

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL – PROPOSED RECORD OF DECISION

## DECISION TO BE TAKEN BY:

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

## DECISION NO:

18/00070

**Unrestricted****Key Decision:** No

**Subject:** This report sets out proposed change to expand Speldhurst Church of England Primary School

## Decision:

As Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education Cabinet I agree to:

- (i) Permanently expand Speldhurst Church of England Primary School, Langton Road, Speldhurst, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN3 0NP, from 140 places to 210 places, increasing the published admission number (PAN) from 20 to 30 Reception Year places from September 2020.

## Reason(s) for decision:

In reaching this decision I have considered:

- the views expressed by those who responded to the public education consultation
- the views expressed by those put in writing by the Area Education Officer for Tunbridge Wells district, the School and the Governing Body.
- the Equalities Impact Assessment regarding this; and
- the views of the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee which will be discussed at the Cabinet Committee meeting on 11 January 2019

## Cabinet Committee recommendations and other consultation:

The views of the Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee will be discussed at the Cabinet Committee meeting on 11 January 2019.

## Any alternatives considered:

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

.....  
**Signed**

.....  
**Date**

**Summary of Public Consultation Responses**

This summary includes information from all the responses received during the 4 weeks consultation period that ended Monday 17 December 2018 (midnight).

There were approximately 200 consultation documents (hard copies) distributed via the school to parents, members of staff and governors. The consultation was emailed to all key stakeholders and was available on the KCC and school websites.

There were 22 responses received via emails, digital and paper response forms that can be summarised as follows:

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided/Not indicated</b>	<b>Total</b>
Parent/Carer	8	3	2	13
Member of Staff				0
Governor				0
Pupil				0
Other Interested Party	2	7		9
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>22</b>

**Of the 10 respondents that agreed with the proposal:**

- 4 agreed that the expansion would be beneficial to the school
- 4 raised safety concerns with regards to increased: pedestrians on the pavements on the walk to school; traffic on surrounding roads; parking congestion. The respondents enquired about the actions the school will put in place to alleviate/mitigate the increase in pedestrians and cars.

**Undecided/not indicated:**

- 2 raised safety concerns with regards to increased: pedestrians on the pavements on the walk to school; traffic on surrounding roads; parking congestion.

**Of the 10 that disagreed with the proposal:**

- 7 raised concerns about the potential detrimental effect on other local schools in terms of pupil numbers and budget. They also question the need for expansion with a surplus of places in the overall Tunbridge Wells area. (note: all 7 were 'Other Interested Parties', many other schools)
- 5 raised safety concerns with regards to increased: pedestrians on the pavements on the walk to school; traffic on surrounding roads; parking congestion.
- 1 felt that pupils from surrounding villages already attended Speldhurst and that there is not a demand for places and that the expansion would mean other schools losing out on funding due to surplus capacity.

Please note that some respondents supplied no comments and just indicated whether that they agreed or disagreed with the proposal, whereas others supplied one or more comments.

**Public Information Sessions:**

A public 'drop-in' information session was held from 16:00 to 17:00 on Thursday 29th November at Speldhurst Church of England Primary School. Representatives of the school, Governing Body and KCC were on hand to answer any questions raised by attendees. During the sessions 2 parents attended and requested information regarding the financial benefit to the school of the expansion and sought clarification on the statutory processes.

### Governing Body Response to Concerns Raised During the Consultation

On behalf of the Governors I would like to respond to the concerns raised by respondents and to set out some of the steps taken to try and mitigate the impact of the additional pupils.

The decision to expand was not taken lightly and has received the support of both KCC and the Diocese throughout. The Diocese have, over the past few years provided LCVAP funding to upgrade the utilities to the school to support additional classrooms, and part funded the 2 new classrooms. KCC have provided financial support by way of a capital loan to fund the balance of the classroom build costs and have supported the application for Planning Permission for the new classrooms. Jared Nehra, West Kent Area Education Officer has been kept informed of progress and supported us at every stage. Without their support we would not have reached the stage we are at.

As will be appreciated, as a Voluntary Aided School and on the basis that this was not a "basic need " expansion, the Governors have had to consider the financial implications of expansion and how to achieve this. We have received the backing of the Diocese in part funding the expansion through LCVAP capital funding but we are unable to access "growth" funding through KCC. Therefore, any additional children admitted over PAN in September 2018 are not funded until the following April. As a result, in order to fund the additional costs of teaching etc it was necessary to admit over PAN in more than Reception. It is for this reason we admitted over PAN in Reception and took an additional 10 children in Year 1 and Year 2.

The effect of this has been to increase the number of children by an additional 30 at the same time.

As part of the Planning application the school submitted a traffic plan with potential ways to mitigate the additional traffic. It is believed that the expansion will enable children within the village who could not access in year transfer places to be admitted to the school, in addition to ensuring the school can meet the increased demand seen over the last few years. We are still in the process of rolling out the measures contained within the travel plan which was sufficient to satisfy the Planning Officer and KCC Highways department such that there was no objection to the Planning Application. Consultation with parents has ensured any changes are made in a phased manner and further measures, in particular a phased end to the school day are still to be implemented.

Speldhurst School is a small village school and following the expansion of other local schools has remained one of the most oversubscribed schools in the area. The Governors are keen to ensure it remains a small but financially viable while continuing to deliver an outstanding education to its pupils. Having the ability to teach in year groups as opposed to split age classes is already reaping benefits for the children which will be set out in more detail by the Headteacher.

In conclusion, this was a difficult decision for the Governors and the school as we accept that the expansion of a small village school will have an impact upon traffic within the village but the pressures on the school to ensure it remains financially viable and continues to deliver the outstanding education has meant we had little choice. Every effort has been made to ensure the village and wider community is fully aware of the reasoning behind the decision.

We now have the infrastructure to deliver the expansion and would ask that a decision is made in favour of the increase in PAN.

Ivan Goodsell  
Chair of Governors  
CE Primary School

**Headteacher Response to Concerns Raised During the Consultation**

In terms of the school's response to the points that have been raised as part of this process, I would like to submit the following information:

**Lack of demand for places**

For the past 3 years, Speldhurst School has been one of the most over-subscribed schools in Kent with 120+ applications for 20 places. This year, over 130 parents have visited the school for open days for entry to reception in September 2019. There is certainly a high demand for places.

I have attached Jared Nehra's letter of support for the school's planning application dated 20th April, 2018, in it he says,

Speldhurst Primary School is a popular and successful school, consistently oversubscribed on preferences. Therefore, additional places at Speldhurst will enable additional pupils to be allocated their parents' preferred school in future. Speldhurst Primary School is rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, the highest possible judgement, which indicates the excellent quality of education it provides to its pupils. I am pleased to note that the school's proposals will increase the facilities available to serve its pupils in future.

Jared also supported the school's loan application which was used to build the new classroom block; it now houses two additional classes.

**Other schools object to the proposal**

In his letter, Jared addressed this concern:

KCC's forecasts of the demand for pupil places indicate a small surplus of places in the medium term, which would [not] indicate a 'Basic Need' for additional provision. Nevertheless, KCC anticipate that the additional places proposed would benefit pupils in the local area and create minimal negative impact on other schools.

Rochester Diocese have also supported the expansion with a stream of LCVAP funding which has facilitated the building of 3 new classrooms. John Constanti wrote:

Whilst I appreciate other schools (some Church) might object to the proposed expansion of Speldhurst, I write to confirm Diocesan support to the proposal which we feel is right for the school and its community.

**Increased traffic and footfall**

The school's Travel Plan outlines a number of initiatives which will be explored in order to reduce the current number of car journeys ahead of expansion. They include:

- Encouraging parents to use the George and Dragon car park as a drop off point by introducing a 'Walking Bus'.

- Expand drop-off times (Currently 8.40 – 8.50am) to 8.30 – 8.50am and provide a ‘Drop-Off’ point manned by staff.
- Stagger finishing times for KS1 and KS2
- Investigate opening the gate to the rear of the field which leads to Peshurst Road to encourage villagers to walk to school rather than drive (Speldhurst Parish Council to assist with funding).
- Introduce the ‘Operation Motion’ initiative from KCC and encourage children to ‘Walk on Wednesday’. This will be backed by newsletter, certificates and Parentmail.
- Consider a ‘Drop-off’ zone at the nearby Business Park.

As the school expands, we feel confident that these measures will alleviate some of the pressure both in terms of traffic and footfall.

Finally, I firmly believe that the expansion will allow the school to provide a better standard of education to its pupils. There will no longer be the need for mixed age classes and this will allow teachers to deliver the curriculum to single year groups which is highly efficient in terms of time and quality of provision.

The project to expand the school has taken 3 years to develop. Funds have been raised, 3 classrooms have been built and parents, KCC, the Diocese and the local community have all been active in facilitating this process. Having taken a loan to part fund the new 2 classroom block, refusal of the application to increase the PAN at Speldhurst would put added financial pressure onto the school which may push it into deficit.

Stephanie Hayward  
Headteacher  
Speldhurst CE Primary School