

CABINET

10 JULY 2012

AMALGAMATION OF SHERWIN KNIGHT INFANT SCHOOL WITH SHERWIN KNIGHT JUNIOR SCHOOL

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Les Wicks, Children's Services

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Summary

This report outlines the proposals for the amalgamation of Sherwin Knight Infant School with Sherwin Knight Junior School by way of statutory prescribed alterations, and requests that the Cabinet approves a period of informal consultation

1. Budget and policy framework

- 1.1 The proposals to make prescribed alterations to Sherwin Knight Infant School and Sherwin Knight Junior School are consistent with the provisions of the School Organisation Plan 2011-16, which flows from the Children and Young People's Plan (policy framework) and is within budget, therefore this is a matter for Cabinet.

2 Background

- 2.1 In 2008 Medway's School Organisation Plan Principles, which were established following extensive consultation, contained a set of guidelines to be used when considering school organisational issues, thereby ensuring that decision-making is clear and consistent, enabling the council to comply with its statutory duty to provide sufficient good school places. The core of these principles ensures that any changes to schools are based upon improving schools and raising standards.
- 2.2 Within the primary phase Medway's School Organisation Plan Principles are:
- To review the future of schools with low standards;
 - All infant and junior schools should be amalgamated over time;
 - To review the future of schools that are at risk of becoming unviable;
 - To enable popular and successful schools to expand.
- 2.3 The main reason for moving to all through primary schools is to provide smoother transitions between the primary phase of education. An amalgamated school provides for:

- A fully integrated curriculum;
 - Fully integrated arrangements for assessment for learning, including recording of progress and planning future provision;
 - A smooth transition for pupils transferring from infant to junior departments;
 - A robust senior leadership team drawing on experience from early years and foundation stage, key stages one and two.
- 2.4 The amalgamation of schools is proving to be a successful aspect of our School Organisation Plan Principles. Medway Council will always review the options including the potential for federation or amalgamation following the resignation or retirement of a head teacher at an infant or junior school.
- 2.5 Currently, Sherwin Knight Infant and Junior Schools are federated with a single governing body, but operate under the leadership of separate head teachers. The schools, both with a published admission number (PAN) of 75, are situated on a good size site, serve the community at the south eastern area of Strood close to the Darnley Road Estate, and sit within the Strood planning area for pupil place planning purposes.
- 2.6 The infant school head teacher tendered her resignation with effect from 30 April 2012, and an interim head teacher is in place.
- 2.7 The chair of the federated governing body contacted the council in May 2012, requesting that amalgamation be considered as a way forward.

3. The Proposals

- 3.1 Local authorities can amalgamate schools in two ways;
- 1) By closing both schools and opening a new school in their place. Under current government legislation, any new school would need to be an Academy or Free School.
 - 2) By closing one school and expanding the age range at the other following the statutory procedures as set out in 'The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2007', and in 'The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) (England) Regulations 2007'.
- 3.2 In this case, it is recommended that the proposals follow the second option above, and involve the closure of the infant school from 31 August 2013, in tandem with the expansion of the age range at the junior school. This will create an all through primary school with an age range of 3-11 from 1 September 2013 by way of statutory prescribed alterations.
- 3.3 It will be for the governing body to decide on a name for the new school, which will need to be confirmed in writing the local authority in advance of the amalgamation.

4. Analysis

- 4.1 Amalgamation will formalise the partnerships already in place between the schools under the single governing body with the aim of ensuring positive outcomes for all children who attend the current schools.
- 4.2 The arrangements that amalgamation brings will enable the school to operate under a single staffing structure which will allow for the sharing of resources, expertise, knowledge and support across the phases; creating a robust structure at the school and ensuring its viability.
- 4.3 Recent Ofsted ratings show that Sherwin Knight Juniors is a 'satisfactory' school, having achieved that rating in July 2010. Previously in May 2007 the school achieved a rating of 'Good'. The Infant school was rated as 'satisfactory' in July 2010, and a section 8 report in October 2011 noted that "inadequate progress in making improvements and satisfactory progress in demonstrating a better capacity for sustained improvement" was being made.
- 4.4 Results indicate that at the infant school, level 2Plus reading, writing and mathematics were below the national average in 2011, with mathematics showing a 3 year decline; the juniors attainment however was close to the floor target threshold of 61% and progress between Key Stage 1 and 2 was low compared to the national average. It is expected that amalgamation will lead to more robust management and leadership, which in turn will lead to improved performance and positive outcomes for the children who attend the single school.
- 4.5 Analysis of the number of pupils transferring from the infant school to the junior school in recent years, shows that virtually all children transfer and so amalgamation will further strengthen the transition between key stages 1 and 2.
- 4.6 Pupil numbers at the schools are expected to continue to increase as they have done over recent years. The infant school has only one space currently in the reception age group, and forecasts indicate that from September 2013 that the reception age group will be over-subscribed. As these pupils progress through the school, the surplus places that have been a feature of the juniors over recent years will see a forecast reduction from the current level of 21% to 2.5% in 2016.
- 4.7 The governors will need to appoint a headteacher for the amalgamated school. The local authority will advise the governing body to operate a competitive process in seeking a head teacher for the single school.

5 Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.1 . A Diversity Impact Assessment will be completed and included in the outcomes of consultation reports to both the Children and Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. It would not be expected that any changes made to the organisation of schools in Medway would have any adverse impact upon equality issues and Medway Council

would follow its statutory duty to promote equality, and all schools in Medway are responsible for ensuring equality in their schools and for promoting community cohesion.

6 Impact of the proposal on arrangements for looked after children

- 6.1 Looked after children receive the highest priority for admission to all Medway schools. If necessary, the Admissions Code allows the council to place looked after children in schools that would otherwise be deemed to be full. This ensures that the council can secure appropriate provision for children that are looked after by the local authority.

7 Timeline

- 7.1 The schools are already federated and so the following is the suggested timeline for amalgamation:

- Cabinet to approve request for consultation period – 10 July 2012
- Minimum 6-week public consultation including public meeting – 10 September to 21 October 2012
- Open sessions for members to review responses – Mid November 2012
- Overview and Scrutiny; Outcomes of consultation – 11 December 2012
- Cabinet; Outcomes of consultation and request statutory representation – 15 January 2013
- 6-week Statutory Representation period - Beginning February to mid March 2013
- Cabinet decision/ determination 16 April 2013
- Amalgamation date 1 September 2013

8 Financial and legal implications

- 8.1 The council has the power under sections 18 and 19 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to make “prescribed alterations” to a maintained school, and under section 15 to close a maintained school. Before publishing a statutory notice relating to proposals to make prescribed alterations to a school, the council must undertake the consultation required by Schedules 5 and 16 of these regulations
- 8.2 The Children and Adult’s capital programme no longer prioritises funding to undertake building works to support the amalgamation of schools, however, some minor capital works to support the amalgamation of the school through the development of a single IT/telephony infrastructure may be required. Any work to support improvements in the infrastructure, would need to be clearly costed and funded through the Children’s Services capital programme, through an appropriate virement of funding.
- 8.3 The council has a statutory duty to provide sufficient good quality school places.
- 8.4 Funding for Medway’s maintained schools comes from central Government via the local authority in the form of the dedicated schools grant, which is a ring-fenced sum of money for the provision of education

across all of our schools. This money can only be used for schools (and certain specified services to schools), and cannot be used to fund other council services.

- 8.5 When the schools amalgamate they continue to receive funding on a per-pupil basis at the same rate, however they will lose any funding they receive for 'curriculum protection' (small schools protection) and one lump sum. Based on 2012/13 funding allocations the figures involved are:

Combined funding as separate schools:	£1,944,258
Less small school protection:	£ 23,037
Less one lump sum:	£ 35,560
Funding as amalgamated school:	£1,885,661

The single school will therefore receive £58,597 less than the individual schools would have, and this money can be released for re-investment elsewhere within the Dedicated Schools Grant. However, the DfE requires LAs to make significant changes to their funding formulae for 2013/14 so the figures involved could change.

9 Risk management

- 9.1 The following risks arise if the proposals as stated in this report are not implemented. These are:

- The council has both a moral and statutory duty to promote high standards and to ensure the sustained viability of its schools.
- A risk that it could undermine the council's need to ensure the most effective use of resources, and in turn raise standards across all schools.
- By not approving consultation, the Cabinet would not be acting in accordance with the School Organisation Plan and Principles, which Cabinet themselves approved under decision 142/2011.
- Because the governing body have requested the amalgamation, it could lead to a strain in the relationship between the council and the school if the proposals are not implemented.

10 Recommendation

- 10.1 The Cabinet is asked to consider the proposals and officers' analysis, and to approve that officers proceed to a period of informal consultation, to obtain the comments and opinions of interested stakeholders.

11 Suggested Reasons for Decision

- 11.1 To comply with the approved School Organisation Plan 2011-16, which states that "all Infant and Junior Schools should be amalgamated over time".
- 11.2 Approval to proceed to a six-week period of informal consultation will ensure the council complies with its duty to follow the full consultation process when proposing changes to school organisation.

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Background papers

Making changes to a Maintained Mainstream School (A guide for Local Authorities and Governing Bodies).

The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2007.