

Cabinet - 1 March 2006

Beechdale Primary School

Portfolio: Councillor Eddie Hughes, Children's Services

Service Area: Education Walsall

Wards:

Forward Plan: No

Summary of report

The report highlights the recent Ofsted inspection of Beechdale Primary school that judged it as failing to provide a satisfactory education for the children attending there. This returned the school in to the special measures category, after a period in serious weaknesses. These circumstances require the Authority to consider a series of possible interventions to determine the future of the school. A detailed discussion of these options is included at Appendix A. The report provides a discussion of these options and recommends the preferred one for consultation.

Recommendations

- (1) That approval be given for public consultation to take place on the three options detailed in Appendix A.
- (2) That a report on the outcome of public consultation be presented to the Cabinet in April 2006.

Resource and legal considerations

These vary across the options. All options would be subject to the approval of statutory proposals for the schools concerned. The Secretary of State also has the power to intervene and close failing schools and may do so unless prompt action is taken to address the issue of Beechdale Primary School.

Where a school is in special measures the establishment of alternative arrangements for the education of pupils may come under the umbrella of the government's collaborative re-start or fresh start programmes. In these instances significant additional funding is available from Central Government in the form of pump priming revenue grant for three years and capital monies to support additional accommodation or remodelling at the schools involved. All of the options proposed are eligible for consideration under these programmes and any additional funding is subject to approval by the Secretary of State in addition to completion of the associated statutory processes.

The seriousness of the situation is such that changes will need to be implemented as soon as possible. Therefore, it is proposed that whichever option is ultimately decided upon as the way forward is implemented as from the start of the new school year in September 2006. Cabinet is asked to approve consultation on the three options detailed in Appendix A.

Citizen impact

The school has been judged as continuously failing its pupils for a number of years in terms of academic achievement. It is therefore not providing the quality of education that parents have a right to expect. It is expected that all of the options under consideration would enable all pupils to access high standards of learning and teaching.

Community safety

Consideration will need to be given to any additional transport needs depending on the option chosen for implementation.

Environmental impact

There are no environmental considerations arising from this report.

Performance and risk management issues

Failure to take action with regard to Beechdale Primary School may possibly lead to direct intervention and an order of closure from the Secretary of State for Education.

Failure to take action will result in children continuing to receive a poor education with low attainment at Key Stage 2.

Parents are beginning to seek places for their children at other schools and numbers will fall rapidly if prompt action is not taken.

Equality implications

All children are entitled to receive a good standard of education and the options detailed in this report seek to secure that for the pupils at Beechdale Primary School.

Consultation

The Governing Bodies of Beechdale Primary School, Hatherton Primary School and Frank F Harrison have been consulted about the current position of Beechdale Primary School and the provision of primary education in the local area. In view of parental anxieties an initial meeting has been held with parents at Beechdale Primary School.

The Governors and Headteachers of Frank F Harrison and Hatherton Primary School are aware of, and prepared to support the various proposals contained within this paper in order to improve standards of primary education within the local community.

Vision 2008

That these arrangements will contribute to "Making Our Schools Great" by taking action to improve the quality of education provided for children resident on the Beechdale estate.

Background papers

DfES "Schools Causing Concern" September 2005.

Contact officer

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Signed:



Executive Director: David Brown

Date: 20 February 2006

Signed:



**Managing Director, Education Walsall
Helen Denton**

Date: 20 February 2006

Signed:



Portfolio Holder: Councillor E F Hughes

Date: 20 February 2006

Introduction

The problems of Beechdale have proved intractable over the last 5 years despite several changes in leadership and substantial investment and other support of the type, which has brought other Walsall schools rapidly out of Ofsted categories. For that reason leaving the school as it is at present is not an option and more radical options than have been utilised in the past are being proposed in this document. We must find a way to ensure that the pupils served by this school receive the education they deserve.

Information about the primary schools located within the Beechdale community is provided below and this offers a context in which the options can be considered.

Published admission numbers:

Beechdale Primary 45

Hatherton Primary 60

Total (both) 105

Number of first preferences (September 2006)

Beechdale Primary 25

Hatherton Primary 49

Total (both) 74

Numbers on roll in September 2006 (estimated as of 9th February 2006)

Yeargroup:	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
Beechdale Primary	25	26	30	32	20	25	22	180
Hatherton Primary	49	44	41	55	44	45	49	327
Total (both schools)	74	70	71	87	64	70	71	507
Total by Key Stage			215				292	

The following options have been identified as the basis of our consultation:

Option 1

Manage the closure of Beechdale Primary School from 31 August 2006 and agree the most appropriate alternative placement for each pupil in other schools in the Borough through negotiation with each parent. If a substantial number of parents express a preference for Hatherton Primary School, the nearest school geographically, we would seek to increase the number of places in order to ensure that children can take the option of moving to this nearest school alongside siblings and friends.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Quick solution.• Removes surplus places.• Allow parents to choose the most appropriate alternative school place for their children.• Increases the viability of all local schools.• Allows parents opting for Hatherton to secure a place for their child alongside siblings and friends.• One community school for the whole of the Beechdale community.• Would attract additional funding from the Government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Large number of children to disperse.• Removes Beechdale Primary as an alternative for parents.

Hatherton Primary School have voluntarily come forward to offer their support to look at the best solution for the children of Beechdale. They envisage that as a next phase of their development, and to support raising attainment particularly at Key Stage 2, that they will be seeking to enter into a federation arrangement with the local secondary school on the same educational site. The local secondary school has expressed its support, in principle, for moving forward with this proposal. This would allow specialist curriculum support and opportunities to be made available to the children and teachers, particularly at Key Stage 2.

Option 2

Close Beechdale School from 31 August 2006 and Fresh Start a one-form entry (30 places) primary school (ages 3-11) on the Beechdale School site as from 1 September 2006.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Achieves a quick solution.• Removes surplus places.• Retains primary school provision on the Beechdale Site.• Retains provision enabling the community currently served by Beechdale School to remain together.• Would attract additional funding from the Government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does not address the long term viability issues of Beechdale School as the pupil numbers have fallen over recent years.• No guarantee that simply replacing the staff will produce any improvement.• Potential difficulty in recruiting quality staff.• National evaluation – mixed outcomes.

Option 3

Close Beechdale School from 31 August 2006 and establish a one-form of entry 3-7 Infant School on the Beechdale site from 1 September 2006; establish a collaborative restart for Key Stage 2 provision by extending the age range of Frank F Harrison from 11-19 to 7-19 from 1 September 2006 with those aged 7-11 taught in a new annex on the Frank F Harrison Site with a one-form of entry Key Stage 2.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Would provide Key Stage 2 support for raising standards – specialist curriculum opportunities for children and teachers.• Continues to retain infant provision on the Beechdale Site.• Improved pupil transition between Key Stages 2 and 3.• Would attract additional funding from the Government.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does not address the long-term viability issues of Beechdale School as pupil numbers have fallen over recent years – for either infants or juniors.• Creates a very small infant school and small junior school provision.• Parents with more than one child might have to take them to more than one site.• Other existing Key Stage 2 provision is available more locally and take-up may, therefore, be low.• Additional point of transition between Key Stages 1 and 2.