

## CABINET

20 MARCH 2012

<b>Title:</b> Proposed Amalgamation of Grafton Infant and Junior Schools and William Bellamy Infant and Junior Schools	
<b>Report of the Cabinet Member for Finance and Education</b>	
<b>Open report</b>	<b>For Decision</b>
<b>Wards Affected:</b> Valence and Heath	<b>Key Decision:</b> Yes
<b>Report Author:</b> Mike Freeman, Group Manager – Schools Estate	<b>Contact Details:</b> Tel: 020 8227 3492 E-mail: mike.freeman@lbbd.gov.uk
<b>Accountable Divisional Director:</b> Jane Hargreaves, Head of Quality and School Improvement	
<b>Accountable Director:</b> Helen Jenner, Corporate Director of Children's Services	
<b>Summary:</b>  This report presents a proposal for the amalgamation of Grafton Infant and Junior Schools and William Bellamy Infant and Junior Schools to form two all through Primary Schools with effect from 1 April 2012 (Academic year 2011/12).  This proposal has been initiated for the following main reasons: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• educationally, a single school is able to ensure a more consistent approach to teaching and learning for the children than two separate schools;</li><li>• each school can look at its management structure with a view to ensuring the best use of staff across the two schools. The combined expertise of the staff would be greater than in the two separate schools;</li><li>• each school would have a combined budget and would benefit from greater flexibility;</li><li>• each school will 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 and surplus balances carried forward from previous years.</li></ul>	
<b>Recommendation</b>  The Cabinet is recommended to agree the amalgamation of Grafton Infant and Junior School and William Bellamy Infant and Junior School to become primary schools from 1 April 2012.	
<b>Reason</b> The Cabinet needs to consider changes proposed in the organisation and structure of schools as designated by the provision of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The Council's policy is to consider amalgamation of linked infant and junior schools whenever a headship is vacant and over time to amalgamate linked infant and junior schools. For both of these paired infant and junior schools, there are clear benefits of amalgamation.	

## **1. Introduction and Background**

- 1.1 Management arrangements at Grafton Infant and Junior Schools and William Bellamy Infant and Junior Schools are going through a process of change. This has therefore created an opportunity to examine the existing arrangements of organisation at the Schools. Further, the Grafton Infant and Junior School and William Bellamy Infant and Junior Schools are suitable for amalgamation owing to their size (4 forms of entry) and their shared sites.

## **2. Proposal and Issues**

- 2.1 Technically, the proposal involves closing the infant schools with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2012 and enlarging the age-range of the existing junior schools. The age-range of the junior schools will be expanded from age 7 to 11 years to age 3 to 11 years with effect from 1 April 2012. All pupils on the school roll of the infant and junior schools as at the end of the Autumn Term 2012 will transfer onto the rolls of the Primary Schools.
- 2.2 An interim governing body for each new Primary School is to be established to focus on the amalgamation of the schools. This governing body will determine a new Instrument of Government, in accordance with the "Education School Governance (Constitution) (England) Regulations 2003", once the Primary School is set up.
- 2.3 This proposal will set a uniform standard number of 120 pupils per year group and will give consistent provision across all the age ranges.
- 2.4 This is in line with the Council's Policy House whereby we want a borough that believes in opportunity and one that recognises and champions success. Both of the junior schools and Grafton Infant School were judged to be good at their last Ofsted inspections. William Bellamy Infant School was given a notice to improve. Also, there is the potential to improve value for money across the proposed amalgamated schools.
- 2.5 The benefits seen in this proposal include:
- an amalgamated school will ensure approaches to teaching, learning and planning the curriculum are consistent and coherent;
  - each primary school will have a combined budget and would benefit from greater flexibility;
  - each primary school will be able to rationalise the management structure to ensure the best use of staff across the schools. The combined expertise of the staff would be greater than in the two separate schools.
- 2.6 On amalgamation of the schools, any current extended school services offered by both infant and junior schools will continue in the same way, unless the primary schools decide otherwise.
- 2.7 This proposal meets with the key principles of the Education Strategy:

- for a 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.

### **3. Options Appraisal**

3.1 As indicated in 1.1 above, there was a dialogue with representatives of both Governing Bodies for each school to explore options. At that time there was in-principle support for an amalgamation and it was agreed to begin the statutory consultation process. It is recommended that the amalgamation is the preferred option.

### **4. Consultation**

4.1 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.

#### **4.2 Grafton Infant and Junior Schools**

4.2.1 Meetings to consult with Headteachers, Chairs of Governors and Governors were held on 17 October and 15 November 2011

4.2.2 A meeting with Governors, staff and parents was held on 5 December 2011.

4.2.3 A consultation letter regarding the proposed amalgamation was sent to parents, carers, guardians of pupils, staff and governors of the Grafton Schools on 21 November 2011. This letter was also sent to Trades Unions of both teaching staff and support staff.

4.2.4 A notice was published in The News on 7 January 2012 to begin a formal consultation process which ended on 17 February 2012. The Notice has been displayed at the main public library in Barking and on both the infant and junior school notice boards.

4.2.5 The following communications have been received through the consultation process at the time of writing the report:

- Grafton Infant School Governing Body – letter dated 14 December with a majority against the proposal, but not unanimous.
- various communications from a parent dated 29 November and 5 December – seeking further information.
- communication from a parent dated 13 December – seeking clarification about the consultation process.

- letter from the Headteacher of Grafton Junior School dated 4 January – fully supporting the amalgamation proposal and indicating a desire to have a dialogue about the physical restraints of the building.
- letter from the Chair of Governors of Grafton Junior School (undated) on behalf of the governors giving unanimous support for the proposal.

4.2.6 The communications indicated above have been acknowledged and additional information provided as appropriate.

### 4.3 **William Bellamy Infant and Junior Schools**

4.3.1 Meetings to consult with Headteachers, Chairs of Governors, Governors and staff were held as follows:

- 12 October 2011 – meeting with Chair of Governors and Headteacher of William Bellamy Junior School.
- 3 November 2011 meeting with Governing Body of William Bellamy Infant School.
- 14 November 2011 – meeting with Headteacher of William Bellamy Infant School.
- 16 November 2011 – meeting with Headteacher of William Bellamy Junior School.
- 21 November 2011 – Director attends meeting at William Bellamy Infant School Governing Body meeting.
- 1 December 2011 – William Bellamy Infant School staff meeting.
- 2 December 2011 – director meets with Headteacher of William Bellamy Infant School, Chair and Vice Chair of Governing Body
- 14 December 2011 – meeting at William Bellamy Junior School.

4.3.2 A consultation letter regarding the proposed amalgamation was sent to parents, carers, guardians of pupils, staff and governors of the William Bellamy Schools on 5 December 2011. This letter was also sent to Trade Unions of both teaching staff and support staff.

4.3.3 A notice was published in The News on 21 January 2012 to begin a formal consultation process which ended on 2 March 2012. The Notice has been displayed at the main public library in Barking and on both the infant and junior school notice boards.

4.3.4 The following communications have been received through the consultation process at the time of writing the report:

- the DfE have indicated their support for the proposal.
- at a meeting held with staff on 1 and 14 December – the main issues raised were about staff contractual matters.
- these contractual issues have subsequently been brought up by staff representative groups (trade unions), and unions have sought clarification about the statements concerning YR2 - YR3 transfer.
- there has been a letter from a parent expressing strong support for the proposal.
- one letter from the Chair of Governors for William Bellamy Infants noted the benefits of having separate infant and junior schools.

- e-mail dated 7 February 2012 from a member of staff at William Bellamy Infants objecting to the proposal.
- letter dated 9 February 2012 from the Chair of Governors of William Bellamy Junior School on behalf of the governors indicating unanimous support for the amalgamation proposals.
- letter dated 9 February from the staff at William Bellamy Junior School indicating 100% support for the amalgamation proposal.
- letter dated 6 February 2012 from a parent of children attending both schools expressing her concerns about the proposal and disagreeing with the views expressed by the Council.
- an undated letter from a parent expressing reservations about the proposed amalgamation.
- a signed petition dated 10 February 2012 against the amalgamation and organised by parents of William Bellamy Infants School with 231 signatures.
- letters dated 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> February from the Headteachers, William Bellamy Junior School sent to all parents and covers explaining a number of issues of concern and inviting parents to join in the debate.
- a survey questionnaire conducted by the William Bellamy Junior School which encouraged parents to enter the debate
- note of a meeting with parents that took place 27 February 2012
- 2 letters from a two parents/members of staff at the Infant School expressing concern about the amalgamation proposals

4.4 Any further issues raised subsequent to the writing of this report will be brought to the attention of Members of Cabinet.

## **5. Financial Implications**

Implications verified by: Dawn Calvert, Finance Group Manager

- 5.1 In terms of formula allocations, for the financial year 2011/12 Grafton Infant and Junior Schools received £1.7million each and William Bellamy Infant and Junior Schools received £1.8 million and £1.6 million respectively. On amalgamation, it is likely this amount of allocation would remain the same as allocations are chiefly driven using factors that include pupil numbers and the gross internal area of the school buildings and these factors are unlikely to change. However a new School Funding Formula is due to be in place from April 2013 and the impact of this new formula on current school allocations is not yet quantifiable. It is hoped the impact of transition will be minimal.
- 5.2 The school buildings do not require any major changes at this stage, however, there are benefits in rationalising provision and Children's Services will discuss with the schools options for improvement in the future. However there will be a reduction in the devolved formula capital allocation. The formula lump sum element funding allocated on an individual school basis will now reduce to one allocation for each of the Primary schools. This should not have a significant effect on the schools' budgets or on the projects planned for the forthcoming budget settlement.
- 5.3 It is not the intention of the amalgamation to cut budgets. However, over time it is expected that owing to efficiencies in staffing there could be some savings which would accrue to the School(s)

5.4 Schools are required to make efficient use of resources and the Governing Body would need to review its budget priorities and staffing structures in the light of demands and the requirement to respond to the needs of young people attending the school.

## **6. Legal Implications**

Implications completed by: Fiona Taylor, Legal Group Manager

6.1 The Education and Inspections Act 2006 and associated Guidance issued by the Department for Education empowers the Local Authority to amalgamate two schools through closure of Grafton Infant School and consequent change in upper age limit of Grafton Junior School to form an all through Primary school.

6.2 A six week consultation process with all interested parties (e.g. families of pupils, staff, trade unions and governing bodies) is a necessary requirement prior to formal publication of the proposals to amalgamate the schools.

6.3 A further six week representation period is required once proposals are published, to allow for comments on the proposals to be made by the public. The Council can then proceed to a final determination.

6.4 Implementation of the proposals would change the current school governance arrangements with the creation of one governing body with powers to determine budgetary and staffing issues as required.

6.5 There are two ways to 'amalgamate' two existing schools:

- a. by closing down both schools and opening a new one which will result in a new school number being issued for it; or
- b. close one school and enlarge the age range of an existing school to accommodate the displaced pupils.

6.6 The report proposes discontinuance of Grafton Infant and William Bellamy Infant Schools and a consequent change in lower age limit of Grafton Junior and William Bellamy Junior Schools to form all through Primary schools through their amalgamation.

6.7 The Council may bring forward such proposals in its role as the Local Education Authority, but must comply with the requirements specified in Part 2 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, Schedule 2 to the Act and regulations made under the Act.

6.8 The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) (England) Regulations 2007 ("the Discontinuance Regulations") govern the proposed discontinuance. The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2007 ("the Prescribed Alterations Regulations"), govern the proposed change in lower age limit.

6.9 In respect of both the discontinuance and the change in age limit, the Council is required to follow a two stage process; to consult with interested parties (families of

the pupils, staff, trade unions and governing bodies) and to then publish its proposals. The consultation period is not prescribed in statute. However, the Department for Education provides a Guideline of 6 weeks. The Council must demonstrate how it considered the views of the consultees. At the end of that period, the Council is required to publish its proposals to discontinue the infant Schools and extend the age range of the Junior Schools. The published proposals should state that the two proposals (for each paired infant and junior school) are dependent, i.e. one will not be implemented without the other.

- 6.10 It is essential that the published notices comply with the statutory requirements as set out in the Regulations otherwise they may be judged invalid.
- 6.11 Once proposals are published, a 6 week statutory representation period should follow during which comments on the proposals can be made.
- 6.12 The Council will make the final decision, for each paired infant and junior school, following that period.
- 6.13 Once approved, the proposals must be implemented as published.
- 6.14 There will be changes in school governance as a result of these proposals but the schools will remain local authority controlled community schools, although there will only be one governing body for the future for each primary school. The consultation process is designed to support these changes.

## **7. Other Implications**

### **7.1 Risk Management**

These proposals effectively close the two infant schools and expand the two junior schools into primary schools covering the age range 3-11 years. Both Grafton Infant and Junior Schools and William Bellamy Junior School were judged 'Good' in their last Ofsted inspections. William Bellamy Infants was judged 'inadequate' in its last Ofsted inspection carried out in October 2011. The Local Authority is working closely with William Bellamy Infant School and its governing body to bring about rapid improvements for the school. The amalgamation of the junior and infant schools will enable some of these changes to be made more rapidly and will bring additional leadership capacity to the schools.

### **7.2 Staffing Issues**

Staff at both paired infant and junior schools will be informed that their employment will be with Grafton Primary School or William Bellamy Primary School respectively with effect from 1 April 2012 and that all other terms and conditions of their contract of employment remain the same if these proposals are agreed.

### **7.3 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:**

- Legislation which allows this – Education and Inspections Act 2006

- DFE Guidance – Expanding a Maintained Mainstream School by Enlargement or Adding a Sixth Form and Closing a Maintained Mainstream School
- Council Policy House
- Children and Young People Plan
- Consultation letters dated 21 November 2011 and 5 December 2011
- Notices published 7 January 2012 and 21 January 2012
- letter from Governing Body of Grafton Infant School
- letter from Headteacher of Grafton Junior School
- letter from Chair of Governors for Grafton Junior School
- letter from Chair of Governors for William Bellamy Infants
- email from member of staff at William Bellamy Infants
- letter from Chair of Governors of William Bellamy Juniors
- letter from staff of William Bellamy Junior pupils
- signed petition from William Bellamy Infant parents
- 2 letters from the Headteacher William Bellamy Junior
- survey details seeking the view of William Bellamy Junior parents
- note of a meeting with parents on 27 February 2012
- 2 letters from two parents/members of staff

**List of appendices:** None