

CABINET

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CHANGE OF AGE RANGE – WALDESSLADE PRIMARY SCHOOL: OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Les Wicks, Children's Services

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Summary

The Council has a statutory obligation to secure nursery education places for all eligible three- and four year-olds, and to improve early years outcomes for children.

This report details the outcome of a public consultation on altering the age range of Walderslade Primary School, Dargets Road, Walderslade, with effect from 2011 and proposes that a statutory public notice be published so that children aged three years may be admitted into the Foundation Stage at the school.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The proposals are consistent with the Children and Young People's Plan and are a matter for Cabinet to decide. The revenue and capital implications can be met within existing resources and from government grants.

2. Background

- 2.1 In October 2005, a review of early years policy and an impact assessment was considered by Cabinet which concluded that the development of all through foundation stage education at schools is generally beneficial, together with support for developing childcare in partnership with private sector providers. It was agreed that schools should have the opportunity to extend their Foundation Stage provision by varying the age range to include the admission of children aged three years. Prior to undertaking public consultation on such a variation, it was determined that Cabinet should consider a report.
- 2.2 A total of 32 Medway schools currently offer a full Foundation Stage of learning, and are permitted to admit children from the age of three years.

- 2.3 In addition, 103 private, voluntary and independent (PVI) settings offer funded places for children aged 3 years.
- 2.4 The establishment of a maintained nursery class or foundation unit at a school, to admit children aged 3 years of age, is a “prescribed change”, and the council is required to publish a public notice and undertake a formal consultation before doing so.

3. Walderslade Primary School

- 3.1 Walderslade Primary School serves an area of relative affluence and at an inspection in September 2010 was judged by Ofsted to be satisfactory in all areas and better in some aspects of its work.
- 3.2 The school is being completely rebuilt as part of the authority’s primary capital programme. The design of the new building will allow for sufficient classrooms to encompass children from the age of three years until the end of the primary phase at age 11.
- 3.3 Subject to the outcome of the public consultation, it is proposed to change the age range with effect from September 2011, whilst the new class would commence the admission of children from early in 2012.
- 3.4 The governing body of the school, and the Headteacher, are supportive of the proposal, and have identified this as a means of raising standards of attainment at the school and improving life chances of children in the area.

4. Public Consultation

- 4.1 Cabinet agreed on 12 May 2009 to consult on the reorganisation of primary schools in Medway, with proposals that included the rebuilding of Walderslade Primary School to encompass the full Early Years Foundation Stage.
- 4.2 The public consultation commenced on 13 September 2010, and closed on 22 October 2010. Details of the proposal to alter the age range of the school were published on the Council website, and a consultation document was circulated widely. Copies of the document were sent to parents, staff and governors of the school; to all other schools in Medway; to all private, voluntary and independent providers of nursery education in Medway; to councillors, MPs, diocesan education authorities, neighbouring authorities, and trades unions. Copies of the document were distributed to council offices and public libraries.

4.5 Responses

A total of 33 formal responses were received. A summary is set out below.

	Total Respondents	Approve	Oppose	% Approve
Parents	25	22	3	
School Staff	6	6	0	
Governors	0	0	0	
Other schools & PVI settings	2	0	2	
Other / Not known	0	0	0	
Total	33	28	5	85%

- 4.6 Within the 33 (85%) consultation responses supporting the proposals, the large majority were parents at the school. Respondents cited a variety of reasons for their approval, with several stating that it improved continuity of care; that it was beneficial for those families with children already at the school; and a number stating that they would want their own child to attend.

All of the school staff that responded are in support of the proposal.

- 4.7 Within the 5 consultation responses opposing the proposals, two respondents commented that the proposal would have a negative impact on existing nurseries in the area, while others cited further pressure on the school grounds and lack of parking, and one respondent wrote that children aged 3 years are too young to be in a school environment.

5. Financial implications

- 5.1 The revenue funding for the development at Walderslade will be net neutral as budget exists to fund all children of the eligible age through the Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF), and additional children at the school will result only in a change to the distribution of funding between settings.
- 5.2 The capital costs of the rebuild of the school building at Walderslade is estimated to be £ 5,748,000, which is to be met in full from the primary capital programme.

6. Legal implications

- 6.1 The Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA 2006) and The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools)(England) Regulations 2007 (as amended by The School Organisation and Governance (Amendments)(England) Regulations 2007) set the framework for how prescribed alterations may be made to schools, including a change to the age range of a school.

- 6.2 The DfE Guidance document “Making Changes to a Maintained Mainstream School (Other than Expansion)” sets out the factors to which the Council, as decision maker, must have regard. These factors are (where relevant to the proposal)
- The effect on standards and school improvement
 - School characteristics
 - The need for places
 - School category changes (where the proposal relates to a change in school category)
 - Funding and land related issues
 - Special Educational Needs provision (where the proposal relates to a change in SEN provision)
 - The views of interested parties
- 6.3 The Cabinet, as the decision maker, may approve the proposals, reject the proposals or approve the proposals with a modification. The Cabinet must give reasons for its decision.
- 6.4 A diversity impact assessment was completed in October 2005 which concluded that as a universal service, available to all, the development of foundation stage provision at schools would not disproportionately affect one part of the community. A refresh of the DIA screening indicates that this remains true.

7 Risk Management

- 7.1 The key risk associated with these proposals relates to the capital projects, and the completion of building works within the desired timescale. Procedures are in place, led by the Council’s Building and Design service to minimise the risk of project delay.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 That Cabinet agree to amend the age range of Walderslade Primary School, to permit the admission of children from the age of 3 years, with effect from September 2011.

9. Suggested Reasons for Decision

- 9.1 The establishment of a Foundation Stage unit at Walderslade Primary School would be consistent with the Council’s duty to secure an education place for all three and four year olds whose parents want one. As the admissions authority for community schools, Medway Council is responsible for determining whether to make a change to the published age range of the schools. The Council, with the support of the governing body and the headteacher of the school, consider that the change in age range to permit the admission of children from the age of 3 years will be an effective means of raising standards of attainment at the school and improving life chances of children in the area.

10. Background papers

- School Standards and Framework Act 1998 and regulations
- School Places for Three Year-Olds – Impact Assessment.
Cabinet Report 18 October 2005
http://www.medway.gov.uk/cabinetdecisions-past_issues.asp?ID=907

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