

Meeting:	Cabinet
Date:	14 May 2009
Subject:	Future Organisation of Priestmead First School and Priestmead Middle School
Key Decision:	Yes
Responsible Officer:	Heather Clements, Director of Schools and Children's Development
Portfolio Holder:	Councillor Anjana Patel Portfolio Holder for Schools and Children's Development
Exempt:	No
Enclosures:	Annexe 1 - Letter from the Chair of the federated governing body

Section 1 – Summary and Recommendations

This report sets out the outcome of the statutory consultation about the future organisation of Priestmead First School and Priestmead Middle School, and the recommendations of the federated governing body that the two schools amalgamate in January 2010.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is requested to:

1. Consider the outcome of the statutory consultation and the recommendation from the federated governing body
2. Approve the publication of statutory notices to combine Priestmead First School and Priestmead Middle School.

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 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 Priestmead First School has resigned and will leave in July 2009. During the Autumn Term 2008, the governing bodies commenced the process to amalgamate the two schools in accordance with the Council's October 2007 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 overriding reasons not to, and a headteacher vacancy in either or both schools is one of the triggering circumstances. This report sets out the outcome of the statutory consultation.

Consultation

3. Consultation activity by the governing bodies commenced in the Autumn Term 2008, and included setting up a steering group, and taking soft soundings from staff, pupils and parents to inform discussions and documentation. During the early part of the Spring Term, governors took further soft soundings by meeting parents at the numerous open evenings for both schools. Formal amalgamation proposals were agreed by the governors at their meetings on 20 and 29 January 2009.
4. The statutory consultation was held from 23 February 2009 until 23 March 2009. The consultation document, which included a proposal evaluation, was sent to all parents, members of staff and governors on 23 February 2009. Two formal parents consultation meetings were held on 11 and 12 March, and a formal consultation meeting was also held with the staff of both schools on 23 March 2009. Harrow Council sent the consultation document to interested parties in accordance with the Department for Children, Schools and Families School Organisation Unit guidance, including neighbouring local authorities, diocesan authorities, local MPs and elected members, voluntary and community organisations, Harrow Youth Council. Information about the amalgamation process and the consultation document were made available on the Harrow Council website, together with an online facility for consultation responses.
5. The written responses to the consultation showed 77% of the responses from parents and staff of both schools were in support of the proposals, 6% were opposed, and 17% were not sure (percentages rounded to nearest % point). 75% of parents and 90% of staff were in support of the proposals. Pupils were not asked to vote on the proposals, but were invited to make their comments in the form of questions. In all the discussions with classes and Year Groups the pupils appeared very positive but keen to make sure that the smaller, younger children are really looked after. Feedback comments from parents, staff and pupils have been collated and are available to governors and the school management so that the comments and issues can be considered in subsequent stages of the process.

6. The first meeting of the Federated Full Governing Body was held on Wednesday 1 April 2009, and the meeting considered the outcome of the consultation. The governors voted unanimously to proceed with submitting the proposed amalgamation to Cabinet with the unreserved recommendation of the Federated Governing Body of Priestmead Schools to amalgamate the two schools.
7. If Cabinet decides to publish statutory notices, it is proposed that these will be published in June 2009, and considered by Cabinet for determination in September 2009 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.
8. If Cabinet decides to approve the publication of statutory notices to combine the two schools, it is proposed that the age range of Priestmead Middle School is extended and the capacity expanded, and that Priestmead First School is discontinued. This is based on the fact that, from 1 September 2009, Priestmead First School would not have a substantive headteacher. This proposed approach was stated in the consultation paper.

Other considerations

9. A combined school would retain the existing pupils. A new staffing structure reflecting the needs of the school would be developed over the initial months. The structure would be subject to consultation with all staff and their professional associations / unions and appointments would be made to the new staffing structure over time. No redundancies have arisen in the schools amalgamated to date and there is no reason for the situation to be different in this instance.

Legal comments

10. 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 in their decision making.
11. 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, giving due regard to the representations received during the representation period. Cabinet's decision is subject to appeal to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator and / or judicial review. In the event Cabinet does not make a decision within two months of this period, the decision must be referred to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator, whose decision is also subject to judicial review.

Financial Implications

12. Amalgamating schools has a positive albeit small revenue effect, and in previous cases this has resulted in improved efficiencies of approximately £40k for the combined school. 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.

13. On 23 April 2009, Cabinet will consider a report recommending that school reorganisation proposals be agreed for implementation in September 2010. These proposals would change the ages of transfer, with Year 3 moving from first to middle schools, and Year 7 moving from middle schools to high schools. If the proposals to change school organisation are agreed and implemented, there will be a significant change to school budgets as funding follows the pupil. Indicative budgets for 2010/2011 have been given to schools so they can plan for this change if it is agreed. It is expected that as a combined school there will be less impact than two separate schools because of the scope to manage changes in one larger school. The greatest financial impact of school reorganisation is likely to be in the separate first schools where there would be one less year group of pupils.
14. Capital expenditure, where necessary, will be financed through existing capital resources including for example Schools Devolved Formula, and other Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) resources as they come on stream for example, the Primary Capital Programme from April 2009.

Performance Issues

15. Delivering school reorganisation so that Harrow's 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.
16. 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.

Harrow's 2007 - 08 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 (Provisional)	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 inc E & M	56.1%	Not set	46.8%

Environmental Impact

17. There is no significant environmental impact arising from these proposals. The combined school would occupy the same buildings as the existing schools.

Risk Management Implications

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

19. A summary of high level risks is provided.

High Level Risks	Consequences	Mitigating/Control Actions
Challenge to Cabinet decision making.	Delay.	Cabinet must have due regard to the Secretary of State's guidance for decision makers in reaching its decisions on school reorganisation proposals.
School reorganisation proposals.	Confusion for stakeholders.	The consultation document included information about the school reorganisation proposals and the likely implications for the schools. If Cabinet decides to publish statutory notices to amalgamate the Priestmead schools, this would occur after Cabinet has determined the school reorganisation proposals.
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 relating to a school involved in a school reorganisation process, Cabinet agreed a clarified policy at its October 2008 meeting. This clarification does not change the policy requirements.

Section 3 - Statutory Officer Clearance

Name: Emma Stabler	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Chief Financial Officer
Date: 21 April 2009		
Name: Jessica Farmer	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	on behalf of the Monitoring Officer
Date: 30 April 2009		

Section 4 – Performance Officer Clearance

Name: David Harrington



on behalf of the
Divisional Director
(Strategy and Improvement)

Date: 14 April 2009

Section 5 – Environmental Impact Officer Clearance

Name: Andrew Baker



on behalf of the
Divisional Director
(Environmental Services)

Date: 20 April 2009

Section 6 - Contact Details and Background Papers

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

Background Papers:

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

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