

From: Patrick Leeson, Corporate Director for Education and Young People's Services

To: Education and Young People's Services Cabinet Committee,
21 January 2016

Subject: Proposed amalgamation of Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School, Hunt Road, Tonbridge TN10 4BB

Key Decision No: 16/00001

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: None

Future Pathway of Paper: Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: Tonbridge (Richard Long and Christopher Smith)

Summary: This report provides information on the proposal to amalgamate Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School by closing the current Infant and Junior Schools and establishing a single Community Primary School.

Recommendation(s): The Education and Young People's Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform in order to:

Issue a public notice to:

- (i) Discontinue Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School, Hunt Road, Tonbridge, TN10 4BB and establish a single, three form of entry community primary school by September 2016.

And, subject to no new objections to the public notice

- (ii) Make recommendation to the Schools Adjudicator for determination for implementation by September 2016.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Kent County Council, with the support of Woodlands Infant School and Woodland Junior School Governing Body are proposing to amalgamate the schools to become a three form entry, single community primary school for children aged 4 to 11 years.
- 1.2 Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School are two separate schools serving the Higham Ward of Tonbridge. Both schools are popular community schools. Currently Woodlands Infant School has 269 pupils on roll and Woodlands Junior School has 382 pupils on roll.
- 1.3 The schools occupy adjacent sites with a single vehicular entrance point and both schools have pedestrian entrances. A Nursery known as Roselands Pre School Highamwood Ltd, have a lease of a large area within the Infant School site. The Nursery have erected their own demountable building on

- site, and have been granted a 25 year lease of the site they occupy, together with rights to use other areas within the Infant School site.
- 1.4 Woodlands Infant School is judged by Ofsted as a 'good' (January 2014) school. Overall teaching is good across the school, and some is outstanding, with pupils across the school making rapid progress in all subjects. Woodlands Junior School is judged by Ofsted as 'Outstanding' (May 2011).
 - 1.5 Following the retirement of the Headteacher of Woodlands Infant School, the Governing Bodies of the Infant and Junior Schools formed a 'soft federation governance arrangement' which meant they organised themselves into a Strategy Group to look at the future of both schools. Whilst the Governing Bodies remain separate, the Strategy Group had certain delegated powers. The Strategy Group reached an agreement that Mary Priestley, Headteacher of Woodlands Junior School, would be appointed Interim Executive Headteacher across both schools. Since September 2015 both schools have already seen the benefits of this approach, particularly in terms of staffing. However, this 'soft Federation' arrangement has limitations as the school budgets and strategic decision making remain separate.
 - 1.6 Both Governing Bodies have confirmed in writing their agreement to proceed to public consultation on the proposal to amalgamate the two schools.
 - 1.7 Public consultation is now underway and will conclude on 20 January 2016. The Governing Bodies agreed that one public meeting should be held on 6 January 2016 from 7pm at Woodlands Junior School.
 - 1.8 If following consideration of the responses to the consultation the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform agrees to issue a public notice, it is planned that a four week notice period would take place in February 2016. Following the end of the notice period, details of the proposal together with the consultation information and Cabinet Member recommendation would be forwarded to the Schools Adjudicator for determination.
 - 1.9 A Temporary Governing body would be set up to take forward the process to establish the new school.

2. Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed that the two schools will amalgamate and a new 3 form entry primary school will be established with effect from 1 September 2016. Both predecessor schools would be discontinued from 31 August 2016.
- 2.2 Currently the Published Admissions Number (PAN) for each school is 90 for the Infants and 96 for the Junior School. The PAN for the new school would be 90 at the point of entry in Reception Year. However the school would continue to admit up to 96 places in Years 3 to 6. The two schools have an admission link and the current oversubscription criteria for both schools would remain the same for the new Primary school, in line with other Community schools.

- 2.3 It is proposed that the new Primary school would continue to operate over both current sites.
- 2.4 These proposals are set out in accordance with The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 published on 28 January 2014.
- 2.5 The legal process for the discontinuance of a school is under sections 15 to 17 and Schedule 2 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (EIA).
- 2.6 Section 15 of the EIA 2006 requires a Local Authority to publish statutory proposals where it is considering discontinuing a maintained school. Section 16 of the Act requires the local authority to consult such people as they feel to be appropriate and to have regard to Guidance published by the Secretary of State, before publishing such proposals.
- 2.7 The local authority is required to consult interested parties and in so doing must have regard to the Secretary of State's School Organisation Guidance for Maintained Schools (January 2014).
- 2.8 Decisions will be taken according to statutory procedures, including a 5 day proposed decision publication period before the decision is taken and a 5 day call-in period after the decision is taken. This proposed change is conditional on the establishment of a new school under section 10 of the EIA, therefore the proposal must be decided by the Schools Adjudicator.
- 2.9 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed as part of the consultation. To date no comments have been received and no changes are required to the Equality Impact Assessment.
- 2.10 There will be no impact on the value of KCC's property portfolio.

3. Financial Implications

a. Capital

- i. It is proposed that the proposals can be implemented without the need for capital expenditure. Should the proposal proceed, Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School would close and a new primary school would operate all-through school on the existing Infant and Junior School sites.

Nursery: A Nursery known as Roselands Pre School Highamwood Ltd, have a 25 year lease in the site they occupy. The lease will expire in March 2024, though it can be terminated by either party subject to 6 months prior written notice. The lease is granted in KCC's name as landowner to the two Schools, which are specified as Woodlands Infant and Junior School respectively. Should the proposal proceed and the schools name change would be appended to the Lease and Roselands Ltd would be notified. A variation of the lease would only be needed if there were material changes to the terms and conditions of the lease, due to changes on site and/or operating procedures.

b. Revenue

- ii. The financial arrangements governing school amalgamations are set out in the Schools Revenue Funding 2016 to 2017 Operational guide July 2015.

Included in Kent's funding formula is a lump sum for all Kent primary schools regardless of their size. Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School currently each receive lump sum funding as separate schools. Should the amalgamation proceed the 'new all-through School' would eventually receive one lump sum. Funding protection will be applied for two years to enable the school to achieve the economies of scale from being one larger primary school. For example, if an amalgamation takes place for 1 September 2016:

- In the year of the amalgamation the two schools keep their lump sums 2 X £120k
- In the year after the amalgamation April 2017 to March 2018 – the school will get 85% of the combined lump sum = £204k.
- From April 2018 to March 2019 the school will get 1 lump sum £120k

c. Human

- iii. It is proposed that all teachers and support staff employed at Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School (at the time of the proposed amalgamation) will transfer to the primary school.

4. Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes: Kent County Council's Strategic Statement (2015-2020) Policy Framework

- 4.1 These proposals will help to secure our ambition "to ensure that Kent's young people have access to the education, work and skills opportunities necessary to support Kent business to grow and be increasingly competitive in the national and international economy" as set out in 'Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes: Kent County Council's Strategic Statement (2015-2020)'.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Approximately 1200 hard copies of the public consultation document were circulated, which included a form for written responses. The consultation document was distributed to parents/carers, staff and governors of both schools, County Councillors, Member of Parliament, the Diocesan Authorities, local libraries, Parish Councils, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, and others. The consultation document was posted on the KCC website and the link to the website widely circulated. An opportunity to send in written responses using the response form, email and online was also provided.
- 5.2 The Headteacher, Mrs Priestley, gave assemblies at both the Infant School and the Junior School to explain to the children about the proposed amalgamation of the two schools. Following this the children were given the opportunity for discussion in classes and then a vote was taken to establish whether the children supported the proposal or not. Views were taken from the 21 classes across both schools. Overall 82% of the children were in favour of the proposed amalgamation with 8% against and 10% undecided.

In addition a school council meeting was held at the Junior School which included a range of pupil groups, including boys, girls, disadvantaged children, children with SEND, children with a variety of ethnic backgrounds and children with English as an Additional Language. Overall 61% of these children were in favour of the proposed amalgamation with 35% against and 4% undecided. A summary of children's views and School Council Meeting is attached at **Appendix 1 and 2**.

- 5.3 At the time of writing 70 consultation responses had been received of which 61 were positive, 2 were negative and 7 were undecided. A summary of responses received to date are attached at **Appendix 3**. The Area Education Officer for West Kent will provide a further update at the Committee meeting and a copy of all responses received will be passed to the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform. A public consultation meeting to discuss the proposal took place on 6 January 2016 from 7.00 – 9.00pm at Woodlands Junior School, Hunt Road, Tonbridge. The meeting was attended by 43 people, a summary of the meeting is attached at **Appendix 4**.

6. Views

- 6.1 The Local Members for Tonbridge have been consulted about these proposals.
- 6.2 The View of the Headteacher and Governing Body of Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School

Woodlands Infant School:

Having consulted on and carefully considered the various ways forward regarding the long-term future of Woodlands Infant School, the Governing Body has unanimously concluded that the interests of the current, and future, pupils of the school will be best served by the school being part of a full Primary school; rather than remaining as an infant-only school. To this end, and after discussion with the Woodlands Junior School governing body, the infant school governing body is co-proposing an amalgamation with Woodlands Junior School to create a new full primary school.

The reasoning behind this proposal is that whilst the two schools are already working closely together under a Soft-federation arrangement, it was felt that even greater benefits for all the Stakeholders, but in particular the children, would be achieved by the two schools becoming one. The key benefit of higher pupil attainment is seen as resulting from: longer-term relationship and trust development between parents/carers and the school, leading to deeper staff knowledge and understanding of the pupils from Foundation Stage to Key Stage 2; greater scope for staff development, effective deployment and the sharing of good teaching practice; economies of scale allowing more of the school budget to be spent on pupil education.

Woodlands Junior School Statement:

The Woodlands Junior School governors have a responsibility to ensure that all children within the school receive the best education possible. The

governors have spent some time considering how this might be best achieved. As a result, in conjunction with the governors of Woodlands Infant school, Woodlands Junior school governors have unanimously decided to co- propose the creation of an all through primary school by combining Woodlands Junior School and Woodlands Infant school. The reasons for this decision include a sharing of best educational practice across a single school, a consistent approach to outstanding teaching across all years, easing the difficulties associated with transition between key stage 1 and key stage 2, a whole school approach to the National Curriculum from foundation to the end of key stage 2 and school policies which will be consistently applied across one school. We believe that this constitutes the best possible future direction for education of the pupils of both schools.

6.3 The view of the Director Quality and Standards:

The Director Education Quality and Standards supports the proposal and believes amalgamation is the best approach to maintain standards for the pupils of Woodlands Infant and Junior School. The benefits of considering this proposal include greater consistency of approach to teaching and learning from ages 4 to 11; seamless monitoring of pupil progress from ages 4 to 11; increased potential for strong leadership and governance and continuity of experiences for young children.

6.4 The view of the Director Planning and Access and the Area Education Officer:

The Director Planning and Access and the Area Education Officer for West Kent consider that the most appropriate solution to securing and sustaining outstanding education provision across the primary age range is for the Woodlands schools to become a single all-through Primary school.

8. **Conclusions**

- 8.1 This proposal is aligned to Kent County Council's commitment to maximising the educational opportunities for children as set out in the Kent Education Commissioning Plan 2015-2019, which recommends the consideration of the amalgamation of separate infant and junior schools to provide all age Primary schools, where appropriate, because of the benefits they offer including better continuity of learning.

9. **Recommendation(s)**

The Education and Young People's Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform in order to:

Issue a public notice to:

- (i) Discontinue Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School, Hunt Road, Tonbridge, TN10 4BB and establish a single, three form of entry community primary school by September 2016.

And, subject to no new objections to the public notice

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| (ii) Make recommendation to the Schools Adjudicator for determination for implementation by September 2016 |
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10. Background Documents

- 10.1 Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes: Kent County Council's Strategic Statement 2015-2020 <http://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/corporate-policies/increasing-opportunities-improving-outcomes>
- 10.2 Kent Commissioning Plan for Education Provision 2015-19
http://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/16236/Commissioningplan-for-education-provision-in-Kent-2015-2019.pdf
- 10.3 Consultation Document and Equalities Impact Assessment
<http://consultations.kent.gov.uk/consult.ti/woodlands>
- 10.4 Schools Revenue Funding 2016 to 2017 Operational guide July 2015
www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-funding-arrangements-2016-to-2017
- 10.5 Kent Commissioning Plan for Education Provision 2016-20
<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s61243/Item%20C1%20FINAL%200APPROVED%20EYPS%20Report%20Education%20Commissioning%20Plan%20Dec%202015.pdf>

11. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Comments from Children

Appendix 2 – Summary of Views of the School Council which met on 10 December 2015

Appendix 3 – Summary of Responses

Appendix 4 – Notes of Public Consultation Meeting - 6th January 2014

12. Report Author

- Jared Nehra, Area Education Officer – West Kent
- Telephone: 03000 412209
- Email: Jared.nehra@kent.gov.uk

12 Relevant Director

- Keith Abbott, Director of Education Planning and Access
- Telephone: 03000 417008
- Email: Keith.abbott@kent.gov.uk

Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School
Children's Views on the proposed Amalgamation

The Headteacher, Mrs Priestley, gave assemblies at both the Infant School and the Junior School to explain to the children about the proposed amalgamation of the two schools. Following this the children were given the opportunity for discussion in classes and then a vote was taken to establish whether the children supported the proposal or not. Views were taken from the 21 classes across both schools.

Overall 82% of the children were in favour of the proposed amalgamation with 8% against and 10% undecided.

In addition a school council meeting was held at the Junior School which included a range of pupil groups, including boys, girls, disadvantaged children, children with SEND, children with a variety of ethnic backgrounds and children with English as an Additional Language

Overall 61% of these children were in favour of the proposed amalgamation with 35% against and 4% undecided.

Comments from the children in support of the proposed amalgamation

Key Stage 1

- 'I can share my lego'
- 'My brother is in the Juniors'
- 'I like the teachers'
- 'I like to learn new people's names'
- 'I'd like to be with my brother'
- 'I know the Juniors already because I go to After School Club'
- 'I can see my friend Emily'

Key Stage 2

- 'really exciting'
- 'I'm very excited that we can work with the infants but sad that we won't be here'

(Y6)

- 'It will inspire the younger children to have older buddies'
- 'We will be able to share stories with the younger children'
- 'It will raise the confidence of Y3'
- 'It will prepare KS1 for secondary school'
- 'It will be good for children without older and younger siblings'

Comments from the children against the proposed amalgamation

- 'I don't want to see my younger sister all the time'
- 'I'm worried about the cut in funding'
- 'Mummy and Daddy said that if the funding is cut we won't have any more computers'
- 'Would it be safe for all the children on the playground at the same time?'

- 'What if the older children do not behave and the younger children copy them?'

Questions

- 'Will they knock the school down?'
- 'Why do we only go as far as Y6?'
- 'How can we attach to the Juniors?'
- 'How will Mrs Priestley see all the classes?'
- 'Will we keep our tree names?'
- 'Will the school name stay the same?'
- 'Would we build a corridor between the schools?'
- 'Will we be able to read stories to the Infant children?'
- 'Will we share Sports Days?'
- 'Will we have 'houses'?'
- 'Can we share some playtimes? '

Summary of Views of the School Council which met on 10 December 2015

Attended by 23 pupils - reps, depts and others by special invitation.

All children were aware of the proposed amalgamation. They shared their thoughts in groups then fed back.

Votes in favour - 14

Votes not in favour – 8

Don't know – 1

Comments in favour of the proposal:

- It will build up our confidence in life [i.e. being with children of younger age]
- It will be good for peer mediators – more opportunity to carry out the role
- It will prepare you for secondary school – due to the bigger size of the school
- The young ones can learn more – we can look out for them
- We can make more friends
- There will be good teamwork – we can learn stuff from other people
- It will be good for those that have brothers / sisters

Comments against the proposal:

- It will be packed on the field for the younger ones – there will be more accidents
- YR are annoying and Y6 will get wound up and accidentally hurt them – they don't get along
- It will be too crowded – there will be bumps
- It will be harder for Mrs Priestley – less lunch and more work
- It will increase the arguments and need more people to sort it out

Summary of Responses

Proposal to Amalgamate Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School, Hunt Road, Tonbridge, Kent TN10 4BB by 1 September 2016

Consultation documents (hard copies) distributed: 1200
Responses received: 70

As at 11.01.16

	Support	Against	Undecided	Total
Parents/Carers	49	2	7	58
Governors	3			3
Members of Staff	9			9
Interested Parties	0			
Total	61	2	7	70

**In Support of the Proposal
Parent(s)/Carer(s)**

- The school will function better as one primary school
- The name of the school should be Woodland Primary School. This will ensure that it is still a well-recognised school. Anything other than this would mean scrapping the good reputation it has built up.
- Great idea, this will aid transition from KS1-2.
- Removing the need to apply for a place at the junior school will not only alleviate an enormous amount of administration but also some stress for parents who aren't always aware that their child's place is guaranteed.
- Mrs Priestly has led other schools in improving. The Infant School will benefit from the expertise in the Juniors.
- Helping the children get the needs throughout primary school by having one school will improve this as they can work together.
- This proposal will be beneficial for all involved.
- Makes sense to join the two schools and share the resources/teachers etc.
- Seems to be the most logical and sensible step.
- Although in favour, concerns about reduction in lump funding.
- Saves the process of applying for the Juniors for Year 3, makes more sense.
- Agree. It would be nice if standards didn't slip if the schools merged.
- Both schools will benefit from sharing resources and ideas.
- In favour of this; however, the management structure needs addressing. This year the deputy at the Infant School has had classroom responsibilities which has been impractical and in future would be more appropriate for a school of this size.

In Support of the Proposal

Staff

- This makes sense. Expectations and progression will be improved when managed by one person.
- Joining the schools will be beneficial for everyone.
- This can only be seen as a positive move.
- This proposal will provide learning and support for children throughout their primary school year.
- Career development prospects can be improved – this proposal will aid the retention of excellent staff.
- Concerns about how the two schools can fully amalgamate using the two separate buildings, from a staff point of view and the children's point of view but am sure it can be worked out.

In Support of the Proposal

Governor (Infant)

- Whole heartedly believe that an amalgamation of these two schools will benefit current and further pupils of the schools.

Against the Proposal

Parent(s)/Carer(s)

- Cannot see the benefits of the proposal.
- Concerned that loss of lump sum funding would impact on children, particularly those with Special Educational Needs.
- The schools already work closely together, why change something that already works?
- Concerned this is a money saving exercise.
- Unsure how an amalgamation would provide a more coherent delivery of the National Curriculum nor how it would provide a consistent approach to the way in which children are taught as pupils currently benefit from this.
- There is currently a system in place for transition which is very simple for parents to follow.
- The school halls are not large enough to accommodate whole school assemblies.
- Previously when there were separate Headteachers for the schools it would have been difficult for the two schools to operate under the same policies and practice. Now Headteacher is now the same in both schools there is no reason why the two schools cannot run the same policies and practice.
- Concerned cut in funding would lead to staff cuts.
- Concerned there would be pressure on the Friends Association to fundraise to provide facilities for the children to have what they already have if the two schools operated separately.

Undecided

Parent(s)/Carer(s)

- Concerned about the reduction in funding and cannot see how this can be a benefit. The effect is likely to be less money to spend on the school.
- Have utter confidence in Mrs Priestley but concerned that if in the future the combined school has a 'bad' headteacher, it will be damaging both schools instead of just one. Woodlands is extremely fortunate at the current time to have such an exceptionally good headteacher.
- Concerned how saving can be made without staff changes.
- Concerned that the reduction in funding would have impact on school performance. Also query whether reduction in funding would pave the way for an additional school in the community or at least additional school places in the best performing school?

Proposal to Amalgamate Woodlands Infant School & Woodlands Junior School

Notes of Public Consultation Meeting - 6th January 2014

Panel	Mr Keith Abbott	Director of Education Planning and Access (Chair)
	Mr Jared Nehra	Area Education Officer (West Kent)
	Ms Tel German	Senior Improvement Adviser
	Mrs Michelle Hamilton	Area Schools Organisation Officer (West Kent)
	Mrs Deborah Ledniczky	Public Meeting Recorder
	Mrs Mary Priestley	Headteacher
	Mr Geoff Bartlett	Chair of Governors (Infant School)
	Mrs Alison Minton	Chair of Governors (Junior School)

Introduction

Mr Abbott welcomed parents, staff and members of the public to the meeting and introduced the supporting officers and principal speakers and explained the running order of the evening.

Mr Nehra explained that the evening was to give people the opportunity to hear about the proposal first hand and to ask questions and to make any comments about the proposal to amalgamate Woodlands Infant and Woodlands Junior School. The evening forms part of the Public Consultation that will run over several weeks during which time people will be able to put their views to KCC.

The meeting will be recorded because it is a public consultation and all comments will be taken into account by our elected Members when the decision is made about the school and it is important that views and comments are on record.

Mr Nehra gave a short presentation detailing the purpose of the meeting, the background to the proposal, admission and financial arrangements, governance, staff, time-line, details for the response forms and the Equality Impact Assessment. Mr Nehra told people that a copy of the presentation can be made available by contacting his office.

Statement from the Headteacher, Mrs Mary Priestley

I would like to say a few words about the proposed amalgamation of the two schools. I am absolutely passionate about both Woodlands schools, having been involved with them since 1996. During that time the schools have had varying degrees of co-operation and working together. Interestingly, historically the schools opened as one and it was only after two years that the Infants moved into their own building and they became two. From my experiences, the times when the two schools have had the closest relationship have always been the times when they have, I believe, been at their most effective. For me, therefore, the decision about this proposed amalgamation centres around making the best educational provision for our children and I wouldn't be standing here tonight if I didn't whole-heartedly support the proposed joining together of the two schools.

It seems to me that the systems supporting the education of our children should, as far as possible, be consistent and completely aligned. It seems obvious that a curriculum which could be planned in its entirety from reception until Y6 will be the most cohesive and that assessment structures will work best when they do not change between key stages.

There are, of course, financial considerations but we are confident that with economies of scale in terms of contracts and purchasing, savings can be made without compromising the educational provision. Conversely the momentum and collective thought process of having one staff team forging forward together more than compensates for this.

These two great schools can and should move forward together, sharing their strengths for the benefit of all the children, their parents and the community in which they are placed.

Statement from the Chair of Governors for the Infant School - Mr Geoffrey Bartlett

The Governing Body have been discussing this proposal Since September 2015 and as explained by Mr Nehra and the points raised by Mrs Priestley the Governing Body agree that this is the best way forward for both schools and pupils and we feel that Mrs Priestley is the best person to take this proposal forward and make it work.

Statement from the Chair of Governors for the Junior School - Mrs Alison Minton

Governors debated long and hard and having also spoken to the CoG of other junior schools last year have concluded that this is the right thing to do; it is the best way forward for our pupils and their education and we are whole heartedly behind this proposal.

Question	Response
<p>Parent The amalgamation will mean a potential loss of £120,000 for the school. Can you help us to understand how the funding is spent and the savings that will be made?</p>	<p>Mr Nehra - Area Education Officer Explained that the financial loss of £120,000 equates to less than 6% of the combined overall school budgets. As two separate schools Woodlands benefits from additional monies which other three form entry schools would not normally receive. There are many such schools across the county that are not receiving this funding and are successfully delivering a good level of education for their pupils. In the past couple of years two Maidstone primary schools, Loose and Madginford, have both successfully amalgamated and, without impacting on the education of the children, have met the savings before the funding protection is taken away. An example of which is, by being one school, they have been able to purchase single contracts for such services as maintenance and admin.</p> <p>Mrs Minton - Chair of Governors (Junior) Spoke to the CoG of Loose about the financial implications. The school amalgamated two years ago and the Chair stated that although there have been challenges the school have achieved the savings needed and amalgamation was the right decision for the school. Mrs Minton pointed out that although their situation for amalgamation was slightly different to that of Woodlands the Governing Body feels</p>

<p>Parent - Infant School Can you give us a cross comparison in schools that, like Woodlands, one is outstanding and one is good/near to outstanding. The school you mentioned was underperforming so the stats will be lower. Do you have an example where this has worked in a similar school?</p>	<p>that this is absolutely the best thing for the schools.</p> <p>Mr Nehra - Area Education Officer Loose Primary school has maintained the level of education delivered and seen attainment increased significantly since becoming an all through primary school.</p> <p>Tel German - Senior Primary Improvement Officer Explained that it was a slightly different situation for the Maidstone schools. One was facing particular challenges and had to spend a large amount of money on staff training and coaching as well as managing the changes in funding. The result of the amalgamation has seen a transformation in the quality of provision and leadership with skills being shared across the school within their separate teams. The amalgamation has had a positive impact seeing a transformation in their Ofsted predicted judgements in terms of their outcomes and the progress their pupils make.</p> <p>Tel German - Senior Primary Improvement Officer For one school the stats were lower because it was under performing but the other was rated as a high performing school and is now improving even further. The same for Madginford, although one school was more challenging the other was rated outstanding and we have seen it transform further to become an excellent school with accelerated pupil progress. Benefits have not only been seen in the challenging school but in the higher attaining school as well. Improvements have been made in data, In Year progress, pupil progress, ease of transition, sharing of good practice - particularly in high attainers, skills, benefits from the input and support from the Junior school staff who were able to offer support with the lower ability children, resulting in the raising of standards and achievements for those pupils. Tel German acknowledged that both Woodlands schools are very good schools but could be even better.</p>
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Ex pupil, Parent, Resident

Have specific questions relating to the finance that I will put in an email directly to the council. Can you give an example of where you have amalgamated two schools of similar standards on same site so that we can objectively see whether or not the execution is something new or something that you have done before as all your relevant answers are not relevant to Woodlands.

We have different views. Frustrated that we have not been provided with the relevant information to be able to make an informed decision and feel we are not going to be getting that information. You have answered the question, yes, you don't have a similar example.

You say that cost savings cannot be achieved when you have two separate schools therefore are you increasing the specific risks.

Can two separate schools on the same site achieve the same contractual advantage as one school on the site?

Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher

Neither of the schools want to rest on their laurels and it is only by moving forward, continuing to make improvements in both schools, that improvements will be made. We need to be constantly changing for the benefits of the children and I can already see improvements by sharing good practice and the improvement in communication. Leadership is currently separate and it makes more sense to do that together, forging forward together in order to make change rather than forcing it. Finances are important but I believe it's all about the children and we have to change. I have thought long and hard about this process and believe that is right thing to do for the school and children.

Mr Nehra - Area Education Officer

Have to disagree with the statement. Feel the examples given by Tel German are a good comparison. Madginford had one school rated outstanding and one underperforming so feel there is some direct relevance. The outstanding school has further improved.

Mr Abbott - Director of Education Planning and Access

I do have examples of same site schools that have amalgamated in the past that have delivered the savings which I can email to you.

There are some areas where there is nothing stopping schools that are not on the same site getting one contract cheaper. There are some services that by the way companies externally charge or price are done on a school by school basis and some where they are instructed that you won't get the same savings.

Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher

We will not be losing any staff as part of the process. There will be a re-structure undertaken to fit an all through primary school but will not be losing any of our

<p>Parent How will the staff situation work out if you lose some of the budget? There are presently two Deputy Headteachers and how will the reduction in the budget affect the support for children with SEN?</p> <p>Parent Will you look to lose people later on in the process?</p> <p>Parent - Infant Are we going to be given any clues of what the management structure will look like before we decide?</p> <p>Teacher When will that consultation be taking place?</p> <p>Finance Officer - Infant My colleague in the Junior school and I already work closely on the contracts and have negotiated jointly on maintenance contracts but each school has to have its own contract. Where we will be looking to save money on services where we currently pay twice services such as: schools personnel, payroll and Information Services (IS) subscription for technical support for computers. We are fortunate that as both Woodlands schools are rated highly and full we are in full receipt of the maximum income from KCC. Although both</p>	<p>resources; the level of support will remain the same. That's not to say that people's job roles won't change in time but as part of the amalgamation process we are not looking to lose anybody. As we go forward I will have to put forward a leadership structure.</p> <p>Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher No, I am not looking to lose staff as part of amalgamation. I do have to put forward a leadership structure in a few weeks' time as part of the process.</p> <p>Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher That I don't know, I would need to seek advice.</p> <p>Mr Nehra - Area Education Officer A key element of the process is that staff will be consulted with. Staff will be given information that we couldn't automatically give out to parents so that they are able to comment in confidence. The suggested structure will not be announced before the end of the process. It will follow as part of the process and will happen before the end of the conclusion of the amalgamation procedure.</p> <p>Mr Nehra - Area Education Officer It is a separate consultation process and does not have the same end date. We will be coming out to see staff and you will have a further period to consult. I do not have the time line to hand but will provide Mrs Priestley with a copy.</p> <p>Mr Nehra - Area Education Officer The £120,000 being referred to is not a saving to the County Council. Schools funding comes through a delegated budget called the DSG budget and is separate to the County Council resource. Any savings will remain in the DSG budget and be distributed through to all schools in the County.</p>
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schools manage their costs I cannot say how we can save £120,000 but we have two years to look at those economies of scale.

Parent

Are the staff consulted on their opinion as to whether you choose to amalgamate the two schools or not?

Parent

What happens about the school uniform coming into September if you are going to change the school name?

Parent

Given that the schools are separate how logistically will the children not feel this transition when there is a transition?

Parent

Who is the adjudicator for the process?

Mr Nehra - Area Education Officer

The view of staff is very important. Through the separate consultation staff have a right to be consulted on confidentially. No changes to staffing are being proposed through this proposal or their terms and conditions i.e. no measures are being proposed as part of this process.

Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher

I met with staff before the proposal was launched and would like to re-iterate that there will be no changes to staff through this process but over time changes will occur to the staffing structure.

Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher

The name Woodlands is synonymous with school; there are no plans to change it and the uniform will remain the same. This proposal is about making a continuous process for the children and despite the reduction in funding, I think it is best way forward for both the schools.

Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher

We are talking about the psychological impact of their transition for the children. As the schools work more closely together that will seem less big because there will be more opportunities where children will come together to share various activities, do more things together, and have the same member of staff talking/overseeing a particular area such as safeguarding or SEN. Changes will be little and subtle but important in making sure that the children's education is as smooth as possible.

Mr Nehra - Area Education Officer

The Schools Adjudicator is a semi-independent government agency that has the right to make impartial decisions on specific things in education legislation. They are the office who will look at the process and their decision is final on the amalgamation.

Parent

Why would you keep two Deputy Heads and an Executive Headteacher, two SENCO's, two school offices?

Parent - Infant

I can see the benefit of 7 continuous years through schooling. Infant presently have their own space to grow in confidence, will they still have their own space in the future?

Parent

The execution of change and leadership is going to be important over the next 3 years. Very encouraged about support by Governing Body for the Mrs Priestley but how are you going to guarantee that Mrs Priestley will not leave in the next 3 years. This process will fail or succeed from leadership from the top.

Ex Pupil, Parent & Resident

Asked the Governing Body if we go ahead and school changes I can see a lot of benefits for staff who will then become a much more valuable commodity. Will the risks of having a better set of staff and how you potentially keep them leaving the school be considered and how might you go about changing the recruitment process for future staff? One of the over-riding principals of the school is its strong leadership from governors.

Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher

Some things will be doubled, such as the school offices. There may be staff retirements coming up which will allow us to move staff around efficiently. There are areas where we are short and I have already talked about how it will work. There are enough roles to be able to separate responsibility out and we can use the expertise of staff already in place.

Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher

Space will stay the same and parent involvement will still be welcome. Will not be mixed playground but will think about using space better. Feeling of nurturing is about the age of children rather than the differences between the schools.

Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher

I do not envisage being here for next 20 years but neither do I see myself leaving or not completing a process or seeing it through.

I have no intention of leaving but the school does perform without me being there. The School has always been about the teaching staff and teaching assistants. Key of good school is that it can work because of its staff.

Mrs Minton - Chair of Governors (Junior)

I do not think training better quality staff will mean that we will lose staff because they develop. Staff develop and move on for their own career and progression. School needs to encourage staff to become excellent teachers because this benefits the children. We have a rigorous recruitment process in place and do not see why this would change. We search externally for staff and provide an outstanding work place environment for children and leadership.

Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher

There comes a point when staff feel the

Parent

Funding will be reduced by 50%. Still need to be convinced that this will work. Have you looked at systemically and realistically feel that we can make these savings?

Parent

Currently there are two parent groups involved in fund-raising for the schools. If the amalgamation goes ahead then there will only be one group resulting in a loss of monies that goes into buying resources for the school. Has that been looked at/considered?

Parent

Would like confirmation you are not going to start asking parents to cover the short fall in funding and as there will not be as many fund raising activities will you be asking for contributions and will the reduction in the budget impact on school trips?

need to move on for their own progression. Do not want to lose that.

Mr Nehra - Area Education Officer

Whilst the £120k relates to 50% of the combined lump sum funding, it is less than 6% of the combined budget across the two schools. There is a possibility under the funding regulations to apply for an extension to the funding protection but the school will need to demonstrate exceptional circumstances why the economies cannot be achieved. The key is whether schools that have amalgamated have met these economies and we have heard that other schools have done so in a more difficult situation. Many three form entry primary schools do not receive these monies and achieve very well.

We aim to provide our professional opinion, not to convince you what you should put in your consultation response. Please express your views on the response forms provided.

Mr Abbott - Director of Education Planning and Access

Have worked with a lot of schools on amalgamation, supporting the school through the process and sharing information about savings.

Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher

We will not taking anything away from the group but it is probably not feasible to run two same events so it is possible that you would not generate the same amount of money. As for trips and other events these will continue.

Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher

All contributions are on a voluntary basis.

Teacher

The recent contribution for a Yr 6 book was voluntary. At my previous school it was more of the usual culture to ask parents to purchase a book. We do not expect parents/carers to purchase resources. Sorry if I gave that impression.

Mr Nehra - Area Education Officer

Parent

Feel there needs to be more transparency about how money is being spent. Unsure how money was spent from the 50th anniversary contributions.

Parent

Clarify the donation ask for recently in the Infant school

Parent

Is the amalgamation process reversible and do you know of a case where this has happened?

Parent

Would it be easier to do before the process got too far along the line or would it make no difference?

Parent

Do you know why Woodlands began as one school then split into two?

Parent

Why didn't the proposed amalgamation go ahead in 1996?

There is Government guidance around voluntary contributions. Parents can be asked to contribute voluntarily, but cannot be forced to contribute if there is a short fall in the school budget.

Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher

Agreed that the school needs to be transparent about what contributions are spent on. The school likes to think very carefully about how it spends its monies and we try and ask less and less for voluntary contributions. I will write something in the schools newsletter about the things that were bought from the Association of Friends to mark the 50th anniversary.

Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher

This is nothing to do with shortfall. It's about our Early Years team making things more hands on in reception.

Mr Nehra - Area Education Office

Yes, I believe it is technically possible to revert to two separate schools, although it's not something I have experience of. It would not be reversing decision taken, but would in effect be discontinuing the Primary school and establishing separate Infant and Junior schools under relevant legislation.

In terms of the statutory process it would be a very similar process and would require a consultation process and staff consultation. I don't think the timing would matter particularly.

Governor

Originally plan was for two separate school buildings but as one was ready before the other all the children went to that one.

Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher

From memory, at that time, when a Headteacher retired from one of the schools it triggered an automatic consultation but it didn't get to the stage that the current process has.

<p>Parent - Junior Do Ofsted give a cooling off period?</p> <p>Parent If amalgamation goes ahead how is school rated?</p> <p>Parent Not planning to lose staff other than natural wastage. In terms of leadership and staff does that mean you will not be back filling posts?</p> <p>Parent If losing senior members of staff, will you use more junior staff as this will cost less?</p>	<p>Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher Just changed - it's now three years after the consultation process goes through to allow structure to embed. Will be inspected after that.</p> <p>Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher Officially we will lose our rating but the Ofsted report will remain published on our website for both schools as they were previously.</p> <p>Mrs Priestley - Interim Executive Headteacher All leadership staff are mostly class based. No plans to change structure</p> <p>I and the Governing Body look at the Leadership team annually. It will however be great to see the leadership roles across both schools. We currently have two Deputy Headteachers and as a big school we need that amount of leadership.</p> <p>Would not look to replace with more junior staff. We do a lot of growing our own staff and do not look at cost. We look at what we need and recruit accordingly. There are costs to be cut but not at the expense of the rounded staff. Would always appoint a member of staff, and I'm sure the governors would as well, on the quality they bring to the role not on a financial basis.</p>
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Mr Abbott thanked everyone for attending and for their views and questions and to please complete a response form, the deadline for which is the 20th January 2016 to make sure we have all the information back so that we can provide that as part of the feedback to the County Councillors for discussion at the Education Cabinet Committee on the 21st January. Thanks were given to Mrs Priestley for hosting the event, the Panel and to everyone for attending.

The meeting was attended by approximately 43 people.

Meeting closed at 8.30pm

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Roger Gough,

Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform

DECISION NO:

16/00001

For publication

Subject:

Decision: Proposed amalgamation of Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School, Hunt Road, Tonbridge TN10 4BB

As Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform I agree to:

Recommendation(s): Issue a public notice to:

Issue a public notice to:

- (i) Discontinue Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School, Hunt Road, Tonbridge, TN10 4BB and establish a single, three form of entry community primary school by September 2016.

And, subject to no new objections to the public notice

- (ii) Make recommendation to the Schools Adjudicator for determination for implementation by September 2016.

Reason(s) for decision:

In reaching this decision I have taken into account:

- the views expressed by those put in writing in response to the consultation;
- the views of the District and Parish Councils, the local County Councillor; Governing Bodies of the schools, the Staff and Pupils;
- the Equalities Impact Assessment and comments received regarding this; and
- the views of the Education Cabinet Committee which are set out below

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

21 January 2016

15 December 2015

The Committee endorsed the Kent Commissioning Plan 2016-20, which recommends the consideration of the amalgamation of separate infant and junior schools to provide all age Primary schools, where appropriate, because of the benefits they offer including better continuity of learning.

Any alternatives considered:

This proposal is aligned to Kent County Council's commitment to maximising the educational opportunities for children as set out in the Kent Education Commissioning Plan 2015-2019, which recommends the consideration of the amalgamation of separate infant and junior schools to provide all age Primary schools, where appropriate, because of the benefits they offer including better continuity of learning.

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

N/A

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Signed

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Date

