

By:	Patrick Leeson, Corporate Director, Education, Learning and Skills
To:	Education Cabinet Committee – 18 January 2013
Subject	Decision number: 02/02007 - Proposed change of status of Watringbury Church of England Primary School from Voluntary Controlled to Voluntary Aided
Classification:	Unrestricted

Summary:	<p>The Governing Body of Watringbury CEPS has made a proposal to change the status of the school from Voluntary Controlled to Voluntary Aided.</p> <p>Kent County Council is the decision maker must approve, or otherwise, within two months of the expiry of the Public Notice.</p>
Recommendations:	<p>The Education Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Education Learning and Skills on the decision to:</p> <p>a) approve the proposal from Watringbury CEPS to change status from 'Voluntary Controlled' to 'Voluntary Aided' School with effect from 1 April 2013 and</p> <p>b) Authorises the notification of the change to the DfE.</p>

1. Introduction

1.1 The Governing Body of Watringbury CEPS has consulted on a proposal to change the status of the school from Voluntary Controlled to Voluntary Aided.

2. Background

2.1 The school has a strong church ethos and strong connections with St John the Baptist Church at Watringbury. The Governing Body believes that Government policy of requiring some schools to become academies threatens that link and therefore the school ethos.

2.2 For many years Watringbury School has operated a split class system due to its Published Admission Number (PAN) of 36. That number often increases through appeals decisions. During 2011, an Ofsted inspection showed that the school needed to look at the early years provision as it was felt that the split class system was not supporting the reception class children and enabling them to benefit fully from the Early Years curriculum.

3. The Proposal

3.1 The Governing Body proposes that the status of the school is changed from Voluntary Controlled to Voluntary Aided on 1 April 2013. Becoming a Voluntary Aided school would change the constitution of the Governing Body to increase the formal church presence on it. If, at a later stage the school was compelled to become an academy that change could not remove the distinctive Church ethos and character of the school.

3.2 The Governing Body of a Voluntary Aided school is its own admissions authority and thus sets its own admissions arrangements and arranges for any appeals to be heard by an Independent Appeal Panel. The Governors believe that having greater control of these processes would benefit the school. However,

currently the Governing Body have no proposals to change the oversubscription criteria from that used by Voluntary Controlled schools.

3.3 The Published Admission Number of the school would become 30 with effect from September 2014.

3.4 On becoming a Voluntary Aided school the Governing Body would be liable for 10% contribution to capital projects at any time in the future. The Governing Body has confirmed that the school currently have a surplus budget and can make the contributions. A Form 18 will need to be sent to the DfE containing this declaration.

3.5 The Public Notice expired on 17 December 2012. Within two months the Local Authority must determine whether to:

- reject the proposal
- approve the proposal
- approve the proposal with a modification (e.g. implementation date)
- approve the proposal subject to it meeting a specific condition

3.6 The Governing Body would have the right of appeal, to be heard by the Schools Adjudicator, if the Local Authority rejects the proposal.

4. Outcomes of the School's Consultation

4.1 A consultation document was published on 22 March 2012 and sent to all families of the school and to all persons listed under Appendix 1. Meetings for staff and the public were held on 21 May 2012 at the school.

4.2 82% of the 122 respondents agreed with the proposal; 16% were not sure and 2% disagreed.

4.3 Positive support was received from Watlingbury Church PCC, Nettlestead Parish Council and Rochester Diocese. (One letter from a member of the public was received objecting strongly both to the proposal and the consultation process).

4.4 At the staff meeting there were questions about the effect of possible changes. A number of staff members voiced strong support for the change; no member of staff objected to the proposal.

4.5 Questions raised at the public meeting are given at Appendix 2. A couple of people were concerned that the change would exclude local families, or might make the school a school for Christians only. More people were generally concerned about how the change might affect the school's ability to improve. The majority were supportive or did not object to the change.

5. Responses to the Public Notice

5.1 Three letters were received in response to the Public Notice. These were very supportive, expressing views that this proposal, if approved, would strengthen and encourage the school's links with the community and Parish Church.

6. Views

6.1 The local County Council Member is Richard Long and he is supportive of the proposal.

6.2 The Area Education Officer has met several times with the Governing Body to discuss this proposal and admissions arrangements. The school has taken time to consider the proposal before taking it forward. The Governing Body has strong reason for wishing to make the change and I support the proposal.

7. Equality Impact Assessment

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and can be found at http://www.kent.gov.uk/education_and_learning/plans_and_consultations/school_consultations.aspx

8. Recommendations

8.1 The Education Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Education Learning and Skills on the decision to:

- a) approve the proposal from Watringbury CEPS to change status from 'Voluntary Controlled' to 'Voluntary Aided' School with effect from 1 April 2013 and
- b) Authorises the notification of the change to the DfE.

Background documents

Watringbury Church of England Primary School public notice document on proposed change of status from Voluntary Controlled to Voluntary Aided

http://www.kent.gov.uk/education_and_learning/plans_and_consultations/school_consultations.aspx

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