

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

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 4 November 2009

Subject: PROPOSED CHANGE OF AGE RANGE FOR AYLESHAM (COMMUNITY) PRIMARY SCHOOL (FROM 3 - 11 YEARS TO 4 - 11 YEARS) AND THE CLOSURE OF THE MAINTAINED NURSERY CLASS.

Classification: Unrestricted

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Summary: The report explains the need to consider a proposal to close the maintained nursery class at Aylesham Primary School and to change the age-ranged from 3-11 years to 4-11 years with effect from 1 September 2010. This report seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on whether to move to public consultation on this issue.

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## **Introduction**

1. (1) Aylesham Primary School serves the rural village of Aylesham, in the former East Kent Coalfield Area. Aylesham Ward is one of the 16% most deprived wards in England. The village was established in 1926 and was built to provide housing for the coal mine at nearby Snowdown Colliery. Following the closure of the pits in the 1980s, a wide range of community initiatives funded both locally and nationally, have been introduced to provide leisure facilities and alternative employment opportunities.

(2) There are two private Early Years providers, who, along with a number of childminders, meet the childcare needs for the Aylesham Community.

- i. The Sunshine Corner Neighbourhood Nursery is situated within the grounds of Aylesham Primary School and is registered for 56 children in the Early Years group of whom no more than 6 may be aged under 2 years old. The nursery is the only day care provider of places for children under 2 in the village. It is open five days a week all year round and offers before and after school provision.
- ii. Kaleidoscope Childcare Ltd operates from accommodation within St Joseph's Catholic Primary School and is registered for 30 children aged 2 years to under 8 years. It is open five days a week all year round and offers before and after school provision. It also runs a school holiday club.
- iii. Together, the Sunshine Corner Neighbourhood Nursery and the Kaleidoscope provision at St. Joseph's are part of the local Children's Centre offer.
- iv. Attached as appendix 1 is a map showing schools within a three mile radius of Aylesham Primary School.

(3) The Sunshine Corner Neighbourhood Nursery is essentially a provision which incorporates both a private pre-school provision and a KCC maintained nursery class within the same accommodation and organisational structure, although each is funded separately. The provision is located on the site of Aylesham (Community) Primary School but the excellent facilities and buildings are not owned by the school.

(4) The financial viability of the existing arrangement can no longer be sustained. There is therefore a need to secure the long term viability of the Sunshine Corner Nursery. Closure of the maintained nursery would achieve this objective, while maintaining the range of pre-school services currently available on the site.

## **Background**

2. (1) Aylesham maintained nursery class was established in 1997 by Kent County Council alongside an existing private pre-school provider which had been operating in a classroom since 1986 offering morning and afternoon sessions. The maintained nursery was established in a classroom next to this nursery. The private pre-school at this time extended its offer to include after school provision which was not available in the newly established maintained nursery class. In 2003 the maintained nursery and the private pre-school began to work closely together.

(2) In 2003 The Pre-School Learning Alliance were successful in obtaining funding from New Opportunities Fund (NOF), now known as the Big Lottery Fund. This funding enabled the purchase of a demountable building, which was sited on the primary school site in 2004. Attached as Appendix 2 is a site plan of Aylesham Primary School showing the location of the nursery accommodation. The private pre-school was dissolved at this time and its assets, including the staff, transferred to the Pre-School Learning Alliance. With the capital funding provided through NOF, the Pre-School Learning Alliance set up a nursery under the Neighbourhood Nursery Initiative (NNI). The NNI was an initiative launched in 2000 by central government to expand childcare provision in the 20% most disadvantaged areas in England. The maintained nursery class and the private pre-school, which was now a Neighbourhood Nursery, worked closely together and so both moved into the new accommodation. The private provision was extended to provide full day-care including 6 places for children aged 0 to 2 years. The maintained nursery class continued to offer nursery education for 26 children aged 3 to 4 years.

(3) Children's attendance at the Sunshine Corner Neighbourhood Nursery varies between one half-day session a week and full time. Currently there are 63 on roll at the nursery. Children move into the primary school's Reception class at age four. The school's maintained nursery class and the Neighbourhood Nursery run seamlessly as the Sunshine Corner Neighbourhood Nursery. The financial viability of the joint venture was achieved through

- (a) Neighbourhood Nursery revenue funding and
- (b) implementation of an agreed formula for sharing the Nursery Education Funding between the School and the Pre-School Learning Alliance, and with the approval of Kent County Council.
- (c) the award of both revenue and capital grant monies from a number of bodies (including KCC) against successful funding bids.

Prudent management and an excellent working partnership between the School and the Pre-School Learning Alliance have ensured the nursery is well established and is a valuable asset to the community.

(4) The Neighbourhood Nursery revenue funding came to an end 3 years ago and as a result it has proved extremely difficult to cover the operational costs of the nursery. A number of management initiatives have been taken to both improve the fee income and keep costs under control while still ensuring a quality environment for young children. However, whilst these initiatives have realised some tangible benefits there still needs to be further action taken to achieve sustainability for the setting.

## **The Proposal**

3. (1) The proposal is to merge the school's maintained nursery and the full day-care Neighbourhood Nursery. Both Aylesham Primary School and the Pre-School Learning Alliance support the proposal. This would be achieved by changing the age-range of Aylesham Primary School from 3-11 years to 4-11 years and effectively closing the maintained nursery class.

(2) Technically, the school would cease to offer nursery classes from 1 September 2010. However the actual places would still be available although technically under the aegis of the Pre-School Learning Alliance from that time. The provision would continue to be an integral part of the Aylesham Children's Centre. Funding is therefore available to employ a qualified nursery teacher who would lead on Early Years Foundation Stage practice within the nursery. The employment of a qualified nursery teacher by Kent County Council would ensure that the Sunshine Corner Neighbourhood Nursery, as the designated nursery for the Aylesham Children's Centre, continued to have extensive support from a qualified nursery teacher. Part of the nursery teacher's role would be the development and management of the curriculum within the nursery setting to ensure that all children have access to the curriculum and make progress commensurate with their developing abilities irrespective of their gender, ethnic or social background, disability or other special needs. There would be no loss of childcare places as the school nursery classes are currently accommodated within the existing capacity. This proposal would give more flexibility to tailor services to meet the needs of parents/carers in the Aylesham community.

(3) If the maintained nursery closes, all the Nursery Education Funding payments would be made to the Neighbourhood Nursery and all the finances would be under the control of the Pre-School Learning Alliance. This would have a significant, beneficial impact on the Neighbourhood Nursery's long term sustainability and any additional initiatives, such as increasing the number of places available for children aged 0 to 2 years, would help towards achieving that goal.

(4) This proposal offers seamless continuity of services. The Pre-School Learning Alliance would continue its commitment to work in partnership with the school to help monitor quality and delivery of the Early Years Foundation curriculum. The Neighbourhood Nursery would also continue to be part of the Children's Centre core offer.

## **Site Issues**

4. (1) There would be no site issues as a result of this proposal as the Sunshine Corner Neighbourhood Nursery would continue to operate in the demountable accommodation owned by the Pre-School Learning Alliance on the school site. The current rent of £1,000 per annum would continue.

(2) The contract for the nursery demountable building awarded by NOF states that no action can be taken with regards to the asset without approval from NOF.

## **Resource Issues**

### *Capital & Revenue*

5. (1) Both the school and the private nursery are facing financial difficulties with the funding operating as it does currently. KCC awarded the Neighbourhood Nursery a sustainability grant of £70k at the end of 2008/9 to enable it to continue until a long term solution can be found. The long term solution would be to close the maintained nursery class and for the Sunshine Corner Neighbourhood Nursery to receive the full Nursery Education Funding.

### *Human*

(2) The primary school employs a full time nursery teacher who is currently on maternity leave. An agency teacher is employed on a temporary contract until 31.08.09 to cover the maternity leave. Half the nursery teacher's salary is funded by the school. The other half of the nursery teacher's salary is met from the Children's Centre funding. If the maintained nursery closes, the teacher on return from maternity leave would continue her employment with Aylesham Primary School as a class teacher.

(3) A nursery assistant is currently employed on a temporary term time only contract by the school. If the maintained nursery closes, the Pre-School Learning Alliance has indicated that they would be in a position to offer her a contract of employment, as the same number of children would continue to attend the nursery.

## **Views of the Local Members**

6. The local member is Mr Steve Manion and his views are as follows.

“Due to the nature of the community, I would be concerned about any increases in costs to the families who use or may in the future use this service. I support the concept of a consultation process so long as the views expressed are taken heed of and used to construct an outcome which meets the needs of the wider community. The Aylesham community is going through a significant period of change and we need to be open to opportunities as they arise to bring sustainable improvements for service delivery”.

## **Views of the Governing Body**

7. The governors have some concerns about the cost of childcare for families in Aylesham if the maintained nursery class ceases and the Pre-school Learning Alliance is the sole provider of childcare on the Aylesham Primary School site. The governors want the best outcome for Aylesham families, but are concerned about costs once the nursery is no longer under Kent County Council control.

## **Views of the Partnership Board**

8. The Chair of the Dover LCSP Board has been consulted, as there is no formal meeting of the Board before the 4 November. The Chair supports the proposed closure of the maintained nursery class in line with the reasons given in the report and in this instance is providing a view on behalf of the Board.

## **School Improvement Implications**

9. (1) Aylesham Primary School's maintained nursery class is inspected by Ofsted as part of the school's inspection. The school was inspected in November 2006 and at that time it was reported that the jointly funded and managed nursery was a good provision.

(2) The Sunshine Corner Neighbourhood Nursery was inspected at the same time as the primary school. Ofsted found the provision to be good in all aspects and stated that "the quality and standards of care are good and the quality and standards of the nursery education are good".

(3) Without these proposed changes the nursery would be unsustainable in its current guise and the Neighbourhood Nursery aspect would have to close. The school would continue to offer the nursery education places for 3 to 4 year olds but the full daycare facility would be lost. This would mean that the Children's Centre core offer could not be met and there would be insufficient childcare places to meet the needs of the Aylesham community.

(4) If the proposed changes take place, the Nursery Education funding would be transferred to the Neighbourhood Nursery securing its future and ensuring the continuation of high quality childcare that meets the needs of local families and children in Aylesham village.

## **Equality Issues**

10. All pupils who access their free maintained nursery education entitlement through the school's maintained nursery part of the provision would continue to do so with the Sunshine Corner Neighbourhood Nursery. This would ensure that the support already in place at the nursery for children with learning difficulties would also still be accessible.

## **Transport & Environmental Impact, Including Community Implications**

11. This proposal would help to ensure the continuation of the Sunshine Corner Neighbourhood Nursery as a viable setting. It would continue to serve the community of Aylesham and continue as part of the core offer for the Children's Centre.

## **Proposed Timetable**

12. SOAB 1 meeting	4 November 2009
Public Consultation Period	23 November 2009 to 15 January 2010
Public Meeting	week commencing 7 December 2009
SOAB 2 meeting	4 February 2010
Cabinet Member decision (to issue a public notice)	End of February 2010
Public Notice Period	5 March to 16 April 2010
Cabinet Member Decision	May 2010
Adjudication if required	June/July 2010
Implementation	September 2010

## **Recommendations**

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

Martyn Doole  
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The Local Member is Mr Steve Manion

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*Background Documents:*

*None*