

By: Rosalind Turner, Managing Director, Children, Families and Education

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – Briefing 23 June 2010

Subject: PROPOSED CHANGE OF AGE RANGE FOR NEWINGTON CE (VOLUNTARY CONTROLLED) PRIMARY SCHOOL, SITTINGBOURNE (FROM 3 - 11 YEARS TO 4 - 11 YEARS) BY THE CLOSURE OF THE MAINTAINED NURSERY UNIT (AND ITS REPLACEMENT BY A VOLUNTARY PRE-SCHOOL PROVISION)

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: The report explains the need to consider a proposal to close the maintained nursery unit at Newington CE Primary School in Sittingbourne and to change the age-range of the school from 3-11 years to 4-11 years with effect from 26 April 2011. This report seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on whether to move to public consultation on this issue.

Introduction

1. (1) Newington CE Primary School is a 1FE school serving the rural village of Newington, situated three miles from Sittingbourne. The majority of pupils live in the immediate neighbourhood. A dot map showing the home location of the pupils is attached as Appendix 1. The school has suffered from a decline in standards which is being addressed. It remains the school of choice for the village community but the school roll has become less stable.

Current School Roll

PAN	Year R	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total
30	28	21	11	24	20	13	22	139

A small number of Traveller Children attend the school. The school has an above average percentage of pupils with Special Educational Needs.

(2) The School has a 52 place (26 full time equivalent) maintained nursery unit which opened in September 2006. When Kent County Council committed (in 2004) to expand the number of maintained nursery units in Kent, it was decided that units would be established in areas of the highest social need or low pre-school provision. Newington fitted both these categories but especially the low number of pre-school places available in the locality. At the time there were 60 children aged three and four in the Newington locality and 26 existing funded early education places. Within a 2 mile radius (Newington and adjacent wards) there were 291 children aged three and four and 116 existing funded

early education places. This gave a shortfall of 175 places within 2 miles of the school, with a shortfall of 34 places within the Newington ward.

(3) Newington has one pre-school provision other than the maintained nursery unit. The Cherries Pre-school is a charity-based organisation run by a partnership of qualified staff and a parent Management Committee. The Cherries Pre-school operates from the Village Hall and provides term time sessional childcare five days per week for children aged from two years until they reach school age. The pre-school has 26 registered places. Currently 18 children attend The Cherries Pre-School including 8 funded 3 to 4 year olds, 7 fee paying 2 year olds and 3 funded 2 year olds. The school has good links with The Cherries Pre-school which was last inspected in June 2009 and judged as good.

Background

2. (1) The maintained nursery unit is managed by the headteacher and the governing body of the school. Admission to the nursery does not guarantee admission to Newington CE Primary School. Currently there are 18 children attending the maintained nursery unit on a part time basis and the nursery operates in the mornings only.

(2) The table below shows the number of pre-school children living in the Newington locality (2009 based data).

Aged 0+	Aged 1+	Aged 2+	Aged 3+	Aged 4+ (current Year R)
33	32	23	13	39

(3) The beneficial impact of good quality pre-school provision on children's learning and social behaviour is recognised by Kent County Council. However, the maintained nursery unit is unable to offer the flexible childcare that many families are looking for. The maintained nursery unit has therefore been undersubscribed since it opened.

Maintained Nursery Unit Historic and Current Roll Numbers – January PLASC

	Jan 07	Jan 08	Jan 09	Jan 10
Number on Roll	9	23	20	15

The table attached as Appendix 2 gives the maintained nursery unit roll numbers for East Kent over the last 4 years. This shows that Newington CE Primary School has the lowest uptake of places.

(3) The school is finding the nursery unit a burden financially and the governing body has asked the Local Authority to consider bringing forward a proposal that would enable the local pre-school provider, The Cherries Pre-School, to move into the maintained nursery unit accommodation.

(4) If The Cherries relocated to the maintained nursery unit accommodation from the village hall, they would be able to consult the community about their childcare needs, and increase the offer available to include breakfast clubs, lunch clubs, afterschool clubs, afternoon and all day sessions.

The Proposal

3. (1) The proposal is to close the maintained nursery unit. This would be achieved by changing the age-range of Newington CE Primary School from 3-11 years to 4-11 years.

(2) The school would cease to offer nursery classes from 1 April 2010. The Cherries Pre-school would move into the maintained nursery unit accommodation in September 2010. Children entitled to receive the Early Years Foundation Stage Entitlement for 15 hours a term after their 3rd birthday would be able to do so at The Cherries Pre-school, so provision in the locality would be maintained in a flexible offer which parents prefer. If this proposal goes ahead, any children attending the maintained nursery unit at the time of its closure would be guaranteed a place at The Cherries Pre-School.

(3) The Cherries Pre-school has well qualified staff as follows:

- Early Years Leader – Early Years Foundation Degree, working towards BA Hons and Early Years Professional Status.
- Deputy Early Years Leader – Level 4 Certificate in Leading and Managing Quality Practice
- Senior Early Years Educator – Level 4 Certificate in Leading and Managing Quality Practice
- Early Years Educator – Level 3 Certificate in Early Years Care and Education

(4) The Grove Park Children's Centre mobile bus visits The Cherries on a weekly basis. The bus promotes The Cherries and gives out information regarding the free places for 2 year olds.

Site Issues

4. (1) The maintained nursery accommodation comprises a teaching area, a safe covered external area and has its own entrance, kitchen, office and toilet provision. The accommodation is excellent; the only problem has been that as a maintained nursery unit it has not been able to provide the flexible childcare that many working parents today are looking for.

(2) The Cherries has been operating in the Village Hall for 40 years. The Village Hall was rebuilt in 1991 and although it offers good accommodation for the pre-school there are the inevitable drawbacks, especially the location of the toilets and outdoor play area and sharing the accommodation with other users. Moving into the maintained nursery accommodation would remove these problems and provide purpose build nursery accommodation with excellent facilities.

Resource Issues

Capital & Revenue

5. (1) For a three year period from its opening in September 2006 the maintained nursery operated for two sessions each day with a full time teacher and two nursery assistants. This resulted in the maintained nursery unit operating at an annual deficit of £27,000. During the current academic year the maintained nursery unit has only opened

in the mornings and the current year end shows a deficit of £1,062.20. If this proposal goes ahead, the school will no longer have to bear this loss from the school budget.

(2) If this proposal goes ahead, The Cherries Pre-School would move into the maintained nursery unit accommodation and pay an estimated rent of £8,000 per annum. The rent would be payable to Kent County Council. A percentage of the rent would be paid to the school. Future maintenance of the accommodation would be the responsibility of The Cherries Pre-School.

(3) The Cherries Pre-School has produced a Business Plan outlining the future financial sustainability of the Pre-School should the proposal goes ahead.

Human

(4) The primary school employs a part time nursery teacher and from September this teacher would continue her employment with the school and there would not be a need for redundancy.

(5) The nursery assistant would have the opportunity to transfer to the employ of The Cherries Pre-school should she wish to do so.

Views of the Local Member

6. The Local Member is Mr Keith Ferrin. Mr Ferrin has been informed and does not wish to object to the proposal at this stage.

Views of the Governing Body

7. The Governors of Newington CE Primary School have fully examined and debated the issues concerning the future of the Nursery and are unanimously in favour of the proposal tabled at their meeting on 29th April, 2010.

Views of the Partnership Board

8. The Partnership Board is in favour of this proposal going forward to public consultation as they understand that the locality cannot sustain the two provisions.

Views of Early Years & Childcare

9. The Senior Advisor for Early Years and Childcare supports the proposal and believes that The Cherries would benefit from the improved environment and the school would benefit from the closer links, as the setting works with children who feed into the school. "The Cherries has always had a good reputation in the village."

School Improvement Implications

10. Maintaining continuity of provision through an alternative provider should ensure that there are no adverse implications for school improvement.

Equality Issues

11. (1) All pupils who access their free maintained nursery education entitlement through the school's maintained nursery unit would be guaranteed a place at The Cherries Pre-school and so would be able to continue to access their entitlement locally.
- (2) Continuing access to high quality provision on the Newington school site should avoid any detrimental impact.

Transport & Environmental Impact, Including Community Implications

12. (1) The continued use of the maintained nursery unit accommodation is not expected to have any transport implications.
- (2) Children currently attending the maintained nursery unit would be able to have a place with The Cherries Pre-School should parents wish.
- (3) The nursery unit is under-utilised and its closure should not impact adversely on the local community with the continued use of the maintained nursery unit accommodation through an alternative provider.
- (4) Members of the Village Hall committee are aware of this proposal and have been very supportive of the idea of the Cherries relocating to the maintained nursery unit accommodation at the primary school and expanding their offer to the community.

Proposed Timetable

13. SOAB 1 meeting	14 July 2010
Public Consultation Period	13 September to 25 October 2010
Public Meeting	week commencing 27 September 2010
SOAB 2 meeting	10 December 2010
Cabinet Member decision (to issue a public notice)	December 2010
Public Notice Period	13 January to 24 February 2011
Cabinet Member Decision and appeal period	March 2011
Implementation	April 2011

Recommendations

14. Members are asked to give their views on whether there should be a consultation on a change of age range for Newington CE Primary School, Sittingbourne, by closing the maintained nursery class.

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The Local Member is Mr Keith Ferrin

Background Documents: None