

From: Patrick Leeson, Corporate Director for Education and Young Peoples Services

To: Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform

Decision Number: 16/00099

Subject: **Proposed changes to Oakley (Special) School – Tunbridge Wells**

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of Paper: Education and Young People's Cabinet Committee – 15 December 2015

Future Pathway of Paper: Cabinet Member decision

Electoral Divisions: James Scholes (Tunbridge Wells South), Richard Long and Chris Smith (Tonbridge)

Summary: This report sets out the results of the public consultation of the proposed changes to Oakley (Special) School, Pembury Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 4NE

Recommendation(s): The Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform is asked to:

Issue a public notice to:

- (i) increase the designated number of places from 218 to 242
- (ii) extend the lower age range at Oakley (Special) School to age 2 for 1st September 2017 in order to develop an observation and assessment nursery provision

And, subject to no new objections to the public notice

- (iii) Implement the proposals for 1 September 2017.
- (iv) Allocate £586,000 from the Education and Young People's Services Capital Budget
- (v) Authorise the Director of Infrastructure in consultation with the General Counsel (Interim) to enter into any necessary contracts/ agreements on behalf of the County Council
- (vi) Authorise the Director of Infrastructure to be the nominated Authority Representative within the relevant agreements and to enter into variations as envisaged under the contracts.

If the cost of the project is greater than 10% the Cabinet Member will be required to take a further decision to allocated the additional funding.

Should objections, not already considered by the cabinet member when taking this decision, be received during the notice period a separate decision will be required in order to continue the proposal in order to allow for proper consideration of the points raised.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Kent County Council's strategy for children and young people with special educational needs and who are disabled (SEND) identified the need to add capacity across the county. The SEND Strategy shows how we will be creating 209 extra places in special schools and 164 in mainstream schools.
- 1.2 As the strategic commissioner of school provision, the Local Authority has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient school places for the residents of Kent. These proposals reflect KCC's aspirations to increase the number of SEN school places across the County, as set out in Kent's Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2016-20.
- 1.3 For a number of years the County Council has had an arrangement with Barnardo's to provide nursery provision for Tunbridge Wells children with complex special educational needs (SEND). The existing contract (which for education covers outreach and nursery provision) is coming to an end and cannot be extended. Kent County Council must have arrangements in place for 1 September 2017 for the children who will no longer be at Barnardo's Ravensdale Nursery.
- 1.4 Oakley School is currently the only district special school which does not deliver nursery provision from age 2. Oakley School serves children with complex needs from across Tunbridge Wells with high quality local specialist provision. Oakley was rated 'Good' by Ofsted in March 2015 and is a popular and successful school. We feel it is important to ensure the needs of children are met locally and that Oakley School can extend its offer to admit children from age 2 as other district special schools do.
- 1.5 Oakley School operates across three sites, currently arranged as primary aged provision at the Waveney Road site in Tonbridge and secondary and post-16 provision at the Pembury Road site in Tunbridge Wells, with a "satellite provision" supporting and integrating a small number of children with special needs into the mainstream setting of the Skinners' Kent Primary School.
- 1.6 As over 50% of the pupils currently attending the primary department in Tonbridge live in Tunbridge Wells the school already has its own plans to alter the current arrangements, which may result in primary aged provision being available at the Oakley Road campus from September 2017.
- 1.7 The need for places is firmly established in Tunbridge Wells and there is a need to ensure high quality provision is maintained to serve the area. The proposal is therefore to establish the O&A provision at the Pembury Road site. We have given careful thought to the location of the nursery on the school site, to ensure that it will be secure and appropriate for the age range and will not impact on the other provision on the school site.
- 1.8 The proposed observation and assessment provision (O&A) would be established for up to 24 children, which would equate to 12 full time equivalent places. Over time it is likely that this would comprise up to 20 children between 3 and 4 years old who claim the free entitlement funding with 4 further children eligible for the two year old funding. It is envisaged

that at a practical level this would mean up to 12 children will be attending the O&A nursery at any one time. The additional places will necessitate an increase in the overall designated number of the school, from 218 to 242.

- 1.9 With the support of the Governing Body, KCC carried out a public consultation. This report sets out the results of the public consultation, which took place from 23 September 2016 until 10 October 2016. An information 'drop-in' session was held on 27 September 2016 at Oakley School Pembury between 3.30pm and 5.00pm.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 KCC is proposing to increase the designated number of places offered at Oakley School from September 2017 and extend the lower age range of Oakley in order to allow the admission of pupils from age 2 for the 1st September 2017.

a. Capital

- i. The current accommodation at Oakley would not readily accommodate an increase in places and we therefore have developed initial plans to create purpose built accommodation at the Oakley School off the Pembury Road, Tunbridge Wells. External finishes will be sympathetic to the sensitive nature of the site and in keeping with the existing buildings.
- ii. The nursery is to be a single storey building located immediately adjacent to the south of the existing school, partly surrounded by the existing building and well screened by the mature trees on site. Accommodation will comprise generous entrance lobby, main play area, adult only area, hygiene room, break out space, toilets and storage. Additionally there will be an outside play area, some of which will be covered and external store.
- iii. The total cost is estimated to be in the region of £586,000 to be allocated from the Education and Young People's Services Capital Budget. The costs are estimates and these may increase as the project is developed. If the cost of the project is greater than 10% the Cabinet Member will be required to take a further decision to allocated the additional funding.

b. Revenue

- iv. The O&A nursery places will be reflected in an increase in the school's formula funding, including an adjustment for the increase in floor area.
- v. Human – Providing continuity for families who currently access provision at Ravensdale Nursery is of the utmost importance to us. We also recognise the great work, skills and expertise that Barnardo's staff have provided over recent years and would seek to retain core staff who directly work with the children should the proposal to create a nursery at Oakley School proceed. Oakley School will be consulting with Barnardo's staff separately in order to review their rights under the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (Amendment) regulations 2014 (referred to as TUPE).

3. Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes: Kent County Council's Strategic Statement (2015-2020) Policy Framework

- 3.1 These proposals 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. Consultation Outcomes

- 4.1 Approximately 400 hard copies of the public consultation document were circulated, which included a form for written responses. The consultation document was distributed to parents/carers, staff and governors of both schools, County Councillors, Member of Parliament, the Diocesan Authorities, local libraries, Parish Councils, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, and others. The consultation document was posted on the KCC website and the link to the website widely circulated. An opportunity to send in written responses using the response form, email and online was also provided.
- 4.2 A drop-in session was organised on 27 September 2016 between 3.30 and 5.00pm at Oakley (Special) School, Pembury Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 4NE.
- 4.3 Oakley School primary phase Key Stage Leader, Caroline Fish, gave an assembly to explain to the children about the proposed addition of a nursery to Oakley School. Following this the children were given the opportunity for discussion in classes. The children were overwhelmingly in favour of the idea, their comments are attached at Appendix 1.

In addition, a survey of parents of children who had recently come to Oakley School from the existing Ravensdale nursery was conducted. This was primarily to ascertain what attracted such parents to have Oakley school as their preferred primary school and to solicit their wider views on the proposal. Whilst a few understandable concerns were expressed at the closure of Ravensdale, it is very clear that what attracted parents to Oakley is summed up by the views “We heard good reviews regarding the school (Oakley) and how it was similar to Ravensdale”; “I had heard positive feedback from friends and work colleagues”; “We had professionals telling us to have a look, and when we did, it just seemed to fit X so well! We were impressed by the children’s work too.”

In response to the question “What are your thoughts about the link between Ravensdale and Oakley school?” every respondent who expressed a view is very positive: five out of the seven respondents (71%) saying “Good”, “great” or “very positive”; one (14%) did not know and one did not express an opinion other than sadness that Ravensdale will close. The full survey responses have been passed to the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform for his consideration.

- 4.4 Following the closure of the education consultation period 28 positive responses were received, 2 were negative and 6 were undecided bringing the total to 36 responses. A summary of all written responses are attached at

Appendix 2. The Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform has been passed a copy of the full set of responses for his consideration.

5. Views

5.1 The View of the Local Members for Tunbridge Wells South and Tonbridge have been consulted about these proposals and confirm that no objections have been raised from residents.

5.2 The View of the Headteacher and Governing Body of Oakley Primary School
The Head, Leadership Team and Full Governing Body of Oakley School are unanimous in their support of the proposed amendment of Oakley's age range to include 2 – 4 year olds and of the associated proposal to build a specialist nursery on our Tunbridge Wells site. Oakley has already purposefully built strong, effective and mutually beneficial relationships with Ravensdale in recent years and integrate very well with their provision. Transition for children (& parents) from Ravensdale to Oakley primary phase is already good but will be even better if co-located.

Furthermore, the synergy of two-way sharing of best practice will undoubtedly raise already high standards yet further. Also, being able to integrate with Oakley's primary children will benefit the social, communication and interaction skills of the nursery age children, whilst learning about and understanding their complex needs at an early stage will benefit Oakley primary staff – enabling them to further tailor our provision to meet the individual needs of each child as they progress into full time education.

All Oakley School staff, including external therapists, were appraised of the proposal during INSET training at the beginning of September and clearly expressed the collective view that the proposal made good sense and was a logical and worthwhile move forward.

The proposal includes an increase in capacity to meet the needs of children in the district - the Head, Leadership Team and Full Governing Body of Oakley School are aware of increasing demand; recognise the needs of the current community together with future growth and thus fully support the increased provision.

In summary therefore, the Head, Leadership Team, staff and Full Governing Body of Oakley School endorse the proposed plan – the only proviso being that the resources, finance and staffing needed to maintain Outstanding specialist nursery provision are provided in addition to, and not drawn from, the existing Oakley School.

5.3 The View of the KCC Head of SEN Assessment and Placement

Kent SEND Strategy, launched in January 2014, sets out a vision of a well-planned continuum of provision, from birth to age 25, supporting every Kent child in their local community wherever possible. The Strategy has three overarching aims for Kent's most vulnerable children; to improve their outcomes, ensure the Council fulfils its statutory duties towards them and most relevant to this proposal, address any gaps in the range of Kent's specialist provision. The plan is ambitious. We must keep in step with the demand for Special school places and identify children with SEND at the earliest possible opportunity in order to provide them with the support they need to make good educational progress. Parents have asked us to ensure

that the SEND Strategy keeps their needs at the heart of the system and increase the support closer to home.

We recognise that the early intervention offered by specialist nurseries attached to special schools catering for children with Profound, Severe, and Complex Needs is an essential part of making sure help is available early. We are committed to increase the number of children for whom we can provide a specialist nursery place. Across Kent, all of the PSCN schools, with the exception of Oakley are now in a position to offer that support. As the district special school, Oakley has already demonstrated the skills and expertise which give parents confidence in the help their children need. The proposal to change the designated age range of the school to enable it to deliver specialist nursery provision responds to the needs of families for local provision that can give their children the earliest possible access to specialist teaching and support.

The Council has had a long and valued relationship with Barnardo's and the natural conclusion of the contract with them provided us with an opportunity to ensure children from Tunbridge Wells have the same offer as those in other districts.

5.4 The View of the Area Education Officer

The Area Education Officer for West Kent fully supports this proposal and, having considered other commissioning options, is of the belief that this is the most sustainable solution. Oakley School is a good school with an inclusive and welcoming ethos.

6. Proposal

- 6.1 These proposals are set out in accordance with Section 19 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 that Kent County Council intends to make prescribed alterations to expand
- 6.2 The proposed alterations to Oakley (Special) School are subject to KCC statutory decision making process and planning.
- 6.3 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed as part of the consultation. To date no comments have been received and no changes are required to the Equality Impact Assessment.
- 6.4 There will be an impact on KCC's property portfolio with the value increased.

7. Delegation to Officers

- 7.1 The Officer Scheme of Delegation; under Appendix 2 part 4 of the Council's Constitution, provides a clear and appropriate link between this decision and the actions needed to implement it. For information it is envisaged, if the proposal goes ahead, that the Director of Infrastructure will sign contracts on behalf of the County Council.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 This proposal will create an additional 24 places at Oakley School Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes: Kent County Council's Strategic

Statement 2015-2020 Policy Framework' and the 'Commissioning Plan for Education – Kent' (2015 – 2019).

9. Recommendation(s)

Recommendation(s): The Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform is asked to:

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And, subject to no new objections to the public notice

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10. Background Documents

- 10.1 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>
- 10.2 Kent Commissioning Plan for Education Provision 2016-20 http://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/56329/Commissioning-Plan-for-Education-Provision-in-Kent-2016-2020.pdf
- 10.3 Consultation Document and Equalities Impact Assessment www.kent.gov.uk/schoolconsultations
- 10.4 Strategy for Children & Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities <http://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/strategies-and-policies/childrensocial-care-and-families-policies>

11. Report Author

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12 Relevant Director

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KS2 Response to Nursery – What ‘Bears’ think of the Oakley Nursery idea.

“Amazing”

“Good because I would get to play with them!”

“Because we would get to see them at school.”

“Because the children would like it there”

“If they get hurt the teachers would look after them.”

“If they want to say something they would learn that they have to put their hand up.”

“The babies can calm down.”

“Every child needs to go to school.”

“It’s good to make a place for the little ones.”

“It makes me feel a bit nervous.”

“Oakley is the best place for a nursery.”

“To help them have a good start to school.”

“A good experience for me to show them how to do it.”

“Exciting”

“Happy”

“Making Friends”

“Nice”

“Be kind”

“Awesome”

“It’s a big improvement for school”

“It will help them learn”

“It will be new and exciting for us.”

Summary of responses

Summary of Written Responses

Proposal to:

- **Increase the designated number of places from 218 to 242**
- **Extend the lower age range at Oakley School, Pembury Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 4NE to age 2 for 1st September 2017 in order to develop an observation and assessment nursery provision**

Consultation documents (hard copies) distributed: approximately 400

Responses received: 36

	Support	Undecided	Against	Total
Parents/Carers	20	2	2	24
Members of Staff (Oakley)	6	1	0	7
Members of staff (Ravensdale)	1	2	0	3
Other Interested Parties	1	1	0	2
Total	28	6	2	36

In support of the proposals

Agree - Parents/Carers

- Very good idea to provide appropriate educational input from the beginning. Continuity is also important for students who find change hard. Using the same site seems good use of space as long as it does not distract from/prevent expansion of senior site facilities.
- This would be beneficial provided the children are diagnosed fully and properly. It would also enhance the school profile as a very good school.
- Good idea to have primary pupils at Pembury site, would make more united and older pupils could mentor.
- This would be beneficial provided the children are diagnosed fully and properly. It would also enhance the school profile as a very good school.
- This is a very good school that has the expertise and capacity to help even more students.
- Great idea. Concerned re implications for parking at secondary site which is already difficult on many occasions.
- Proposals are a brilliant idea – will give children attending at better chance in life.
- Fully supports increasing the number of places at school. However, concern about ending the nursery provision and Ravensdale part way through the year. Believes this is extremely disruptive for the children who attend and in particular children leaving in Sept 2017.
- Beneficial to have consistent provision all under one roof.
- In support - there is currently insufficient SEND provision for this age group in this area.

Agree - Members of Staff (Oakley)

- Very well thought through proposal and much needed.
- Makes sense to extend to cover pre-school provision. It will aid transition from pre-school to reception for children as well as parents and carers.

Agree - Members of Staff (Ravensdale)

- Priority is always about children and their families – concerns re:

Practicality:

- Latest floor plan for the new nursery – to accommodate 12 children + at least 6 staff within the confines of the proposed classroom is clearly not suitable and nowhere big enough – is the floor space designated by regulation for children with special needs?
- 2 classrooms of 6 children would better suit the very individual needs of our children.
- There is no provision for soft room/multi-sensory room

Supporting parents/carers

- The Office/Reception area needs to be at the front of the building with a clear view of who is approaching the nursery, i.e. to receive children, families and visitors, not tucked away the other side of the staff room. Need to pre-empt any difficulties our children and parents demonstrate as they come into nursery and to welcome them accordingly – this cannot be done if no one can see who is coming into the building.

Agree - Other Interested Parties

- District Coordinator for STLS/Outreach - based at Broomhill Bank School, aware of the excellent work undertaken by the Ravensdale. However, also acutely aware of the growing need for specialist nursery places. Welcomes proposal, although acknowledges that the change will have an impact on Barnardos staff and there will be a period of change that may prove challenging, the end result will be of benefit to the district. Trusts that Ravensdale and Oakley will be able to work together in order to ensure that Oakley continue the delivery of 'outstanding' rated provision that has been benchmarked by Ravensdale.

Undecided

Undecided - Parents/Carers

- A good idea to have nursery facilities but important to get it right.
- Ravensdale has provided a wonderful facility, the building and premise have been equally important as well as staff. Beneficial to nursery age children who require this provision and will be less disruptive for those children as they get older as they can continue onto school.
- Points to raise which they believe plans lack:

- Space- the new nursery will be double the amount of children, equipment, parents and carers - the area allocated would be too small for easy storage of equipment. (example given of equipment their daughter needs on a daily basis - high chair/floor seat/standing frame/buggy chair).
- Entrance hall on plans seems small. Currently Ravensdale has a large hall area where wheelchair services, physio visits etc are held easily but with space for visitors, play area and child. There is no sensory room in new plans.
- Parent believes this to be 'page one of the handbook requirement as all children benefit from this', although there is one in the senior school it would not provide a service to the nursery. No parents room on the plans - this room is often used and valued in the school as a private place to meet with professionals. Classroom space is biggest concern and wants to highlight how this space will look with children/staff and equipment. Safety concerns - children running around/those laying on the floor quite possibly on oxygen and some children may struggle with noise levels of such a big room. Parents would appreciate these points looked at to ensure the nursery meets all requirements.

Undecided - Members of Staff (Oakley)

- Concerned with the space and parking for extra pupils and staff

Undecided - Members of Staff (Ravensdale)

- Agreement is based entirely on whether the new build is fit for purpose for the number and special individual needs of the children which I don't think the current plans are at all. The physical inside space is simply not safe or practical in my opinion for the number of children/adults proposed, with all their equipment, furniture, toys etc.
- The nursery requires its own sensory/soft play area. The main school facility is a) too far away from the proposed nursery site, b) far too big for 2, 3 & 4 year olds and would obviously have to be timetabled which nursery children would not understand.
- Understand that this nursery is for the long term and therefore it is important that it is right at the beginning and that the staff who are experienced in working with such children's views are listened to. I also understand that the fantastic facilities that we have at Ravensdale are not going to be exactly replicated. However, there are basic essentials that I feel are not yet included in the plans.
- I think it imperative that the change does not happen mid-academic year as this would be too disruptive for the children currently attending Ravensdale.
- The principal idea of the move is a good one and speaking to most people that will be involved in the move agree. However as a member of staff working directly with children I would like to see that we are involved in the planning and set up of the new nursery, working directly with the children and understanding their needs in my eyes makes us the best to consult.
- If you are going to increase the number of children up to 12 at any one time then two rooms would much more preferable. We have children that are so

poorly and their immunity cannot cope with large groups, smaller ones enable the children to access nursery and enjoy and experience it, sadly sometimes is a very short life span.

- The new setting should have a sensory room, soft room and a parent room even if it's a small one. The sensory and soft room are used on a frequent basis and often at the same time to meet the needs of the children. The parent room is used more so when new children start with us and parents need a place to sit and talk, often crying at the loss of the child that was going to be in their minds. We use it to discuss the children's progress go through the files etc. and when the parents are not quite confident at first to leave their child for a length of time they can sit and relax in the knowledge we are just next door.
- Ravensdale has a great atmosphere and a homely feel, another thing that is so important to keep when thinking about the plans.
- Breaking up a team that works so fantastically is devastating. We as the nursery staff working directly with the children are able to do this because of the backup we have from our team manager, admin staff and our family liaison worker all who we understand will probably lose their jobs. Another area that KCC need to think about when setting up the new nursery.

Undecided - Other Interested Parties

- Would just like to highlight the potential need for more involvement from occupational therapy regarding planning of new building for children with disabilities. E.g. looking at access, space for equipment, sensory rooms, changing facilities, hoisting, turning tables, door widths.

Against

No – Parent/Carer

- Oakley should stay as it is. The school isn't big enough to cope. Will more staff be taken on? Will the quality of teaching not be to a high standard?
- Oppose the proposals. Although the two proposals themselves are not objectionable, the framework supporting these proposals is not viable in its present form:
 - KCC consultation – costs have not been outlined for equipment, storage, etc for the new provision.
 - The timeline does not offer clear timetable from March 2017 re building and disruption to all pupils and staff on TW site.
 - Transport arrangements from Tonbridge site and implications on Oakley School.
 - Road works re: A21 are not addressed.
 - Lack of planning in the areas of building and transition.