

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

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 4 February 2010

Subject: THE 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

Summary: This report sets out the results of the public consultation on the proposal to close the maintained nursery class at Aylesham Primary School and to change the age range from 3-11 years to 4-11 years with effect from 1 September 2010. It seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the issuing of a public notice.

This paper should be read in conjunction with the report to School Organisation Advisory Board of 4 November 2009.

Introduction

1. (1) The maintained nursery class at Aylesham Primary School was established by Kent County Council in 1997 alongside a private pre-school provider which had been operating in a classroom in the school since 1986. The private provider offered morning and afternoon sessions and when the maintained nursery class began operating in an adjacent classroom, the private pre-school extended its offer to include after school provision in order to enhance the services available to the families of Aylesham and to help ensure its viability.

(2) In 2003 the private pre-school was dissolved and taken over by the Pre-School Learning Alliance (PLA). With funding obtained through the New Opportunities Fund, the PLA established a Neighbourhood Nursery in new demountable accommodation on the school site. The maintained nursery class and the pre-school worked closely together and both moved into the new accommodation.

(3) The two provisions operate together as the Sunshine Corner Neighbourhood Nursery but each is funded separately. The nursery is well established and is a valuable asset to the community. The nursery is also part of the local Children's Centre Offer. The financial viability of the joint venture was achieved through

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

(4) 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

2. (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.

The Consultation

3. (1) The consultation document was distributed to parents/carers, school staff, nursery staff, governors and County Councillors, Member of Parliament, the Diocesan Authorities, local library, local Children's Centre, the District and Parish Councils and others in accordance with the agreed County policy. The document was also posted on the KCC website and the link to the website widely circulated via email.

(2) Approximately 600 copies of the public consultation document were circulated, which included a form for written responses. A copy of the public consultation document is attached as Appendix 1.

Responses to the Public Consultation

Written Responses

4. (1) Twenty six responses have been received. All 26 responses are in favour of the proposal.

(2) A summary of written responses is attached as Appendix 2.

Public Meeting Responses

(3) A summary of the points, questions and comments made at the public consultation meeting is attached as Appendix 3.

Views of Local Member

5. The Local Member is Mr Steve Manion. Mr Manion attended the public meeting and has indicated his support for the proposal.

Views of Local Member of Parliament

6. The Local MP is Mr Gwyn Prosser. He was sent a copy of the consultation document and a reminder but has not responded. If subsequently a response is received it will be reported at the meeting.

Views of the Parish Council and Dover District Council

7. Dr Linda Keen and Mr Bob Thompson are both Parish and District Councillors and provided the following response:

“We have no objections to the proposal on the grounds that it appears to be necessary for financial reasons, and will not result in any increase in costs for the end-users, or diminution of service.”

Views of the Governing Body

8. The governing body unanimously support the proposal.

Views of the Local Children’s Centre

9. The local Children’s Centre has responded as follows:

“The Children’s Centre fully supports the proposal to sustain the designated Children’s Centre childcare offer. This will ensure that the Children’s Centre will meet its full core

offer in a sustainable way. We have a good partnership with both the school and the Pre-School Learning Alliance and believe this is the best way forward to continue the successful provision of full day care in the Aylesham Children's Centre catchment area."

Views of the Local Children's Services Partnership Board

10. The Partnership Board discussed the proposal at its meeting on 14 December and agreed to support the proposed closure of the maintained nursery class for the reasons outlined in the public consultation document.

Views of the Area Children's Services Officer

11. (1) The proposal will protect the full range of pre-school provision and childcare which is currently available and will secure seamlessly, essential services for the community. This is a sensible and pragmatic approach which will enable parents and children to benefit from continuing access to high quality services without loss of amenity and with no discernable adverse implications.

Resource Issues

Capital & Revenue

12. (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 to cover the maternity leave. If the maintained nursery class 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 class closes, the PLA has indicated that it would be in a position to offer her a contract of employment.

Proposed Timetable

13. If it is decided that a public notice should be issued in respect of the proposal, the following timetable could apply.

Cabinet Member decision (to issue a public notice)	End of February 2010
Public Notice period	5 March to 16 April 2010
Decision by Local Authority	May 2010

Adjudication (if required)	June/July 2010
Implementation	September 2010

Recommendation

14. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on:
- (a) The closure of the maintained nursery class at Aylesham Primary School and change of age-range from 3-11 years to 4-11 years, and
 - (b) if agrees the issuing of a public notice.

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The Local Member is Mr Steve Manion

Background Documents:

None

Previous Committee Reports:

School Organisation Advisory Board – 4 November 2009