

Cabinet – 17 January 2007

Outcome of consultation on the future of King Charles Primary School

Portfolio: Councillor Zahid Ali, Children's Services

Service: Education Walsall

Wards: Bentley & Darlaston North

Key decisions: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

Summary of report

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

Recommendations

- (1) That Cabinet note the consultation responses received.
- (2) That Cabinet give King Charles and Bentley West Primary Schools an opportunity to explore the federation option (option 3) further.
- (3) That Cabinet request a progress report at the April meeting to enable members to assess the progress being made and, should this not be satisfactory, to consider whether to progress with option 1 or option 2.

Resource and legal considerations

The recent Ofsted report (October 2006) highlights that the problems at King Charles Primary School are very serious, identifies the school as failing to provide a satisfactory education for its pupils, and places the school in special measures. In addition, the Ofsted report indicated that the school's capacity to address the issues was limited. For that reason, leaving the school as it is at present, ie 'doing nothing', is not an option.

In the light of this, on 29 November 2006, a report on the future of King Charles Primary School was considered by Cabinet when consultation on three options was agreed in order to find the best way to ensure that the pupils served by this school receive the education they deserve.

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 King Charles Primary School.

Citizen impact

King Charles Primary School has been judged as 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 King Charles 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 King Charles Primary School may 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.

Equality implications

The proposed arrangements would enable pupils to receive their entitlement to a high standard of education.

Consultation

On 29 November 2006, Cabinet approved the consultation on the future of King Charles Primary School. The consultation period commenced on 30 November 2006 and ended on 31 December 2006. A consultation document was circulated to parents, staff and governors at King Charles Primary School and was circulated to all stakeholders and neighbouring authorities. It was also made available to the general public and was posted on the Education Walsall website.

Consultation meetings were held at King Charles Primary School on 4 December 2006 with parents, staff and governors. Attendance at these meetings is detailed in the table below.

Table 1 Attendance at Consultation Meetings

School	Parents	Staff	Governors
King Charles Primary School	48	23*	9*

* Including Headteacher

Earlier meetings had been held with the Chair of Governors and the headteacher regarding the seriousness of the situation and possible ways forward.

The consultation was on the basis of the three options approved by Cabinet at the meeting on 29 November 2006. Two of the options proposed the closure of King Charles Primary School from 31 August 2007, one of these proposed the opening of a fresh start school; the third option was for a hard federation with another school. Details of the options and the differing proposed arrangements for the future education of pupils are provided in the information that follows.

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. There is a national expectation that satisfactory progress in addressing the issues will be made within the first year of special measures.

There is a requirement for local authorities to consider all options for a school when it goes into special measures; these include closure, fresh start and federation.

The following options were agreed by Cabinet as the basis for consultation:

Option 1

Manage the closure of King Charles Primary School from 31 August 2007 and agree the most appropriate alternative placement for each pupil in other schools in the Borough through negotiation with each parent.

Lodge Farm JMI School is the nearest school with the potential to admit a large number of the King Charles pupils. Although the school was originally two forms of entry, admissions in recent years have been limited to 45 places in each year group. If a substantial number of parents express a preference for Lodge Farm JMI School, we would revert to the original admission number of 60 in order to ensure that children can take the option of moving to this school alongside siblings and friends. Places would also be available at other nearby schools including County Bridge Primary School and Bentley West Primary School.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick solution. • Removes surplus places at King Charles and other local schools. • Allow parents to choose the most appropriate alternative school place for their children. • Increases the viability of all local schools. • Allows parents opting for Lodge Farm to secure a place for their child alongside siblings and friends. • Eliminate mixed age teaching at schools in the area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approx 120 children to disperse to other schools. • Removes King Charles Primary as an alternative for parents. • Nurture Group (designated SEN provision) would need to be established at another school.

Local schools have come forward to offer their support to look at the best solution for the children of the locality.

Option 2

Close King Charles Primary School from 31 August 2007 and Fresh Start a one-form entry (30 places) primary school (ages 3-11) on the site of the existing School from 1 September 2007.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achieves a quick solution. • Retains primary school provision on the King Charles Site. • Retains provision enabling the community currently served by King Charles Primary School to remain together. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not address the long term viability issues of King Charles Primary 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. • Does not remove any surplus places. • National evaluation – mixed outcomes.

In view of the relatively low number of pupils at King Charles Primary school, it is unlikely that this option would be viable.

Option 3

Invite other schools to consider entering into a hard federation with King Charles Primary School

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Achieves a quick solution.• Retains primary school provision on the King Charles Site.• Retains provision enabling the community currently served by King Charles Primary School to remain together.• Improved leadership and management• Less disruption for pupils• Allows further time to fully consider the issue of surplus places in the area.• Creates the first primary hard federation of schools in Walsall.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Does not address the long term viability issues of King Charles Primary School. Currently there are 141 pupils on roll.• Existing staff retained; no guarantee that this will produce sufficient improvement.• Potential difficulty in recruiting quality staff.• Does not remove any surplus places.• National evaluation – mixed outcomes.

The creation of a hard federation between King Charles Primary School and another school would depend upon the governing bodies of the school reaching agreement on the terms. Consultation would then be undertaken by the schools and the decision on whether to proceed would be made by the individual governing bodies. A local primary school has expressed an interest in exploring the possibility of federation with King Charles.

This option would not address the viability of King Charles Primary School immediately and would not necessarily dissuade some parents from seeking places for their children at alternative schools. It does, however, deal with the immediate standards issue, whilst giving a longer timescale for a more detailed consideration of surplus places in the area.

Response Summary

During the consultation period, 38 consultation responses were received and details of these are provided in the table below. A petition containing 425 signatures has also been received during the consultation period.

The majority of responses favour Option 3, federation with another school.

Table 2: Summary of consultation responses

		OPTION 1			OPTION 2			OPTION 3			Total number of responses
		Preference			Preference			Preference			
Group		First	Second	Third	First	Second	Third	First	Second	Third	
King Charles Primary	Parents	1	1	16	1	15	1	21	1	0	23
	Staff	1	0	8	0	8	1	11	1	0	12
	Governors	0	0	2	0	2	0	2	0	0	2
	Total	2	1	26	1	25	2	34	2	0	37
Others		0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
Grand Total		2	1	27	1	26	2	35	2	0	38

Note: 34 responses were received but not all stated 2nd or 3rd preferences; one respondent was in more than one category; The Chair of Governors from King Charles Primary School responded on behalf of the whole Governing Body and this is included in the table.

The main issues raised during the consultation period were concern about disruption to children's education and that their progress would be hindered by a change to another school, and also the potential loss to the community of their local primary school. It was suggested that the regeneration of Bentley would lead to an increase in demand for places at the school. However, there is some uncertainty about the timescale for this and pupil yield from housing developments is unlikely to significantly increase pupil numbers in the short term.

All Walsall schools were invited to consider entering into a hard federation with King Charles Primary School and a positive response was received from Bentley West Primary School.

Meetings have been held with the governors at King Charles Primary School and Bentley West Primary School to outline the implications of entering into a hard federation and the process which would need to be followed. Both governing bodies have indicated that they wish to take this further and their commitment is demonstrated by a decision to enter into a partnership early in 2007. In addition, two governors from Bentley West have been appointed to the governing body at King Charles so as to provide support and assistance in advance of a federation.

The timescale for establishing a hard federation is generally in the order of six months or more and requires further consultation by the governing bodies of the schools concerned prior to the final decision by each governing body. It is for the Governing Bodies to make such a decision and should they wish to progress to a hard federation, no further action will be required of Cabinet. However, should this not come to fruition, Cabinet would need to decide what action it wishes to take as a continuation of the current situation would not secure the necessary improvement in standards of education for the children at King Charles Primary School.

Given the schools' commitment to the federation option, Education Walsall is supporting both governing bodies with this process. This option has very significant support in the school community at King Charles.

In the light of all available information, the need to secure improved education provision for the children attending King Charles Primary School and the strong support from the governing bodies of King Charles and Bentley West Primary Schools for federation, Cabinet is recommended to give the schools an opportunity to explore this further. However, as outlined in option 3, there are some issues that federation would not address, for example, the long term viability of King Charles Primary School (whether in a federation or not) is uncertain; the school has places for 210 pupils but currently there are only 141 pupils on roll (excluding nursery pupils); this equates to a surplus places level of 33%.

A progress report will be brought to the April meeting of Cabinet to enable members to assess the progress being made towards federation and, should this not be satisfactory, to consider whether to progress with option 1 or option 2, as consultation has already taken place.

Details of the timescale for consideration of school organisation matters in relation to King Charles Primary School are provided in Table 3 below.

Table 3

Date	Action
29 November 2006	Cabinet decision on consultation
30 November 2006	Letter and consultation document issued to parents, staff and governors Consultation period from 30 November - 31 December 2006
4 December 2006	Separate consultation meetings with parents, staff and governors
17 January 2007	Report on outcome of consultation considered by Cabinet
18 April 2007	Interim update on Federation and further decision on the future of the school by Cabinet, if required.

Vision 2008

The proposed course of action would contribute to the delivery of Walsall's vision for 2008 – Section 4 Make Our Schools Great by providing access to improved education for the pupils at King Charles Primary School.

Background papers

DfES "Schools Causing Concern" September 2005.

Ofsted Report for King Charles Primary School, October 2006.

Cabinet report: King Charles Primary School, 29 November 2006.

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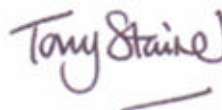
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Signed:

Executive Director: David Brown

Date: 8 January 2007



Signed:

Deputy Managing Director, Education
Walsall

Date: 8 January 2007



Signed:

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Zahid Ali

Date: 8 January 2007