday 6<sup>th</sup> August.

In addition, the Consultation Document was hand delivered to approx. 100 residents immediately adjacent to the proposed new site off Woodside Road.

### **Consultation Meetings**

Eight separate consultation meetings were held in the schools for the parents of children currently in or offered spaces from September 2010, members of staff and governors of Hookergate School or Ryton Comprehensive School.

Four separate public 'drop in' sessions for the parents from the linked primary schools and the wider community Four 'drop-in' sessions were held at the following venues: -

Hookergate School, Ryton Comprehensive School, Chopwell Primary School, Winlaton/Blaydon Surestart

A time, date and location of the meetings are attached.

We also held separate meetings with the following: -

- Ward Councillors
- Gateshead and Early Years and Childcare Partnership

The Headteachers at both Ryton Comprehensive and Hookergate Schools facilitated consultation sessions with the students at each school for their views on the proposals. The views are represented in the consultation returns.

### **Letters and Emails**

We received 25 letters and 3 emails commenting on the review and the options.

### **Other**

We also received the following documents which have been used as part of the consultation process: -

- Consultation response from Governors of Ryton Comprehensive School (copy attached).
- Consultation response from Governors of Hookergate School (copy attached).
- Consultation response from Governors of Kingsmeadow Comprehensive School.
- Consultation response from Governors of St. Thomas More RC School.
- Consultation response from Governors of Ryton Junior School.
- Consultation response from GMB / Unison unions
- 118 forms circulated by the Ryton Parents Group entitled "Protect Ryton Green Belt & Ryton School" objecting to the Council's proposal to build a new school on the site at Woodside Lane in Ryton.
- A paper from a resident entitled 'The Case Against The Preferred New Site Option'

## Key Findings from Response forms

Overall, 692 respondents returned a survey. Of these 80% were returned by post and 20% by the online survey. Duplicated responses received both by post and online are accounted as one online response.

Of the 692 returned surveys, 17 had not filled in profile information so we cannot account for the profile of 2.5% of the respondents.

Figure 1: Profile of participants

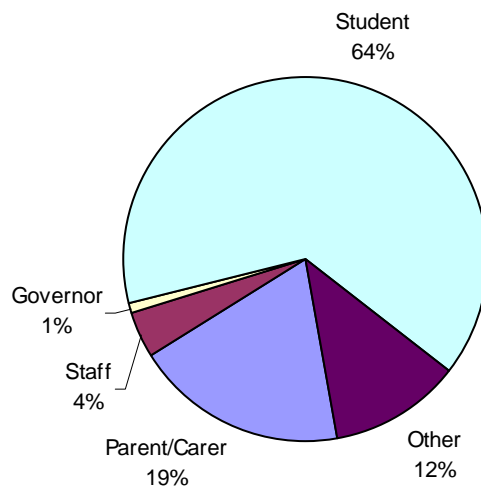
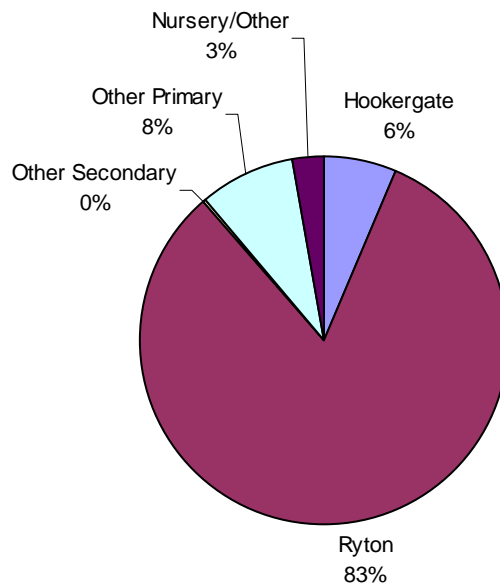


Figure 2: Association with a particular school

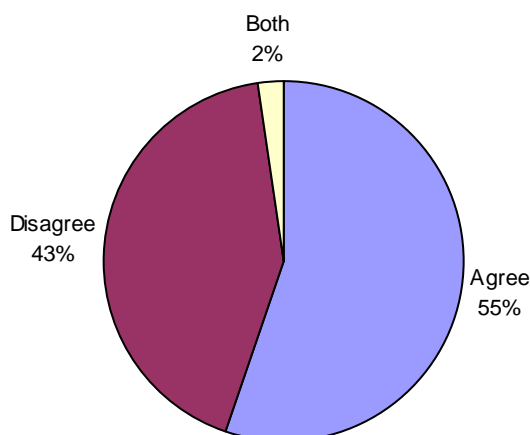


## Response to Proposals

Respondents were asked for comments on the options proposed. The following is an analysis of the responses received and a summary of the key issues based on correspondence to council from the official response forms. Key comments received via correspondence to council officers, elected members, ward councillors and the local MP are also included. These summaries condense all the arguments received from all respondents.

Do you agree with our Vision for a single school to provide Best for the West?

Figure 3: Agree with a Vision



- Understand that the current situation at Hookergate is unsustainable due to pupil numbers and resources need to be better distributed to raise the standards of education in Gateshead;
- Need to keep both schools as significant capital spent at both schools in recent years. Schools should be local and preferably within walking distance. The school run is the largest form of traffic congestion and pollution;
- The consultation should be deferred until government spending decisions on schools capital are known to allow informed decisions on either a new building or the redevelopment of the existing Ryton site. An assurance is needed that funding is definitely available from other sources for people to agree to the proposed vision;
- Funding targeted to just one school would offer the children the best facilities, with more opportunities in all areas of the curriculum for example music, languages, arts and science.
- There is an underlying reason for relocating from Ryton due to the value of existing land;
- There would be an increase in traffic on the private estates, the traffic increase and volume of pupils is too great to converge in Ryton;
- The value of property surrounding the proposed site would fall;
- This does not align with the healthy schools agenda as the vision does not encourage children to walk or cycle to school;
- We must maximise the value for money by refurbishing existing buildings as opposed to rebuilding;
- Hookergate is a good school with strong community links and children from this area will have to travel too far to Ryton;

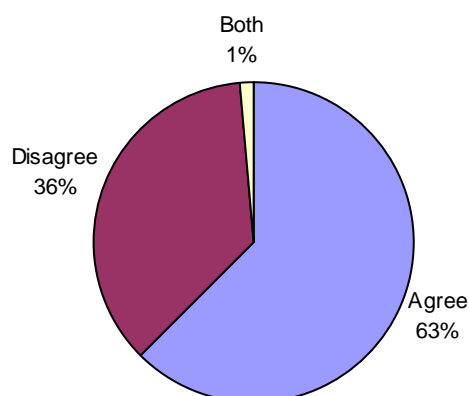
- Ryton will become too large.
- It will be difficult to maintain the current high standards if the school is too big; Children thrive in smaller teaching environment which promotes a sense of community and respect, large schools do not have this sense and are impersonal;
- Ryton will be overcrowded if the money for a new school does not materialise.
- Ryton juniors and infant school are currently co-located on the Ryton site and benefit from transition arrangements;
- Hookergate site has enough room for refurbishment and has a safer less congested access;
- Children would need to be transported by bus from all over the area with no supervision.
- This is another upheaval in children's schooling who have already been through a school closure at Kepier Chare which was very unsettling;
- Staff and pupils at Ryton will have a more favourable outcome with this proposal;
- A new school will deliver less accommodation than is already available on the existing Ryton site;
- The west of Gateshead needs a valued secondary school for the whole community which delivers education for 11-18 year olds;
- Temporary accommodation should not be used at Ryton without an idea of the timescales for redevelopment. Whickham School has had "temporary" accommodation for tens of years and it is still being used today;
- There will be more bullying as the two schools will clash;
- The catchment area will be too large and will provide no community school choice for parents in the West Gateshead;
- The plan makes no reference to the projected pupil numbers for Ryton or the projected pupil numbers for the new school. This information is needed to make a judgement about the quality of education children will receive as there is no evidence available of potential class sizes.

Pupil comment: -

- Preference would be for one big school in the West. Pupils will come together which will help pupils from both schools feel they belong in one school, have a new start, a chance to meet new people and improve grades;
- It would be better if everyone attended Ryton site; consider knocking down the demountables and built a 2 storey building in their place;
- Two schools have been managed up till now and consideration should be given to the feelings of current Hookergate pupils having to move.
- The history of both schools would be lost.
- People should not be forced to move if they don't want to.
- Pupil standards could be affected by those who are against the proposed change and should be delayed until there are fewer pupils at Hookergate;
- Pupils who currently enjoy walking to school will have to travel by bus

Do you support the proposed closure of Hookergate and the transition arrangements for 2011 - 2013?

Figure 4: Support for Closure and Transition



- Kepier Chare moved into Emmaville without any problem this should happen in the case of these two schools.
- The Council do not listen to the consensus as demonstrated with the Interchange;
- Teaching, not buildings, raise achievement;
- Hookergate has a purpose built special educational needs unit which should be maintained;
- Keep both schools and operate as upper and lower schools;
- Hookergate School is off the main road through the very busy village of High Spen, whereas Ryton is situated on the main road. More accidents could happen if more children are travelling to Ryton.
- The facilities available at Hookergate site offer more opportunities for the students;
- Primary school education has already been disrupted in Hookergate's catchment and the Rowlands Gill area has been left with a building not fit for purpose and a school with falling standards.
- The school has falling roles due to the Council publicising the proposed closure;
- The Council will sell both sites to a property developer for the money and therefore make more money for the Council.
- Hookergate may be losing numbers but why should Ryton be penalised.
- Pupils would need to leave home very early to make the 08.30 start time at Ryton potentially resulting in poor concentration especially in the younger children.
- The closure of Hookergate will mean the loss of an amenity to the Hookergate/High Spen/Highfield residents.
- Hookergate has quite a large catchment area, it wouldn't be a good idea to have such a large group of children travelling the extra distance and increasing the amount of traffic at peak times which would also increase the carbon footprint and during severe winter weather it could cause considerable problems for the children getting to and from school.
- It is short sighted to close the school as future numbers of pupils could rise.

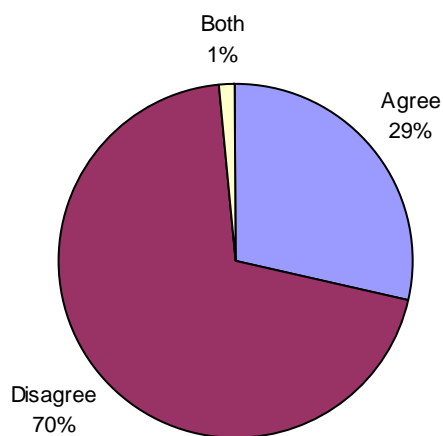
- The transition arrangements for 2011-2013 are not the best as some parents will have children in different year groups and on different sites;
- Once the single school is introduced, the retention of Hookergate would be costly for what it would be providing, especially as there are other facilities available.
- The way some year groups are moving into the existing Ryton School, then moving again into the new school will cause more disruption.
- It would be better to allow the current students at Hookergate to finish their education at the Hookergate site to avoid disruption to learning.
- Are there going to be larger class sizes by increasing the size of Ryton?
- The transition arrangements seem fair, although extra support is needed as moving Hookergate pupils to Ryton may result in bullying, this is a real fear by local Hookergate children.
- The transition arrangements are not what was previously promised at last September's consultation. The children are safe and happy where they are and the massive costs will amass with these plans.
- The transition arrangements seem sensible as they will provide certainty and seem to minimise the extent of the disruption to the maximum amount of pupils.
- Disagree with moving pupils to a second site therefore changing school location twice for Hookergate pupils.
- It would not be in the interests of students to be in a very small school which would not be able to offer a broad education, and would not be a good use of Council resources to keep such a school open.
- If Hookergate does have to close then just absorb the current children into all schools including Kingsmeadow.
- It's unfair that parents and children of Hookergate School have been given such short notice of the closure. A gradual winding down of the school would have been more appropriate;
- Neither agree nor disagree but feel the stepped up closure will result in a ghost-town school in Hookergate for years 8, 9, and 11. Schools also provide social education for teenagers and this will be disrupted;
- Ryton students will be giving up their identify to accommodate a minority of incoming students;

Pupil Comment:

- The proposed transition arrangements will help pupils integrate into new lessons, avoid being overwhelmed or feeling pressurised.
- Hookergate pupils should go to another small school to increase the numbers.
- Agree with closing an empty and unpopular school for a new school which will be more accessible for all.
- Agree to the proposals as it will not be necessary for parents of Hookergate pupils to find a new school as Ryton has already been guaranteed.

## Do you agree with the proposed site for the new build?

Figure 5: Proposed site



- It would be more economical to build on existing site and a waste of public funding to develop on any alternative proposed site.
- There has been no valid case or justification for the vision presented to build on the proposed site when it is only 400m from the present site of Ryton.
- This is not the sustainable option as there will be significant impact on the environment, pollution and wildlife to build on green belt land;
- The junction of A695 bypass/Woodside Lane Junction is dangerous with fatalities and accidents. Safety to pupils must be a priority.
- Pupils from Greenside who are less than 3 miles away will have to walk to school because there will be no free travel and they will need to use the footbridge.
- In last year's consultation 89% of respondents wanted Ryton to continue on its present site. Why has this been ignored despite assurances last year that it was a real consultation?
- How can a new school be built next to telephone masts when the Council won't grant these being erected beside existing schools.
- If the new build has to go ahead, the proposed site would seem to be the most sensible.
- The roads on the estates will become congested, and will be used as an access route to the school.
- Local businesses will suffer.
- The current Ryton School is extremely well served by public transport (other than school buses) which gives pupils who, for example, are attending after school activities the transport needed.
- There is a continued risk of flooding from surface water despite the surface water reservoir.
- The owner of the mineral rights will have to be compensated if the land is acquired.

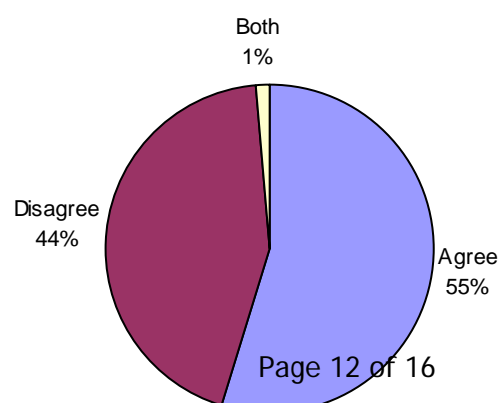
- The coal board as previous owners of this land will have a hold over this land and will seek to recover a substantial percentage of the developed value of the land.
- The size of the proposed site is smaller than the existing site of Ryton School.
- Land at Ryton School was bequeathed by the Thorpe Education Trust (Thorpe Schools) and eventually became the current school. There were covenants on the land for its use for educational purposes lets keep the land in use for its intended purpose and redevelop on the current site of Ryton School.
- Hookergate is situated away from main roads and a lot safe for children to be travelling to and from.
- It is too far for children to travel from Rowlands Gill and Highfield.;
- It's in a better location and will stop parking in the streets near to Ryton School;
- Transport links are needed both to and from school for evenings and weekends. Ryton is currently on a main road and is easily accessible. The proposed site does not provide this accessibility as Nexus will only provide links during school hours. How will parents who don't drive access the school for parents' nights and how will pupils visit friends on evenings and weekends;
- If the proposed build goes through the location is acceptable as it's not far from the original site of Ryton;
- Should be more geographically central;
- This is an opportunity for a new green building hopefully using sustainable energy which is a great way for pupils to learn about the importance of green energy;
- There has been no consultation with the nearest residents of the proposed new build site;

Pupil comment:

- Agree as buildings at both schools are old and the classrooms are horrible, the seating areas, corridors and dining hall are cramped. One big school would provide more space incorporating sheltered areas.
- Disagree due to lack of amenities close to new site.
- Agree with the proposed site which means change for everyone as well
- Road noise may be an issue during lesson times.

**Do you agree with the proposal to join all the existing Hookergate linked primary schools to Ryton and therefore to the new school?**

*Figure 6: Do you agree with the linked primaries?*



- Yes it makes sense for all catchments to feed into Ryton but if feeder schools are closer to another school then obviously they should go there.
- Transport is a major concern.
- It was suggested that Chopwell would become bigger with houses, retail, shops which will mean population growth. Could Hookergate not be sustained?
- A better and cheaper solution is to refurbish Hookergate school to provide the new school requirement.
- Distances between the current Hookergate linked primaries and Ryton school make easy provision of visits by those schools and fostering links impractical, a large group of linked schools increases bureaucracy.
- There isn't going to be a new school as the Government have stopped the funding. Should concentrate on educating the primary schools and their parents on why they should choose Hookergate. If this had been done many years ago Hookergate would not have a falling pupil roll.
- Siblings will get separated if the numbers are too great to enter Ryton.
- Students feel more comfortable in small friendly schools with smaller class sizes. The new school will be big and impersonal and too big to manage successfully.
- Yes to give all children in the West the same opportunities.
- Each child's parents should have the choice of comprehensive they should attend and not the linked system of primary schools. This removes choice and aids the demise of Hookergate School.
- Too diverse a mix - students could clash!
- People will be faced with having youngest child in Ryton and eldest at Hookergate. This will cause particular problems for single parents.
- Children are too young to use public transport to get to and from school.

**Are there any other comments or suggestions you would like to make to help us with this decision and in planning for the future of secondary education in the West of the Borough?**

- Council should work hard at addressing the polarisation which has occurred between the two communities as a result of last year's consultation.
- Concerns for the stability of pupils and value for money. There should only be one move although do realise that all pupils may not be able to come to the Ryton site all at once.
- Why bother with consultations it seems a decision has been made.
- Gateshead Council should carry out their remit - to carry out the wishes of those they were appointed to represent and build on the existing site. Do not allow local political considerations cloud judgement. Cases were not prepared for existing site upgrade options.
- Surprised at the figures for empty places. No evidence has been seen on the large scale population decline and people in the catchment area for Hookergate sending children elsewhere.

- Use the money to employ and retain teachers - people make a good school not buildings, that are heartless and distanced from their communities.
- Consider the expense of changing uniforms for both communities.
- The whole scheme must be reviewed in light of the fact that funding for a new school is not available.
- Ensure all pupils have an opportunity to participate in school rules, uniform, school design etc. Outside play areas are crucial.
- There is a massive shortage of choice available to parents and children in the west and that this is not addressing the situation. Hookergate is a beautiful site and the children feel safe.
- The collaborative working between the two schools should continue.
- What investigation has been undertaken to identify a site in Blaydon for a small new school that could potentially take its pupils from Rowlands Gill, High Spennings, Blaydon and Swalwell.
- There needs to be a full and proper comparison between the proposed site and the existing site. This is something that absolutely must be done.

Pupil Comment: -

- Don't delay any longer. Build a new school which is modern, comfortable, with improved technology facilities and not crowded so children enjoy going to school. Inclusion of a swimming pool should be considered to improve fitness.
- School name should stay the same.
- Agree so that friends from Hookergate could share the same school.
- Hookergate students should transfer sooner.
- Ryton staying on the same site would be better for the environment.
- Ryton should not change its name or uniform as Hookergate students are coming to Ryton.

**Are there other implications for the community, the council should consider if it decides to close Hookergate School?**

- People recall what happened when Blaydon was closed and have now seen the gradual downfall of Hookergate as a result.
- Sell the site and the land for the maximum amount possible to help fund the upgrade of Ryton School but take into account the considerations of the local residents who vote.
- Loss of a local amenity to Hookergate/High Spennings/Rowlands Gill area.
- There has been a lot of work carried out by both heads and governors of both schools to consider the transition and welfare of Hookergate pupils. These pupils will all be settled in Ryton before the new build and move to a new site. Why therefore move again to a site 40 yards away!
- More bus services needed people find it very hard to travel to Ryton.
- Numerous social problems will be created as children won't be able to have social interactions.

- Teachers at Hookergate are not happy about lack of consultation. Teachers need support to find alternative work as do catering and cleaning staff.
- People will not move to areas without schools, the long term prosperity of villages around Hookergate will suffer.
- The primary schools will be a long way from the secondary school making it difficult for parents with children in both primary and secondary school
- We need clarity on the future of vacated school sites.
- Do not promise the land will benefit the community, then build expensive housing no one in the area can afford.
- Travel costs may be a problem for some if the school is less than 3 miles from home. Free transport should be given if children can't safely walk to school.
- There will be implications of a possible derelict site at Ryton.
- A school in a community is better than a stand alone school. It inspires respect for the environment in which families live and make education the centre of a community. A stand alone site such as that proposed will lower the community spirit for the school.

Pupil Comment:

- There should be no fighting with everyone becoming friends straight away.
- Ask another school to join so Hookergate would not feel isolated.
- Close Hookergate sooner and build a new school.
- New pupils should be welcomed with a celebration which can then be celebrated annually.
- Pupils should make a choice on which school they want to go to.
- Ryton should change its name and uniform if Hookergate request it.
- It might be hard for Hookergate pupils.
- There will be no more Active Kids.

### Where the Consultation Sessions were held

Meeting Type	Date	Time
<b>Hookergate</b>		
Staff	Tuesday 6 <sup>th</sup> July 2010	3.15 p.m. Staff
Governors	"	5.00 p.m. Governors
Parent/Carer	"	6.30 p.m. Parents
<b>Ryton</b>		
Staff	Tuesday 13 <sup>th</sup> July 2010	3.15 p.m. Staff
Governors	"	5.00 p.m. Governors
Parent/Carer	"	6.30 p.m. Parents

### Drop In Sessions

Separate public sessions for the parents from the linked primary schools and the wider community were held on the following dates.

Venue	Date	Time
Hookergate School	Wednesday 7 <sup>th</sup> July 2010	2.00 p.m. - 6.30 p.m.
Ryton Comprehensive School	Wednesday 14 <sup>th</sup> July 2010	3.00 p.m. - 6.30 p.m.
Winlaton/Blaydon Surestart	Wednesday 21 <sup>st</sup> July 2010	2.00 p.m. - 6.30 p.m.
Chopwell Primary	Tuesday 20 <sup>th</sup> July 2010	3.00 p.m. - 5.30 p.m.