

MAYOR AND CABINET			
Report Title	Amalgamation of Sandhurst Infant School and Sandhurst Junior School – Permission to consult		
Key Decision	Yes	Item No.	
Ward	Catford South		
Contributors	Executive Director for Children and Young People		
Class	Part 1	Date:	19 July 2017

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report updates Mayor and Cabinet on the discussions that officers have had with both Sandhurst Infant School and Sandhurst Junior School with regards to amalgamation.
- 1.2. The report then requests the permission of the Mayor to conduct an initial informal consultation regarding the proposal to amalgamate the two schools by closing Sandhurst Junior School and extending the age range of Sandhurst Infant School.
- 1.3. Officers would then report back to Mayor and Cabinet with the results of the consultation and proposed next steps before the end of 2017.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. The report requests the Mayor's permission to undertake an initial informal consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Sandhurst Infant School and Sandhurst Junior School with effect from April 2018.

3. Recommendation

- 3.1. The Mayor is recommended to agree that there should be an initial informal consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Sandhurst Infant School and Sandhurst Junior School with effect from April 2018, and that officers should report back to Mayor and Cabinet by the end of 2017 with the results and next steps.

4. Policy Context

- 4.1. The contents of this report are consistent with the Council's policy framework. It supports the achievements of the Sustainable Community Strategy policy objectives:
 - ***Ambitious and achieving*** – where people are inspired and supported to fulfil their potential.

The proposed recommendations are also in line with the Council's corporate priorities:

- ***Young people's achievement and involvement*** – raising educational attainment and improving facilities for young people through partnership working.
- ***Protection of children*** – better safeguarding and joined up services for children at risk
- ***Inspiring efficiency effectiveness and equity*** – ensuring efficiency, effectiveness and equity in the delivery of excellent services to meet the needs of the community

- 4.2 The Local Authority has a duty to ensure the provision of sufficient places for pupils of statutory school age and, within financial constraints, accommodation that is both suitable and in good condition.
- 4.3 In aiming to improve on the provision of facilities for education in Lewisham which are appropriate for the 21st century, the implementation of a successful school places strategy will contribute to the delivery of the corporate priority *Young people's achievement and involvement: raising educational attainment and improving facilities for young people through partnership working.*
- 4.4 It supports the delivery of Lewisham's *Children & Young People's Plan (CYPP)*, which sets out the Council's vision for improving outcomes for all children and young people, and in so doing reducing the achievement gap between our most disadvantaged pupils and their peers. It also articulates the objective of improving outcomes for children with identified SEN and disabilities by ensuring that their needs are met.

Place Planning Strategy 2017-22

- 4.5 A priority in the recent Lewisham Education Commission Report was for the Council to develop a new 5 year Place Planning Strategy that succeeded the Primary Strategy for Change. Officers reviewed what had gone on before and what needs to be achieved in the future, and the draft strategy went through a public consultation process. The strategy was approved by Mayor and Cabinet on 22 March 2017.
- 4.6 Within the new strategy the council committed to constantly review it's forecasting to ensure that the necessary supply of educational places was as accurate as possible, as both undersupply and oversupply can have knock on effects on school standards and finances.
- 4.7 Indeed the strategy highlights the need for schools to work more collaboratively, identifying synergies, economies of scale and striving for better outcomes for our children and young people.

School Organisation Requirements

- 4.8 There are two ways to amalgamate two (or more) existing maintained schools:
- 4.9 The LA can publish a proposal to close two, or more, schools and the LA can publish a proposal for the establishment of a new school or invite proposals under the free school presumption. This results in a new school number being issued.

- 4.10 The LA can publish a proposal to close one school (or more) and change the age range (following the statutory process) of an existing school to accommodate the displaced pupils. The remaining school would retain its original school number, as it is not a new school, even if its phase has changed.
- 4.11 Proposals to close a school and to change the age range must comply with the provisions set out in *The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA 2006)* and *The School Organisation (Establishment & Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013* and *The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools)(England) Regulations 2013*. These set out the statutory process for making changes to a school, and statutory guidance on making changes to a maintained school indicates 4 stages to making a prescribed alteration to a maintained school. These are:
- 1) Publication of a Statutory Notice
 - 2) Representation period
 - 3) Decision making
 - 4) Implementation
- 4.12 However, when a proposer is seeking to close school then there should first be a period of informal consultation before publishing a statutory notice.
- 4.13 In this instance, the Governing Bodies of both schools have agreed that their preference is to close the Junior School and extend the age range of the Infant School. These are two separate but related processes, and will be run in parallel, including an informal consultation for the extension of age range, as whilst for this element it is not statutory it is best practice, and the two parts are inter-related.

5. Background

- 5.1 There are currently 3 remaining separate Infant and Junior phased schools in Lewisham: Sandhurst, Stillness and Torridon.
- 5.2 Officers were approached by both Sandhurst Infants and Sandhurst Juniors Governors in Summer 2016 to help provide them with information regarding the amalgamation process. Since that time, officers have continued to engage with both schools and their governing bodies to assist with any questions regarding the benefits of amalgamation and the process.
- 5.4 The governing bodies of both schools have separately come to the decision that they wish to amalgamate, stating the following reasons:
- 5.4.1 The Sandhurst Junior School Governing Body feel strongly that amalgamation is in the best interests of the children of both schools as they feel the two schools have a shared ethos and clarity of vision and amalgamation will provide:
- 1) Greater consistency across both Key Stages;
 - 2) Improved safeguarding;
 - 3) The opportunity for Junior staff to get to know the children and families at a much earlier stage and identify when help and support may be needed earlier;
 - 4) Staff unity, the opportunity for staff to share expertise and resources and greater professional development opportunities across both Key Stages;

- 5) Continuity of care and development for our children meaning, for example, less anxiety for them as they move from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2;
- 6) A better staff understanding of curriculum challenges and the demands of each phase;
- 7) Greater opportunity for the older and younger children to mix leading to, for example, increased mentoring and support for the younger children by the older ones;
- 8) Significant financial savings.
- 9) Better continuity in progress for all pupils

5.4.2 The Sandhurst Infant School Governing Body feel strongly that amalgamation is in the best interests of the children of both schools as they feel the two schools have a shared ethos and clarity of vision and amalgamation will provide:

- 1) Security of having Headteacher in post
- 2) Greater consistency across both Key Stages;
- 3) Improved safeguarding;
- 4) The opportunity for Infant staff to support children right through their primary experience
- 5) Staff unity, the opportunity for staff to share expertise and resources and greater professional development opportunities across both Key Stages;
- 6) Continuity of care and development for our children meaning, for example, less anxiety for them as they move from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2;
- 7) A better staff understanding of curriculum challenges and the demands of each phase;
- 8) Greater opportunity for the older and younger children to mix leading to, for example, increased mentoring and support for the younger children by the older ones;
- 9) Significant financial savings.
- 10) Better continuity in progress for all pupils

5.5 As a result both governing bodies have requested officers to commence the amalgamation process. Their aspiration is that the proposed amalgamation can be implemented in April 2018.

5.6 Officers support the proposed amalgamation for the following reasons:

5.6.1 It would provide an uninterrupted transition from year 2 to year 3, allowing for a better continuation of education and helping to prevent pupils taking a backwards step in their learning and progress.

5.6.2 It would allow for a greater oversight of collective school improvement and allow a better use of a wider pool of collective resources and skills to ensure that pupils receive the best education possible.

5.6.3 It would provide more opportunity for staff development and career progression as the result of a larger workforce and wider skill set. As a consequence it would also therefore make it easier for the school to retain and attract staff as more career and learning opportunities would be available.

5.6.4 It would allow the school site(s) to be used more effectively and to the collective good of all pupils and staff, creating a more engaging and enriching environment in which to work and learn.

- 5.6.5 It would also allow for the school to achieve economies of scale regarding procuring services and resources, as well as allowing the school to be collectively more financially viable due to a larger pupil base.
- 5.7 Officers draw attention to the following potential negative issues relating to amalgamation. Firstly it will result in the amalgamated school only receiving one lump sum of £140k, whereas currently each school receives £140k lump sum. Secondly there can sometimes be a negative public perception around creating a larger school, particularly in relation to those parents of infant school pupils who may see the larger school as too daunting. However, on balance, officers believe that the arguments for amalgamation vastly outweigh the arguments against, particularly when medium term economies of scale are taken into account, and the governing bodies' proposed approach of closing the junior school and extending the age range of the infant school will address the concerns regarding public perception.

6. Financial Implications

Capital Financial Implications

- 6.1 There are no capital financial implications as a result of this report.

Revenue Financial Implications

- 6.2 All on-going revenue costs of running the amalgamated school will be met from the resources of the Dedicated Schools Grant. However it should be noted that as a result the amalgamation the new school will only receive a single lump sum allocation of £140k.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 The Human Rights Act 1998 safeguards the rights of children in the borough to educational provision, which the local authority is empowered to provide in accordance with its duties under domestic legislation.
- 7.2 Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 obliges each local authority to ensure that there are sufficient primary and secondary school places available for its area i.e. the London Borough of Lewisham, although there is no requirement that those places should be exclusively in the area. The Authority is not itself obliged to provide all the schools required, but to secure that they are available.
- 7.3 In exercising its responsibilities under section 14 of the Education Act 1996 a local authority must do so with a view to securing diversity in the provision of schools and increasing opportunities for parental choice.
- 7.4 The Education and Inspections Act 2006 places requirements on local authorities to make their significant strategic decisions concerning the number and variety of school places in their localities against two overriding criteria:
- to secure schools likely to maximise student potential and achievement;
 - to secure diversity and choice in the range of school places on offer.
- Section 19 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 provides that where a local authority or the governing body of a maintained school proposes to make a prescribed alteration to a maintained school and it is permitted to make that alteration, it must publish proposals.

- 7.5 The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 provide that changes to the age limit of a school are prescribed alterations which means that statutory proposals have to be published, and there must be a period of four weeks for representations before a decision is made. Similarly, The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 requires that where there is a proposal to close a school these will require statutory proposals to be published and there must be a period of four weeks from the date of publication for objections or comments to be received. Proposals to close a school and to change the age limit of a school will be determined by the local authority as decision maker, as related proposals.

Equalities Legislation

- 7.6 The Equality Act 2010 (the Act) introduced a public sector equality duty (the equality duty or the duty). It covers the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
- 7.7 In summary, the Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 7.8 It is not an absolute requirement to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation or other prohibited conduct, or to promote equality of opportunity or foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. It is a duty to have due regard to the need to achieve the goals listed at 7.7 above.
- 7.9 The weight to be attached to the duty will be dependent on the nature of the decision and the circumstances in which it is made. This is a matter for the Mayor, bearing in mind the issues of relevance and proportionality. The Mayor must understand the impact or likely impact of the decision on those with protected characteristics who are potentially affected by the decision. The extent of the duty will necessarily vary from case to case and due regard is such regard as is appropriate in all the circumstances.
- 7.10 The Equality and Human Rights Commission has issued Technical Guidance on the Public Sector Equality Duty and statutory guidance entitled "Equality Act 2010 Services, Public Functions & Associations Statutory Code of Practice". The Council must have regard to the statutory code in so far as it relates to the duty and attention is drawn to Chapter 11 which deals particularly with the equality duty. The Technical Guidance also covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty. This includes steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The guidance does not have statutory force but nonetheless regard should be had to it, as failure to do so without compelling reason would be of evidential value. The statutory code and the technical guidance can be found at:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-actcodes-practice

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-acttechnical-guidance

- 7.11 The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) has previously issued five guides for public authorities in England giving advice on the equality duty:

The essential guide to the public sector equality duty
Meeting the equality duty in policy and decision-making
Engagement and the equality duty: A guide for public authorities
Objectives and the equality duty. A guide for public authorities
Equality Information and the Equality Duty: A Guide for Public Authorities

- 7.12 The essential guide provides an overview of the equality duty requirements including the general equality duty, the specific duties and who they apply to. It covers what public authorities should do to meet the duty including steps that are legally required, as well as recommended actions. The other four documents provide more detailed guidance on key areas and advice on good practice. Further information and resources are available at:

www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/public-sectorequality-duty-guidance#h1

- 7.13 A further report will be brought to the Mayor by the end of 2017 detailing the results of the consultations and full legal implications associated with any future proposals will be set out in future reports.

8. Crime and Disorder Implications

- 8.1 There are no crime and disorder implications.

9. Equalities Implications

- 9.1 This report supports the delivery of the Council's Equalities programme by ensuring that all children whose parents/carers require a place in a Lewisham school will be able to access one.

10. Environmental Implications

- 10.1 Every effort will be made to enhance rather than detract from school environments in the solutions to providing additional school places.

11. Background documents

None.

If there are any queries on this report, please contact Matt Henaughan, Service Manager, School Place Planning on 0208 314 8034