

By: Director Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 8th January 2009

Subject: FLEETDOWN INFANT FLEETDOWN JUNIOR SCHOOLS,
DARTFORD - PROPOSED AMALGAMATION

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report seeks the views of the School Organisation ADVISORY Board on a proposal to undertake a Public Consultation on the amalgamation of Fleetdown Infant School and Fleetdown Junior School (subject to an exemption under Section 10 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006).

Introduction

1. (1) There are two separate schools, Fleetdown Infant and Fleetdown Junior Schools serving the Brent Ward in Dartford East. See Appendices 1 & 2. Both are Community Schools.

(2) The head teachers of both schools have notified their respective Governing Bodies of their intention to retire in December 2009.

(3) The Kent Primary Strategy recommendation for linked Junior and Infant schools, is that when a change of headteacher is notified then the local authority should consider amalgamation.

(4) The local authority will need to apply to the Secretary of State for an exemption to the need to invite proposals to promote a new school under Section 7 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006. This exemption procedure is described in Section 10 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the DCSF guide, "Establishing a New Maintained Mainstream School - A Guide for Local Authorities".

Background

2. (1) The Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) that these schools are sited in is ranked at 755 (out of 883) on the Index of Multiple Deprivation in Kent, indicating that the LSOA is amongst the least deprived in Kent (Analysis and Information Team, KCC).

(2) The IDACI (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index, a sub-domain of the IMD which relates specifically to children rather than for the whole population) is scored at 770, indicating that the children of the LSOA are amongst the least deprived in Kent.

(3) The two schools are on the same site. The schools have separate staffing structures and governing bodies. The Published Admissions Number of the Infant School reduced from 70 to 60 under primary strategy. And the intention was to reduce the Junior Schools admissions number in line with this in due course. The Infant School has a maintained nursery class.

(4) The head teachers of both the schools have indicated that they will be retiring from their schools in December 2009

(5) Kent County Council has had a policy of supporting the amalgamation of infant and junior schools since 1992 as part of "Children First – A Primary Strategy for Kent". The Kent Primary Strategy 2006 continued this policy with recommendations 14 and 15:

14. All-through primary schools, rather than separate infant and junior schools, are generally preferred, as they help to eliminate barriers to children's learning by providing continuity of experiences, which in turn leads to an overall higher quality of educational achievement.

15. Amalgamation of separate infant and junior schools should be considered when it becomes known that a headteacher is about to leave.

(6) The governing bodies of both schools have voted in favour of proceeding to a Public Consultation with a view to amalgamation.

(7) Fleetdown Junior and Fleetdown Infant schools have well-established, on-site provision for teaching children with impaired hearing.

(8) Both schools are part of the Dartford West Local Children's Services partnership.

The Proposal

3. (Subject to receiving an exemption under Section 10 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006)

(1) To discontinue Fleetdown Junior School and Fleetdown Infant School on 31 December 2009.

(2) To amalgamate the two schools to form a new 2 FE (420 place) Community Primary School for pupils aged 3-11 years, retaining in full the existing provision for children with impaired hearing. All existing pupils at the Infant and Junior Schools will transfer into the new school.

(3) The view of the SOAB is sought on undertaking a public consultation on the proposal to amalgamate the two schools.

Site Issues

4. (1) The schools occupy the same site on Lunedale Road, Dartford, Kent. See plan at Appendix 3

(2) There is a common vehicular entrance and both schools have separate pedestrian entrances.

(3) The schools were built in the 1960s to serve the Fleet Estate in Dartford.

(4) The school buildings are flat roof, brick built on two floors. The general

state of the accommodation is adequate.

(5) There are several outside play areas and three green spaces nearby which the schools use for sports and environmental science studies.

(6) Within a mile radius of the development there are five Primary schools: Brent CPS, Stone, St Mary's CEPS, Gateway CPS, York Road Junior and, St Albans Infant. See Appendix 4.

(7) Within two miles there are six more primary schools. Darenth CPS, Oakfield CPS, Sutton at Hone CPS, Westgate CPS, Temple Hill CPS and St Anselm's RC PS. See Appendix 5.

Resource Implications

5.

Capital

(1) In order for the amalgamated school to operate effectively, it would be preferable to consider some refurbishment and refreshment of the school buildings. It is anticipated that capital to support this will be available in a future capital programme.

Revenue

(2) The proposed amalgamation would be eligible for support from the re-organisation fund. The new school will receive a lump sum of 47,500 and an additional sum if one or both of the schools are eligible for curriculum protection in the year of amalgamation. Based on pupil numbers for 2008-09 the new school would receive an additional £45,318 from the re-organisation fund. The one off funding is intended to support the revenue costs of the associated amalgamation.

(3) There would be efficiency savings in the senior management structure, support staff and in the maintenance of the schools.

Human

(4) An interim governing body would need to be established to oversee the amalgamation and with an early duty to appoint a headteacher. This would ultimately be replaced by a new governing body for the amalgamated school.

(5) The staff of both schools would transfer into the new school, with an alignment of posts once the new school is established. The number and grading of posts below that of headteacher and deputy headteacher would be determined by the interim governing body within the budget available. The posts of headteacher and deputy headteacher would be advertised locally and nationally.

(6) There will also be some impact on support staff, but any adverse impact will be kept to a minimum.

(7) In the event of any redundancies being necessary, full support and advice would be available to all staff in search of suitable alternative employment.

Transport and Road Safety Implications

6. (1) The amalgamation of the two schools is not expected to cause any additional problems or issues. Most of the pupils live locally (see appendices 3 & 4).
- (2) The Fasttrack bus service passes by the Fleet estate along Princes Road to the North.
- (3) A preliminary School Travel plan will be produced prior to the opening of the school.

Environmental Impact

7. (1) The school primarily serves the local community area of Fleet. There is no expected increase in environmental impact.

Equality Issues

8. (1) PLASC data for the Fleetdown schools records a low percentage of pupils with an ethnicity that is not White English or Other White British. Assessment: Low.

Ofsted

9. (1) Fleetdown Junior School was last inspected in January 2008 and rated as a good school:

“This is a good school which provides a good education for pupils and prepares them well for the next stage of their education. Pupils make good progress in all year groups because of good teaching and a curriculum which meets their needs effectively. “

- (2) Fleetdown Infant School was last inspected in January 2008 and rated as a good school:

“This is a good school which has a number of real strengths. Pupils of all abilities grow in confidence and achieve well. It is popular with parents, who express overwhelmingly positive views, typically referring to Fleetdown as 'a welcoming school'.”

- (3) It is anticipated that the amalgamation will result in a positive impact on overall standards for the young people of the Fleet area of Dartford and for improved life opportunities in the local communities.

Exemption under Section 10 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA 2006)

10. (1) From 25 May 2007 a new statutory framework applies for the establishment of any new school. The new provisions will apply in all circumstances where it is intended to establish a new school.
- (2) Where the Local Authority wishes to see a new school established it must

either:

(i) invite proposals for the school as provided for in Section 7 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006 and The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance) (England) Regulations 2007 (SI: 2007 No 1288) (as amended). The process is generally referred to as a “competition”.

or

(ii) apply to the Secretary of State for consent to publish proposals for a new school, without running a competition, as provided for in Section 10 of EIA 2006. This process is generally referred to as an “exemption”

(3) The DCSF guide, “Establishing a New Maintained Mainstream School - A Guide for Local Authorities” states in Part B that:

“9. All applications will be considered on their merits taking into account the particular circumstances and factors that apply. However, Ministers have indicated they might be prepared to give consent in the following circumstances:

- straightforward amalgamations of infant and junior schools where a replacement primary school is proposed;”

(4) An exemption is applied for after a Public Consultation has taken place and before the Statutory notice is published. Details of the exemption applied for should be incorporated as part of the Public Consultation as the Secretary of State requires that the following are consulted before the exemption conditions can be considered satisfied:

- (i) any local authority likely to be affected by the proposals
- (ii) the governing bodies and staff of the school
- (iii) the staff of any other school that may be affected
- (iv) families of children at the school
- (v) families of children at any other school who may be affected by the proposals
- (vi) any trade unions who represent staff at the school or affected schools
- (vii) the local C of E and RC dioceses
- (viii) anyone else who has previously expressed an interest in setting up a school
- (ix) MPs whose constituencies include the schools that are the subject of
- (x) the proposals or whose constituents are likely to be affected by the proposals
- (xi) the local district or parish council where the proposed school is to be situated
- (xii) the Local Children’s Services Partnership
- (xiii) such other persons as appear to the LA to be appropriate
- (xiv) any other interested party
- (xv) Under Section 176 of the Education Act 2002, local authorities and governing bodies are under a duty to consult pupils on any proposed changes to local school organisation that may affect them.

A Kent County Council Public Consultation would consult with the above as a matter of course.

(5) An exemption is applied for using Annex D of Section 10 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006. There is a six week target for decisions to be returned.

(6) If the Secretary of State grants an exemption, then the decision documentation will form part of the report to SOAB to seek their recommendation to publish a Public Notice.

(7) If the cabinet member agrees to submit the proposal to statutory public notice, the Secretary of State's decision must be referred to in the Public Notice.

Views of the Governing Bodies

12. (1) The Governing body of both schools are fully supportive of the amalgamation and wish to see it proceed at pace.

Views of Local Children Services Partnership Board

13. The LCSP Manager, Karen Coffey has been informed and is in favour of the proposal.

Views of Local Member(s)

14. The Local Member, Christine Angell has been informed of the proposal.

Views of District Council

15. Dartford Borough Council has been informed of the proposal.

Views of the Area Children Services Officer

16. (1) The proposal is supported by all stakeholders and in my opinion should be allowed to proceed.

(2) Both Governing Bodies have independently of the local authority, met with schools across North West Kent who have amalgamated and have, independently of each other, agreed that amalgamation would benefit the current and future children in their schools.

(3) The Governing Bodies seek to appoint the Head teacher of the new school by November 2009 and have requested that the local authority proceed at pace with this proposal.

(4) The Area Children Services Officer considers that this is an innovative proposal, designed to enhance the life opportunities of young people in the Dartford East district. It is therefore, appropriate to conduct a public consultation for the amalgamation of the two schools.

Proposed Timetable

17.	08 Jan 2009	SOAB
	12 Jan 2009	Start of Consultation
	13 Jan 2009	Public Meeting
	23 Feb 2009	Close of Consultation
	27 Feb 2009	Annex D to Secretary of State
	10 Apr 2009	Secretary' of State's decision received

23 Apr 2009	SOAB – Outcome of Consultation
Early May 2009	Cabinet Member Decision to issue Public Notice
Early May 2009	Public Notice issued, if agreed by Cabinet Member
Jun 2009	End of Statutory Representation Period
Late June/July 09	Cabinet Member decision in proposal
Jun 2009	Establish Temporary Governing Body
31 Dec 2009	School Governing Bodies dissolved
01 Jan 2010	New School opens

Recommendation

18. Members of the School Organisation Advisory Board are asked to agree to submit the proposal to amalgamate Fleetdown Infant and Fleetdown Junior Schools to public consultation.

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The Local Member is Mrs Christine Angell

Background documents:
Other Information Sources