

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL - RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TAKEN BY

DECISION NO.

MIKE WHITING

12/01976

CABINET MEMBER FOR EDUCATION, LEARNING AND SKILLS

Unrestricted

Subject:

Proposal to expand St John's Church of England Primary School, Maidstone

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills, I agree to

- (i) ALLOCATE the capital funds to enable the expansion of St John's Church of England Primary School to proceed.
- (ii) AUTHORISE the Director of Property and Infrastructure Support in consultation with the Director of Law and Governance to enter into any necessary contracts/ agreements on behalf of the County Council
- (iii) AUTHORISE the Director of Property and Infrastructure Support to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant agreements and to enter into variations as envisaged under the contracts.

Reason(s) for decision

In 2012, 20 families living in the Bearsted planning area did not receive places in any of their local schools, resulting in a local petition signed by 1171 individuals calling for increased provision. In line with our duty to consider parental representations, we undertook some analysis and survey work.

The survey found that 404 primary school aged pupils lived within the 'priority intake area' defined in the admissions arrangements of St John's CEP School. 178 (43%) attended St John's CEP School. The remainder attended 25 other Kent maintained schools/academies. We surveyed the 404 pupils' parents to better understand this data. This found 64% wanted their children to go to their local community school; 47% chose St John's CEP School because of its reputation; and 34% chose it because of its small size. We also found that some parents did not express a preference for St John's CEP School as they felt their child would not be offered a place, or their older sibling had not been able to get in.

Following discussions with St John's CEP School, which is an academy, the Governing Body, supported by KCC, undertook a public consultation on a proposal to expand from 1FE to 2FE with effect from September 2013. The consultation identified broad support for the need for local children to be able to attend a local school; an appreciation that currently St John's CEP School is not always able to serve the local community; and, sympathy for the need to take some action. However, concerns have been raised regarding the impact of the proposal on traffic congestion, disruption to pupils and residents of the building programme, the loss of outside space, and the potential loss of the 'family' feel of the school as it becomes bigger. While not wishing to appear in anyway dismissive of the concerns raised by respondents, a number of these are short term difficulties which are outweighed by the long term benefit to the local community. Importantly the expansion of the school will ensure that over half the local children do not have to be driven to neighbouring communities for education. The school itself is confident that it has the capacity to grow whilst also continuing to raise standards and maintain its current ethos.

The Governing Body has resolved to pursue the expansion of the school by submitting a business case to the Education Funding Authority, and requesting the Secretary of State amend its funding agreement to enable the expansion.

Maidstone has experienced a significant increase in the number of Year R pupils. In September 2011, 1,622 pupils joined Reception classes in the Borough. 1,726 pupils are expected to join Maidstone primary schools in September 2012 with forecast rolls increasing to 1,847 by September 2015. The Commissioning Plan for Education Provision 2012-17 identifies a pressure in Maidstone North in 2014/15, and shortfall of places in the Bearsted planning area in 2015/16. The expansion of St John's CEPS will address these pressures, while responding to parent representations. Looking to the future, significant additional housing is included in Maidstone Borough Council's Core Strategy, which will in turn lead to increased pupil numbers across the town.

The expansion of St John's adheres to the principles of our Commissioning Plan. It increases capacity at a good, popular school.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation

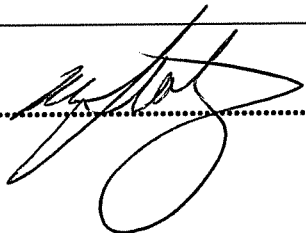
The proposed decision was considered by the Education Cabinet Committee at its meeting held on 21st November 2012. The Committee agreed that Kent County Council should allocate the capital funds to enable the expansion of St John's Church of England Primary School to proceed.

Any alternatives considered: Expansion of Thurnham CE Infant and Madginford Infant schools. Both are already 3FE schools, and neither has sufficient site capacity to enlarge. Additionally, the related junior schools (Roseacre and Madginford) would also need to be enlarged. These options were not considered viable.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer:

None

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signed



28 November 2012
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date