

CABINET

19 November 2013

Title: Proposed Amalgamation of Northbury Infant and Junior Schools	
Report of the Cabinet Member for Children's Services	
Open Report	For Decision
Wards Affected: Abbey Ward	Key Decision: Yes
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Accountable Divisional Director: Jane Hargreaves, Divisional Director Education	
Accountable Director: Helen Jenner, Corporate Director of Children's Services	
Summary: <p>This report presents a proposal for the amalgamation of Northbury Infant School with Northbury Junior Schools to form an all through Primary school with effect from 1 January 2014.</p> <p>This proposal has been initiated for the following main reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• educationally, a single school is able to ensure a more consistent approach to teaching and learning for the children than two separate schools;• a single school can look at its management structure with a view to ensuring the best use of staff across the whole school. The combined expertise of the staff would be greater than in the two separate schools;• a single school would have a combined budget and would benefit from greater flexibility;• a single school would be able to rationalise the use of all resources and gain efficiencies including the benefits from the combination of funding from the individual school budgets. <p>The consultation process regarding this proposed amalgamation concluded on Tuesday, 29 October and any changes to the proposals following this will be presented at the meeting.</p>	
Recommendation(s) <p>The Cabinet is recommended to agree the amalgamation of Northbury Infant and Junior Schools to create an all-through Primary School from 1 January 2014 via the closure of the existing infant school and expanding the premises and age range of the existing junior school.</p>	

Reason(s)

To assist the Council achieve its aim to provide a Better Future and a Well Run Organisation. Council policy is to consider the amalgamation of linked infant and junior schools where possible, for example, when a headship is vacant and over time to amalgamate linked infant and junior schools. For this infant and junior school, there are clear benefits of amalgamation.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Management arrangements at Northbury Infant School are going through a process of change and the Head teacher of the school has recently retired. This has therefore created an opportunity to examine the existing arrangements of organisation at the Schools. Further, Northbury Infant School and Northbury Junior Schools are suitable for amalgamation owing to their size and their location on a shared site.

1.2 Northbury Infant School

The school was last inspected in December 2011 and was judged to be a good school. The two areas for improvement that Ofsted Inspectors highlighted were:

- To raise pupil's attainment in reading, writing, and mathematics, by increasing the consistency in teaching.
- To ensure that all parents and carers fully understand the impact of absence from school on their children's learning and progress.

1.3 Northbury Junior School

The school's last Ofsted inspection was in July 2013 and it was judged to be a good school. Ofsted gave the following advice in order for the school to improve further:

- Increase the amount of outstanding teaching by ensuring that:
 - all teachers match classroom activities more effectively to the different needs of all pupils.
 - teachers' written feedback of pupils' work is consistent and guides pupils onto their next steps.
- Refine the systems for measuring and analysing pupils' level so that the process for checking progress and target setting is clearer to all staff.

2. Proposal and Issues

2.1 Technically, the proposal to amalgamate involves five steps:

- Closing, or discontinuing, the infant school with effect from 31 December 2013,
- Enlarging the premises of the existing junior school by including the buildings previously used by the infant school,

- Making an alteration to the current junior school by lowering the age range of the pupils there, from 7 to 11 years to age 3 to 11 years,
- Adding nursery provision, with effect from 1 January 2014, and
- Establishing an Admission number of 120.

2.2 Closure of one school and expansion of another is the most straightforward way in which to achieve an amalgamation. All pupils on the school roll of the infant and junior schools as at the end of the Autumn Term 2013 will transfer onto the roll of the primary school. The alternative to this technical process is to close both schools and create a new school. This is a longer and more complex process.

2.3 There are different types of school within the local authority maintained sector and most are community schools. Northbury Infant School and Junior Schools are community schools. In these schools the Local Authority is responsible for employees, land, funding and admissions. It employs all staff at the schools directly.

2.4 This proposal will set a uniform standard number of 120 pupils per year group and will give a consistent provision across all the age ranges.

2.5 This proposal is in line with the Barking and Dagenham Vision for the borough to encourage growth and unlock the potential of Barking and Dagenham and its residents. The Barking and Dagenham vision is drawn from both the Council's Community Strategy 2013/2016 and Corporate Plan 2013/14 that together set out the vision and priorities for the borough.

2.6 Included as one of the five priorities of the vision is "To ensure every child is valued so that they can succeed". Further, there is the potential to improve value for money across the proposed amalgamated schools.

2.7 The benefits seen in this proposal include:

- the present technical barrier which exists at age 7, when pupils are admitted to the junior school would be lifted. Pupils would automatically move from Year 2 to Year 3, if this was their parents' wish;
- an amalgamated school will ensure approaches to teaching, learning and planning the curriculum are consistent and coherent;
- the primary school will be able to rationalise the management structure to ensure the best use of staff across the school. The combined expertise of the staff would be greater than in the two separate schools.
- the primary school will have a combined budget and would benefit from greater flexibility;

2.8 On amalgamation of the schools, any current extended school services offered by the infant and junior schools will continue in the same way, unless the primary school decides otherwise.

- 2.9 This proposal meets with the key principles of the Education Strategy:
- for raising of the expected standards and shared ambition for all the children who live in the Borough;
 - for a commitment to sustain and refresh the partnership between schools and the Council which has been a critical factor in the improved outcomes for children and young people.
- 2.10 In particular, the Education Strategy sets out the agreement for a programme for developing school places; subject to the proviso that it may need revision in the light of changed demand for places and resources available. Appendix 1 sets out the schools that have been amalgamated or federated since 2009.
- 2.11 All staff, those currently working at the Infants and the Junior School, are employed by the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. Those who currently work at Northbury Infant School will mostly continue in the same positions as previously, but within years Reception, One and Two of the newly formed primary school. They will remain employed by the Borough and their terms and conditions will remain as before. If there are structural changes to the management of the school involved in the amalgamation, these will include staff from both current schools, and these will be the subject of consultation with the relevant parties.
- 2.12 If the amalgamation is approved a commitment is sought to bring certain aspects of the school physically together. There was a similar commitment in recent amalgamations and this may involve a modest capital investment to be met from existing grants.
- 2.13 The two schools have previously discussed the amalgamation proposals at a meeting on 11 June 2013, having considered the issue at informal meetings.
- 2.14 The current head teacher of the junior school is now also the Acting Head teacher of the infant school. The Governing Body will decide who will be appointed head teacher of the newly formed primary school.

3. Governance

- 3.1 The Governing Body of a school is dissolved when the school is discontinued. A temporary Governing Body will be formed before this happens, that will include Governors from both the Infants and the Junior Schools. This will determine a new Instrument of Government to take effect from 1 January 2014, in accordance with the School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2012. In the case of Northbury Infant and Junior Schools, the Governors of both existing schools are engaged in establishing a temporary governing body to start the process and facilitate discussion.

4. Options Appraisal

- 4.1 Realistically there are three options to be considered in respect of the future arrangements for Northbury Infant School and Northbury Junior schools. First would be to amalgamate the two schools forming a single school under one governing body. Secondly, to make no change and leave the schools separate.

The third option would be to develop two primary schools. These options are explored further below.

- 4.2 **Option 1** - The Council has a policy which requires a review of linked or adjoining infant and junior schools to consider the possibilities of amalgamation when there is an appropriate opportunity. The head teacher at Northbury Infant School will be retiring and so this presents an opportunity for the schools to amalgamate. This option delivers value within our schools.
- 4.3 **Option 2** - An alternative is to make no change at this time and allow the schools to continue separately. This would be contrary to the Council's intended policy and would mean the opportunity for amalgamating the schools whilst there is no head teacher for Northbury Infant School will pass.
- 4.4 **Option 3** - The possibility of developing both schools into primary schools. This would mean an additional nursery being provided. Both schools currently admit up to four forms of entry. It would not be possible on the current site to allow each school to become a four form of entry primary school. It would mean that some of the benefits, particularly of organisation of the school and budget management, would not be achieved.
- 4.5 The current recommendation would, on balance, be to proceed with the amalgamation proposal, although this is subject to the consultation which ended on 29 October 2013.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Governing Bodies of all infant and junior schools in the Borough were presented with a report in the Spring Term of 2011 that included information on the Local Authority's policy to amalgamate all separate infant and junior schools over time, where governors were invited to discuss and comment. This was repeated to all governing bodies in the following (summer) term.
- 5.2 A series of meetings have been held to consult with Head Teachers and Governors, including a special meeting held on 11 June 2013 with the Chair of the Infant and Junior Schools and the respective Vice Chairs.
- 5.3 A consultation letter regarding the proposed amalgamation was sent to parents, carers, guardians of pupils, staff and governors of both Northbury Infant School and Northbury Junior School on 17 June 2013. This letter was also sent to Trades Unions of both teaching staff and support staff.
- 5.4 A notice was published in the Barking and Dagenham Post on 18 September 2013 to begin a formal consultation process which ended on 29 October 2013. The Notice has been displayed at the main public libraries in Barking and Dagenham and on both the infant and junior school notice boards.
- 5.5 Any issues raised after this report was written will be brought to the attention of Members of Cabinet.

6. Financial Implications

Implications completed by: Dawn Calvert, former Finance Group Manager

- 6.1 From 2013/14, revenue costs for maintained schools are calculated using the new Schools Funding Formula as proposed by the Department for Education (DfE) as part of their School Funding Reforms. The funding formula for 2013/14 was agreed by Cabinet on 19 December 2012.
- 6.2 Although the amalgamation is proposed for 1 January 2014, the funding for the new all through primary school until the end of the 2013/14 financial year will be the balance of the current budgets allocated to Northbury Infant School and Northbury Junior School.
- 6.3 In June 2013 the DfE published their arrangements and changes for the 2014/15 schools funding formula. This publication will result in a number of changes to the current funding formula and hence an individual schools budget for 2014/15. At present these changes, on an individual school basis, are not quantified. In accordance with the timetable published by the DfE, the local authority must submit its provisional Schools Budget pro forma for 2014/15 to the Education Funding Agency by 31 October 2013 with the final one being submitted by 21 January 2014. Local authorities must confirm the budget for their maintained schools by 28 February 2014.
- 6.4 Under the current arrangements each individual school receives a lump sum factor of £150,000. The new arrangements for 2014/15 enable two merging schools to keep 85% of the two lump sums for the next full financial year following the year in which they merge. Currently Northbury Infant School and Northbury Junior School receive a lump sum of £150,000 each. Under the new arrangements the lump sum for the new all through primary school will be protected at £255,000 for 2014/15 rather than reducing to £150,000 (at the 2013/14 lump sum factor). The DfE guidance for 2014/15 continues to say that for some school mergers there may be a requirement to continue to provide tapered lump sum protection beyond the first year. Depending on when a national funding formula is introduced, the DfE will consider whether further tapered protection should be provided for merged schools for up to two years.
- 6.5 The Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG) remains in 2014/15. This means that losses are protected by the MFG as each school is guaranteed 98.5% of their prior year funding on a per pupil basis.

7. Legal Implications

Implications to be completed by Lucinda Bell, Education Lawyer

- 7.1 The steps to be taken to bring about the amalgamation of these two schools are described in paragraph 2.1 above. The process for discontinuing a school is prescribed in the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools)(England) Regulations 2007, as amended. The processes for the remaining steps are prescribed by the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2007, as amended. Under these Regulations it is for the Local Authority to make each of the proposals.

7.2 The Regulations require consultation prior to the publication of proposals, in a manner that is not specified, but that should last for at least six weeks, not including school holidays, and that in consulting proposers have regard to the Secretary of State's Guidance. The publication of proposals must be in accordance with the relevant Regulations.

8. Other Implications

8.1 **Risk Management** - These proposals effectively close the infant school and expand the junior school to a primary school covering the age range 3-11 years. Both schools were judged 'Good' in their last Ofsted inspections as detailed in Section 1 above. The amalgamation of the infant and junior schools will bring additional leadership capacity to the schools.

There is a risk about appointment of staff, however, to mitigate this risk all staff will transfer to the new school. The current head teacher of the junior school is now also the Acting Head teacher of the infant school as the former Head of the Infant school has retired. The Governing Body will decide who will be appointed head teacher of the newly formed primary school.

There is a further risk that the community including parents could object to these proposals. To mitigate this risk an informal consultation has already been started and a letter sent to all parents outlining the proposals. A closing date was set for representations to be made and this has passed without any comments having been received. A formal notice has been published in the local press inviting other interested parties to make comment and these will be reported at the meeting together with the mitigating action proposed to respond on any matters raised.

8.2 **Staffing Issues** - Staff at both infant and junior schools will be informed that their employment will be at the primary school with effect from 1 January 2014. The employer for all staff at the newly formed primary school will remain the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. TUPE does not apply. The post of Head Teacher at Northbury Infants School will be deleted when that school is discontinued. The temporary governing body will decide on whom to appoint as head teacher for the new primary school. There may be changes in line management for some staff, but the general terms and conditions for all staff will remain the same.

8.3 **Property / Asset Issues** - The amalgamation of the schools will allow for a pooling of asset related revenue budgets, and the ability to manage property costs over both buildings, which will support a better maintenance regime.

Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

- Children and Young People Plan
- Consultation letter dated 17 June 2013
- Notice published 18 September 2013

List of appendices:

Appendix 1 - School Amalgamations and Federations