

CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
23rd JUNE 2008

DEVELOPMENTS IN DARLINGTON SCHOOLS

SUMMARY

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Members with information about any significant developments in Darlington's schools.

Summary

2. The report details the emergency closure of the Firthmoor Primary School building and plans for the future of Dodmire Infant & Nursery school and Dodmire Infant School.

Recommendation

3. It is recommended that Members receive the report for information.

Murray Rose
Director of Children's Services

Background Papers

There are no background papers attached to this report

George McQueen : Extension 2887

S17 Crime and Disorder	It has been necessary to engage a security guard at Firthmoor
Health and Well Being	There are no Health & Well Being issues arising from this report
Sustainability	There are no sustainability issues arising from this report
Diversity	The proposed amalgamation of an infant & junior school has implications for the diversity of school places available to parents in Darlington
Wards Affected	The temporary closure of Firthmoor Primary School Building affects the Eastbourne ward. Children temporarily moved from Firthmoor have been accommodated in schools in the Lingfield, Park East, Sadberge and Middleton St George wards. Developments at the Dodmire schools affect the Bank Top and Lascelles wards
Groups Affected	Children of Primary School age
Budget and Policy Framework	Spend related to the management of the temporary closure of Firthmoor Primary School will be beyond current budget estimates and will be the subject of a further report to Members in due course.
Key Decision	There are no key decisions arising from this report

Urgent Decision	There are no urgent decisions arising from this report
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	Providing a school place for every child is consistent with the Aspiring Darlington theme in the Sustainable Community Strategy.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

Proposed Amalgamation of Dodmire Infant & Nursery and Dodmire Junior School

4. The informal consultation period closed on 25 April 2008. No written submissions were received from members of the public, or from parents at either school. Responses were received from:
 - (a) The National Union of Teachers (representing union members at both schools)
 - (b) The Governing Body of Dodmire Junior School
 - (c) The staff at Dodmire Junior School (signed by each member of staff)

5. These letters were supportive of the proposal to amalgamate the schools. Each of the representations noted that there was not currently an all-weather corridor between the school buildings and that amalgamation would be more successful if capital funds could be found for such an improvement. The letter from the NUT sought re-assurances about salary protection.
 - (d) The Governing body of Dodmire Infant & Nursery School.

6. This letter, which the Governors also sent to the Press, was not supportive of the proposed amalgamation. Governors raised concerns over finance, curriculum and leadership issues. A further meeting was held with the Governors on 14 May 2008 to discuss their concerns further.

7. In accordance with legislation the Department for Children, Schools and Families has been contacted to seek permission to enter into formal consultation. If this permission is granted, a further decision by Cabinet will be required to launch the consultation. If permission is given to consult, it will be possible to establish a Temporary Governing Body for the proposed new school, in anticipation of the amalgamation going ahead. This would ensure that the Temporary Governing Body would have the full period of the consultation process in which to address key issues such as vision, values and staffing for the proposed new school.

Firthmoor Primary School

8. There have been on-going problems with the electrical supply at Firthmoor Primary school. Before half-term the school had to shut to some year groups for two days as it was not possible to run the fire alarm or the lights.

9. Intensive work was carried out at the school over the half term period. The school was removed from the mains and a generator was hired in an attempt to solve the supply problem. The problem was not solved and the electrical system in the school building continued to trip out. With reluctance, the decision was taken to close the building for on-going repair work, and to decant children into classroom space, or halls available at other

primary schools throughout the Borough.

10. Coaches have been laid on and a routine has been set whereby children register at Firtmoor as normal in the morning, then transfer by coach with their teachers and other adult assistants, to their host schools. The children receive lessons from their usual teachers. Meals are provided at lunchtime by the host schools. At the end of the school day, children return by coach to Firthmoor and are dismissed from there to be received by their parents.
11. The host schools are:
 - (a) Heathfield Primary
 - (b) Bishopton Redmarshall Primary
 - (c) Cockerton CE Primary
 - (d) Skerne Park Primary
 - (e) St. George's Primary
 - (f) Dodmire Junior School
12. Nursery children are being accommodated at Maidendale house and the school Breakfast Club is being run from there. The Lead Member for Children's Services has written to all of the schools to thank them for their cooperation and their ready response to the need for emergency accommodation.
13. Officers from Community Services, Children's Services and the electricity suppliers continue to chase down the problem but at the time of writing, despite intensive investigations, no obvious solution has been identified. An up to date report will be given verbally to Members at the meeting.
14. As there is disruption at the Firthmoor site, a security firm has been engaged to monitor the premises on a full time basis.
15. A cost centre has been set up so that all spend related to the management of the temporary closure of the Firthmoor Primary School can be identified. This will be beyond current budget estimates and will be the subject of a further report to Members in due course.

Longfield School Sports College and Haughton School

16. The National School Challenge announced by DCSF on 9th June impacts on two of Darlington's Secondary Schools. At present Longfield and Haughton schools have published GCSE results for 2007 which are below the DCSF threshold of 30% 5 A* to C including English and Maths. Both schools have detailed action plans in place to improve this situation. They have benefited over the last year from a strong partnership agreement with the LA Children's Services Department based on appropriate levels of challenge and support. Senior management in both schools and within the LA are confident that neither school will be below the 30% threshold when up to date results are published in August 2008.

Impact on Looked After Children

17. There are no specific implications for looked after children.