

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	16 February 2006
Subject:	Amalgamation of Pinner Wood First and Middle Schools
Responsible Officer:	Executive Director, People First
Contact Officer:	Director of Learning and Community Development
Portfolio Holder:	Education and Lifelong Learning
Key Decision:	No
Status:	Public

### **Section 1: Summary**

The Governing Bodies of Pinner Wood First School and Pinner Wood Middle School have undertaken a feasibility study, followed by consultations, into the possibility of amalgamating the two schools. At separate meetings on 7 and 8 February the two Governing Bodies decided to seek the approval of Cabinet for statutory notices to be issued. The plan will be to open as a new combined two form of entry school in September 2006.

### **Decision Required**

1. To approve that Statutory Notices are published for the proposed amalgamation of Pinner Wood First and Middle Schools.
2. To delegate the decision whether to agree to the amalgamation of the two schools to the Portfolio Holder for Education and Lifelong Learning, if no objections are received during the representation period.

## **Reason for report**

The Council's Amalgamation Policy requires the Governing Bodies of all separate first and middle schools to consider combining the two schools when specified circumstances arise. Two of the circumstances specified in the policy apply to Pinner Wood First School. The two Governing Bodies have implemented the initial stages of the policy, and now seek Cabinet approval for Statutory Notices to be published.

## **Benefits**

Potential is identified to improve educational standards, particularly by enhancing the transition between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.

As part of their overall strategy, the Governing Bodies seek approval to open a new combined school with two forms of entry. Amalgamation and a move to two forms of entry are expected to ensure each class is full and to provide resilience to fluctuations in pupil numbers.

Upgrading of the school premises will proceed as part of the plan to amalgamate.

The strategy of the Governing Bodies will lead to improvement in the budget position for the schools.

Opportunities for staff development and enhanced career prospects are identified.

## **Cost of Proposals**

The Council has included a provisional figure of £300,000 annually in the Capital Programme to support school amalgamations.

Building work has been identified to be undertaken in support of the amalgamation of the two Pinner Wood schools should the decision be made to amalgamate. The schools have been told that £300,000 would be allocated towards the works in support of the amalgamation.

The schools have received advice from the Schools Finance Manger to assist them with their business case in support of amalgamation.

The Schools Forum have agreed to amend the school formula so any new

school will be given the balances of the two closing schools and agreed the protection for 1 year of the fixed lump sum which both closing schools would have received.

## **Risks**

If the Governing Bodies are not able to implement their strategy, there is an imminent risk of budget deficit arising in the First School and continued issues of surplus places and fluctuations in pupil numbers.

There is potential risk to the current ethos of the separate schools, though good management is expected to minimise this risk.

The change will generate uncertainty for some staff members. This risk is well recognised by the Governing Bodies who will implement change sensitively over time.

## **Implications if recommendations rejected**

The two schools would continue to experience the current difficulties of operating as separate three forms of entry schools with significant surplus places.

## **Section 2: Report**

### Brief History

In February 2005 Cabinet approved the Shaping Schools for the Future Strategy. The Strategy has two strands: a Framework for Managing the Over-Provision of School Places; and an Amalgamation Policy. The Strategy sets out how Harrow Council will work in partnership with schools and all key stakeholders to address over-provision of places in schools and to support the implementation of the Amalgamation Policy.

The first stage of the Framework for Managing the Over-Provision of School Places involves an annual overview of numbers and trends in school places. A letter was sent to all primary schools in July 2005 to advise them that work was proceeding to identify those schools that have had surplus capacity of 15% or more over the past three years. This was with a view to engaging in preliminary discussions about the situation with those schools from early in the Autumn term. During September and early October preliminary discussions were held with six

community First and Middle schools, together with their associated schools where applicable. These discussions were conducted using the following partnership approach: any actions to be taken forward would be with the full agreement of the school and governing body; any actions would be in the context of the school's development plan; actions taken must add to what the school offers and contributes; the local authority would support schools with any actions that are agreed. The outcome of these discussions was reported to the Shaping Schools for the Future Group at a meeting held on 21 November 2005, and the group agreed the recommendations for further discussions with schools.

Pinner Wood First School is one of the schools that has had surplus places of 15% or over during the past three years. In September 2005 preliminary discussion was held with the headteachers of Pinner Wood First School and Pinner Wood Middle School about the situation. The discussions were constructive, and the headteachers undertook to consider the situation further and consult with their governors. Shortly thereafter the headteacher of Pinner Wood First School confirmed her intention to retire in April 2006.

Two of the circumstances when Governing Bodies are required to consider combining separate first and middle schools apply to Pinner Wood First School, namely: a headteacher vacancy has arisen; and pupil numbers are 25% or more below admission number. In accordance with the Amalgamation Policy, the governing bodies of the two schools initiated a process to consider whether amalgamation would be in the best interests of the schools. The Pinner Wood Schools Consultation Steering Group was established to steer initial consultations and to undertake a feasibility study. This work was concluded in December 2005, and an Amalgamation Feasibility Study report has been written (see background papers).

The two governing bodies met in January 2006 and decided to move to a full consultation phase. The consultation process has included: letters to stakeholders; the feasibility study has been posted on the First School website; meetings with staff and parents. The consultation period closed on 6 February. The response to the consultation was favourable, and the two governing bodies decided at meetings on 7 and 8 February to recommend to Harrow Council that the schools be amalgamated and move to two forms of entry.

### Options considered

The two governing bodies have considered remaining as separate schools, and recruiting to fill the first school headteacher post. However, Pinner Wood First School historically has a high level of surplus places, and this surplus is projected to continue at a level that effectively means it will be a two form of entry school by default. Pinner Wood Middle School also has surplus places which, though at a lower level than the first school, are likely to increase further. The feasibility study explored these issues, and the governing bodies have decided that

amalgamation, and opening as a new two form of entry combined school, is in the best interests of the schools.

Another option is to amalgamate the two schools, and to move to two forms of entry at a later date. However the earliest realistic time for a move to two forms of entry using this approach would be September 2008. This is because of the consultation and publication timescales required for changes to admission numbers of existing schools. The governing bodies consider it is important that the move to two forms of entry occur in 2006 for financial and school development reasons, and to ensure each class is full and provide resilience to fluctuations in pupil numbers.

The school development programme includes the establishment of a Children's Centre on the school site from Spring 2007, the creation of an improved Early Years Foundation Unit, and improvements to ICT and music provision. A move to becoming a two form of entry school in September 2006 will enable this development programme to be implemented without delay.

There is a statutory period of six weeks following the publication of notices for objections and comments to be made. If there are no objections, the local authority may determine the proposals. If there are objections, the School Organisation must determine the proposals. The earliest date for this six week period to end is 13 April. This date is after April Cabinet, and the following Cabinet will be in June after the local elections. Cabinet is asked to authorise the Portfolio Holder for Education and Lifelong Learning, if no objections are received during the representation period, to decide whether to agree to the amalgamation of the two schools. This would allow time for the schools to implement the proposals by September 2006. If there are objections, the earliest the proposals will be determined by the School Organisation Committee is June.

Importantly, if a new two form of entry school is created in September 2006, the commitment to existing pupils in Year groups of more than 60 pupils will continue. The Statutory Notices will be framed with the advice of Legal Services to ensure the issues of amalgamation and opening as a two form of entry school are fully addressed.

### Consultation

Formal consultation occurred up until 6 February. The two governing bodies have considered the outcome of the consultation and have decided to recommend to Cabinet that the two schools amalgamate.

### Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications for the Council of the schools amalgamation. All revenue cost implications will be contained within the Dedicated Schools Grant.

### Legal Implications

The School Standards and Framework Act 1998 requires the Council to publish Statutory Notices to make any prescribed alteration to a community school. Closing two schools and the establishment of a new school are prescribed alterations. The Act outlines the procedure to be followed. The initial requirement is informal consultation with all interested parties. The consultation process has adhered to the necessary statutory principles. The next step is the publishing of Statutory Notices.

Once Statutory Notices have been published, legislation provides a statutory timescale in which comments can be made. If no objection is made the Council has a discretion as to whether to implement the proposal. If an objection is made the proposal must be referred to the School Organisation Committee (SOC) for a determination. If SOC agrees the proposals they must be implemented.

### Equalities Impact

Amalgamation and the opening of a new combined two form of entry school is likely to have a positive impact through the creation of a financially secure school with full classes, improved Early Years Foundation Unit, a Children's Centre, and enhanced scope to deliver extended school activities.

### Section 17 Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Considerations

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## **Section 3: Supporting Information/ Background Documents**

Pinner Wood Schools Amalgamation Feasibility study (December 2005)

Shaping Schools for the Future Strategy (Cabinet Report 17 February 2005)

Any person wishing to inspect the background papers should telephone 020  
8420 9270