

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

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 10 December 2010

Subject: PROPOSED CHANGE OF AGE RANGE FOR NEWINGTON CHURCH OF ENGLAND (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: This report sets out the results of the public consultation on the proposal to close the maintained nursery unit at Newington Church of England (Voluntary Controlled) Primary School and to change the age range from 3-11 years to 4-11 years with effect from 26 April 2011. It seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the issuing of a public notice.

This paper should be read in conjunction with the report to School Organisation Advisory Board of 14 July 2010

Introduction

1. (1) Newington is a one form entry Voluntary Controlled Church of England primary school with a maintained nursery unit. It serves the rural community of Newington village.

(2) The maintained nursery unit opened in September 2006 when KCC expanded the number of units to serve areas with the highest social need or low pre-school provision. However, the maintained nursery unit is unable to offer the flexible childcare that many families are looking for and therefore the numbers of children have not come forward. The school is finding the nursery unit a financial burden. This has resulted in resources that should be available for the children in Years R to 6 in the school having to be diverted to support the running of the nursery unit.

(3) Newington has one other 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 has 26 registered places for children aged from two years until they reach school age. The Cherries operates from the Village Hall where it has been located for 40 years. The Village Hall was rebuilt in 1991 and although it offers good accommodation there are the inevitable drawbacks, especially the location of the toilets and outdoor play area, and having to share the accommodation with other users.

The Proposal

2. (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 April 2011. The Cherries Pre-school would move into the maintained nursery unit accommodation in April 2011. 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) 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 Consultation

3. (1) The consultation document was distributed to parents/carers, school staff, nursery staff, governors and County Councillors, Member of Parliament, the Diocesan Authorities, local library, the Borough and Parish Councils, and others, in accordance with the agreed County policy. The document was also posted on the KCC website and the link to the website widely circulated via email.

(2) Approximately 300 copies of the public consultation document were circulated, which included a form for written responses. A copy of the public consultation document is attached as Appendix 1.

Responses to the Public Consultation

Written Responses

4. (1) 48 responses have been received, of which 47 are in favour, and 1 is undecided. A written response was also received from the Governing Body which is included below.

(2) A summary of written responses is attached as Appendix 2.

Public Meeting Responses

(3) A summary of the points, questions and comments made at the public consultation meeting is attached as Appendix 3.

Views of Local Member

5. The Local Member is Mr Keith Ferrin who said "I have no comments to make on this proposal".

Views of Local Member of Parliament

6. The following response has been received via email from Mr Henderson's constituency office:

"So long as a pre-school nursery provision is available to the residents of Newington within easy access of the villages Mr Henderson would have no objection to changes which will provide a better service to them".

Views of Swale Borough Council

7. The views of the Leader and Chief Executive were sought but neither wished to comment.

Views of the Diocesan Authorities

8. The Diocese supports the proposal as it will enable the school to concentrate on raising standards within the 4-11 age range.

Views of the Governing Body

9. A written response was received from the Chairman of the Governing Body on behalf of the governors and reads as follows:

"The Board of Governors would have very much liked to have kept the Nursery running along the original lines, clearly, the necessary numbers of children to make it viable are not going to be forthcoming.

In the circumstances, we believe that the proposed solution is the best for the school and for the village and we unanimously endorse it.

In addition, we have taken account of parents' concerns that there should be a smooth transition for the children currently attending and, following discussions with The Cherries and the relevant parents, a plan acceptable to all parties has been agreed.

We would therefore now urge that the proposal is approved."

Views of the Pupils

10. The views of the pupils were sought and the following has been provided by the School Council.

"The School Council discussed the Nursery proposal at their meeting on 13 October. They raised some points – one of these was a concern of the size of the Reception class; another was that they thought it would be a good idea as The Cherries has only a very small outside space at its present site, as opposed to the Nursery building at the school. They all liked the idea of possible after-school clubs and holiday clubs in the future. Following their discussion they agreed unanimously that they supported it."

Views of the Local Trust Board

11. Chris White the chairman of the Local Trust Board has given the following response on behalf of the Board. "I agree with this proposal as I feel it will benefit the children in Newington by giving them the opportunity of the wider range of childcare provision that The Cherries could offer."

Views of the Area Education Officer

12. (1) This proposal will provide a good solution for the school and for the Newington Community.

(2) It will ensure that high quality nursery space continues to be used, and will give the flexible preschool provision sought by parents.

[3] It will also offer scope for improved community use of the facilities in the current nursery.

Resource Issues

Capital & Revenue

13. (1) Since the opening of the maintained nursery unit in 2006 it has operated at an annual deficit and the current year end will also show a deficit. 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 will move into the maintained nursery unit accommodation and a lease issued by Kent County Council with an estimated rent of £8,000 per annum. The Cherries Pre-school has produced a Business Plan outlining the future financial sustainability of the pre-school should the proposal go ahead.

Human

(3) The part-time nursery teacher and the part-time nursery assistant would be redeployed within the school.

Proposed Timetable

14.

Cabinet Member decision (to issue a public notice)	December 2010
Public Notice period	13 January to 24 February 2011
Decision by Local Authority and appeal period	March 2011
Implementation	April 2011

Recommendation

15. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on:
- (a) the closure of the maintained nursery unit at Newington CE Primary School and change of age-range from 3-11 years to 4-11 years, and
 - (b) if agreed, the issuing of a public notice.

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The Local Member is Mr Keith Ferrin

Background Documents:

None

Previous Committee Reports:

School Organisation Advisory Board – 14 July 2010