

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

Rory Love,

Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

DECISION NO:

23/00055

For publication

Key decision: No

Subject Matter / Title of Decision

Proposed change to age range of Laddingford St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Darman Lane, Laddingford, Maidstone, Kent ME18 6BL

Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, I propose to:

- a) authorise a change to the age range of Laddingford St Mary's Church of England Primary School from 4-11 years to 3-11 years, to enable the school to establish a nursery class from September 2023.

Reason(s) for decision:

In order to provide sufficient early years provision in the Laddingford area, Kent County Council (KCC), together with the school's Governing Body, is seeking to permanently change the age range of Laddingford St Mary's Church of England Primary School from 4-11 years to 3-11 years, to enable the school to establish a nursery.

Background

The proposed change would alter Laddingford's age range and increase its PAN to accommodate a cohort of nursery children, reducing its lower age to 3 years, whilst keeping the upper limit at 11 years. This would expand the overall roll of the school to 104 children, educated in 8 cohorts of 13 children. In the first instance, the school would only offer 10 places in nursery at one time, to allow flexibility in class structures to meet the individual needs of children and not breach the required staffing ratios for nursery aged children.

In the Laddingford area there is a significant absence of nursery provision, with KCC sufficiency data indicating a 234 place deficit within the Marden and Staplehurst planning group (which contains Laddingford) and also place deficits in the neighbouring Maidstone district planning groups. This results in some parents travelling outside of the local area for nursery provision, some by choice and some also due to limited options. It can also present a barrier for parents who aren't able to travel outside of the rural area, or those who do not wish to.

This gap in provision combined with cultural factors means that each year many children join Laddingford Primary School having not been to a pre-school setting. Providing a nursery provision in an environment where parents already feel comfortable and have a relationship with staff is intended to allow Laddingford to support children into school earlier to avoid or close any academic gaps that may already be forming.

Financial Implications

There is a set up cost associated with this project estimated to be £9,534, as the school require new resources including changing facilities. The school is seeking funding to meet this cost through a grant administered by The Education People on behalf of the County Council. This grant is used to support the development of nursery provision in areas of a high place deficit, such as the Marden and Staplehurst planning group. The funding can be used to purchase new equipment up to the value of £10,000 per setting. There is no direct revenue or capital costs to the council expected from this proposal. If the school is not successful in securing the funding, the nursery would be unlikely to proceed.

Initially, the school is not expecting any additional staffing costs, as the school has 2 Teaching Assistants with a Level 3 childcare qualification, one of whom will work fulltime alongside the teacher in the class. Once the nursery is fully operational, the school would seek to appoint an additional member of support staff. One of the drivers for the nursery is to provide an additional funding source to support the 4th class within the school structure.

The school has moved between a 3 and 4 class structure in response to changes in pupil numbers over recent years. Where the numbers of pupils have started to rise, the school have moved back to a 4 class structure this year. This is both academically and operationally beneficial for the school. The addition of a nursery cohort will secure additional revenue that will help to support the funding of the 4th class teacher more sustainably and support the school to maintain the current structure.

Funding for the nursery class will be received separately to the school's main budget, but the school will be able to manage their budget in its totality. The majority of funding for the nursery class is expected to be received from KCC through the funding of the 3 and 4 year old free entitlement. This is funded by the Council via the Dedicated Schools Grant received from the Department of Education. The total funding for the nursery class is determined through Kent's Early Years Funding Formula and will be dependent on the number of support hours provided. The basic rate of funding for a 3 and 4 year old place for 2023-24 is £4.55 per hour, or a total of circa £52,000 in the first year if the school is able to consistently fill the 10 places.

Legal Implications

There are no specific legal implications for KCC. The change relates to children who are under the statutory school age.

Equalities implications

An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been produced and no issues were identified in the early stage EqIA, but the assessment will be reviewed as the project continues.

Data Protection implications

When handling consultation and scheme responses KCC is the 'controller' under the General Data Protection Regulation and will ensure that any personal information is processed fairly and lawfully within any consultation.

Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

The Children's and Young People Cabinet Committee will consider the decision on 16 May 2023.

Any alternatives considered and rejected:

Laddingford is a small village school that lies in the heart of its rural community to the South of Maidstone. Local early years places are limited and the options within the village to provide additional provision are limited.

Any interest declared when the decision was taken and any dispensation granted by the Proper Officer: None

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signed

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date