

Cabinet - 12 April 2006

Beechdale Primary School: outcome of consultation

Portfolio	Councillor Eddie Hughes, Children's Services
Service Area	Education Walsall
Wards	Birchills Leamore
Forward Plan	Yes

Summary of report

This report provides details of the outcome of consultation on the future of Beechdale Primary School.

Recommendations

Cabinet approve the publication of a statutory proposal to manage the closure of Beechdale Primary School and agree the most appropriate alternative placement for each pupil in other schools in the Borough through negotiation with each parent with effect from 31 August 2006 (Option 1 of the consultation document).

Resource and legal considerations

Beechdale Primary School was first placed in special measures in February 2000. By March 2004, sufficient improvement had been made for the school to be removed from special measures; however, Ofsted considered that the school still had serious weaknesses. Over the last three years, the school has received a lot of additional support. However, when the school was reinspected in November 2005, just over a year after being moved to serious weaknesses, it was once again deemed to be failing.

A report on the future of Beechdale Primary School was considered by Cabinet on 1 March 2006 when consultation on three options was agreed. Cabinet is now asked to consider the outcome of the consultation and decide what action it wishes to take.

The Secretary of State 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 proposed closure of Beechdale Primary School would be subject to the approval of a statutory proposal. After the Easter holiday, following this Cabinet decision, the statutory proposal would be published and a four-week representation period would then follow. If no objections are received during this period, the final decision regarding the future of the school would be taken by Cabinet. If any objections are received, the final decision would be taken by the School Organisation Committee. It is anticipated that the final decision would be made in June 2006.

Closure of the school may result in some redundancies although every effort would be made to help staff to find alternative suitable jobs at other schools. Some additional staff may be required at other local schools in order to teach pupils transferring from Beechdale.

Citizen impact

Beechdale Primary 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 and children in Walsall have a right to expect. It is expected that the option recommended for implementation would enable all pupils to access high standards of learning and teaching.

Community safety

If the final decision is to close Beechdale Primary School, pupils would be offered a place at other local schools.

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 will probably lead to direct intervention and an order of closure from the Secretary of State for Education. This is particularly high risk in the light of the length of time the school has been in special measures/serious weaknesses.

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

A number of parents have removed their children from the school and numbers will fall further very rapidly if prompt action is not taken.

Equality implications

The provision of alternative places for Beechdale pupils at other schools would enable pupils to receive their entitlement to education in schools which are viable educationally, socially and financially. Sufficient places are available at other local schools to accommodate all children displaced.

Consultation

On 1 March 2006, Cabinet approved the consultation on the future of Beechdale Primary School. The consultation period commenced on 2 March 2005 and ended on 30 March 2006. A consultation document was circulated to parents, staff and governors at Beechdale Primary School, Hatherton Primary School and Frank F Harrison Community School and was also made available to the local community. Consultation meetings were held at Beechdale on 13 March, at Hatherton on 14 March and at Frank F Harrison on 15 March 2006. Attendance at these meetings is detailed in the table below.

Table 1 Attendance at Consultation Meetings

School	Parents	Staff	Governors
Beechdale Primary	42	22	5
Hatherton Primary	19	25	9
Frank F Harrison Community	2	58	6

Earlier meetings had been held with the Governing Bodies and the headteachers about the seriousness of the situation and possible ways forward. An additional meeting was also held with the parents of pupils at Beechdale prior to this consultation and two previous meetings have been held with staff.

The consultation was on the basis of the three options approved by Cabinet at the meeting on 1 March 2006. Each of the options proposed the closure of Beechdale Primary School from 31 August 2006. Details of the options and the differing proposed arrangements for the future education of pupils are provided in the information that follows.

In addition, in relation to applications for places for September 2006, the number of parents who have expressed a first preference are now confirmed:

- Hatherton (Admission number 60): First preferences 49
- Beechdale: (Admission number 45): First preference 15

This demonstrates the additional implications of the failure of the school as 15 pupils does not make the new entry viable.

The National Viewpoint

In January 2006 Ofsted stated that it is totally unacceptable for a school to go on providing a poor education beyond two years, or to improve only to fail again. Only 5 per cent of schools that recover from special measures are assessed by Ofsted as unsatisfactory or worse two years later. Beechdale now falls within this situation.

The 2005 White Paper proposes new arrangements in which schools requiring Special Measures will be given 12 months to demonstrate real progress or be considered for closure and replacement. Of the schools that do not close soon after going in to Special Measures, currently less than 10% make a full recovery within 12 months, although around two-thirds of the schools make at least reasonable progress over the first 12 months.

The Schools White Paper, of course, proposes a requirement for local authorities to consider all options for a school when it goes into special measures, including closure, particularly so if improvement has not been demonstrated after one year. Beechdale has been in this unsatisfactory situation for the last five years therefore, requiring a swift resolution.

The DfES have also informed us this week that there will be new guidance on Federations and Trusts available very soon. Schools entering such arrangements will be able to bid to set up joint facilities which would also benefit the community.

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 – moral responsibility. • There are sufficient places at Hatherton to accommodate pupils wishing to transfer and transitional arrangements to allow this to happen would be agreed. This also allows parents opting for Hatherton to secure a place for their child alongside siblings and friends. • Other local schools have sufficient space should parents opt to send their children elsewhere. • There would be sufficient capacity at Hatherton to accommodate the number of first preferences for the current two schools. • Pupil numbers in the area are declining and a single two form entry school would provide sufficient school 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large number of children to disperse. • Removes Beechdale Primary as an alternative for parents and could create initial community resentment. • Further discussion with DfES would be needed to secure funding for the temporary expansion of Hatherton Primary School should this be needed.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One community school for the whole of the Beechdale community. • Provides an opportunity to consider a future federation of schools supporting children and young people of the Beechdale Community. • Would attract additional funding from the Government through either the Federation and/or Trust arrangement which could include an external ITT provider such as University of Central England or The University of Wolverhampton. 	
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Hatherton Primary School has voluntarily come forward to offer its support to look at the best solution for the children of Beechdale. The school envisages that as a next phase of its development, and to support raising attainment particularly at Key Stage 2, that it 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. Other opportunities to enter into a Trust arrangement could also be explored and would benefit the whole of the community as they would have to play a significant role in supporting the Trust in raising standards. The DfES has indicated that there would be new funding for such community projects and a bid would need to be submitted in either June 2006 or some time in the coming Autumn/Spring terms. Further guidance is expected very shortly.

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 from 1 September 2006.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating a one form entry school removes surplus places at Beechdale. • Retains primary school provision on the Beechdale Site 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. (see earlier note, only 15 applications for September 2006). • Although on the surface this seems a quick fix, recruiting and retaining good staff will remain a major challenge. • No guarantee that simply replacing the staff will produce any improvement. • National evaluation of Fresh Start has received mixed outcomes. • Ofsted expect a twelve to eighteen months recovery period. • Significant difficulty in recruiting a further Headteacher experienced in

	<p>taking a school out of special measures for September 2006.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would mean that some Beechdale children will be further unsettled and their education may continue to be affected instead of entry into an existing experienced and well run school.
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- It is very unlikely that the Secretary of State will be satisfied with this option as most of the proposed changes have been tried over the past five years.

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.

Response summary

At the time of writing this report 156 consultation responses have been received; details of these are provided in the table below. A petition containing 297 signatures has also been received during the consultation period.

Whilst the majority of responses favour Option 2 a significant minority favour other Options – with Option 1 being the second preferred choice.

In the light of all available information, and the need to secure viable education provision for the Beechdale Community, Cabinet is recommended to approve the publication of a statutory proposal to close Beechdale Primary School from 31 August 2006 and implement Option 1.

Option 1 allows for the situation to be resolved quickly; leaves parents with choice; will enable the best potential for future investment from Central Government as it explores new Trust arrangements; and it is likely that a large primary school working with a secondary school would be more attractive to a Trust partner. It also enables existing pupils to access education in an existing well run school, rather than face at least a further year of uncertainty and new arrangements.

Alongside this reorganisation it would be beneficial that a Community Learning Plan is developed to support the implementation of the Children's Centre but also to ensure that the community is more fully engaged in playing its part in raising standards – an area for potential development identified by a number of parents who responded to the consultation.

During the intervening period, staff would work closely with parents to identify preferences for the future education of their children and, dependent upon the outcomes, this may result in a need for additional places at one or more local schools.

Table 2: Summary of consultation responses

School	Group	OPTION 1			OPTION 2			OPTION 3			TOTAL		
		Preference			Preference			Preference			Preference		
		First	Second	Third	First	Second	Third	First	Second	Third	First	Second	Third
Beechdale Primary	Parents	0	9	3	86	0	0	1	3	4	87	12	7
	Staff	0	1	5	44	0	0	0	5	1	44	6	6
	Governors	0	1	0	3	0	0	0	0	1	3	1	1
	Total	0	11	8	133	0	0	1	8	6	134	19	14
Hatherton Primary	Parents	5	1	6	6	4	1	1	6	4	12	11	11
	Staff	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	3	3	3	3
	Governors	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
	Total	8	2	6	7	7	1	1	6	8	16	15	15
Frank F Harrison	Parents	2	1	2	3	3	0	1	1	3	6	5	5
	Staff	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Governors	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Total	2	1	2	3	3	0	1	1	3	6	5	5
Grand Total		10	14	16	143	10	1	3	15	17	156	39	34

Note:

- 156 responses were received but not all stated 2nd or 3rd preferences
- Note: some respondents were in more than one category e.g. staff governor, parent of a child at more than one school

Vision 2008

The proposed reorganisation of primary school places in the area would contribute to the delivery of Walsall's vision for 2008 – Section 4 Make Our Schools Great by the provision of a viable and sustainable education service provision for the local community.

Background papers

Cabinet report, 1 March 2006: Beechdale Primary School
Consultation document
Consultation responses

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Signed:



Executive Director: David Brown

Date: 3 April 2006

Signed:



Managing Director, Education Walsall

Date: 3 April 2006

Signed:



Portfolio Holder: Councillor E. F. Hughes

Date: 3 April 2006