

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	17 January 2008
Subject:	Amalgamation of First and Middle Schools
Key Decision:	No
Responsible Officer:	Heather Clements, Director of Schools and Children's Development
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Christine Bednell Schools and Children's Development
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Annexe A Letter from West Lodge Middle School Governing Body - 19 November 2007 Annexe B Letter from West Lodge First School Governing Body 12 December 2007 Annexe C Letter from Belmont Middle School Governing Body 4 December 2007

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report outlines processes undertaken by the Governing Bodies of West Lodge First and West Lodge Middle Schools and Belmont First and Belmont Middle School Governing Bodies to investigate and consult with parents on amalgamation and the outcome of the Governing Bodies' decisions.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet is requested to:

- 1 Note the outcome of the decisions of the Governing Bodies of West Lodge First and West Lodge Middle Schools.
- 2 Agree that the Local Authority in response to parental representations should undertake a consultation and report the outcomes to Cabinet.
- 3 Note the outcome of the decisions of the Governing Bodies of Belmont First and Belmont Middle Schools in respect of amalgamation.

- 4 Agree that if a substantive Headteacher to Belmont First School is not appointed by April 2008, the Governing Body will be requested to apply the Amalgamation Policy October 2007.

Reason: (For recommendation)

Cabinet agreed a revised Amalgamation Policy in October 2007 to contribute to raising standards of achievement in Harrow and to establish a foundation for the implementation of a change in the age of transfer. This Policy requires Cabinet to confirm the decisions of Governing Bodies.

Section 2 – Report

Introduction

Harrow's vision is to provide high achieving schools at the centre of community services, and a corporate priority is to continue improvement in schools to make education in Harrow even better. In order to further this vision, in October 2007 Cabinet agreed its strategic approach to school organisation.

Background

Cabinet agreed the Amalgamation Policy originally in February 2005. The Policy was then reviewed by the Shaping Schools for the Future Group and amended in the light of experiences in applying the policy. This amended version was published in November 2005. Since then six schools have amalgamated to establish three combined first and middle schools. The combined school is more aligned with the National Curriculum Key Stages and there will be less impact on the school when the age of transfer is implemented. The continuation and strengthening of the policy will secure a good foundation for the implementation of a change in the age of transfer.

The Cabinet considered a report at their October 2007 meeting on the Strategic Approach to School Organisation. The Cabinet agreed the recommendations and the amended Amalgamation Policy.

In accordance with the original Amalgamation Policy, four schools, Belmont First and Belmont Middle Schools and West Lodge First and West Lodge Middle Schools, commenced the process to consider amalgamation when a Headteacher resigned in the Summer Term. The Governors have confirmed their decisions and supporting reasons to the Director of Schools and Children's Development. The details of which are included in this report.

West Lodge First and Middle Schools

- The Governing Bodies of West Lodge First and West Lodge Middle Schools commenced the process to consider amalgamating the two separate schools in April 2007 on the resignation of the Middle School Headteacher.
- The Steering Group was established in June 2007 to prepare the feasibility study for the Governing Bodies to consider.
- The relationship between the Steering Group, First School Governing Body and Middle School Governing Body deteriorated irretrievably and the study was not completed to the satisfaction of all members of the Steering Group.

- The Local Authority urged both Governing Bodies to re-start the process or begin the process again. Reconciliation was not possible.
- Without the Steering Group's completed feasibility study, the Middle School Governing Body considered amalgamation at their meeting on 17 November 2007 and decided against amalgamation. This letter is in Annexe A.
- With the evidence available and also without a completed feasibility study, the First School Governing Body also considered amalgamation. The Governors were in support of amalgamation and a copy of the letter is in Annexe B.
- The Local Authority considers that the Amalgamation Policy process has not been followed correctly.
- In accordance with the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the Local Authority has a duty to respond to parental representations.
- In the light of representations received from parents coupled with the incomplete process undertaken, it is proposed that Cabinet consider whether the Local Authority should undertake a consultation on the future organisation of West Lodge First School and West Lodge Middle School with all interested parties.

Should a consultation be undertaken the process will be as follows:

- Cabinet decision to undertake consultation January 2008.
- Local Authority undertake consultation with all stakeholders
- A report summarising the outcome of the consultation and making recommendations to Cabinet is prepared
- Cabinet determines whether to publish statutory notices at their meeting in April 2008.

Belmont First and Belmont Middle Schools

- The Governing Bodies of Belmont First and Middle Schools commenced the process to consider amalgamating the two separate schools in May 2007 when the Headteacher of the First School announced her retirement.
- A Steering Group with representatives from both schools was selected to undertake a feasibility study and present the study to the Governing Bodies separately for them to consider amalgamation.
- The Chair of Governors of the Middle School confirmed the Governors decision at their extraordinary meeting on 20 November 2007. The Governing Bodies voted separately. The First School Governors voted in favour of amalgamation. The Middle School Governors voted against.
- On the basis of these votes the schools will remain separate in accordance with the original amalgamation policy. The reasons presented by the Governing Body of the Middle School for not amalgamating are included in the letter dated 4 December 2007 in Annexe C.
- In considering the letter from the Governing Bodies confirming the details of their decisions and the process undertaken to prepare the feasibility

study for the Governing Bodies, it appears that the process has been undertaken in accordance with the Amalgamation Policy of November 2005.

- It is proposed that Cabinet notes the outcome of the Governing Bodies decisions and that the First School should initiate the process to appoint a substantive Headteacher. If, however, this appointment is not secured by April 2008, the Governing Bodies will be requested to undertake a further consultation on amalgamation in accordance with the October 2007 Amalgamation Policy.

Other Considerations

The officer support provided to schools considering the amalgamation is met from within existing budgets.

A combined school will retain the existing pupils and therefore will require the same staffing levels. As part of the combined school's development plan a new staffing structure will be developed to reflect the new organisation of the school. Appointments will be made to this structure over time.

Legal Comments

Parental Representations

The Local Authority has a duty under Section 14A of the Education Act 1996 to consider parental representations in respect of the provision of education. The guidance is issued under Section 3 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The Local Authority is under a duty to respond to parental demands and is "expected to provide dedicated consultancy support to help parents develop concrete proposals".

The Local Authority is compliant with the duty by asking the Governing Bodies and Steering Group to re-start the amalgamation process. Failure by the Governing Bodies to consider the overwhelming parental representations could result in referral to the Secretary of State. If the Governing Bodies can not establish a representative Steering Group then the Local Authority may have to initiate similar intervention. Throughout the process Governing Bodies must be reminded of their overriding duty towards the school and its pupils.

Changes to Schools

The Education and Inspection Act 2006 provides a framework for consultation, publication and determination of statutory notices in respect of proposals for schools, including the establishment of combined first and middle schools. The legislation has provision to amalgamate separate first and middle schools and create a combined school through two routes. Both routes retain all existing pupils and staff. The options are to close both schools and open a new school or close one school and extend the age range of the other school. However, under the Education and Inspections Act 2006 Local Authorities are required to apply to the Secretary of State for consent to establish new schools without a competition. Therefore to avoid any risk to the continuation of these successful schools it is proposed that one school is closed and the age range of the other is extended.

Financial Implications

Amalgamating schools have had a positive albeit small revenue effect, in previous cases this has resulted in net savings of approximately £40k. The principal saving results from having one head teacher instead of two. Schools will also benefit from having fewer SLA charges for some services, for instance, at

present first and middle schools are charged separately for the Schools Finance SLA. This will change to only one charge after amalgamation.

Capital expenditure, where necessary, will be financed through existing capital resources including for example Schools Devolved Formula, and other DCSF resources as they come on stream for example, the Primary Capital Programme from April 2009.

Performance Issues

Delivering School Re-organisation so that Harrow Schools are in line with the national agenda is Council Improvement Plan project IP7D and contributes to a range of performance indicators including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) on achievement at all key stages, Local Area Agreement (LAA) targets including those for reducing NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), and Average Points Score at 16 (GCSE Results) and the Every Child Matters Score Card. Whilst Harrow's performance is currently above national and statistical neighbours at all Key Stages, Harrow's targets, which are set annually by the DCSF, are highly challenging. Harrow has not made as much improvement in these KPIs over recent years as statistical neighbours. This is an indication of the pressures on these targets due to a changing demography. Harrow needs to act to maintain performance, meet the challenging targets it has been set and achieve the most positive outcomes for every Harrow child

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Bharat Jashapara	<input type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Chief Financial Officer
Date: 21 December 2007		
Name: Helen White	<input type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Monitoring Officer
Date: 3 January 2008	—	

Section 4 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name: Mike Howes	<input type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the* Divisional Director (Strategy and Improvement)
Date: 8 January 2008		

Section 5 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Author Contact: Johanna Morgan, Service Manager, Partnership and Well-Being, Adults and Housing Department, 020 8736 6841

Background Papers:

Report to Cabinet 17 October 2007 – Strategic Approach to School Organisation

If appropriate, does the report include the following considerations?

1.	Consultation	YES / NO
2.	Corporate Priorities	YES / NO