

From: Patrick Leeson, Corporate Director for Education and Young People's Services

To: Education and Young People's Services Cabinet Committee 8 July 2015

Subject: Amalgamation of Murston Infant School and Murston Junior School, Sittingbourne: Proposal to discontinue Murston Infant School and Murston Junior School and establish a single, 1.5FE community primary school and maintained nursery unit.

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway Paper: None

Future Pathway of Paper: Cabinet Member decision

Electoral Division: Swale East – Andrew Bowles

Summary: This report provides information on the proposal to amalgamate Murston Infant School and Murston Junior School by closing the current Infant and Junior Schools and establishing a 1.5FE, single Community Primary school and maintained Nursery unit for children aged 3 to 11 years.

Recommendation(s):

The Education Cabinet Committee is asked to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform the amalgamation of Murston Infant and Junior schools following consideration of the results of the outcome of the consultation and agree to:

- (i) Issue a public notice to discontinue Murston Infant School and Murston Junior School and establish a single, 1.5FE Community Primary school and maintained Nursery unit on 1 September 2016.

And, subject to no objections being received to the public notice

- (ii) Make recommendation to the Schools Adjudicator for determination for implementation on 1 September 2016.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Kent County Council, with the support of the Governing Bodies of Murston Infant School and Murston Junior School, are proposing to amalgamate the schools to become a 1.5FE, single Community Primary school and maintained Nursery unit, for children aged 3 to 11 years.
- 1.2 Murston Infant School and Murston Junior School are two separate schools serving the Murston Ward of Sittingbourne. Both schools are popular Community schools. Currently Murston Infant School has 134 pupils on roll and the Murston Junior School has 164 pupils on roll.
- 1.3 Murston Infant School and Murston Junior School are situated on adjacent sites.
- 1.4 Murston Junior School was judged to require improvement by Ofsted in December 2014. The subsequent monitoring visit conducted by Ofsted in

February 2015 found that senior leaders and governors were not taking effective enough action to tackle the areas requiring improvement following the inspection in December. However Ofsted considered that the Headteacher and staff were working hard to bring about improvements and that there were some aspects where the actions taken were beginning to make a positive difference.

- 1.5 Murston Infant School was inspected in January 2013 and judged as good by Ofsted. Currently there is an Acting Headteacher in post and the Governors believe that there is therefore an opportunity to review the leadership and governance arrangements.
- 1.6 The Governing Bodies of Murston Infant School and Murston Junior School view this proposal as a natural progression, which will secure benefits for staff and pupils. The Kent Commissioning Plan's recommendation for linked Junior and Infant schools is "when the opportunity arises the local authority will consider the possibility of either amalgamation of separate infant and junior schools into a single primary school or federation of the schools."
- 1.7 Both Governing Bodies have confirmed in writing their agreement to proceed with public consultation on the proposal to amalgamate the two schools.
- 1.8 Public consultation is now underway and will conclude on 15 July 2015. The Governing Bodies agreed that one public meeting should be held and this took place at the Junior school on Thursday 2 July, chaired by Leyland Ridings.
- 1.9 If following consideration of the responses to the consultation the Cabinet Member agrees to issue a public notice, it is planned that the four week notice period would be 11 September to 8 October 2015. Following the end of the notice period, details of the proposal together with the consultation information and Cabinet Member recommendation, would be forwarded to the Schools Adjudicator for a determination.
- 1.10 A Temporary Governing body would be set up to take forward the process to establish the new school, including the recruitment of a new Headteacher.

2. The Proposal

- 2.1 It is proposed that the two schools will amalgamate and a new 1.5FE Primary school and maintained Nursery unit will be established with effect from 1 September 2016. Both predecessor schools would be discontinued from 31 August 2016.
- 2.2 Currently the Published Admission Number (PAN) for each school is 45 and this would be the PAN for the new Primary school. The two schools have an admission link and the current oversubscription criteria for both schools would remain the same for the new Primary school, in line with other Community schools.
- 2.3 It is proposed that the new Primary school would continue to operate over both sites. Consideration is being given to options to improve access between the two sites and in the longer term the Local Authority will pursue opportunities for future building work that would allow the infant phase to be accommodated on the junior site.

- 2.3 The consultation document together with the Equalities Impact Assessment can be found at www.kent.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

3. Financial Implications

a. Capital

- i. The proposals can be implemented without the need for significant capital expenditure as the new Primary school could operate as an all-through school on the existing Infant and Junior school sites. Feasibility is currently being carried out on ways of providing a link between the two sites, to enable easier access for the pupils and staff.

b. Revenue

- ii. As a result of an amalgamation the two predecessor schools will become one school and consequently this would result in the removal of one of the lump sum funding allocations (£120,000). The amalgamated school would continue to be funded at 100% of the two lump sums for the remainder of the 2016/17 financial year from September 2016 to March 2017. The School and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2013 provide funding protection for amalgamating schools for the first academic year. Therefore, it is proposed that protection will be provided on the lump sums at 85% from April 2017 to March 2018. ($2 \times £120,000 \times 85\% = £204,000$). From April 2018 the amalgamated primary school would receive one lump sum, currently £120,000.

c. Human

- iii. The staff consultation process will be carried out in parallel with the public consultation.

4. Policy Framework

- 4.1 This proposal will help to secure our ambition “to ensure that Kent’s young people have access to the education, work and skills opportunities necessary to support Kent business to grow and be increasingly competitive in the national and international economy” as set out in ‘Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes: Kent County Council’s Strategic Statement (2015-2020)’.
- 4.2 This proposal is also aligned to Kent County Council’s commitment to maximising the educational opportunities for children as set out in the Kent Education Commissioning Plan 2015-2019, which recommends the consideration of the amalgamation of separate infant and junior schools to provide all-through Primary schools where appropriate because of the benefits they offer.

6. Views

The view of the Director Quality and Standards

- 6.1 The Director Education Quality and Standards supports the proposal and believes amalgamation is the best approach to secure improved standards for the pupils of Murston. The benefits of considering this proposal include greater consistency of approach to teaching and learning from ages 3 to 11; seamless monitoring of pupil progress from ages 3 to 11; increased potential for strong leadership and governance and continuity of experiences for young children.

The view of the Director Planning and Access and the Area Education Officer

- 6.2 The Director Planning and Access and the Area Education Officer for East Kent consider that the most appropriate solution to securing and sustaining outstanding education provision for both infant and junior age ranges at Murston Infant School and Murston Junior School is to have a single all-through Primary school.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The Governing Bodies of Murston Infant School and Murston Junior School view this proposal as a natural progression, which will secure benefits for staff and pupils. Furthermore, this proposal is aligned to Kent County Council's commitment to maximising the educational opportunities for children as set out in the Kent Education Commissioning Plan 2015-2019, which recommends the consideration of the amalgamation of separate infant and junior schools to provide all age Primary schools, where appropriate, because of the benefits they offer including better continuity of learning.

8. Recommendation(s)

Recommendation(s):

The Education Cabinet Committee is asked to recommend to the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform the amalgamation of Murston Infant and Junior schools following consideration of the results of the outcome of the consultation currently underway and agree to :

- (i) Issue a public notice to discontinue Murston Infant School and Murston Junior School and establish a single, one and a half form of entry Community Primary school by September 2016.

And, subject to no objections being received to the public notice

- (ii) Make recommendation to the Schools Adjudicator for determination for implementation on 1 September 2016.

9. Background Documents

- 9.1 Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes: Kent County Council's Strategic Statement 2015-2020.

<http://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/corporate-policies/increasing-opportunities-improving-outcomes>

- 9.2 Kent Commissioning Plan for Education Provision 2015-2019

<http://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/education-skills-and-employment-policies/education-provision>

9.3 Consultation Document and Equalities Impact Assessment
www.kent.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

10. Contact details

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