

Education

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While primary and pre-school education is pursued through locally-based schools and centres in rural areas of the county, Cambridgeshire has a policy of providing State Secondary education through a network of Village Colleges and Further Education through Sixth Form Colleges (principally in Cambridge itself) rather than encouraging Secondary Schools to have sixth forms of their own. The County applies sanctions to those who opt for their children's secondary and further education outside Cambridgeshire—eg. by refusing free or subsidised transport. Thus, for Guiden Morden residents who do not wish to "go private", there is little option but to send their children for Secondary education to Bassingbourn Village College, and for Further education to one of the 6th Form Colleges in Cambridge—principally either Hills Road 6th Form College or Long Road 6th Form College, with the attendant travel problems.

Guiden Morden has its own primary school, located in the centre of the village, which caters for children from 4 – 11 years. For the reasons stated above, children of 11 years and over then generally attend the Village College in Bassingbourn, although some children do complete their Secondary education in other schools within the surrounding area. The Appraisal did not attempt to determine the balance between public and private sector education.

There is also a thriving Mother & Toddler group and a separate Pre-school in the village, which follows the National Curriculum guidelines and is subject to Ofsted and Social Services inspection. The Appraisal unfortunately omitted questions relating to both of these groups, and also on the perceived quality of local schools.

Mother & Toddler Group

This group meets on Wednesday mornings in the Village Hall. It is a social group where babies and toddlers from 0 to pre-school age and parents/carers get together for support, play and interaction. It is a registered Charity, run by a committee, with funding on a "pay as you attend" basis and occasional fund raising. There are no staff employed but the children benefit as it is their first interaction with pre-school (they often share equipment) and the two groups cooperate for outings and social events.

Guiden Morden pre-school

The pre-school meets four days a week; three in the Village Hall and the fourth morning is in the school itself. They meet between 9.30 am – 12 noon and Friday between 9.15 am and 11.45 am. The children can attend from 2 years to, as the name suggests, their pre-school year. Here children are left in the care of the qualified pre-school staff. The pre-school is subject to an Ofsted Inspection and inspection by Social Services. At the latest Ofsted Inspection (2002), the pre-school passed all its requirements and it was verbally praised on its multi-cultural and equal opportunity ethics. The pre-school is financed

Asked how important residents considered the School to the future of the village -

- ❖ 80% of respondents said it is very important
- ❖ 13% said it was relatively important
- ❖ 2% said that it was relatively unimportant
- ❖ 2% said that the school was not important at all
- ❖ 3% did not comment

Some responses included:-

"The school is the single most important service in the village"

"The school creates identity and integrity for the local community"

"The school must not become the tail that wags the dog – i.e. do not build more houses just to keep the school"

through fees from parents, donations and fund-raising as well as some finance available from the County Council.

The school session for pre-school children or "rising 5's" is invaluable to the children. They have a chance to become familiar with the school building, can play with the other school children at breaktimes and their morning is geared more towards a school lesson than focusing on play.

The pre-school has outings each year, which parents can attend if they wish to. The grounds of the village hall are often used by the children for outdoor activities and play, including a sports day, and learning about wildlife and their natural surroundings.

Children also have the benefit of attending a lunch club two days each week, where they bring their own lunch and can learn social skills and have an extended play at the village hall.

Guiden Morden (CE) Primary School

As reported in our Interim Report, the building on Pound Green has served as the village school since 1974 and the school roll remains at between 55 – 70 children from the ages of 4 – 11.

The school complies fully with the National school curriculum and gives a broad and balanced education to its pupils, its numeracy and literacy-learning programme, and has the benefit of a small teacher/pupil ratio. It also complies with the recommended requirement for IT and extra curricular activities include languages, music tuition and sports activities after school with a professional coach. Also Personal Health & Social Education (PHSE) is taught from 4 – 11 as part of the curriculum.

The grounds of the school are large, with soft and hard play areas, an adventure playground, a nature

area with pond, a quiet garden and an outdoor swimming pool. Pupils use the pool as part of their curriculum, and they have the benefit of utilising this facility after school times and during the summer holidays. The building itself, although fairly small, was not designed for more than 90 pupils. The hall area has a low ceiling; therefore some of the physical activities have to be restricted to out-of-doors. If a new Village Hall is built, it is anticipated that the schoolchildren will use this facility for some of their sporting pursuits.

The Appraisal Group would also like to suggest that, in view of the present impasse over funding for a new Village Hall, an alternative—or complementary—option might be to seek funding for an enlargement of the school to create a multi-functional space that could provide a Gym for the school and an indoor sports facility for the village as a whole. Perhaps this alternative approach might enable the village to access other sources of grant funding not otherwise available—and perhaps also allow a more modest (and cheaper) reconstruction proposal for the Hall. We believe that this option should, at least, be explored.

There is a strong PTA presence as well as an After-school Club. Many different events throughout the year are organised to support the school and the children go on day trips to musical events and theatres. The older children also have the opportunity of going on a residential trip in their last year. There are strong links with Bassingbourn Village College

The 2000 Ofsted Inspection Report on Guiden Morden Primary School included the following comments:

- ❖ "This is a good school."
- ❖ "Standards are well above average in English and science."
- ❖ "The very high grades in mathematics indicate that the school is achieving within the top five percent nationally."
- ❖ "The quality of teaching is good ... this is a contributory factor to the high standards being attained."
- ❖ "Parents have very positive views about the school."

and children in year 6 (or their final year) make an educational visit in their final year to familiarise themselves with the College.

The children set their own mission statement but "care, commitment and courtesy" are enforced amongst the school population. The children are encouraged to play together across all ages and they learn to respect each other. The school welcomes visitors and has an "open door" policy.

Not all village children attend the village school - quite a few families send their children to Steeple Morden Primary School and schools in surrounding villages/towns. Some attend independent schools in Cambridge and neighbouring counties, but unfortunately the survey did not ask why villagers chose schools outside the village for their children. That



The village school

being said, there are children who attend Guiden Morden School from towns and villages around that have their own school, so it can only be assumed that parents exercise their right to chose when deciding on the best education for their children.

The Appraisal asked whether the school was important for the future of the village. Some respondents gave food for thought regarding the future of the school, including the suggestion of a merger with Steeple Morden School. "No need for a school in both Guiden and Steeple", "the social structure of the village is so diverse that children need large school environment to develop their social skills, therefore a merge with Steeple would be preferable" and "it is important if the population can support it". However, for those families who have children of both infant and junior age, it is probably preferable from a transport perspective that both groups are educated in the same location. Facilities are shared to some extent and the children enjoy friendly football matches each year.

Some residents are of the opinion that the village would lose character if lots of houses were built in order to support pupil numbers. One respondent wrote, "I worry that more houses will be built if the school attracts too many pupils". However, as mentioned earlier, the school is designed to be small and were the village to have an influx of new families, places at the school would probably be restricted.

Other respondents wondered whether small schools are viable. This is fair comment, as one may be under the impression that smaller schools have less facilities and less support, but it is the Local Education Authority's policy to keep small schools open. Although it would appear that these small schools exist independently, in fact they have close links with other schools. Guiden Morden School is no exception, and the head teacher liaises with five other head teachers to support the children in years 5 and 6. The strong link with Bassingbourn Village College allows assisted teaching for ICT, maths and technology and future schemes are planned for English and sports activities.

Most significantly, 80% of respondents to the Appraisal said that the school was important for the future of the village. Of these, over half gave additional comments, most of which were positive, including "it is not just important, it is vital"; "no school would make us even more of a commuter village"; "a school is essential to maintain a balanced age-range - we don't want to be a purely retirement village", "no school - no community life". One of the more unusual comments was "even

though we are retired, we still enjoy the sound of the children".

GM School has a policy in place for children with special needs. For children who fall into this category who are gifted or have special talent, this is registered by Guilden Morden School and Bassingbourn Village College and their education is monitored to enhance their skill. Children who have learning difficulties are supported by individual education plans. Advice is provided by specialists who visit the school as needed and also enhance the provision made for these children.

Bassingbourn Village College

Once children leave Guilden Morden Primary School, many progress at age 11 to Bassingbourn Village College. The college takes children from the feeder schools of Steeple Morden, Petersfield and Orwell as well as Bassingbourn Primary School. The college was opened in 1954 and is based on a site of 22 acres within Bassingbourn Village.

In September 2002, the college gained Specialist Technology College Status, which means that the school receives additional funding to give enhanced delivery of Maths, Science and Technology. Indeed, during January 2002, the Science Department was fitted out with a new suite of state of the art equipment and all subject areas benefit from increased availability of ICT resources. This additional funding will be available until 2006.

The College also provides part-time adult and continuing education, largely through its programme of Evening courses and Saturday schools.

Hills Road Sixth Form College

Hills Road Sixth Form College provides full-time education to 16-19 year old students studying for 'A' Levels, etc. Its selection procedures tend to attract those of higher academic ability. The College was awarded the top grade of "outstanding in all 11 areas inspected" during the 2001 OFSTED inspection. These comprised 10 curriculum areas plus an overall grade for "leadership and management".

Long Road Sixth Form College

The college has an informal yet purposeful atmosphere. The majority of students achieve A-level and AVCE grades higher than predicted by their GCSE results. Pass rates and retention rates are higher than the national averages for sixth-form colleges, and most teaching departments have A-level pass rates between 95% and 100%. The recent award of Accredited status is official recognition of the college's success.

ADULT EDUCATION

The principal centre for Adult Education in the area is Bassingbourn Village College, which offers an extensive programme of evening and Saturday classes covering a wide range of topics. Adult classes are also available at the Villages Colleges in Melbourn and Comberton, which are accessible by car from the village. Reduced course fees are available to selected groups such as the elderly and the unwaged.

Asked "Do you think more opportunities for adult education are needed in Guilden Morden?", 25% of Appraisal respondents replied "Yes", while 29% said "No." The remainder were either undecided or failed to respond to the question. These results suggest that villagers are uncertain whether there needs to be more adult education opportunities. Perhaps it is because we all lead such busy lives these days, that people cannot spare the time to take part in further education.

However, those who favoured more provision for adult education were invited to comment about the sort of opportunities they would find most attractive. Most respondents wanted recreational courses including art, yoga and sports classes. Some respondents wanted computer studies and some suggested that the school or village hall could be utilised for this purpose, which would mean "less travel and give opportunity for social interaction within the village". It has been suggested that the village school could act as an "outreach" venue for adult classes that at present are run at Bassingbourn Village College.

WEA (Workers Educational Association)

Guilden Morden Primary School hosts one of the longest established branches of the WEA in the Eastern District and this year the association celebrates its 100-year anniversary. The organisation originated to provide additional education to people who had left school at an early age (14+ or earlier) but these days, it is run as a social study group for adults covering such topics as current affairs, humanities, botany, ecology, art and history. There are two 10-week courses run in the autumn and winter terms, as well as related field trips. Volunteers operate a Committee and do their own administration, including recruiting speakers for each course, and run the group. The members pay subscription fees to attend these meetings, per term, if it is a course that interests them. Numbers of attendees vary, according to their interest in each specific course but there is usually a minimum of 16 participants each term.

University of the Third Age (U3A)

Some people from the village attend the University of the Third Age, run at Melbourn Village College. The original organisation started in France and came over here some years ago. Now over 200 people meet in Melbourn once a month, for social interaction, studies and to share their interests in recreation. There are volunteer speakers who share information on local history or give watercolour demonstrations etc. There is a walking group and birdwatching enthusiasts who are connected with the organisation as well as people whose interests include conversational French and Italian. The group meets once a month, is committee run and publishes a newsletter. Associated with the U3A, a Local History study group is held at the Chapel once a month.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Overall, respondents appear to be happy with the quality of education provided within the village for children of Infant and Primary age.

There is also a clear conclusion that a majority of residents are anxious to see the village school sustained—though not always for education reasons, but often for wider reasons of 'community' or village character. However, there is a significant minority who have concerns that the character of the village should not be compromised purely to sustain the school.

Some respondents thought that there should be more cohesion between Guilden Morden Primary School and Steeple Morden Primary School and Bassingbourn Village College.

The Appraisal Group suggests that funding might be sought for an enlargement of the school to create a multi-functional space that could provide a Gym for

the school and an indoor sports facility for the village as a whole.

Most of the people who completed the Appraisal questionnaire were unsure whether they wanted more opportunities for Adult education in the village and we gained the impression that residents know little of the opportunities that already exist in the village.

In an effort to make up for the omission of reference in the Appraisal Questionnaire to the PlayGroup and Pre-School Groups, the Appraisal Group has made informal enquiries of some residents, from which we conclude that the existence of these pre-school facilities is seen as important to the village. We recognise, however, that the groups need further support in terms of funding and manpower if they are to continue and thrive. We would like to see a wider appreciation within the village of what these groups are doing and, to this end, we suggest that the groups themselves might project their work more positively to villagers as a whole.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- We recommend that the Local Education Authority give more consideration to smaller schools in rural areas.
- We propose that the LEA encourage and expand the existing liaison and sharing of resources between local village schools, as this goes largely unnoticed by people not connected with the school.
- There seems to be less emphasis on sport these days and a decrease in sporting activities between schools. We recommend that this is reviewed by the LEA to encourage challenge and competition between schools.
- As Guilden Morden is a small school, difficulties exist when putting together a school team for football, cricket, etc. We recommend liaison with Steeple Morden School, to perhaps put together a "Mordens" team to compete at inter-school matches.
- We recommend that consideration is given to seeking funding for an enlargement of the school to create a multi-functional space that could provide a Gym for the school and an indoor sports facility for the village as a whole.
- We recommend that organisers of Adult Education in the village and the surrounding area advertise their activities and courses more positively in Gamut.