

## **High Achieving Schools at the centre of Community Services**

### **Strategic Approach to School Organisation Contributing to a *Cosmopolitan, Confident and Cohesive Harrow***

#### **Issue**

National Government policies and recent local developments within Harrow create a favourable context in which to consider school organisation issues. This briefing paper outlines the key school organisation issues for Harrow and proposes an approach that will engage all Stakeholders.

#### **Background**

Harrow schools are popular and successful and perform consistently in line with or above National Averages at all Key Stages. There are good partnerships between schools, the local authority and other organisations and as a result many schools provide a range of opportunities for the local community. The Council's commitment to this agenda is confirmed in its Vision Statements and associated Corporate Priorities. The Vision Statement to provide high achieving schools at the centre of community services translates to a Corporate Priority to continue improvement in schools and make education in Harrow even better.

Whilst this level of achievement has been maintained, demographic data indicates that the profile of Harrow is changing. Therefore, the challenge for Harrow is to secure the most effective school organisation for the 21st Century that supports the best outcomes for all schools and local communities and maximises the use of resources. Any changes to school organisation must be based on educational principles, support the council's priorities and embrace the Government's widest agenda.

The local authority, as the champion of pupils and parents, has a duty to promote high standards, fair access to educational opportunity and the fulfilment of every child's educational potential. This includes the statutory responsibility to manage the supply of school places and the provision of sufficient school places in its area. The authority works with partners including schools and other public services to achieve mutually agreed objectives. This approach is fostered in the Harrow Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) 2006-2009 and the Children's Trust approach to multi-agency co-operation and performance management. Changes to school organisation demonstrate the leadership role of the local authority and will contribute to the achievement of many priorities within the CYPP.

Harrow is working with partners and forging links between initiatives and priorities where ever possible, the result of which is a range of Government learning and community focussed initiatives being implemented in Harrow. Many are based on school sites using remodelled school accommodation and draw on strands of capital funding. Key projects are outlined as follows:

- The development of the Harrow Sixth Form Collegiate is making real progress to increase opportunities and choice, including school based provision, for 14-19 learners in Harrow in line with the Government's 14-19 Implementation Plan. Through the collaborative work of the High Schools, Colleges, Local Authority and Learning and Skills

Council (LSC) the Harrow Sixth Form Collegiate will be established fully from September 2008 supported by £24.8m capital from the LSC. The Collegiate includes all 10 high schools and 3 colleges as well as the two special schools and the Skills Centre. It provides a range of curriculum pathways for learners across the institutions.

- By working in partnership within School Clusters, and with other partners including the local authority, private and voluntary sector, there is an extensive Extended Schools programme with one Full Service extended school and 18 offering the full Core Offer by September 2007. Five of the 9 Children's Centres will be operational this year with a further 4 completed by Autumn 2008 with examples of joint service planning and delivery established on school sites.
- The Harrow Building Schools for the Future One School Pathfinder will provide high quality teaching and learning environments as well as community facilities.

Whilst there is demonstrable progress in joining-up initiatives, changing school organisation in Harrow, using the funding available through the Government's Building Schools for the Future programme and Primary Capital Programme, will accelerate the implementation of this agenda and maximise its impact.

### **Rationale for Change**

The imperative to consider the Age of Transfer issue afresh is both organisational and educational. The current organisation of schools in Harrow is out of line with that found in most authorities nationally and out of sync with the current Key Stage structure. We also know from previous consultations on this issue that a change to the age of transfer is the preferred option for most parents of pupils in Harrow schools.

Within this context we need to be clear that Harrow is a comparatively high performing authority in relation to academic achievement. However we also know that our demographic profile is changing and the challenge will be to maintain or continue to improve our performance in the light of those changes including:

- a more fluid pupil group moving into and through our schools other than at the normal admission points
- a change in the ethnicity of our pupils away from the settled Indian community being the largest group to an increasingly diverse and newly arrived group with more English as an Additional Language issues

### **Organisational Factors**

The significant organisational factors which have informed our decision to look at this again with a view to bringing forward the change of age of transfer are:

- **Loss of pupils at the end of year 6 to neighbouring boroughs and counties, currently 26%** – *the impact of this is that smaller classes in year 7 are to some extent subsidised by schools in order to ensure that provision is broad and balanced with specialist teaching in some areas or schools are unable to offer the breadth of opportunity that full classes would allow*

- **Inflow of pupils in year 7 to access secondary places at popular schools** – *the impact of this is that schools are inducting pupils for one year resulting in some instances in difficult inter-pupil relationships, a dip in progress and behavioural challenges as well as financial uncertainties*
- **Parents choosing to educate their children outside Harrow as there is a net outflow from Harrow** – *it is difficult to separate this out from the post-16 issue as the two factors combined have obviously been a part of some parents' decision and others are more concerned about the post-16 issue which has now been addressed.*
- **Parents “hedging their bets” by applying for selective schools at the end of year 6 and staying on into year 7 if unsuccessful** - this may create a feeling that it is a second best option
- **The anomaly with the Catholic sector where age of transfer is at the end of year 6** – *this could be challenged under equal opportunities legislation as non-catholics do not have this option*

### **Educational and Social Factors**

In addition there is an educational and social case that needs to be considered. Here there are arguments on both sides:

- **Split Key Stage 3 across two phases presents significant challenges for both middle and secondary schools** – *For middle schools the challenge is to provide high quality specialist teaching and facilities. For secondary schools it is the variable experiences at middle school resulting in many instances in re-teaching those elements of the curriculum. Results in Science for example remain significantly lower at the end of KS3 than for English and Maths reflecting perhaps the impact of this since performance at KS4 is good.*
- **Split Key Stage 2 across two phases presents a similar challenge for separate first and middle schools** – *the co-location of these schools and the significant match in pupils between these schools minimises the issues and schools do work closely together, however there are long standing issues around moderation of standards between KS1 and KS2*
- **The emerging issue of standards in the foundation stage where Harrow is actually performing below national expectations in some aspects (in line with the demographic trends) means that first schools now have to focus on this key stage** – *there is also a growing trend to liberate the Key Stage 1 curriculum to establish a more play based mode of learning for longer and thereby leaving year 3 more isolated in separate first schools*
- **The additional year in middle school allows pupils to mature within a smaller setting thus helping with their social and emotional development enabling them to make a better start to secondary school and contributing to overall high standards** - *this appears to vary from year to year with some pupils more than ready to move on to secondary school at the end of year 6 while others benefit from the additional year. Over the last two years high schools have reported an increasing number of pupils presenting*

*very challenging behaviour in year 8 and indeed this year group is the focus for the off-site provision*

- **A shared Key stage 3 ensures that middle and secondary schools work more closely together to share the curriculum and this improves transition** – *the reality is that the structure in Harrow is not a pyramid one and high schools draw from a number of feeder schools within and beyond Harrow resulting in a tendency to repeat much of the Year 7 curriculum*
- **Personalised learning pathways across key stages 3-5 are more difficult if only 2 years of KS3 are in secondary school** – *this doesn't preclude transfer into year 8 but would mean that schools that wanted to start key stage 4 a year early for some pupils would only have a year to complete key stage 3*

### **Stakeholder Support for Change**

The organisation of schools in Harrow has been the subject of debates and surveys with stakeholders. The School Organisation Debate in 2003 confirmed a consensus amongst stakeholders to increase post-16 opportunities and change the age of transfer to 11+. The Post-16 Stakeholder Survey in 2004 confirmed the preference for post-16 provision on school sites.

### **Progress Towards Securing Change**

A series of actions have been implemented in advance of a change in the age of transfer:

- A capital bid was submitted to the Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) as part of the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme in 2003 to re-organise schools, to change the age of transfer and provide post-16 on school sites. Harrow will receive funding under the BSF programme in 2011-2013.
- Since the initial launch of the BSF programme, in early 2006 the DCSF brought forward some of this funding and created One-School Pathfinder projects. Harrow was successful in securing funding, and Whitmore School will be rebuilt under this programme for completion in Autumn 2009; there will be capacity for year 7 pupils once the build is completed.
- The Amalgamation Policy was agreed by Cabinet in 2005. In the context of a change in the age transfer, the impact on a combined first and middle schools is reduced. The school will usually be organised along the National Curriculum Key Stages and will cease to provide Key Stage 3 for Year 7 pupils. Six schools have amalgamated since 2005 to establish 3 combined schools. From September 2007 there will be 16 separate first and 16 separate middle schools. A proactive approach to amalgamation will continue when circumstances are met within the Policy at these schools.
- In readiness for the DCSF Primary Capital Programme funding available from 2009, all schools in the first and middle school sector are preparing a Capital School Development Plan. These plans address specific individual school needs as identified in the Asset Management Plan (AMP) within the context of the long term vision that the schools will cover the full primary age range in the future.

The local authority monitors pupil population and roll projection data and some reductions in standard numbers have been implemented. No further changes are proposed so that the impact of the Harrow Sixth Form Collegiate and other factors can be assessed and used to inform future planning for a school re-organisation.

### **The Way Forward**

Changing the age of transfer is a challenging and complex project. It involves delivering teaching and learning within the context of the removal of approximately 2,000 Year 7 places from the first and middle school sector and their relocation into high schools. However, there is real potential to secure exciting and quality outcomes for all Harrow's communities. Engaging stakeholders at the outset in the development of a re-organisation strategy and retaining their commitment throughout the strategy's implementation is critical. The timescale needs to be challenging but realistic to ensure that the full benefits are experienced by those children, young people and communities now as well as in the future. For this purpose an implementation date of September 2010 is proposed.

To move the project forward Harrow will:

- Brief and engage stakeholders on an informal basis during early Autumn 2007, including Headteachers, Governors and external partners in Harrow and DCSF.
- Develop options to implement a change in the age of transfer to 11+ including an analysis of high schools' capacities, an initial capital build programme, identifying revenue requirements, consultation processes and project plan. (This will form the basis of any future submission to the DCSF for funding as part of the Building Schools for the Future programme if possible and the basis of consultation)
- Respond to the DCSF Building Schools for the Future consultation in the Autumn Term.
- Seek Cabinet commitment to implementing a change in the age of transfer, establish a Representative Stakeholder Reference Group, and re-submit a bid to the DCSF Building Schools for the Future programme.

### **Conclusion**

A change in school organisation will impact on every school community in Harrow. There is funding available through the DCSF Building Schools for the Future Programme and Primary Capital Programme to provide a level of investment currently seen in only a few schools in Harrow. This is a demanding and exciting challenge but the foundations are in place. Through a strategic approach, with full stakeholder support and sustained leadership by the local authority, the full potential for all Harrow's young people and communities will be realised.