

# REPORT FOR: **CABINET**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	19 February 2015
<b>Subject:</b>	Proposal to amalgamate Whitchurch First School and Nursery and Whitchurch Junior School
<b>Key Decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Chris Spencer, Interim Corporate Director of Children and Families
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Councillor Simon Brown, Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Young People
<b>Exempt:</b>	No
<b>Decision subject to Call-in:</b>	Yes
<b>Wards affected:</b>	Belmont
<b>Enclosures:</b>	Appendix A – Considerations about the proposal in relation to the Decision Makers Guidance

## **Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations**

Statutory proposals were published in January 2015 that would effect the amalgamation of Whitchurch First School and Nursery and Whitchurch Junior School. Cabinet approval is sought to enable the two schools to combine on 1 April 2015.

### **Recommendations:**

Cabinet is requested to approve the statutory proposals to combine Whitchurch First School and Nursery and Whitchurch Junior School on 1 April 2015.

### **Reason: (For recommendations)**

In line with the Council's amalgamation policy, combining the two schools would give the opportunity to further improve educational standards by enabling planning as a coherent whole across the primary phase of the national curriculum and providing greater flexibility across and between key stages. Access to the whole primary curriculum supports and informs whole school planning, assessment, pastoral systems, etc, and provides opportunities for wider staff development and experience across the full primary phase.

## **Section 2 – Report**

### **Introduction**

1. Harrow Council has an Amalgamation Policy that requires separate infant and junior schools to combine when a headteacher vacancy arises in either or both schools unless there are compelling and over-riding reasons not to.
2. There are two key statutory stages to the processes leading to a decision to amalgamate two schools:
  1. Statutory consultation, following which a decision is made whether to proceed to the next statutory stage of publishing statutory proposals;
  2. Publication of statutory proposals, which is followed by a 4 week representation period.

### **Options considered**

3. The Amalgamation Policy was agreed initially in February 2005. The policy subsequently has been revised and up-dated and was confirmed by Cabinet in July 2013.
4. The Headteacher of Whitchurch First School and Nursery retired in Summer 2014. In accordance with the Amalgamation Policy, a joint steering group of governors from the two schools was convened to plan the consultation about the amalgamation proposal and report to the Interim Executive Board and the Governing Body on the outcomes of the consultation.

5. The statutory consultation was held from Monday 3 November 2014 until Friday 12 December 2014. 60 written responses to the consultation were received from parents, staff, governors and other interested stakeholders. 47 of the responses (78.3%) support the proposal, 2 (3.3%) do not support the proposal, and 11 (18.3%) are not sure. Following the consultation, the Interim Executive Board and the Governing Body wrote to Harrow Council in support of the amalgamation proposal.
6. On 18 December 2014, the Portfolio Holder for Children, Schools and Young People considered the outcome of the consultation and the views of the Interim Executive Board and the Governing Body and decided to publish statutory proposals.
7. Linked statutory proposals were published on 5 January 2015 with a statutory representation period of 4 weeks that if approved would effect the amalgamation of the Whitchurch schools to provide an all through primary school. The local authority received no representations during the representation period. The Governing Bodies of the two schools have responded to the statutory proposals as follows.
8. The Interim Executive Board (IEB) of Whitchurch First School and Nursery has responded that they are supportive of the proposed amalgamation to take place between Whitchurch First and Junior School. The IEB considers it is the correct decision from an economic perspective as they are in the same building, from a staff perspective in terms of professional development and enhancing teaching and learning and also for the pupils so that they can enjoy a fully supportive primary education without the transition from First to Junior school. The IEB welcome the concept of a newly constituted Governing Body effectively representing all parts and stakeholders of the school.
9. The Governing Body of Whitchurch Junior School has responded that their views remain unchanged from the views expressed in December 2014 regarding the amalgamation of Whitchurch Junior School with Whitchurch First School and Nursery. The Governing Body of Whitchurch Junior School decided in a unanimous vote that it was in the best interests of the children that both schools should amalgamate.
10. Cabinet has the following options:
  - a. Reject the proposals;
  - b. Approve the proposals without modification;
  - c. Approve the proposals with modification;
  - d. Approve the proposals, with or without modification, subject to certain conditions being met.

### **Determination of statutory proposals**

11. In its role as the Decision Maker, Cabinet must have regard to the statutory and non-statutory guidance, provided by the Department for Education, when determining statutory proposals. Appendix A provides Cabinet with commentary on the salient points contained in the Decision Makers' Guidance.

## **Recommendation**

12. The Corporate Director of Children and Families recommends that Cabinet approve the proposals to effect the amalgamation of the two schools with effect from 1 April 2015, namely to:
- extend the age range of Whitchurch Junior School to establish a primary school with an age range of 4 years (Reception) to 11 years (Year 6) plus nursery from 1 April 2015;
  - expand the capacity of Whitchurch Junior School from 1 April 2015 to accommodate 840 pupils plus nursery when the school is fully expanded in 2020; and
  - discontinue Whitchurch First School and Nursery on 31 March 2015.
13. In line with the Council's amalgamation policy, combining the two schools would give the opportunity to further improve educational standards by enabling planning as a coherent whole across the primary phase of the national curriculum and providing greater flexibility across and between key stages. Access to the whole primary curriculum supports and informs whole school planning, assessment, pastoral systems, etc, and provides opportunities for wider staff development and experience across the full primary phase.

## **14. Performance Issues**

15. Schools in Harrow perform well in comparison to national and statistically similar local authorities. The vast majority of primary schools and secondary schools are judged 'good' or 'outstanding' by OfSTED. As at October 2014, 87% of Harrow's primary and secondary schools are judged 'good' or 'outstanding', compared to 85% in London and 80% nationally (Source: Ofsted Data View).
16. The Schools White Paper and Education Act 2011 maintain a focus on driving up standards in schools, and place more of the responsibility with the schools directly for their improvement. The role of the Local Authority in measuring performance and driving improvement has changed significantly and is reduced from its previous level. However, the Local Authority maintains a strategic oversight and enabling role in local education, and is likely to retain some role in monitoring educational achievement and key measures such as exclusions and absence. The Local Authority is also statutorily responsible for supporting and improving underperforming schools.
17. The Local Authority continues to monitor key education indicators. The indicators are used locally to monitor, improve and support education at both school and local authority level. They are also used within information provided to the DfE.

Year	Key Stage 2	Reading, Writing & Maths L4+	KS1-KS2 Expected Progress - Reading	KS1-KS2 Expected Progress - Writing	KS1-KS2 Expected Progress - Maths
2011-12	Harrow	79%	91%	93%	90%
	National	74%	90%	90%	87%
2012-13	Harrow	79%	90%	92%	92%
	National	75%	88%	92%	88%
2013-14	Harrow	83%	94%	93%	93%
	National	79%	91%	93%	90%

Source: DfE Statistical First Release

18. The indicators fall within the following areas:

- Attendance and exclusions - remain a statutory duty for the Local Authority to monitor and improve.
- Underperforming schools – schools are assessed at Key Stage 2 & Key Stage 4 against defined floor standards.
- Closing the Gap - is a fundamental part of Ofsted’s school inspection process, and accordingly, the Local Authority monitors the attainment of identified groups of pupils in its schools. The table below includes the gap at key stage 2 between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers and the gap between Harrow’s SEN children and their peers – children with a SEN provision includes School Action, School Action Plus or a Statement.

2013-14 Key Stage 2 – Closing the Gap	Harrow	National
Achievement gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers, based on pupils achieving level 4 or above in Reading, Writing and mathematics at Key Stage 2.	14%	18%
Achievement gap between pupils with special educational needs and their peers, based on pupils achieving level 4 or above in Reading, Writing and mathematics at Key Stage 2.	52%	52%

## Environmental Impact

19. There is no significant environmental impact arising from this proposal.

## Risk Management Implications

20. Risk included on Directorate risk register? No  
Separate risk register in place? No

High Level Risks	Consequences	Mitigating/Control Actions
Confusion for stakeholders.	Stakeholders struggle to give clear views.	The brief notice and full proposal were developed with close reference to the government guidance and contained as full information as possible. Consultation meetings were held to allow scope for discussion and for questions to be

		answered.
Challenge to decision making.	Delay.	The decision maker must have due regard to the Department for Education School Organisation Guidance for proposers and decision-makers in reaching its decisions on school reorganisation proposals.

## Legal Implications

21. The Local Authority has a statutory entitlement under Sections 15 and 19 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, to issue statutory proposals in respect of school reorganisation.
22. New school organisation regulations and associated guidance came into force on 28 January 2014 and the process has been amended to streamline the process. The statutory proposals were published on 5 January 2015 following the decision made by the Portfolio Holder on 18 December 2014. Cabinet must determine the proposals within two months of the representation period, which ended on 2 February 2015, or the matter is referred to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator for determination. Cabinet must have regard to the Secretary of State's guidance when reaching its decision, and should consider the representations received during the course of the publication period when making its decision.

## Financial Implications

23. From April 2015, there would be a new budget for the combined school calculated in accordance with the Harrow schools funding formula, which is essentially based on an amount per pupil.
24. Under the current school funding arrangements, as a combined school there will be loss of one 'lump sum' which each school receives annually as part of its budget. This reduction is implemented over time. In the year following the proposed amalgamation (2016/17) the combined school would receive the equivalent of 85% of two lump sums. This would allow time for the Governing Body to plan for this change which represents a comparatively small amount of the combined school budget (about 5%). Funding efficiencies arising from combining the schools can be used to offset this reduction. The Governing Body and leadership team of a combined school should be able to plan strategically in a cost effective manner in the best interests of the children in order to achieve positive outcomes for the children in the long term.

## Equalities implications / Public Sector Equality Duty

25. The equality impact assessment indicates that the equalities impact of Cabinet's decision will be effectively neutral. No child would be displaced if the schools amalgamate nor if they were to stay separate. Harrow's community schools are inclusive schools and this would continue in a combined school. The proposal is intended to build on

the many positives already in place at the schools. In an all through school, there may be benefits for pupils with special educational needs as the amalgamation might help to alleviate issues of transition as it could provide continuous support for pupils and a common set of school rules and processes.

### Council Priorities

26. The Council's vision is **Working Together to Make a Difference for Harrow**
27. The Council Priorities are as follows
- Making a difference for the vulnerable
  - Making a difference for communities
  - Making a difference for local businesses
  - Making a difference for families
28. The recommendation supports these priorities by providing opportunities to enhance educational standards and to further promote positive community outcomes by ensuring the most effective use of school facilities and coordinated extended services support to families and children.

### Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Jo Frost	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 21 January 2015		
Name: Sarah Wilson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 21 January 2015		

<b>Ward Councillors notified:</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>EqIA carried out:</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>EqIA cleared by:</b>	Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment Quality Assurance Group

## **Section 4 - Contact Details and Background Papers**

**Contact:** Johanna Morgan, Education Lead School Organisation,  
020 8736 6841 [johanna.morgan@harrow.gov.uk](mailto:johanna.morgan@harrow.gov.uk)

**Background Papers:** Equalities Impact Assessment on the proposed amalgamation of Whitchurch First School and Nursery and Whitchurch Junior School.

**Call-In Waived by the  
Chairman of Overview  
and Scrutiny  
Committee**

**NOT APPLICABLE**

*[Call-in applies]*