

DEVELOPMENTS IN DARLINGTON'S SCHOOLS

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Members of developments in Darlington's schools.

Information and AnalysisProposed Amalgamation of Dodmire Infant & Nursery School and Dodmire Junior School

2. It is the 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.
3. There are some major advantages to operating primary schools, rather than linked infant and junior schools. For example, parents do not have to make an application to the Admissions Authority so that their child can progress from infant to junior School. This saves administration costs and is less stressful for parents and pupils. There is greater continuity of curriculum provision and pastoral care. The school operates one set of policies and strategies, adopts a common philosophy of teaching and learning and the staff come to know all the pupils, especially if there are established sibling links. Finally, a large primary school generates a larger budget than two smaller infant & junior Schools. This allows the Headteacher and school governors greater flexibility. They benefit from economies of scale, the number of service level agreements that need to be purchased is reduced by at least half, and through employing a larger staff base, it is easier to provide a competitive career structure across the school workforce.
4. Dodmire Infant & Nursery School and Dodmire Junior School are both successful schools, as attested through inspections by OfSTED during the past eighteen months. The Headteacher of the Infant & Nursery School has announced that she intends to retire on 31 December 2008.
5. Informal Consultation - 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 remains open until 25 April 2008 and all attendees at the meetings were asked to submit responses in writing, with support offered to parents lacking confidence in their literacy skills.
6. What Happens at the end of Informal Consultation - Cabinet will consider the representations received under the informal consultation process. If the representations indicate a degree of unhappiness with the scheme, Cabinet would have to consider carefully whether the proposals should be progressed in the face of substantial public

opposition. If it appears that the community is in favour of the amalgamation, the Council will publish Public Notices in accordance with legislation, seeking to close the Infant and Junior Schools on 31 December 2008 and open on the same site, a primary school, from 1 January 2009. A period of formal consultation will begin, during which members of the public may raise objections to the scheme.

7. The Schools Adjudicator must be sent a copy of the Public Notice and may call in the notice if objections to the formal proposals are received. Assurances will be sought from the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Dioceses that neither religious foundation wishes to establish a faith-based school, to replace the closing Infant & Junior Schools.
8. If, after the statutory consultation period, it is possible to proceed with the amalgamation, a Temporary Governing Body will be established for the proposed Primary school. The Temporary Governing Body will be formed from some members of the existing Infant & Nursery School, and some from the Junior School. The Director of Children's Services will appoint an independent Chair for the Temporary Governing Body, who has no connection with either of the two existing schools. The Temporary Governing Body will be responsible for drawing up a staffing establishment for the proposed school, and for making appointments to the new structure. It is anticipated that the serving Headteacher from the Junior School will be invited to become Headteacher (Designate) for the proposed Primary School, this being consistent with guidance in the Schoolteachers' Pay & Conditions of Service document, where there is only one candidate in a unit of selection for a post. Deputy Headteacher posts will have to be advertised nationally. Leadership posts and posts for classroom teachers, teaching assistants and other school staff will be advertised on a ring-fenced basis within the two schools. While redundancies cannot be ruled out should the amalgamation go ahead, they are likely to be few in number. The pupil population will still attend the new school so a similar number of staff will be required to look after them while they are at school. Following the start of the informal consultation period, the Headteachers and Governing Bodies of the existing schools agreed to make only temporary appointments to any vacancies that arise, to give the Temporary Governing Body maximum flexibility in the appointments process, and to minimize the need for redundancies.
9. Conclusion - The Council has carried out successful amalgamations of infant & junior schools before, notably at Alderman Leach, Whinfield and Harrowgate Hill schools. The creation of primary schools is educationally sound.

Relocation of the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) to the Phoenix Centre

10. As Members are aware, it was planned to move pupils from the PRU into the refurbished buildings of the former Rise Carr Primary School in March 2008. Due to a four week delay in construction (caused by inclement weather), it was not possible to meet this target. The Phoenix Centre will be operational from 21 April 2008. Staff have already moved equipment and learning materials into the centre and set up classrooms ahead of the school Spring break.
11. Colleagues from the Language for Learning team and the Behaviour Support team have also moved to the Phoenix Centre from Belgrave Street.
12. There are community spaces within the building. The Headteacher will meet with Ward Councillors once the Phoenix Centre is open, to facilitate the setting up of a community use agreement.

Building Developments at Carmel RC College

13. The refurbishment works at Carmel RC College were funded through a Targeted Capital Bid made directly from the school's Governing Body to the DCSF (Voluntary Aided schools deal directly with the Department over Capital issues). Work has been carried out to the estimated time line, and phases of the new building have been handed over to the school. The expected completion date for the project is May, 2008.

Building Developments at Hummersknott School and Language College

14. The refurbishment works at Hummersknott are well established. Like Carmel, there will be a phased hand-over of parts of the project, so that pupils can occupy new premises as further work is carried out on older parts of the building. It is anticipated that the new Administration Block will be handed over in the summer. The scheme is still scheduled for completion by September 2009.

Eastbourne Church of England Academy

15. The contractor for the design and build of the new Academy Buildings is Balfour Beattie. Work has continued between the Authority, Partnerships for Schools and the Academy Sponsors to complete the final business case. Cabinet has agreed the draw-down of funds and it is anticipated that work will begin on site on 6 May 2008

North Road Primary School

16. Darlington was one of the 23 Authorities selected to be a pathfinder for the design and build of a primary school with high energy sustainability and low carbon emissions. Atkins won the contract for the design of the building. Their bold and dynamic ideas promise an excellent 21st century learning environment for pupils. At the time of writing, the tendering process is underway for the selection of a construction contractor. Pre Qualification Questionnaires are to be opened on 14 April 2008.
17. The project is due for completion by September 2009.

Legal Implications

18. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

19. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

Impact on Looked After Children

20. (a) Looked After Children will have their needs met in the proposed primary school in the same effective and efficient way their needs are currently being met at the Infant &

Nursery and Junior Schools.

(b) There are no issues impacting on Looked After Children as a result of the relocation of the Pupil Referral Unit.

(c) There are no issues impacting on Looked After Children as a result of the building developments at Carmel, Hummersknott, Eastbourne, or North Road schools.

Recommendations

16. Members are asked to:

(a) note the contents of this report; and

(b) request the Director of Children's Service to bring further reports on the outcome of informal and formal consultations on the amalgamation of the Dodmire schools.

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Background Papers

No Background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

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