

From: Matt Dunkley, Corporate Director of Children, Young People and Education

To: Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education

Subject: Proposed amalgamation of St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Infant School and St James' Church of England Junior School

Decision number: 19/00015

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: None

Future Pathway of Paper: Cabinet Member Decision

Electoral Division: Catherine Rankin - Tunbridge Wells South

Summary:

This report sets out the proposed amalgamation of St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Infant School and St James' Church of England Junior School, Sandrock Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN2 3PR

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education is asked to agree on the decision to:

- (i) amalgamate St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Infant School and St James' Church of England Junior School, Sandrock Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN2 3PR from 1 September 2019.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Governing Bodies of St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Infant School and St James' Church of England Junior School wish to consolidate their already close links with an amalgamation into one school. The schools have well established existing ties and share the same site, with the schools only 4 metres apart at the closest point. The schools share kitchen facilities and benefit from various cross-schools staff arrangements, including sharing the same Executive Headteacher.
- 1.2 The Governing Bodies of both schools have met with officers of Kent County Council (KCC) and agreed that amalgamation of the two schools to create an all-through primary school would be the natural progression for the schools, which will secure benefits for staff and pupils.

2. Proposal

- 2.1 The proposal would amalgamate the two schools in order to create one all-through 630 place primary school for children aged 4 to 11 years from 1 September 2019. The process of amalgamation will entail changing the age range of the Infant school to be a primary school and the closure of the Junior school. The all-through school will be in the existing accommodation of both schools.
- 2.2 Following a public consultation that sought the views of parents/carers, staff and key stakeholders (see Consultation section for more details), the Governing Bodies made their decisions to issue a joint Public Notice regarding the proposed amalgamation.
- 2.3 In accordance with section 15(2) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 the Governing Body of St James' Church of England Junior School gave notice that it intends to discontinue St James' Church of England Junior School, Sandrock Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN2 3PR on 31 August 2019. All pupils attending St James' Church of England Junior School at the time of the closure would be transferred to the roll of St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Infant School. The Infants School name will be changed at this time to recognise its expanded age range that covers all primary year groups.
- 2.4 In accordance with Section 19(3) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 the Governing Body of St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Infant School gave notice that it intends expand St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Infant School by increasing the upper age range from 7 to 11 years on 1 September 2019.
- 2.5 It was also noted that the two proposals are related and each will only be implemented if both are approved.
- 2.6 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.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 **Capital** – There is no capital expenditure associated with this proposal.
- 3.2 **Revenue** – Included in Kent's funding formula is a lump sum for all Kent schools regardless of their size. St James' Infant and St James' Junior schools each receive lump sum funding as separate schools. Should the amalgamation proceed, the all-through primary 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. The governing bodies have considered this issue and are confident that the efficiencies generated by being one school mean there will be no detriment to school standards or the opportunities available to pupils.
- 3.3 **Human** - Staff of the Junior school will transfer under TUPE arrangements from being employees of the County Council to being employed by the Governing Body of the all-through primary school. There has been a separate consultation process for the staff transferring to the all-through primary school that will run concurrently to the education public consultation.

No staffing changes or alterations to terms and conditions are planned as a result of these proposals.

4. Raising Standards

4.1 St James' Infants is a voluntary aided Church of England infant school that was graded 'Outstanding' by Ofsted in March 2008. The school was also graded 'Outstanding' when inspected as a church school under the SIAMS (Statutory Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools) framework in February 2018.

4.2 St James' Junior School is a voluntary controlled Church of England junior school that was graded 'Good' by Ofsted in July 2017. The school was also graded 'Good' when inspected as a church school under the SIAMS framework in February 2018.

4.3 There are a number of benefits when amalgamating two schools; these are primarily educational. The key benefits for pupils include:

- Smooth progression for children's learning throughout their 7 years at primary school.
- A more coherent delivery of the National Curriculum from Foundation Stage through to the end of Key Stage Two.
- A consistent approach to the ways in which children are taught.
- Greater ability to safeguard the needs of all pupils.
- Seven uninterrupted years of education without a potentially unsettling transition to another school.
- Easier sharing of good practice across the whole school.

4.4 For parents/carers an all-through primary school provides a consistent approach to their child's education, with the opportunity to develop longer-term relationship with all of those involved in the school. It also removes the requirement for parents/carers to apply for a Junior school place for Year 3 from September 2020.

4.5 Within an all-through school, teaching and support staff can draw upon their current expertise, experience and specialist knowledge in order to share and develop best practice more effectively. Staff from both schools would have the development opportunity to gain experience in all phases of primary education.

5. Policy Framework

5.1 This proposal is in line with Kent County Council's policy as set out in the Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2019-2023, which states KCC believes that 'all-through primary schools deliver better continuity of learning as the model for primary phase education in Kent. When the opportunity arises, we will either amalgamate separate infant and junior schools into a single primary school or federate the schools.'

6. Consultation

- 6.1 In advance of the formal consultation, the Governing Bodies wrote to parents/carers asking for comments on a possible amalgamation and responded to the queries raised. This included responding to concerns regarding the Junior school changing to VA, with governors reassuring parents that the religious character of the school will not significantly change. Governors noted that pupils already complete Years R to 2 of their schooling within the VA Infant school before moving to the VC Junior school. Admission records indicate that nearly all the pupils who attended the VA Infant school moved onto the VC Junior school.
- 6.2 A public consultation was carried out by the Governing Bodies, with support from KCC, from 4 February 2019 to 4 March 2019. A consultation document was produced together with an Equality Impact Assessment which can be obtained from KCC's website.
<https://consultations.kent.gov.uk/consult.ti/StJames/consultationHome>
- 6.3 The consultation document was distributed via the school to parents/carers, members of staff and governors. The consultation was available on the school and KCC websites and was emailed to all key stakeholders. An opportunity to send in written responses using the response form in paper format and online was provided. A public consultation meeting was held on 25 February 2019 at 7pm in St James' Infant School Hall, with representatives present from the Schools, Governing Bodies, the Diocese of Rochester and KCC.
- 6.4 There were 17 responses to the consultation: six from parents/carers, seven from staff, one from an individual who is a parent and a staff member, and three from other interested parties. The responses can be broken down as follows:

Respondent	Agree	Disagree	Undecided/ Not indicated	Total
Parent/Carer	5	1	0	6
Parent and Staff Member	0	0	1	1
Member of Staff	7	0	0	7
Governor	0	0	0	0
Pupil	0	0	0	0
Other Interested Party	2	1	0	3
Total	14	2	1	17

- 6.5 Following the positive outcome from the consultation, the Governing Bodies agreed to proceed with the amalgamation of the schools and to move to a Public Notice period. The Public Notice was published in a local newspaper on Friday, 8 March 2019. The Notice was displayed at all main entrances to the schools, on the schools' main noticeboards and was also available on KCC's website.
- 6.6 No responses were received during the Public Notice period and therefore the governing Bodies confirmed their decision to amalgamate the schools.

7. Views

7.1 The View of the Local Members

The KCC Member for Tunbridge Wells South, Catherine Rankin, has been consulted on and endorses these proposals.

7.2 The View of the Executive Headteacher and Governing Bodies

This is a governing body proposal and both Governing Bodies are fully supportive of the proposed amalgamation of their two schools. The Governing Bodies believe the amalgamation is a natural progression for the schools that builds on already close relationships. Governors feel that an all-through primary school will provide enhanced educational opportunities for pupils and enhanced career opportunities for staff and ensure continuity for parents/carers, staff and pupils throughout the primary years.

7.3 The View of the Executive Headteacher

The Executive Headteacher St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Infant School and St James' Church of England Junior School, John Tutt:

'I have been working as Executive Headteacher of St James' Infant and Junior schools for the past 18 months and we are already seeing the benefits of closer cooperation. Before this time our schools were completely separate organisations with very different ways of working and styles of teaching. Despite being one community, our pupils and parents experienced an artificial and stark divide midway through the primary age range.

In the last 18 months we have brought teaching, learning and assessment more into harmony and we have begun to streamline back office and site management functions. Pupils, parents and staff are already seeing tangible benefits.

However, we have gone as far as we can go while remaining as two separate schools. For this process of harmonisation to continue it is essential that we become one school; moving forward and looking to the future; and working for the best possible outcomes for all our pupils, staff and parents. We need to continue integrating our teaching and learning styles into one in order to give our children a smooth progression through primary school. We need to formally merge our school offices to prevent unnecessary costs and duplication. It will end the need for parents to formally apply to move from Year 2 to Year 3. We need to provide our staff with all the opportunities that working in an all through primary school will provide.

I am truly excited for all of our stakeholders by this opportunity.'

7.4 The View of the Area Education Officer

The Area Education Officer fully supports these proposals and feels that an all through Primary school will benefit pupils, parents and staff of the schools.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 This report sets out the St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Infant School and St James' Church of England Junior School Governing Bodies proposal to amalgamate their two schools into one all-through primary

school. The amalgamation would build on already close links between the two schools and offer various educational and operational benefits to pupils, parents/carers and school staff. The proposal is aligned to KCC's policy set out in the Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2019-2023 that supports 'all-through primary schools' as the preferred deliver model.

9. Recommendation(s)

9.1 The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education is asked to agree on the decision to:

- (i) amalgamate St James' Church of England Voluntary Aided Infant School and St James' Church of England Junior School, Sandrock Road, Tunbridge Wells, TN2 3PR from 1 September 2019.

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 2019-2023 <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/s88604/KCP%202019%20-%202023%20 Cabinet%20Committee%20-%20FINAL%20PW.pdf>

11. Report Author

- David Adams, Area Education Officer
- Telephone: 03000 414989
- Email: David.Adams@kent.gov.uk

12. Relevant Director

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