

Cabinet - 13 March 2013

Enlargement of Phoenix Special School

Portfolio: Councillor Rachel Andrew, Children's services

Service: Children's Services

Wards: All Walsall Wards

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1. Summary of report

This report describes proposals to enlarge Phoenix Primary Special School, in Leamore, designated provision for children with special educational needs in relation to emotional, social and behavioural difficulties (ESBD) in the primary phase.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet approves consultation on the proposal to provide an additional 6 planned places at Phoenix Primary ESBD Special School from September 2013. This proposal would increase the planned places at Phoenix Primary Special School from 30 to 36 places.

3. Report detail

- 3.1 Following the last major review of special school provision in 2004, a series of structural changes were introduced to the pattern of special school provision together with an extension of the continuum of special educational needs by the introduction of Additionally Resourced Provision (ARP). Phoenix Primary ESBD special school was opened following this review in January 2008, providing 30 planned places, 6 of which were designated as assessment places. ARPs were designed to deliver specialist but inclusive special educational support in mainstream schools across a range of identified need including communication, physical disability, specialised learning needs (specific learning difficulty) and sensory needs.

- 3.2 As part of this pattern of provision the Little Acorns Nurture Group was established at King Charles Primary School to support KS1 pupils who were identified as requiring a nurturing approach to meet emotional developmental needs that inhibited their social behaviour and subsequently their effective access to the mainstream classroom. The nurturing approach was based on a set of nationally recognised principles and was adapted to suit needs and resources in the Walsall context. Children attending the Little Acorns group remain on the roll of their home school, normally spending the morning session at their home schools and the afternoon session at the nurture group. Typically a child would attend the group for up to four terms. .
- 3.3 King Charles Primary school became part of the Central Bentley Federation in September 2007, a structural change in governance and leadership with a single governing body and Executive Headteacher responsible for both schools. In March 2012, the governors of the Bentley West Federation served a termination notice to Children's Services Serco giving 12 months notice of closure of the Little Acorns Nurture Group. The provision will close on March 31st 2013.
- 3.4 The closure of Little Acorns has created an opportunity to review the pattern of provision for primary aged pupils with emotional, social and behavioural needs. Such a review has been undertaken in consultation with primary headteachers during the period April to October 2012.
- 3.5 National policy, reflected in the Education Act 2011 and related changes to school funding emphasises increased autonomy at school level, encouraging groups of schools to work together with leadership from within the profession. The local authority role in this context is that of championing choice. Consistent with this approach, Walsall Council is working with headteachers to determine a new relationship with schools following a direction of travel that places less reliance on centrally retained services and increased emphasis on schools working together in groups or clusters with commissioned services from a range of potential providers. Significant changes to the landscape for special educational needs are signalled in the Green Paper ('Support & Aspiration', 2010) and the Local Offer, in relation the funding framework for schools management of special educational needs, together with the Pupil Premium are impacting on the pattern of resourcing for schools.
- 3.6 The review of the pattern of provision for primary aged pupils with emotional, social and behavioural needs was carried out by a group constituted as a Theme Group of the Primary, Nursery and Special Schools Forum (PNS Forum) which comprised primary and special headteachers together with senior officers from Serco and Council Education Transition Advisors. Regular feed back was provided to the PNS Forum during the review period and a set of agreed final recommendations was put before Forum in October 2012.
- 3.7 The proposed recommendation of this review, supported by headteachers through PNS Forum, is that of commissioning an additional 6 planned places at the Phoenix Primary ESD Special in order to extend the provision available to meet the additional needs of children exhibiting emotional, social and behavioural developmental difficulties. These will be primary places (KS1 & KS2) and subject to a statutory assessment of special educational needs and Statement (under current regulations) prior to placement. Currently, Phoenix School planned

places and assessment places are full. The additional places will provide needed flexibilities in provision.

- 3.8 In relation to the changing educational landscape discussed above, there was no support from PNS Forum to continue the current nurture group arrangements. The changing schools funding streams, the opportunities the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Local Offer presented for development of nurturing within 'localities' and the logistical challenges of a single nurture group making provision across the Borough provision led the proposed recommendations.
- 3.9 Primary headteachers supported a vision for the development of nurturing within localities as part of the proposed Local Offer for children with special educational needs and disabilities, a proposal that has the potential to extend capacity for support across the Borough. A training programme will be offered to schools and clusters of schools to promote the initial development of locality based nurturing arrangements.
- 3.10 If Cabinet accepts the recommendation to consult on expanding the number of planned places at Phoenix Primary Special School then a statutory process for undertaking a consultation will be carried out. This will mean that all stakeholders including parents, other local schools and their Governing bodies which may be affected by the proposed expansion, will be consulted with over a minimum period of 6 weeks. The Statutory notice of the proposal following consultation will then be published and local authorities are then required to provide a 6 week period within which representation regarding the proposal can be received.
- 3.11 A further report to Cabinet will then be provided with a recommendation based on the outcome of the consultation.

4. Council Priorities

The provision of appropriate special school places ensures effective teaching and learning for our most vulnerable groups, helping them to fulfil their potential and to develop skills and attitudes that support effective transition through education into future appropriate education, employment and training opportunities.

5. Risk Management

The provision of additional places for primary age children with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties will support mainstream schools where identified needs cannot be met, reducing the risk of permanent exclusions and unsatisfactory 'managed moves' between primary schools seeking effective ways of managing challenging behaviour.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 The six additional places will be funded through the 'high needs block' allocated within the delegated schools budget. The costs have been factored in to current financial plans.

6.2 The costs of individual planned places at Phoenix special school are currently in the range £12,129 – £19,826 per place although note needs to be taken of the revised funding structures from April 2013

7. Legal Implications

Statutory requirement set out by the School Organisation Unit at the DfE confirm that a formal consultation process as set out in The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2007 is required where proposals to increase of 10%+ to the number of places are to be considered.

8. Property Implications

Minor alterations will be required to ensure sufficient and appropriate classroom space. Various options are under consideration for internal alterations to the former looked after children office accommodation on the school site. It is proposed to bring forward any cost implications to a future Cabinet meeting at the point of final decision to proceed with this proposed expansion. It is expected that any costs that will be incurred would be jointly funded between the Authority and the school.

9. Staffing Implications

Additional teaching and support staff will be recruited to provide for the additional children at school. Additional staffing will be based on the agreed pupil/teacher ratio for Phoenix ESB special school as part of the special school funding matrix.

10. Equality implications

It is of crucial importance to the achievement of the Council's strategic objectives that the young people of Walsall are able to access the right provision to meet their needs in order to achieve appropriate qualifications, progressing to employment and/or training and make a positive contribution within the borough in the future.

11. Consultation

The recommendations of this report have been presented to Schools Forum, as part of the consultation on provision, and have their support.

Background papers

Author

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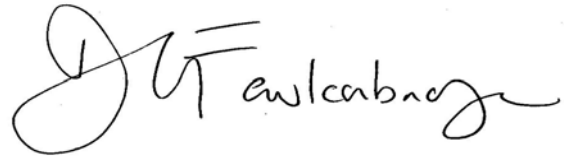
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Handwritten signature of Rose Collinson in black ink, with a small flourish at the end.

Signed:
Interim Executive Director:
Rose Collinson
Date: 4 March 2013

Handwritten signature of Denise Faulconbridge in black ink, featuring a large, stylized initial 'D'.

Signed:
Managing Director, Walsall Childrens
Services, Serco: Denise Faulconbridge
Date: 4 March 2013

Handwritten signature of Rachel Andrew in black ink, with a small flourish at the end.

Signed:
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Rachel Andrew
Date: 4 March 2013