

## **Cabinet - 1 March 2006**

### **Outcome of consultation on proposed changes to Mary Elliot, Oakwood and Old Hall Special Schools**

**Portfolio:** Councillor Eddie, Hughes, Children's Services

**Service Area:** Education Walsall

**Wards:** All

**Forward Plan:** No

#### **Summary of report:**

This report provides details of the outcome of consultation on proposed changes to Mary Elliot, Oakwood and Old Hall Special Schools.

#### **Recommendations**

Cabinet is recommended to:

- (1) note the consultation responses received;
- (2) approve the publication of a statutory proposal to change the age range to 11-19 and increase the number of places to 110 at Mary Elliot Special School from 1 September 2008 with a replacement school building to be co-located on the Frank F Harrison Community School site;
- (3) approve the publication of a statutory proposal to change the age range to 3-11 at Oakwood Special School from 1 September 2008;
- (4) approve the publication of a statutory proposal to change the age range to 3-11 and change the number of places to 60 at Old Hall Special School from 1 September 2008.

#### **Resource and legal considerations**

At the meeting on 21 December 2005, Cabinet approved consultation on proposals to reorganise special school provision for children and young people with severe learning needs. This was in line with the outcomes of the review of specialist SEN provision previously agreed by Cabinet on 22 December 2004.

The proposed changes are subject to the approval of statutory proposals to change the age range at Mary Elliot, Oakwood and Old Hall Special Schools, to change the number of places at Mary Elliot and Old Hall Special Schools, and to relocate Mary Elliot Special School to the Frank F Harrison site on Leamore Lane, Walsall.

As the proposed changes at the three schools are inter-dependent, the statutory proposals would be linked and therefore all would have to be determined by Cabinet or by the School Organisation Committee at the same time.

The DfES has made a targeted capital allocation to support the provision of a replacement building for Mary Elliot School. This funding is dependent upon the approval of the associated statutory proposals. At this stage it is not envisaged that there will be any significant investment needs in order to implement the proposed changes at Oakwood and Old Hall Schools.

It is not envisaged that these proposals would impact on staffing levels across the three schools, although it is likely that there will be some changes at individual school level.

### **Citizen impact**

The proposed changes would enable a significantly improved learning environment to be provided for pupils at Mary Elliot Special School where the existing accommodation is unsuitable and in poor condition.

### **Community safety**

There are no direct implications as a result of this report.

### **Environmental impact**

A scheme to provide a new school would use sustainable resources wherever possible and the design would incorporate developments to reduce the impact on the environment.

### **Performance and risk management issues**

The condition and suitability of the accommodation at Mary Elliot Special School is such that the proposed investment would ensure continuity of education for vulnerable children and young people.

### **Equality implications**

The proposal provides an opportunity to create a school with a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment for the local community and would provide significantly improved accommodation for some of the most vulnerable pupils in the Borough.

## Consultation

A consultation document on the proposed changes at Mary Elliot, Oakwood and Old Hall Special Schools was issued by Education Walsall on 6 January 2006. The consultation period ended on 10 February 2006.

The consultation document and consultation response form were issued to all parents, staff and governors at Mary Elliot, Oakwood and Old Hall Special Schools and were circulated to all stakeholders and neighbouring authorities. The documents were also made available to the general public and were posted on the Education Walsall website.

Three consultation meetings were held at each of the schools for parents, staff and governors.

The consultation meetings provided an opportunity for parents, staff and governors to discuss the issues relating to the opportunity to reorganise special school provision for children and young people with severe learning needs. At each meeting, notes were taken of issues that were raised and the responses given to questions. Thirty written consultation responses have been received. An update will be provided to Cabinet at the meeting on 1 March 2006.

Details of attendance at the consultation meetings are provided in Table 1 below. The schools were asked to consider whether it would be helpful to hold further meetings.

Table 1 Attendance at Consultation Meetings

School	Parents	Staff	Governors
Mary Elliot	0	18	4
Oakwood	17	29	8
Old Hall	13	19	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>18</b>

Details of individual written consultation responses are provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Consultation Responses

School	Total	Parents	Staff	Governors	Local Resident	Other
Mary Elliot	3		2	1		
Oakwood	20	9	9	4	1	
Old Hall	7	1	5	1		
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	

Note: some respondents are included in two categories eg parents and staff who are also governors.

Parents were informed individually of the proposed changes and the relatively low attendance at meetings is considered to indicate that parents are generally in favour of this proposal.

The consultation meetings included a presentation followed by questions and answers. Details of the issues raised at the consultation meetings are provided below.

There was significant support for the proposed changes which had been the basis of extensive consultation in autumn 2004 as part of the review of specialist SEN provision in the Borough.

The greater inclusion opportunities which would be afforded by co-location on a secondary school site were welcomed and the advantages of separating the primary and secondary phases were generally supported.

The need for a new school building for Mary Elliot Special School was widely accepted especially by those familiar with the existing accommodation at the school. Details of the range of facilities to be provided in the new building were outlined. There was discussion regarding the proposed new site and details of the process which led to the identification of the proposed site for the new Mary Elliot School building and details were outlined.

At Mary Elliot School, it was recognised that the arrangements for some curriculum activities would need to be changed if the school moved to the proposed site.

Some concern was expressed about the necessity for changes in staffing across the three schools. Although it is not envisaged that these proposals will impact on staffing levels across the three schools, it is recognised that there are likely to be some changes at individual school level.

## **Vision 2008**

The proposed consultation would contribute to the delivery of Walsall's vision for 2008 – Section 4 Make Our Schools Great by improving the learning environments for Walsall pupils and thereby contributing to the raising of standards.

## **Background papers**

Cabinet Report, 13 April 2005: Targeted Capital Fund 2006-2008

Cabinet Report, 21 December 2005: Mary Elliot Special School

## **Contact officer**

Susan Lupton

Strategic Leader: School Organisation, Admissions, Capital & Asset Management

Tel 01922 686231

[susan.lupton@we.serco.com](mailto:susan.lupton@we.serco.com)

**Signed:**



**Executive Director: David Brown**

**Date: 20 February 2006**

**Signed:**



**Managing Director, Education Walsall**

**Date: 20 February 2006**

**Signed:**



**Portfolio Holder: Councillor E.F. Hughes**

**Date: 20 February 2006**