

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	18 September 2008
Subject:	Future Organisation of Belmont First School and Belmont Middle School
Key Decision:	Yes
Responsible Officer:	Director of Schools and Children's Development Heather Clements
Portfolio Holder:	Portfolio Holder for Schools and Children's Development Councillor Anjana Patel
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Letters from the governing bodies

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the outcome of the statutory consultation about the future organisation of Belmont First School and Belmont Middle School, and the recommendations of the governing bodies that the two schools amalgamate in September 2009.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to approve that Statutory Notices are published that would have the effect of combining Belmont First and Middle Schools if implemented.

Reason: (For recommendation)

For Cabinet to consider the outcome of the statutory consultation, and to exercise the local authority's statutory responsibility in relation to school organisation and consider whether to publish statutory notices to effect the change.

Section 2 – Report

Introduction

1. 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.

Options considered

2. The Headteacher of Belmont First School retired, and in May 2007 the governing bodies commenced the process to consider amalgamating the two schools in accordance with the Council's amalgamation policy agreed in February 2005. At the conclusion of the process, the Belmont First School Governing Body voted in favour of amalgamation, and the Belmont Middle School Governing Body voted against. At its meeting on 17 January 2008 Cabinet noted the decisions of the Governing Bodies of Belmont First and Belmont Middle Schools in respect of amalgamation, and resolved that if a substantive Headteacher to Belmont First School was not appointed by April 2008, the Governing Bodies be requested to reconsider.
3. A substantive Headteacher to Belmont First School was not appointed by April 2008, and the governing bodies commenced the process to amalgamate the two schools in accordance with the Council's amalgamation policy. The October 2007 amalgamation policy requires separate first and middle schools to amalgamate when one or more of the triggering circumstances arise unless there are compelling and over-riding reasons not to. This report sets out the outcome of the statutory consultation.

Consultation

4. At a meeting on 13 May 2008, governors formed a representative steering group to plan the consultation process and agree a consultation document to send to all stakeholders. A consultation document was prepared by the steering group, which provided information about the consultation and addressed educational, staffing, premises, budget and finance issues, and invited comments to be returned via either school office.
5. The statutory consultation was held from 9 June 2008 until 27 June 2008. The schools distributed the consultation document to all parents, members of staff and governors, and to representative unions and interested parties local to the schools. The steering group made themselves available to meet with parents and staff, and pupils at the schools were consulted via the school councils and discussions held in classrooms. Harrow Council sent the consultation document to interested parties in accordance with the DCSF School Organisation Unit guidance, including neighbouring local authorities, diocesan authorities, MPs and elected members, voluntary and community organisations, Harrow Youth Council. Information about the amalgamation process and the consultation documents were made available on the Harrow Council website.
6. No objections were raised during the consultation to the principle of amalgamation. Four written responses were received to the consultation document, and two parents took the opportunity to discuss the proposed amalgamation at a publicised event. Discussions were held with pupils in

classes and through the school councils. Some concerns were raised by staff and school pupils around the uncertainties of the changes involved and about how things would operate post amalgamation. For example, issues were raised about the increased responsibility of the headteacher, and that the headteacher would not know everyone. Issues were also raised about the impact of the proposals on younger children.

7. The governing bodies met on 1 July 2008 to consider the outcome of the consultation, and both governing bodies decided to recommend to Cabinet that the two schools amalgamate from September 2009. The governing bodies considered the concerns raised by staff and pupils, and will deal with them as far as possible before September 2009. The reasons the governing bodies consider amalgamation to be in the best interests of the schools are as stated in the amalgamation policy. Additionally, with the consultation on proposals for Year 7 to move into the high schools, and the difficulty in recruiting a headteacher, the governing bodies consider that amalgamation is the most appropriate organisation for the schools. The governing bodies consider that amalgamating in September 2009 would provide sufficient time, particularly for staff, to prepare and adjust to ensure a smooth transition.
8. If Cabinet decides to publish statutory notices, it is proposed that these will be published in October 2008, and considered by Cabinet for determination in December following the representation period. In accordance with practice under the October 2007 amalgamation policy, the statutory route to establish a combined school would be to discontinue the school where the headteacher vacancy has arisen, and to extend the age range and expand the capacity of the other school. Cabinet would need to determine the proposals within two months from the end of the representation period.

Legal comments

9. Only Cabinet can make decisions on proposals to close schools and to make changes to schools. If Cabinet decides to publish statutory notices, the decision must be made with regard to the representations and feedback provided by stakeholders. Cabinet must have regard for the Secretary of State's guidance.
10. If Cabinet decides to publish statutory notices, there will be a 6 week statutory period during which representations could be made. Cabinet would need to determine the proposals within two months from the end of the representation period. A determination may be subject to appeal to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator.

Financial Implications

11. Amalgamating schools has a positive albeit small revenue effect, and in previous cases this has resulted in improved efficiencies of approximately £40k. The principal efficiencies result from having one headteacher instead of two. Schools will also benefit from having fewer Service Level Agreement (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.
12. 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

13. Delivering School Reorganisation 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, in particular the following from the new National Indicator Set. NI 72 – 109 ‘Enjoy and Achieve’ indicators covering Key Stage achievement and progression, narrowing the gap for lower performing and vulnerable groups, attendance, behaviour, special educational needs.
14. Whilst Harrow’s performance is currently above national and statistical neighbours averages at all Key Stages, Harrow’s targets, which are set annually for the DCSF, are highly challenging. The table below presents Harrow’s performance against its targets and the national averages as published by the DCSF.

Harrow's 2006-07 Results

KS1	Actual	Target	National
Reading L2+	85%	Not set	84%
Writing L2+	81%	Not set	80%
Maths L2+	91%	Not set	90%
Science L2+	88%	Not set	89%
KS2	Actual	Target	National
English L4+	82%	85%	80%
Maths L4+	79%	85%	77%
Science L4+	88%	Not set	88%
KS3	Actual	Target	National
English L5+	79%	82%	74%
Maths L5+	79%	80%	76%
Science L5+	75%	78%	73%
GCSE	Actual	Target	National
% 5+ A*-C	68.0%	67.5%	62.0%
% 5+ A*-C incl E&M	56.1%	Not set	46.8%

Risk Management Implications

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

16. A summary of high level risks is provided.

High Level Risks	Consequences	Mitigating/Control Actions
Challenge to Cabinet decision making.	Delay.	Cabinet must have regard to the Secretary of State’s guidance for decision makers in reaching its decisions.
Statutory consultation about school reorganisation	Confusion for stakeholders.	If Cabinet decides to publish statutory notices to amalgamate the Belmont schools, the determination of them will occur before any statutory notices are

during the autumn.		published about school reorganisation. The school reorganisation consultation papers will explain the position.
Clarification of the Council's Amalgamation Policy.	Confusion for stakeholders.	In response to issues raised by the DCSF in regard to the amalgamation policy, and a corporate complaint investigation, a clarified policy will be consulted on and considered by Cabinet in the Autumn Term 2008. This clarification does not change the policy requirements.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name:	John Stansfield	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date:	14 th August 2008		
Name:	Helen White	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date:	27 th August 2008		

Section 4 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name:	Liz Defries	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Divisional Director (Strategy and Improvement)
Date:	14 th August 2008		

Section 5 - Contact Details and Background Papers

Contact: Chris Melly, Senior Professional, Service Development Team
020 8420 9270 chris.melly@harrow.gov.uk

Background Papers:

Papers of Cabinet 17 January 2008 - Amalgamation of First and Middle Schools

Consultation document on the Future Structure of Belmont First and Middle Schools

DCSF School Organisation Unit guidance for decision makers
www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg