

OUR SCHOOL

We are hoping to set up a co-operative school.
We hope it will be a success.
I think we should include sharing, working
together and helping each other.



Village school to revive the spirit of Co-op pioneers

Polly Curtis

A Cumbrian village is to establish the first cooperative-run state school after losing two appeals to keep its 18-pupil primary open.

Villagers in Lowick, which is spread over three small parishes on the southern edge of the Lake District, have been told that their 150-year-old school must close in July due to falling rolls. Pupils will instead have to travel up to 11 miles a day by taxi to Perry Bridge school.

However, campaigners for the school, including its pupils, who mounted the judicial review which failed to halt its closure, insist that the school is vital to the community and must stay to cater for an expected baby boom in the area.

They have dismissed the option of going independent, saying Lowick needs a state school and have come up with the idea of running it as a co-operative. The school would be state funded but run by the community. The Co-operative Action Fund has donated £28,000 to help produce a legal model of the new school before term starts in September. The school's headteacher, Shirley Rainbow, said the school is the "focus of the community".

"There is no shop, no post office, just the church and the school. We were badly hit by foot and mouth, nobody could go anywhere, but they came

'We hope to create a model for schools to spring up all over the country'

here, just to talk," she said. They plan to call the school the Lowick Pioneers school after the founders of the cooperative movement. The 13 children in the junior class last term visited the museum in Rochdale dedicated to the Rochdale Pioneers, the founders of the cooperative movement.

A wall at the school is dedicated to reports the children wrote about the experience. "We hope that having a cooperative school will help us do what the pioneers did — treat each other fairly and work together," writes 10-year-old Charlotte Walker.

Rose Bugler, chairman of the governors, said the cooperative school would be better value to the council because it would provide more services, including adult learning, a centre for e-learning and child minding services.

"Across the country there are small rural schools in danger of closing. We are trying to pull off a new school model that helps small schools survive and provide more services to the community."

Steven Youd-Thomas of the Co-operative Action Fund said: "Our first hope is that the school is available to stay open. It will be a major benefit to the local community. Second, we hope this model works and we have a fully functional cooperative school, the model for which could lead to them springing up all over the country."

Cliff Mills, a lawyer at Cobbetts solicitors, is devising the legal model for a community-owned school. He said: "People can be quite shocked about these ideas. We have to comply with the government's requirements."