

**REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE'S SERVICES****ST. AUGUSTINE'S COMMUNITY INFANT & NURSERY AND ST.
AUGUSTINE'S COMMUNITY JUNIOR SCHOOLS, WORKSOP - POSSIBLE
AMALGAMATION****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report provides Cabinet with the outcome of formal consultation about possible amalgamation of the above named schools, and seeks approval to publish a statutory notice as required under the provisions of Sections 11 (as amended by Section 37 of the Education Act 2011) and 15 of the Education and Inspections Act (EIA) 2006.
2. This proposal is a key decision as defined by the category 'Opening, merging or closing schools' in the Constitution and was first published in the Forward Plan in January 2012.

Information and Advice

3. It is current policy that consultations take place to actively consider the advantages of amalgamating schools to form new primary schools and that reports be brought to Cabinet on the outcome of the consultations with recommendations for action.
4. St. Augustine's Infant and Junior Schools are co-located on a single site with a shared vehicular and pedestrian access and are equally accessible and convenient for parents. The junior school is currently operating with a permanent headteacher in post, whilst the infant school has been operating with a shared role of acting headteacher since January 2012.
5. The opportunity to propose an amalgamation of the two schools has arisen as a result of a headteacher vacancy at St. Augustine's Infant and Nursery School.
6. The proposed amalgamation is not a reflection on the quality of education currently provided by either St. Augustine's Infant School or St. Augustine's Junior School.
7. The current predicted combined pupil roll for 2012/13 is 337 with a combined net capacity of 420. By the 2014/15 and 2015/16 academic years, the combined pupil roll is forecast to rise to 381 and 398 respectively.

Consultation

8. Since the introduction of the Education Act 2007, when a new school is to be established a set of regulations must be applied - these are called the competition regulations and until recently, even apply in the case of straightforward amalgamations. In response to these regulations, an initial consultation document was sent to all parents/carers, staff and governors of both St. Augustine's Schools. It was also sent to other local stakeholders to assess levels of interest for the status of the school that might be established and whether there was any interest in proposing the new school. By the end of the consultation period no responses were received.
9. As no alternative proposals were registered with the County Council, an appropriate application was subsequently sent to the Secretary of State requesting consent to publish the County Council's proposal to create a new primary school outside the competition regulations.
10. However, following the receipt of the Local Authority's application, the DfE subsequently announced that with effect from 1 February 2012 any proposed new schools emanating from infant and junior school amalgamations would be exempt from the competition regulations. The County Council's formal application seeking consent to publish its proposal was therefore withdrawn.
11. Subsequent to this initial round of consultation, informal discussions were held between representatives of the Schools and the County Council. Joint consultation meetings were then held with the Schools' staff, parents/carers and governors. A consultation document was circulated prior to the meetings.
12. The consultation meetings were held on 19 January 2012 and provided parents/carers, staff, governors and the wider public the opportunity to discuss with County Council officers the implications of amalgamating the two Schools.
13. Approximately 1,200 consultation documents were distributed and 23 responses returned during the consultation period that expired on 17 February 2012. Of the responses, 18 agreed and 3 disagreed with the proposal to amalgamate. 2 respondents 'Didn't Know'. The Junior School headteacher, Infant School acting headteachers and governors of both Schools support the proposal and feel it would be a positive step forward. In supporting the proposal, the headteachers and governors also support the proposed new primary school being established in the existing infant and junior buildings.
14. All written responses received either by the reply form provided or by electronic mail, are available as a background paper to this report. A summary of the comments made is included in the attached **Appendix**.

Statutory Notice

15. If amalgamation were to be approved, the proposal requires that both schools shall formally close and that a new community primary school should be established. This will involve the publication of a statutory notice under the provisions of Sections 10 and 15 of

the EIA 2006. This notice will stand for six weeks and the decision on the outcome of its publication will be determined by an independent Schools Adjudicator.

Other Options Considered

16. Two other possible options for the future of these two schools were considered:
 - both schools remain independent but form a federation
 - both schools remain as separate infant and junior schools
17. The particular benefits of amalgamation include:
 - making more efficient use of the available accommodation on the site to benefit not only the two schools, but also the local community as a whole
 - a larger, single primary school will benefit from a combined budget and be a more viable provision of educational places for the community it will serve

Reasons for Recommendation

18. There is support from staff, governors and parents/carers of both educational establishments for an amalgamation to be implemented in January 2013 at the earliest. A new single primary school for 420 pupils, with 39 full-time equivalent early years places, is perceived as being in the best interests of both Schools and the community.
19. It is also felt there are sound educational advantages for the proposal to proceed which include:
 - greater opportunities for staff to develop and share their professional knowledge and skills
 - greater flexibility in the way management responsibilities can be shared, particularly in coordinating the curriculum and addressing the needs of all children
 - resources can be effectively focused on priorities and economies of scale and would mean that financial savings can be targeted appropriately.

Statutory and Policy Implications

20. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of service users, finance, equal opportunities, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Implications for Service Users

21. When the proposal is implemented, pupils on roll at St. Augustine's Infant and Junior Schools at the time of closure will automatically transfer to the new school as appropriate.

Financial implications

22. If the St. Augustine's Schools were amalgamated, the budget for a new school would be calculated on the same basis as other primary schools of a similar size. This means that if amalgamation were approved there would be a projected revenue saving of approximately £72,000 per annum. The new school will retain 100% of the identified savings in the first year, 60% in the second year, 40% in the third year and 20% in the fourth year. This gradual reduction will provide the new school with resources that will help to enable a smooth transition to a single primary school.
23. It is the intention that the new primary school will operate from the existing buildings. In advance of this, the Local Authority would wish to work with the new school's governing body, headteacher and staff to determine, in the best interests of the children, the most appropriate way of utilising the existing accommodation.

Equalities Implications

24. Equal opportunities issues for staff will be addressed within an agreed enabling document which will follow an agreed standard format.
25. As part of the process of making decisions and changing policy, public authorities are required by law to think about the need to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics (as defined by equalities legislation) and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not.
26. Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are a means by which a public authority can assess the potential impact that proposed decisions/changes to policy could have on the community and those with protected characteristics. They may also identify potential ways to reduce any impact that a decision / policy change could have. If it is not possible to reduce the impact, the EIA can explain why. Decision makers must understand the potential implications of their decisions on people with protected characteristics.
27. An EIA has been undertaken and is available as a background paper. Decision makers must give due regard to the implications for protected groups when considering this report.

Human Resources Implications

28. The governors of the new school will be supported by County Council officers to ensure that decisions about staffing in the school are made in accordance with employment law and the Local Authority's previously determined policies.

RECOMMENDATION

- 1) That Cabinet agree to the publication of a statutory notice, under the provisions of Sections 11 and 15 of the EIA 2006, for the proposal to amalgamate St. Augustine's Infant and Nursery School and St. Augustine's Junior School to form a single 3-11 years community primary and nursery school, in existing accommodation, from January 2013 at the earliest.

Councillor Philip Owen

Cabinet Member for Children and Young People's Services

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

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Constitutional Comments (LM 06/02/12)

29. Cabinet has the delegated authority under the Scheme of Delegation to approve the recommendations in the report in order to discharge the County Council's functions in relation to education.

Financial Comments (NDR 03/02/12)

30. The financial implications are set out in paragraphs 22 and 23 of the report.

Background Papers

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- 1) Initial consultation leaflet regarding competition regulations (circulated 4 November 2011)
- 2) The document for parents/carers, staff, governors and other interested parties explaining the possibility of amalgamating the two schools (circulated 6 January 2012)
- 3) Notes of questions and views expressed and discussed at the consultation meetings held on 19 January 2012 with parents/carers, staff and governors
- 4) Written responses received during the formal consultation period that expired on 17 February 2012
- 5) Equality Impact Assessment

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

Worksop East: Councillor Glynn Gilfoyle

M19C2973

APPENDIX

Proposed Amalgamation of St. Augustine's Community Infant and Nursery School and St. Augustine's Community Junior School

	No. of responses received Agree	No. of responses received Disagree	No. of responses received Don't Know
Parent/Carer	12	3	2
Governor	1	0	0
Staff	5	0	0
Other	0	0	0
TOTALS	18	3	2
Where reply forms indicated more than one type of respondent, only one has been included in the table above using a priority order of 'parent/carers', governor, 'staff' and then 'other'.			

Points Raised and Discussed at the Consultation Meetings and Raised within Written Responses:

The amalgamation and decision making process

- feeling expressed that the infant school should remain independent. It was felt there would be a detrimental affect on the school in relation to the junior school
- the establishment of the Temporary Governing Body was raised
- what happens to the Governing Body?
- the opportunity to involve children and parents in the decision making process was seen as positive.

Staffing matters

- it was felt that a continuity of ethos and staff is very important, particularly senior leadership
- it was felt the proposal would offer consistency for teachers and support staff who could provide a whole school approach and continuity for the children
- feeling expressed that the infant school was excellent with great staff and leadership and caters well for the infant age group
- concerns expressed that there was a risk of losing experienced members of the existing teaching staff if the proposal went ahead
- will the same teachers and teaching assistants work with the children?
- the appointments of the new school's headteacher and its staffing structure were raised
- will there be any redundancies or restructuring?
- if amalgamation goes ahead, who is the head designate?
- does service employment remain continuous?

Building and site related issues

- clarification sought on whether there would be any joining of school buildings and whether there would still be two school halls or only one
- support for the proposal was expressed providing the new school was not relocated elsewhere
- opposition to the proposal expressed as existing school buildings are not joined together
- opposition to the proposal expressed as it was felt there would be no communal headteacher's office, staffroom, school office. Also no covered access from one building to the other. Without these it was felt that it would not be an amalgamation
- concern raised that neither existing school's halls would be large enough for whole school assembly or school performances, and so it was felt there would also not be adequate space for parents to attend these events
- will there be physical changes to the school?
- concern raised regarding potential difficulties caused by the school buildings being separate
- if buildings are to remain the same what can be done to integrate staff and develop a culture for the new school?

Financial issues

- it was felt having only one school would make positive financial sense
- support expressed for both infant and junior schools and a feeling expressed that as they are really good schools separately, why change them. If the proposal was about cutting costs then this should not be a reason to proceed with it. Children's education should not be put at risk
- it was felt that the proposal was just about cost savings, one headteacher responsible for two separate buildings instead of two headteachers
- will there be additional resources?

Pupil, Curriculum and Community related issues

- the proposal would provide a more coherent and continuous education for the children and further allow both schools to develop in many areas
- support was given for the proposal although a feeling expressed that the new school would still be viewed as two separate ones
- only having to apply for their children's one admission to a primary school rather than to an infant then junior school, was felt to be a benefit to parents
- it was felt the proposal provided a good opportunity for change and a challenge for all involved at the new school
- it was felt the proposal would make a big difference with transition from Key Stage 1 to 2 and also bring everyone together as a whole
- strong agreement expressed that the proposal was in the best interests of the pupils and staff at both St. Augustine's schools
- it was felt the proposal would contribute to the already existing links between the St. Augustine's schools and cement the ethos of the whole site which, including the Children's Centre, provides 0-11 years places. The proposal would also demonstrate to local families the commitment of the existing schools in providing the best care and education for their children
- having a through primary school was felt to make sense and would benefit children, staff and the local community
- concern expressed about the differing results of respective Ofsted reports for the infant and junior schools
- what will be the effect on those pupils who will be in Yr6 in 2013 if staff are focusing inward and not on the children?
- it was felt the schools have been working in a very collaborative way and amalgamation would speed up a process that is already underway. The process would also allow both schools to dispense with anything that didn't work well for them.