

By: Grahame Ward - Director - Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 23rd April 2009

Subject: FLEETDOWN INFANTS & NURSERY AND FLEETDOWN JUNIOR SCHOOLS, DARTFORD - PROPOSED AMALGAMATION

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report:

(1) provides the results of the Public Consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Fleetdown Infant School and Fleetdown Junior School (subject to an exemption under Section 10 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006).

(2) provides the details of the Secretary of State's decision on the local authority's application to publish proposals for a new school, without running a competition, as provided for in Section 10 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006.

(3) 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 8th January 2009.

Introduction

1. (1) There are two separate schools, Fleetdown Infant and Fleetdown Junior Schools serving the Brent Ward in Dartford East. Both are Community Schools. Appendices 1, 2 and 3 are maps showing pupil distribution and location of the school.

(2) The Headteachers of both schools have notified their respective Governing Bodies of their intention to retire on 31st December 2009.

(3) The Kent Primary Strategy recommendation for linked Infant and Junior schools, is that when a change of Headteacher is notified then the Local Authority should consider amalgamation.

(4) The local authority has applied to the Secretary of State for an exemption to the need to invite proposals under Section 7 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006. This exemption procedure is described in Section 10 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006 and the DCSF guide, "Establishing a New Maintained Mainstream School - A Guide for Local Authorities".

The Proposal

2. (1) To discontinue Fleetdown Infant School and Fleetdown Junior School on 31 December 2009.

(2) To open a new 2 FE (420 place) Community Primary School, retaining in full, the existing provision for children with impaired hearing (subject to receiving an exemption under Section 10 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006)

The Consultation

3. (1) The consultation process began on the 20th January 2009 and finished on the 2nd March 2009.

(2) A consultation document, a copy of which is attached as Appendix 4 was circulated according to the County Procedures for Review. This circulation included Local Members, Dartford Borough Council, local libraries, the Member of Parliament and all Dartford Primary and Secondary School Headteachers. Fleetdown Infant School and Fleetdown Junior School was sent enough copies for all staff, governors, parents and carers to receive one. Attached to the consultation document was a reply form for respondents to express their views. Approximately 1500 copies of the document were circulated

(3) The consultation document can be viewed on the KCC website at:
<http://www.kent.gov.uk/education-and-learning/about-education-service/consultations>

(4) A public meeting was held at Fleetdown Infant School on 11th February 2009. Mrs Valerie Dagger, Chair of SOAB, chaired the meeting. In attendance was Mr Simon Webb, Area Children's Services Officer for Dartford & Gravesham. About 60 people attended.

Responses to the Public Consultation

Written Responses

4. (1) 70 responses have been received, of which all are in favour. There were no responses that either did not express an opinion or were opposed.

(2) A summary of written responses is attached as Appendix 5.

Public Meeting Responses

(3) A summary of the points, questions and comments made at the public consultation meeting is attached as Appendix 6.

Application for an Exemption under Section 10

5. (1) From 25th May 2007 a new statutory framework applies for the establishment of any new school. The relevant law is described in Section 7 of The Education and Inspections Act 2006 and The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance) (England) Regulations 2007 (SI: 2007 No 1288) (as amended). The new provisions will apply in all circumstances where it is intended to establish a new school.

(2) The regulations require the Local Authority to invite proposals for any new school. The process is generally referred to as a "competition".

(3) Alternatively if, after consultation, it believes it to be in the best interests of the school, children, parents and community, the Local Authority may apply to the Secretary of State for consent to publish proposals for a new school, without running a competition, as provided for in Section 10 of EIA 2006. This process is generally referred to as an “exemption”

(4) Within the Public Consultation process, the Local Authority invited respondents to comment on whether they felt that a competition was necessary or desirable. The results of which were forwarded to the School’s Adjudicator for a decision on whether an exemption can be granted.

(5) The decision was returned on 26 March 2009. The Secretary of State has agreed to grant the Local Authority an exemption. A copy of the decision is attached as Appendix 7.

(6) If the Cabinet Member agrees to submit the proposal to statutory public notice, the Secretary of State’s decision must be referred to in the Public Notice.

Views of Local Members

6. (1) Mrs Christine Angell is the local Member for Fleetdown Infant School and Fleetdown Junior School.

(2) Mrs Angell supports the amalgamation and says, “Care and attention should be given to those deaf/deaf and partially hearing children attending Fleetdown to ensure a space of quiet can be offered in this ‘new’ all through school; perhaps this can come from the two year subsidy to improve provision within the school.”

Views of Local Member of Parliament

7. The Member of Parliament for Dartford, Dr Howard Stoate has been fully informed of the proposal. No reply has been received.

Views of Dartford Borough Council

8. Dartford Borough Council has been fully informed of the proposal. No reply has been received.

Views of the Governing Bodies

9. (1) Mr Michael Kiely, Chair of Governors of Fleetdown Junior School: “The proposal to amalgamate both schools has come about purely as both Headteachers have decided to retire at the same time. Kent County Council encourages schools to amalgamate whenever such a situation arises, as it is considered beneficial to staff, parents and pupils. Both governing bodies have worked closely with Simon Webb (Area Children’s Services Officer) to meet and discuss proposals. The governing body have also met with other Headteachers where schools have amalgamated to try and understand what is involved. The conclusion is the same, everyone believing it is the best decision they have ever made.”

(2) Claire Jones, Chair of Governors at Fleetdown Infant School:

“It has been a privilege to serve on the governing body for eight years, representing staff, parents, pupils and the wider community. The governing body had visited three other schools to seek their views and opinions on amalgamation and was reassured by the positive remarks received. Therefore, the governing body have voted unanimously to agree to the proposal to amalgamate Fleetdown Infant and Junior Schools, adding two fantastic schools can be turned into an amazing one”.

Views of the Pupils

10. The pupils have been kept fully informed of developments through assemblies and classroom discussion. Informal question and answer sessions indicate that pupils are in favour of the proposal.

Views of the Partnership Board

11. The Local Children’s Services Partnership Manager fully supports the proposal to amalgamate the Fleetdown schools and feels that it will add extra value to the education that these two good schools already provide for the community.

Views of Highways (if appropriate)

12. There is no change in the location of the site nor is there any anticipated increase in traffic in the area.

Views of the Area Children’s Services Officer

13. (1) This proposal has been led by both governing bodies with support from the Local Authority and has gained universal support from all stakeholders.

(2) The amalgamation will deliver significant organisational and management changes which will benefit the children who will attend the ‘new’ school.

(3) Both of the current schools have been judged by recent Ofsted inspections to be “good”.

(4) The interim governing body will be set up swiftly, to enable a smooth transition for both schools and to ensure that there will be sufficient time to appoint an experienced Headteacher.

Resource Issues

14.

Capital

(1) In order for the amalgamated school to operate effectively, it would be desirable to undertake some refurbishment and refreshment of the existing school buildings. An initial feasibility study has been carried out to ascertain what work may be possible.

(2) The Capital Strategy Unit have advised that some funding may be available from the Primary Capital Programme and would seek to hold discussions with the new Headteacher and the Interim Governing Body to understand the school's priorities.

Revenue

(3) The proposed amalgamation would be eligible for support from the re-organisation fund. The fund has now been formularised and the sum of £47,500 is allocated to merging infant and junior schools as a one-off grant to support the merger policy and offset initial revenue costs associated with a merger. Additional funding will be available, largely based on the pupil roll.

(4) There would be efficiency savings in the senior management structure and support staff and in the maintenance of the schools.

Human

(5) A temporary governing body would need to be established to oversee the amalgamation and with an early duty to appoint a Headteacher. This would ultimately be replaced by a new governing body for the amalgamated school.

(6) Following the retirement of both Headteachers and deputy Headteachers on 31st December 2009 one Headteacher post would be made redundant. The interim Governing Body will agree a new structure. The posts of Headteacher and deputy Headteacher would be advertised locally and nationally.

(7) The staff of both schools would transfer into the new school, with an alignment of posts once the new school is established. The number and grading of posts below that of Headteacher and deputy Headteacher would be determined by the interim governing body within the budget available.

(8) There will also be some impact on support staff, but any adverse impact will be kept to a minimum.

(9) In the event of any redundancies being necessary, full support and advice would be available to all staff in search of suitable alternative employment.

Proposed Timetable

15. The following timetable will be adopted if the proposal progresses:

23 April 2009	School Organisation Advisory Board meets to discuss the results of the Public Consultation and the Schools' Adjudicator decision.
19 May 2009	Cabinet Member decision on whether or not to issue a Public Notice.
21 May 2009	Public Notice issued, if agreed by Cabinet Member.
1 July 09	End of statutory representation period.
3 July 09	Establish interim governing body.

31 December 09 School governing bodies dissolved.

01 January 10 New school opens.

Recommendation

16. The views of the School Organisation Advisory Board are sought on the issuing of a Public Notice for the amalgamation of Fleetdown Junior School and Fleetdown Infant School.

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Area Children's Services Officer
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The Local Member is:

Mrs Christine Angell

Background Documents:

None

Previous Committee Reports:

School Organisation Advisory Board - 8 January 2009