

## **Future Organisation of Priestmead First School and Priestmead Middle School**

### **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. This two month period will end on 20 September 2009.

Decision Makers are required to have regard to 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/> and in Background Papers.

The format of this Annex follows the framework of the guidance. The text in italics at the start of each section contains extracts from the guidance to assist members to understand the context.

### **Compliance with statutory requirements**

*There are 4 key issues which the Decision Maker should consider before judging the respective factors and merits of the statutory proposals:*

#### **1. Is any information missing?**

*If so, the Decision Maker should write immediately to the proposer/promoter specifying a date by which the information must be provided.*

In order to make the nature of the proposals explicit and clear for all stakeholders, the notices and the complete proposals stated as full information as possible. For example, during the statutory consultation it was explained to stakeholders that the timing of the amalgamation proposals was delayed because of the school reorganisation consultation timetable, and in the explanatory notes included with the notices clear reference is made to the school reorganisation proposals.

#### **2. Does the published notice comply with statutory requirements?**

*The Decision Maker should consider whether the notice is valid as soon as a copy is received. Where a published notice does not comply with statutory requirements it may be judged invalid and the Decision Maker should consider whether they can decide the proposals.*

Three linked statutory proposals were published that could effect the amalgamation of Priestmead First School and Priestmead Middle School to provide an all through primary school. The following two statutory proposals were published on 8 June 2009 with a statutory representation period of 6 weeks.

- A prescribed alteration to extend the age range of Priestmead Middle School to establish a school with an age range of 4 years (Reception) to 12 years (Year 7) with attached nursery class from 1 January 2010.
- A notice to discontinue Priestmead First School on 31 December 2009.

The third statutory proposal was published on 22 June 2009 with a statutory representation period of 4 weeks:

- A prescribed alteration to expand the capacity of Priestmead Middle School from 372 to 732 from 1 January 2010.

All three statutory proposals had the same closing date of 20 July 2009 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.

Discussion with the School Organisation Unit has identified that, if Cabinet agrees these statutory proposals, a technical issue would arise in that there would be a duty to implement two different sets of statutory proposals in relation to Priestmead Middle School, namely:

- The change of age range to 4–12 years on 1 January 2010 (to achieve the amalgamation of the two schools)
- The change of age range to 7–11 years on 1 September 2010 (published in February 2009 as part of the school reorganisation proposals, and agreed by Cabinet in April 2009)

The Unit advise that a similar duty to implement two different sets of statutory proposals would not apply in relation to Priestmead First School because the school would cease to exist on 31 December 2009.

If Cabinet agrees these statutory proposals, it is proposed that this technical issue is addressed by the publication of further notices after the schools combine in January 2010 to clarify the position, namely to:

- Revoke the statutory proposal to change the age range of Priestmead Middle School to 7-11 years that was agreed in April 2009 as part of the school reorganisation statutory proposals.
- Establish the age range of the combined school to be 4-11 years from September 2010 with a planned admission number of 90 and an attached nursery class.

### **3. Has the statutory consultation been carried out prior to the publication of the notice?**

*Details of the consultation should be included in the proposals. The Decision Maker should be satisfied that the consultation meets statutory requirements. If some parties submit objections on the basis that consultation was not adequate, the Decision Maker may wish to take legal advice on the points raised. If the requirements have not yet been met, the Decision Maker may judge the proposals to be invalid and should consider whether they can decide the proposals. Alternatively 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.*

A statutory consultation was conducted from 23 February 2009 until 23 March 2009. All applicable statutory requirements have been complied with in relation to the consultation on the proposals. The local authority has had regard to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) School Organisation Unit guidance and the consultation document was sent to all interested parties in accordance with the guidance.

The consultation responses and outcomes (see 'Other issues' below) were reported to Cabinet on 15 May 2009, and Cabinet decided to publish statutory proposals.

### **4. Are the proposals linked or "related" to other published proposals?**

*Any proposals that are "related" to particular proposals must be considered together. Generally, proposals should be regarded as "related" if they are included on the same notice (unless the notice makes it clear that the proposals are not "related"). Proposals should be regarded as "related" if the notice makes a reference to a link to other proposals. If the statutory notices do not confirm a link, but it is clear that a decision on one of the proposals would be likely to*

*directly affect the outcome or consideration of the other, the proposals should be regarded as "related". Where proposals are "related", the decisions should be compatible e.g. if one set of proposals is for the removal of provision, and another is for the establishment or enlargement of provision for displaced pupils, both should be approved or rejected.*

Three linked statutory proposals were published that could effect the amalgamation of Priestmead First School and Priestmead Middle School to provide an all through primary school (see key issue 2 above).

### **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 decision makers 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 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**

*The Government's aim is to create a schools system shaped by parents which delivers excellence and equity. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 amends the Education Act 1996 to place new duties on local authorities to secure diversity in the provision of schools and to increase opportunities for parental choice when planning the provision of schools in their areas. In addition, local authorities are under a specific duty to respond to representations from parents about the provision of schools, including requests to establish new schools or make changes to existing schools. The Government's aim is to secure a more diverse and dynamic schools system which is shaped by parents. The Decision Maker should take into account the extent to which the proposals are consistent with the new duties on local authorities.*

### **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 will implement changes to the ages of transfer in September 2010.

In October 2007, Cabinet agreed its strategic approach to school organisation and reaffirmed its 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 maintaining and improving the educational performance of Harrow schools and their pupils, and also to preparations for a change in the age of transfer. In October 2008 Cabinet agreed a clarified amalgamation policy and implementation guidance.

In April 2009, Cabinet agreed statutory proposals to implement school reorganisation in Harrow through changes in the ages of transfer. Statutory proposals were published following a statutory consultation on school reorganisation held in Autumn 2008, which indicated support for the school reorganisation proposals.

#### Priestmead Schools Proposals

Parents and stakeholders have had the opportunity to contribute and shape the proposals for the Priestmead Schools.

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. Information about the responses to this consultation is given under 'Other issues' later in this Annex.

The local authority received one representation during the representation period from the London Diocesan Board for Schools, which was in support of the proposals.

#### **Standards**

*The Government wishes to encourage changes to local school provision where it will boost standards and opportunities for young people, whilst matching school place supply as closely as possible to pupils' and parents' needs and wishes. Decision Makers should be satisfied that proposals for changes to a school's provision will contribute to raising local standards of provision, and will lead to improved attainment for children and young people. They should pay particular attention to the effects on groups that tend to under-perform including children from certain ethnic groups, children from deprived backgrounds and children in care, with the aim of narrowing attainment gaps.*

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*

Harrow Schools are high performing and overall the local authority is above National Averages and above or in line with statistical neighbours. Harrow strives for continuous improvement and has set challenging targets for achievement. Both Priestmead schools had Ofsted inspections during 2007, and were found to be good schools. The schools are aware from initial consultations of concerns among some parents that the 'homely atmosphere' of the school may be lost. This concern was addressed directly in the consultation document with clear statements that the schools "...will ensure that for each child, the class teacher is the most important person in the school. Both schools already have in place excellent systems of pastoral care which OFSTED has recognised over the years. The pastoral care which each class teacher provides is enhanced by the support of the teaching assistant(s) working in that class / year, the work of the Year Leader and of course the welfare assistants in each school. All staff play their part in caring for every pupil. Every Child Matters in both our schools and will continue to do so.”

The proposed Priestmead School would be a combined three-form entry school with attached nursery class. 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**

*The Government's aim is to transform our school system so that every child receives an excellent education – whatever their background and wherever they live. A vital part of the Government's vision is to create a more diverse school system offering excellence and choice, where each school has a strong ethos and sense of mission and acts as a centre of excellence or specialist provision. Decision Makers should consider how proposals will contribute to local diversity. They should consider the range of schools in the relevant area of the local authority and whether the expansion of the school will meet the aspirations of parents, help raise local standards and narrow attainment gaps.*

Schools in Harrow offer 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. Increased self-governance is promoted within a collaborative whole-borough framework, for example through partnerships and soft and hard federations, and in April 2009 the two Priestmead schools established a federated governing body for the schools.

Harrow Schools are popular and successful, but the profile of Harrow's population is changing and, to meet challenging targets to continue this status, schools need to evolve and innovate. The local authority is committed to developing a positive and proactive approach to: encourage greater self-governance in order to extend choice, diversity and fair access; raise standards as part of the transformation of education expected from Building Schools for the Future (BSF) and Primary Strategy for Change investments; listening to parents and acting to promote diversity of school provision where this is appropriate; and all schools to offer extended services by 2010.

A combined school would contribute to diversity by its model of governance and that its new organisation is aligned with parental aspirations.

### **Every Child Matters**

*The Decision Maker should consider how proposals will help every child and young person achieve their potential in accordance with Every Child Matters' principles which are: to be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution to the community and society; and achieve economic well-being. This should include considering how the school will provide a wide range of extended services, opportunities for personal development, access to academic and vocational training, measures to address barriers to participation and support for children and young people with particular needs, e.g. looked after children or children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities.*

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 extended services support to families and children, and the 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.

### **Equal opportunity issues**

*The Decision Maker should consider whether there are any sex, race or disability discrimination issues that arise from the changes being proposed, for example that there is equal access to single sex provision for the other sex to meet parental demand. Similarly there needs to be a commitment to provide access to a range of opportunities which reflect the ethnic and cultural mix of the area, while ensuring that such opportunities are open to all.*

These proposals do not make changes to equal access to school provision.

### **Need for places**

*Where proposals will increase provision, the Decision Maker should consider the supporting evidence presented for the increase. The Decision Maker should take into account the existence of spare capacity in neighbouring schools, but also the quality and popularity with parents of the schools in which spare capacity exists and evidence of parents' aspirations for places in particular schools. The existence of surplus capacity in neighbouring less popular or successful schools should not in itself prevent the addition of new places.*

These 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.

The statutory proposals for Priestmead Middle School, agreed by Cabinet in April 2009 as part of the school reorganisation proposals, included changing the planned admission number of the school from 93 places to 90 places from September 2010 (this modest reduction in the planned admission number of the middle school aligns it with the planned admission number of the first school). The statutory notice published on 22 June 2009 stated that the current admission number for the middle school is 93 and the proposed admission number will be 90 from September 2010 in line with Harrow's school reorganisation changes. As the proposed date for combining the schools is 1 January 2010, it was further explained that the combined school would have a planned admission number of 93 for Years 4-7 until September 2010.

Harrow prepares pupil projections and manages the supply of places across the Borough and within Planning Areas. Through this process proposals are brought forward to increase or reduce the supply of places accordingly. Pupil projections suggest that there will be an increase in pupil numbers in Harrow by 2015. Although the economic climate is affecting proposed housing developments, if they are completed they could generate child yield which would further increase the pupil projections. Additionally, in common with many other local authorities Harrow has experienced an unexpected increase in level of applications for Reception places. To accommodate additional applications for September 2009, four additional Reception classes are planned as bulge years. The situation is being monitored closely and planning for September 2010 has commenced. 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.

### **Travel and Accessibility for All**

*In considering proposals for the reorganisation of schools, Decision Makers should satisfy themselves that accessibility planning has been properly taken into account. Facilities are to be accessible by those concerned, by being located close to those who will use them, and the proposed changes should not adversely impact on disadvantaged groups. In deciding statutory proposals, the Decision Maker should bear in mind that proposals should not have the effect of unreasonably extending journey times or increasing transport costs, or result in too many children being prevented from travelling sustainably due to unsuitable routes e.g. for walking, cycling etc. Proposals should also be considered on the basis of how they will support and contribute to the local authority's duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to school.*

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.

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.

### **School category changes**

No changes to school categories (e.g. no changes to become voluntary aided, foundation body, trust or academy) arise from these proposals.

## **Funding and land**

*The Decision Maker should be satisfied that any capital required to implement the proposals will be available. Normally, this will be some form of written confirmation from the source of funding on which the promoters rely (e.g. the local authority, DCSF, or Learning and Skills Council). In the case of a local authority, this should be from an authorised person within the local authority, and provide detailed information on the funding, provision of land and premises etc. Proposals should not be approved conditionally upon funding being made available, except for proposals being funded under the Private Finance Initiative or through the Building Schools for the Future programme.*

The statutory proposals are not dependent on capital funding being available. If an all through school is established, part of the implementation process would 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.

The schools are already progressing premises development for identified improvements, which take account of school reorganisation changes and potential amalgamation. These plans have the express purpose of maximising the use of the site and improving facilities for the benefit of all the children. If Cabinet agrees these proposals, the school site development planning would be reviewed to ensure that the use of accommodation supported the long term functioning of the combined school.

Both schools receive 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 other funding streams 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.

There are no capital receipts, new sites or playing fields, or land tenure arrangements arising from these proposals.

## **Special educational needs provision**

*When reviewing SEN provision, planning or commissioning alternative types of SEN provision or considering proposals for change local authorities should aim for a flexible range of provision and support that can respond to the special educational needs of individual pupils and parental preferences, rather than necessarily establishing broad categories of provision according to special educational need or disability.*

These statutory proposals do not involve a review of special educational needs provision. 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. Separate from these proposals, the schools are developing specialist resource provision for children with autistic spectrum disorders.

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.*

The local authority received one representation during the representation period from the London Diocesan Board for Schools, which was in support of the proposals.

The statutory consultation was held from 23 February 2009 until 23 March 2009. 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.

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.