

**From:** Rory Love, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills  
Sarah Hammond, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

**To:** Children', young people and education Cabinet Committee – 16 May 2023

**Subject:** 23/00055 Proposed change to age range of Laddingford St Mary's Church of England Primary School

**Key decision:** Involves Significant Service Development

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Past Pathway of report:** N/A

**Future Pathway of report:** Cabinet Member Decision

**Electoral Division:** Simon Webb - Maidstone Rural West

**Summary:** This report sets out the proposed change to the age range of Laddingford St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Darman Lane, Laddingford, Maidstone, Kent ME18 6BL.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member, concerning the proposals to:

- a) authorise a change to the age range of Laddingford St Mary's Church of England Primary School from 4-11 years to 3-11 years, to enable the school to establish a nursery class from September 2023.

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1 In order to provide sufficient early years provision in the Laddingford area, Kent County Council (KCC), together with the school's Governing Body, is seeking to permanently change the age range of Laddingford St Mary's Church of England Primary School from 4-11 years to 3-11 years, to enable the school to establish a nursery.

**2. Body of the report**

- 2.1 The proposed change would alter Laddingford's age range and increase its PAN to accommodate a cohort of nursery children, changing its lower age to 3 years, whilst keeping the upper limit at 11 years. This would expand the overall roll of the school to 104 children, educated in 8 cohorts of 13 children. In the first instance, the school would only offer 10 places in nursery at one time, to allow flexibility in class structures to meet the individual needs of children and not breach the required staffing ratios for nursery aged children.

- 2.2 In the Laddingford area there is a significant absence of nursery provision, with KCC sufficiency data indicating a 234 place deficit within the Marden and Staplehurst planning group (which contains Laddingford) and also place deficits in the neighbouring Maidstone district planning groups. This results in some parents travelling outside of the local area for nursery provision, some by choice and some also due to limited options. It can also present a barrier for parents who aren't able to travel outside of the rural area, or those who do not wish to.
- 2.3 This gap in provision combined with cultural factors means that each year many children join Laddingford Primary School having not been to a pre-school setting. Providing a nursery provision in an environment where parents already feel comfortable and have a relationship with staff is intended to allow Laddingford to support children into school earlier to avoid or close any developmental and learning gaps that may already be forming.

### **3. Alternative options**

- 3.1 Laddingford is a small village school that lies in the heart of its rural community to the South of Maidstone. Local early years places are limited and the options within the village to provide additional provision are limited.

### **4. Financial Implications**

- 4.1 There is a set up cost associated with this project estimated to be £9,534, as the school require new resources including changing facilities. The school is seeking funding to meet this cost through a grant administered by The Education People on behalf of the County Council. This grant is used to support the development of nursery provision in areas of a high place deficit, such as the Marden and Staplehurst planning group. The funding can be used to purchase new equipment up to the value of £10,000 per setting. There is no direct revenue or capital costs to the council expected from this proposal. If the school is not successful in securing the funding, the nursery would be unlikely to proceed.
- 4.2 Initially, the school is not expecting any additional staffing costs, as the school has 2 Teaching Assistants with a Level 3 childcare qualification, one of whom will work fulltime alongside the teacher in the class. Once the nursery is fully operational, the school would seek to appoint an additional member of support staff. One of the drivers for the nursery is to provide an additional funding source to support the 4th class within the school structure.
- 4.3 The school has moved between a 3 and 4 class structure in response to changes in pupil numbers over recent years. Where the numbers of pupils have started to rise, the school have moved back to a 4 class structure this year. This is both academically and operationally beneficial for the school. The addition of a nursery cohort will secure additional revenue that will help to support the funding of the 4th class teacher more sustainably and support the school to maintain the current structure.
- 4.4 Funding for the nursery class will be received separately to the school's main budget, but the school will be able to manage their budget in its totality. The

majority of funding for the nursery class is expected to be received from KCC through the funding of the 3 and 4 year old free entitlement. This is funded by the Council via the Dedicated Schools Grant received from the Department of Education. The total funding for the nursery class is determined through Kent's Early Years Funding Formula and will be dependent on the number of support hours provided. The basic rate of funding for a 3 and 4 year old place for 2023-24 is £4.55 per hour, or a total of circa £52,000 in the first year if the school is able to consistently fill the 10 places.

## **5. Legal implications**

- 5.1 There are no specific legal implications for KCC. The change relates to children who are under the statutory school age.

## **6. Equalities implications**

- 6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been produced and no issues were identified in the early stage EqIA, but the assessment will be reviewed as the project continues.

## **7. Governance**

- 7.1 The Cabinet Member decision will be made in accordance with KCC's constitution and will be subject to a Public Notice prior to the confirmation of the decision.

## **8. Consultation**

- 8.1 In accordance with the Department for Education's Statutory Guidance (January 2023): Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools, there is a need to undertake a formal statutory consultation process. An informal education consultation will run from 19 April to 19 May 2023. Subject to the decision from the Cabinet Member, a Public Notice is planned to run in June/July 2023.

## **9. Views**

### **9.1 The View of the Local Members**

The KCC Members for Maidstone Rural West, Simon Webb, has been consulted on this proposal and asked for the following to be included:

'The proposed change is a sensible solution to support the early engagement for our young people within the Laddingford area. It is vital that as an authority we seek to strengthen the community bonds by allowing entry of 3year old children. This cements the excellent use of the school facilities and should provide certainty of future pupil numbers for the school.'

### **9.2 The View of the Area Education Officer**

The Area Education Officer fully supports this proposal as it will ensure that there are sufficient early years provision in the Laddingford area.

## 10. Conclusions

10.1 This report sets out a proposal to change the age range of Laddingford St Mary's Church of England Primary School to enable the school to establish a nursery class. The introduction of a nursery at Laddingford will help local children into school earlier to avoid or close any academic gaps that may already be forming. It will also support the financial sustainability of the school.

### 11. Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member, concerning the proposals to:

- a) authorise a change to the age range of Laddingford St Mary's Church of England Primary School from 4-11 years to 3-11 years, to enable the school to establish a nursery class from September 2023.

## 13. Background documents

Appendix 1 – PROD 23/00055

Appendix 2 – Equalities Impact Assessment

Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2023-27

## 14. Contact details

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