
**PROPOSAL TO AMALGAMATE DODMIRE INFANT AND NURSERY SCHOOL
WITH DODMIRE JUNIOR SCHOOL**

Responsible Cabinet Member – Cllr Chris McEwan, Children and Young People Portfolio

Responsible Director – Murray Rose, Director of Children's Services

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To seek Members' approval to begin the statutory process to amalgamate Dodmire Infant and Nursery School with Dodmire Junior School.

Summary

2. Members will be aware that it is Council's policy that when a vacancy for a Headteacher occurs at a linked infant and junior school, the possibility of amalgamating the schools to form a Primary School should be considered. The Headteacher of the Infant and Nursery School has announced that she intends to retire on 31 December 2008.
3. New procedures on school organisation were established by the Education and Inspections Act (2006). The relevant provisions of the Act came into effect on 25 May 2007. Advice from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is that the amalgamation of infant and junior schools is in technical terms a closure of the two schools and an opening of a new primary school. Procedures to be followed are laid down in the following notes published by the DCSF:

Closing a Maintained School: A guide for Local Authorities and Governing Bodies

Establishing a New Maintained Mainstream School: A Guide for Local Authorities.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that Members :-
 - (a) Note the outcome of informal consultation on the proposals to amalgamate Dodmire Infant and Nursery School with Dodmire Junior School;
 - (b) Agree to the statutory process to amalgamate Dodmire Infant and Nursery School with Dodmire Junior School being started; and
 - (c) Approve the establishment of a Temporary Governing Body for the proposed primary school.

Reason

5. To implement Council policy to consider the amalgamation of linked infant and junior schools.

Murray Rose,
Director of Children's Services

Background Papers

Closing a Maintained School: A guide for Local Authorities and Governing Bodies
Establishing a New Maintained Mainstream School: A Guide for Local Authorities.
Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee report 28 April 2008 "Developments in Schools in Darlington"

David Chambers : Extension 2934

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no issues arising from this report.
Health and Well Being	There are no health and wellbeing issues arising from this report.
Sustainability	The amalgamation of the Dodmire schools will create a large primary school that will benefit from economies of scale and be likely to provide better value for money than two separate schools.
Diversity	The proposed new primary school would be a community school so the diversity of choice available to parents in Darlington would not be affected.
Wards Affected	Bank Top and Lascelles.
Groups Affected	Children aged 3 – 11 years in the two wards mentioned above.
Budget and Policy Framework	Consistent with Darlington's scheme of financing schools.
Key Decision	This is a key decision affecting two neighbouring Wards and school budgets in excess of £1million.
Urgent Decision	Yes. To preserve continuity of management, the statutory process for the closure of the existing schools and the opening of a new primary school needs to begin as soon as possible. Comments on the proposal can continue to be made throughout the period of representation.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The content of this report is consistent with the Aspiring Darlington strand particularly easing transition for pupils between key stages in Education.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

6. Following discussions with the Children's Services Management Team and Ward Councillors it was decided to begin informal consultation at the two schools, to take an assessment of the attitudes of parents, staff and governors, with a view to the amalgamation of the schools. Officers arranged meetings with governors, staff, parents/carers & pupils at the Infant & Nursery school on Monday 17 March 2008. Governors, staff, parents/carers & pupils were consulted at the Junior School on Wednesday 19 March 2008. The consultation events were advertised in the local press and broadcast by local radio stations. Representatives of Trade Unions and Staff Associations were invited to the staff consultation sessions. Informal consultation remained open until 25 April 2008 and all attendees at the meetings were asked to submit responses in writing. On 28 April 2008, Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee received information on the amalgamation proposal as part of the report on Developments in Darlington's Schools.

7. By the end of the consultation period, responses to the consultation had been received as follows:

- (a) a letter from the NUT, representing teachers at both schools
- (b) a letter signed by every member of staff at Dodmire Junior School
- (c) a letter from the Governing Body of Dodmire Junior School

These letters were supportive of the proposal to amalgamate the schools. However, there was another representation.

- (d) a letter from the Governing Body of Dodmire Infant and Nursery School.

This letter was not supportive of the proposed amalgamation.

8. Further meetings have been held with the governors of the Infant and Nursery School. While the Governors retain some concerns about the ethos of the proposed primary school, it is believed that objections are not on points that are insurmountable or beyond resolution. It is therefore recommended that the process of amalgamating the two schools should continue.

9. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has set down a procedure to be followed when making a significant change to a school or schools. The procedure is outlined in Table 1 below:

STAGE	ACTION	TIMESCALE
Pre Stage	Application to DCSF for consent to publish proposals	Up to 6 weeks
Stage 1	Consultation	6 weeks recommended excluding school holidays
Stage 2	Publish statutory notice	One day
Stage 3	Representation period (to allow for comments and objections to be submitted)	6 weeks excluding school holidays

STAGE	ACTION	TIMESCALE
Stage 4	Decision by Schools Adjudicator	Normally within 2 months
Stage 5	Implementation	No prescribed timescale

10. Consent to publish proposals for the amalgamation of the Dodmire Schools has been received by the DCSF. A Cabinet decision to support amalgamation is required before notices can be published in the local press and advertised in the two schools affected by the proposal. The formal consultation period commences once the public notices have been published (expected to be Friday 11th July 2008).
11. A period of six weeks, excluding school holiday periods, must be allowed for representations to be made. The period for representation will close on Friday 3rd October 2008. As the Local Authority is the proposer of the scheme to amalgamate the schools, the Schools Adjudicator will make a decision on the proposal. The Schools Adjudicator will take into account any representations received during the consultation.
12. When a new school is proposed a Temporary Governing Body must be set up. The Temporary Governing Body has the same role and function as the Governing Body of a fully established school, except for financial responsibilities. This is because there is no delegated budget for a proposed school.
13. The responsibility for setting up a Temporary Governing Body rests with the Local Authority. The composition and membership of the Temporary Governing Body follows the same rules as those for other Community Schools. Parent governors and community governors are appointed by the Director of Children's Services. Staff governors are appointed by the Temporary Governing Body.
14. Although the proposals for amalgamation have not been determined, the Temporary Governing Body should carry out whatever work is possible to ensure that if the amalgamation takes place, the management structure and planning for the new primary school are in place and ready to become operational.

Outcome of Consultation

15. Please see paragraphs 6 – 8 above for details of consultation.