

Decision Makers Guidance

The decision maker for these statutory proposals is the local authority, and this report presents the proposals to Cabinet for determination. If the local authority fails to decide proposals within two months of the end of the representation period the local authority must forward proposals, and any received representations, to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator for decision.

Decision Makers are required to have regard to statutory and non-statutory guidance issued by the Secretary of State when they take a decision on proposals. The guidance documents are available on the School Organisation Unit website at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg/>

Compliance with statutory requirements

A statutory consultation was conducted from 9 June 2008 until 27 June 2008. The consultation responses and outcomes were reported to Cabinet on 18 September 2008, and Cabinet decided to publish statutory notices. The decision maker may take into account the sufficiency and quality of the consultation as part of their overall judgement of the proposals as a whole.

Three linked statutory proposals were published that could effect the amalgamation of Belmont First School and Belmont Middle School to provide an all through primary school. The following two statutory proposals were published on 6 October 2008 with a statutory representation period of 6 weeks.

- A prescribed alteration to extend the age range of Belmont Middle School to establish a school with an age range of 4 (Reception) to 12 (Year 7) with attached nursery class from 1 September 2009.
- A notice to discontinue Belmont First School on 31 August 2009.

The third statutory proposal was published on 20 October 2008 with a statutory representation period of 4 weeks:.

- A prescribed alteration to expand the capacity of Belmont Middle School from 360 to 639 from 1 September 2009.

All three statutory proposals had the same closing date of 17 November 2008 for the representation periods. This staged approach to publication ensured that all three proposals had the same closing date and could be determined together within 2 months of the closing date.

The statutory notices were developed using the School Organisation Unit 'Build a Statutory Notice' facility. This facility is designed to help local authorities, governing bodies and other proposers who will be publishing statutory proposals, to construct a statutory notice which contains all the information required by law.

Factors to be considered by decision makers

The factors contained in the Secretary of State's guidance should not be taken to be exhaustive. Their importance will vary, depending on the type and circumstances of the proposals. All proposals should be considered on their individual merits.

The sections that follow contain information to assist Cabinet to determine how the proposals meet the factors the decision maker must have regard to in reaching a decision. Not all of the factors contained in the guidance are relevant to these proposals. For example: the proposals do not make changes to early years provision or nursery schools; there are no issues of poor performance; there are no post-16 implications; there is no change to school category; and there is no special educational needs reorganisation. The net effect of the proposals is to establish an all through primary school, by amalgamating the two separate schools on the existing school site, that will be the same overall size and character, offering places to the

existing pupils and serving the same area. The following sections, therefore, focus on relevant factors of the guidance.

A system shaped by parents

Strategic Approach to School Organisation

In 2002, the council undertook a debate on School Organisation in Harrow, the outcome of which was a consensus from stakeholders on three issues: to increase opportunities for early years; to increase choices and opportunities at post-16 including provision on school sites; and to change the age of transfer. The council has secured the provision for early years and post-16 and now is seeking to make progress to change the age of transfer.

In October 2007, Cabinet agreed their strategic approach to school organisation and reaffirmed their commitment to change school organisation. Cabinet established a Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG) to consider issues arising from school reorganisation and agreed a revised amalgamation policy. The council's amalgamation policy contributes to preparations for a change in the age of transfer, and also to maintaining and improving the educational performance of Harrow schools and their pupils. In October 2008 Cabinet agreed a clarified amalgamation policy and implementation guidance.

In June 2008, Cabinet received a report on the progress of the SRG and agreed to undertake a consultation on school reorganisation which is being held from 8 September to 5 December 2008.

Belmont Schools Proposals

Parents and Stakeholders have had the opportunity to contribute and shape the proposals for Belmont Schools.

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. Members of the representative steering group formed by the governing bodies 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. Information about the responses to this consultation is given under 'Other issues' later in this Annex.

No representations or comments were received by the local authority during the representation period.

Standards

The council's amalgamation policy identifies a number of educational benefits arising from the creation of all through primary schools:

- Organisational structure is aligned with the National Curriculum Key Stages. Planning across Foundation, Key Stages 1 and 2 as a coherent whole for the primary phase provides greater flexibility across and between the Key Stages.
- Reducing the number of changes for children in a school system strengthens continuity and progression for children and families in the primary phase, both in terms of the curriculum and pastoral experience. Research shows that the fewer moves children have during their school career the better they perform. However, currently some children change schools at the end of Year 3 in the First School, at the end of Year 7 in the Middle School and at the end of Year 11 in the High School. There can be a further

change where a child attends a nursery. If there is a combined primary school, and with post-16 provision available on all high school sites, the number of imposed changes will be minimised. In general, children and their families will have just two major changes. This reduction in the number of school moves is important, and particularly for children with special educational needs.

- Greater opportunities are created for older children to take on responsibility. For younger children the presence of older children provides aspirational role models and also mentoring support.
- Teachers and classroom staff have access to the whole primary curriculum. This supports and informs whole school planning, assessment, pastoral systems, etc, and provides opportunities for wider staff development and experience across the full primary phase over time.
- Growing national evidence shows that all through primary schools create more consistency between year groups and key stages in learning, planning and assessment. There is improved use of teachers' skills, specialist teaching and improved pastoral arrangements, as well as benefits for management, leadership and financial management. The financial viability of separate infant schools with two forms of entry could be challenging.

"Where primary education is provided in separate key stages, there is generally very little effective curriculum continuity and progression. In such situations the scope for discontinuity of learning is increased, together with the attendant, wasteful, repetitive teaching of subject content and learning experiences in the receiving key stage."
Educational Management Information Exchange at NFER

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. Whilst Harrow's performance is currently above national and statistical neighbours at all Key Stages, Harrow's targets, which are set annually for 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.

The proposed Belmont School would be a combined two-form entry school. All schools have their own distinct ethos and identity and relationship with their local community. These proposals would continue and develop further the existing good practices of these separate schools as a combined school.

Diversity

There is a range of schools in Harrow offering diversity to parents both in terms of ethos and size. Harrow has a Church of England primary school, a Hindu primary school and a Jewish primary school, six Roman Catholic primary schools and two Roman Catholic high schools. Schools are organised as separate and combined first and middle schools and have a range of planned admission numbers.

Every Child Matters

The five outcomes for Every Child Matters are central to all Harrow plans for schools so that wrap around care, support for families and a wide range of opportunities are developed in all schools. These extended services also support the Narrowing the Gap agenda, and these proposals would not impact negatively on these agendas.

An all through school would be able to further promote the Every Child Matters outcomes by ensuring the most effective and coordinated use of school facilities. As a result of these proposals it is considered that it would be possible to build on the established best practice of both schools to promote access to extended services.

School characteristics

No changes to the overall characteristics of the schools arise from the proposals.

Need for places

The statutory proposals do not lead to the creation of additional places or to the loss of any places. The overall effect of the linked proposals is to create an all through school with the same number of places as the existing schools. No pupils would be displaced by the proposals.

Overall the pupil projections in Harrow indicate that there will be an increase in the pupil population. This is through a combination of increase of the birth rate and population and potential pupil yield generated by proposed housing developments.

The Belmont schools are in the Central Planning Area. The projections suggest that there will be an increase in pupil numbers by 2015, which could lead to an increase in demand of about two forms of entry in the Central Planning Area. Potential child yield from housing development could lead to a further increase in demand of about two forms of entry. Harrow considers a range of options to manage the supply of school places, including temporary expansion, bulge year groups, and permanent expansion. Should additional places be required, then options would be considered for all schools in a relevant area.

Impact on the community and travel

The combined school would build on the existing community use and extended school activities. Potential use of the school site by the community could be enhanced by the ability to plan for one school rather than two separate schools.

As there are no proposals to change the overall size of the school or to change the site, these proposals would not affect journey times or lead to increased transport costs.

Funding and land

The statutory proposals are not dependent on capital funding being available. If an all through school is established, part of the implementation process will be to undertake a school site development plan. This would consider the priorities identified in the School Asset Management Plans and the building changes that are required to enhance provision and the functioning of a combined school. Any building plans would need to be fully costed and funding secured.

Both schools have capital resources from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) Devolved Formula Capital. In addition, it may be possible to access some funding from the council once the future organisation of the schools and site development has been agreed.

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 would 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 would change to only one charge after amalgamation.

Special educational needs provision

The statutory proposals do not involve a review of special educational needs provision and the schools do not have additional special educational units. The schools provide support for pupils with special educational needs for whom a mainstream school is appropriate and there are no proposals for this to be changed as a combined school.

All pupils attending the schools would transfer to the all through school.

In an all through school, there may be benefits for pupils with special educational needs. There would be continuity in planning and support across all key stages. In addition, there could be greater consistency in the organisation and management of the schools, for example, behaviour policies, school rules etc.

Other issues

The decision maker should consider the views of all those affected by the proposals or who have an interest in them. The decision maker should not simply take account of the numbers of people expressing a particular view when considering representations made on proposals. Instead the decision maker should give the greatest weight to representations from those stakeholders likely to be most directly affected by the proposals.

No representations or comments were received by the local authority during the representation period from 6 October 2008 until 17 November 2008.

A statutory consultation was conducted from 9 June 2008 until 27 June 2008. 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.

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.