

Appendix 2

The creation of Westwood Primary School

(The closure of Maple Grove Infant School and the extension of the age range of Westwood Junior School, March)

QUESTIONS ARISING FROM THE PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETINGS, THE STAFF CONSULTATION MEETINGS AND THE CONSULTATION RESPONSES RECEIVED.

Why not just Federate the schools to ensure the benefits of all-through primary education and reduce uncertainty for primary school staff?

There are different forms of Federation hard and soft. Both Governing Bodies would need to agree to the proposed solution. If a collaboration (soft federation) were established a Joint Strategic Committee would be created with representatives from the two governing bodies with a defined remit and delegated responsibilities. However, the two schools would retain their separate identity, budgets and governing bodies. As this is not a statutory partnership, it could be dissolved at any time.

A Federation is a statutory partnership, which can only be established following consultation and with the agreement of the governing bodies of the schools concerned. The DfE would continue to recognise the schools as separate schools, and they would be subject to separate Ofsted inspections, as now even though there would be a single governing body with collective responsibility for the schools and a single leadership team. The special measures designation of the Infant School would remain in place as would the usual process for re-inspection and monitoring.

Westwood Junior School's governors have made clear that their preference is to expand their school's age range to become an all-through primary school rather than enter into a Federation.

If the lump sum for the Infant School is lost will the new primary school have fewer resources?

In 16-17 the new school will receive 85% of both lump sums and we will apply to the EFA for an extension to this arrangement. Our experience is that the economies of scale do not leave amalgamated schools at a financial disadvantage.

The DfE has recently indicated that this budgetary arrangement should apply to this re-organisation.

When you talk of savings what it really means is fewer jobs?

Not necessarily, although the Authority cannot make any guarantees about the number of jobs in a school – any school. There are efficiencies from joint purchasing, from having subject leaders who operate across both key stages, for example.

What is the evidence for primary schools delivering better outcomes than separate junior and infant schools?

Academic studies have reached different conclusions on this issue. The evidence in Cambridgeshire is that generally (not always) separate infant and junior schools have found themselves in difficulty more than primary schools. In this area of the county we have recently had Ramnoth Junior/ Nene Infant, St Peter's Junior/ Clarkson Infant and Ramsey Junior / Ramsey Spinning Infant placed in special measures. There is strong evidence of the transition dip from infants to juniors and that primary schools provide consistency of practice and continuity for the whole age range.

Will the school be too large to manage/for pupils?

No. The infants and juniors will be the same size as they would have been. It's the strength and depth of internal leadership and management structure that's most important to the success of a school.

The primary school would also be a split site operation with (eventually) 480 pupils on the current junior school site and 360 pupils on the current infant school site. There is nothing unusual in these numbers for individual school sites.

Who makes the final decision to go ahead with the proposal?

The Council's Children and Young People's Committee (a cross-party Committee of County Councillors).

What happens to the Infant School staff?

They would be placed at risk of redundancy, but would be placed in a ring fence and given prior consideration for posts in the primary school. The number of jobs depends on structure that is decided by the Junior School Headteacher and governing body but there would be the same number of classes as there is now.

A document would be issued to all unions for consultation regarding the plans for appointment to vacancies at Westwood Junior School and how staff who may be displaced would be supported in finding alternative employment.

Why did the Council dismiss the possibility of closing the school?

We would have to place the children in neighbouring infant / primary schools and no schools in the area have space.

Additional pupil places are required in primary schools within March and the expansion of Westwood Primary School is part of the proposal under consideration.

Why did the Council not provide support to a struggling school after it was placed on amber alert?

We did. Additional support for the school was provided through the Local Authority Primary Offer, which included Headteacher Performance Management. An enhanced Keeping InTouch(KIT) visit with comprehensive data analysis was also carried out. Joint monitoring with the Headteacher took place, this included lesson observations and work scrutiny. Support was given for school improvement planning and planning for a new leadership structure. The school also had opportunities to attend support and training for senior leaders, subject leaders and governors. The Primary Adviser supported the school on a termly basis and the English Adviser also made regular visits to support the moderation of levels, this also involved work with Westwood Junior School.

Why is the LA being unsupportive towards the Infant School?

We do not think we are, although we can understand your question. We have to do something or the DfE will intervene. We think an all-through primary is the best solution for children / community / school and ultimately staff. Westwood do not want to become an academy so this is the only option

available to the Authority to achieve its aim. The alternative is the Infant School becoming a sponsored academy separate from the Juniors and we don't think this is the best solution. This is a way of giving the community the school it deserves.

Why did the Local Authority not do more to support Maple Grove?

We did as much as we could or should. Our support was noted in the Ofsted report.

Why is the Infant School not being given the opportunity to become a good school again?

The process in place for schools in special measure does not allow this. The Local Authority is required to consider the future governance arrangements for the school. DfE would not be prepared to allow a year plus to elapse before proposals are made. DfE would begin to broker new governance arrangements for the school if proposals did not come forward from the Local Authority and quickly.

Restoration of the Infant School to good is less disruptive than what is proposed?

This is not an option. 'Getting to good' will take at least a year to be officially recognised by Ofsted and the DfE expects action before then.

This will be disruptive to children's education.

It should not be. Support will continue and be increased if necessary. The primary school should improve education.

The County Council has already made up its mind the consultation is window dressing?

No. We've been clear about our preference, and are explaining why. However, Members will make their own minds up having read and considered the consultation responses.

Have parents applying for a Reception school place been consulted?

It is a public consultation – anyone can have a view.

The Authority can send details of the consultation to parents who have applied for a place at Maple Grove Infant School in September 2015 and provide them with an opportunity to respond before 27th February 2015.

Will academy status be considered for Westwood Primary School in the future?

That is a decision for the school's Governing Body.

Why has the Council rejected the DfE preferred solution of an academy conversion of the Infant School?

As above. Only because it would not see an all-through primary provision that we think is the best solution for the school community.

Do the Junior School Governors and Headteacher have the capacity to take on the Infant School?

Yes. Their recent Ofsted made this very clear.

Why not let the Infant School complete its improvement and then implement the change?

As above. The DfE's timetable does not allow this.

Why was our MP not aware of this proposal earlier?

We were, of course, going to inform Steve Barclay. However, we wanted to give a briefing to the staff first. This was supposed to be confidential but this confidentiality was breached. This was very unfortunate. We would do this differently in the future, in case confidentiality was breached again.

Why is the Authority not proposing an amalgamation to create an all-through primary school so that all staff are treated equally?

This route to establishing an all-through primary school will take more time and will extend the period of uncertainty for parents and staff.

Both schools would have to be closed and a new school opened in their place.

The process for establishing a new school would be much longer. There would be a need to – appoint a temporary governing body; a headteacher (this may or may not require external advert). Only then could the planning for the new school commence. Under the Authority's proposal implementation could start immediately after the members' decision.

The number of posts to be filled in a new school and through competition would be greater. This process itself will be longer.

What is the relationship like between separate Junior and Infant Schools where one is an academy and the other a different status (community school)?

There are not many examples within Cambridgeshire and where they do exist the changes have happened very recently and it is too early to make any judgment.

What happens to staff if the Infant School becomes an academy?

TUPE would apply and staff would transfer to the new academy with exiting rights protected. It is not possible to predict how the academy would organise the school in the future and the number of staff they would require.

Can we propose alternative solutions as part of the consultation process?

Yes. The consultation has been structured to provide an opportunity for comment and not just a straight yes or no in terms of supporting or rejecting the Local Authority proposal.

Why did the Maple Grove governors not find out about this proposal until it was in the Press?

Arrangements had been made to inform Governors, confidentially, in advance of the consultation being launched. However, following the staff meeting at Maple Grove Infant School, which was meant to be a confidential briefing on the proposal ahead of the official consultation launch, details were given to the press and resulted in governors finding out about the proposal through the media first and prior to the Authority circulating its own details and consultation paper on 26th January 2015. This was very unfortunate. The Director of Learning will meet the governing body on Tuesday 10 February.

If all through primary schools are such a good idea why were the schools not amalgamated some time ago? Why wait until one of the schools is in trouble?

The Authority has a preference for all-through primary schools. However, it is also the Council's view that it will not impose amalgamation on separate junior and infant schools where they exist. A proposal to amalgamate schools, where no school improvement issues are present, needs to have the support of the schools themselves and the communities they serve. The Authority has never been approached by either Maple Grove Infant School or Westwood Junior School about the potential for amalgamation.

What happens if the Local Authority Proposal is rejected?

The DfE would require the school to convert to academy status and would identify a potential sponsor(s) for the school. The school could not continue on as now. This has been re-affirmed in recent DfE guidance on schools causing concern. A structural/governance solution is the clear expectation.

Why were we led to believe that the school would not close at the parents meeting in December?

The answer given in December was to the very specific question posed by the DfE after the publication of its inspection report. The DfE asks local authorities, when a school is placed in special measures, to consider whether that school can be closed and the children placed in good schools elsewhere. In March this option does not exist as there is a need to expand the number of primary school places available in the Town to meet the needs of local families and not reduce them.

What are the disadvantages of all-through primary schools?

The Local Authority does not see any disadvantages and that is the reason for the policy it has adopted. The view is shared by the Westwood Junior School governing body and leadership team and explains its support for the proposal.

What will be the potential adverse impact on the Junior School in taking on an Infant School in Special measures?

The Authority is not anticipating any adverse impact. External validation of the quality of leadership and management in the Junior School has been provided by Ofsted. This management team will be expanded when the school becomes larger and as it continues to grow. The Council will also continue to provide the additional support already put in place for the Infant School and will provide further support both financial and practical during the transition period.

The Junior School has only just become good so this proposal is a risk?

(see above answer)

In addition, schools that are previously designated as “Requires Improvement (RI)” by Ofsted are not re-inspected for another two years. Under the Inspection process 2 years is the shortest time in which any school can move from RI to good. However, most of the measures that led to the good designation in January 2015 had been put in place considerably earlier. The Junior School has been an improving school for a lengthy period of time and this is confirmed by HMI monitoring inspections and Local Authority keeping in touch (KIT) visits.

Will Maple Grove Infant School have another Ofsted Inspection before this proposal is implemented?

Extremely unlikely.

What would be the Ofsted rating of the newly created Westwood Primary School?

As the Junior School is continuing but with an expanded age range the current Ofsted designation as “Good” will remain in place.

How can standards be maintained in the Infant School when staff are worried about their futures?

The Authority understands that this is a worrying time for staff at the Infant School and has, therefore, sought to keep staff informed and outlined the process for recruitment to Westwood Primary School. Under the process staff will receive prior consideration for posts in the primary school which will require good teachers. It will require as many classroom teachers in

September 2015 as there are currently working across the separate junior and infant schools.

The Authority will work with the governing bodies of both schools to keep staff informed throughout and to ensure that the period of uncertainty/transition is minimised.

Trade Union representatives have already attended meetings with staff and they will also be kept fully informed by the Council so that they are able to offer the advice needed by their members.

Are there any implications for those parents who have applied for a Reception place at Maple Grove Infant School in September 2015?

No. All children on the rollof both Maple Grove Infant School and Westwood Junior School will automatically be transferred to the role of Westwood Primary School. This would be equally true for those children who applied for and secured a place in the Reception Year at Maple Grove Infant School and in Year 3 at Westwood Junior School in September 2015.

Some parents applied for a place at Maple Grove Infant School before the Local Authority's proposal was published. Can they change their admissions application in the light of this new information?

It is possible for parents to amend their preferences if they wish. However, because the closing date for the receipt of admissions applications has passed any such change would be treated as a late application. A late application would only be considered after the initial allocation of places to applicants who met the closing date deadline. In March, where there is a pressure on school places, there is an increased risk that it would be difficult to meet the preferences of parents who have submitted a late application.

The Local Authority will be writing to applicants for a reception place at Maple Grove Infant School in September 2015 to provide further information and advice on available options.

When will Ofsted inspect the new Westwood Primary School to ensure improvements are being made?

The Local Authority is not Ofsted so cannot say with absolute certainty. Assuming current results are maintained it would be in the region of 3 years before a full inspection took place again.

However, it is likely that there will continue to be HMI monitoring visits to ensure that progress is being made on the improvement plan submitted for the current Infant School.

Is there time to recruit the staff required?

The timetable is challenging but manageable and will commence immediately after the decision of the Local Authority on 16th April 2015.

If there is still a need to recruit some staff following the prior consideration process, it is envisaged that the opportunity to work in an expanded school that will continue to grow over the next 6 years will prove attractive.