

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**CHILDREN'S SERVICES
CABINET MEMBER**

**AMALGAMATION CONSULTATION
BERKELEY INFANT SCHOOL AND BERKELEY JUNIOR SCHOOL**

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To seek the Cabinet Member's approval to undertake a formal consultation regarding a proposal to amalgamate Berkeley Infant School and Berkeley Junior School.
- 1.2 The key points of this report are:
 - 1.2.1 There is a formal process which the local authority (LA) must follow in order to consider a school amalgamation. A formal consultation is the first stage of this process.
 - 1.2.2 The federated governing body of Berkeley Infant School and Berkeley Junior School have resolved that a consultation should be undertaken to formally consider amalgamation.
 - 1.2.3 The outcome and feedback from the consultation will be used to inform a formal decision by the Cabinet Member whether to proceed to the next stage of amalgamation.
- 1.3 An urgent decision is required in order that the consultation can be undertaken in the required timescales to inform the governors' decision about head teacher recruitment.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The governors from Berkeley Infant School and Berkeley Junior School formed a hard federation on 1 January 2015. The new arrangement created a single governing body that now oversees the strategic governance of both schools. The infant school and junior school both currently have separate head teachers.
- 2.2 The federation structure has created a more effective arrangement to allow school leaders to work in partnership. There is now increased scope to build capacity within the schools to achieve more than either school could as a single establishment.

- 2.3 The current federation arrangements are working well. However, in light of the recent retirement of both head teachers, governors have reviewed the current federation structure to consider whether an alternative option maybe more suitable. In conclusion governors have decided, in partnership with the LA that now is the right time to look at becoming a through primary school.
- 2.4 Over the last five years a number of infant and junior schools have been amalgamated. Most recently these have include Broughton Infant School and Broughton Junior School; Grange Lane Infant School and Grange Lane Junior School and; Priory Lane Infant School and Priory Lane Junior School.

Amalgamation Process

- 2.5 In order to create a primary school, the infant and junior school would be amalgamated. The amalgamation consultation proposes that the existing governing body and a single head teacher would collectively oversee the running of the 'new' primary school and the nursery. Children would start in the reception year and continue through to year 6 without having to apply to move up to the junior school. This would bring both establishments together to become a single school community.
- 2.6 As both establishments are community schools, the LA is the 'proposer'. The proposer must follow relevant statutory regulations in order to consider a school amalgamation. In the first instance, these regulations require the proposer to undertake a public consultation, so stakeholders' views may be considered before a final decision is made.

The consultation methods include:

- The publication of a formal proposal incorporating a questionnaire to facilitate feedback
- An online-questionnaire for comments and feedback
- 'Drop-in' sessions so stakeholders can have informal discussions
- Separate staff consultation

- 2.7 There are three ways that infant and junior schools can be amalgamated. It should be noted that, in order to amalgamate two schools, at least one of the schools must 'technically close'. The three methods are described below:
- a) To expand the age range of the infant school to encompass key-stage 2 pupils and 'close' the junior school.
 - b) To expand the age range of the junior school to encompass key-stage 1 pupils and 'close' the infant school.
 - c) To 'close' both the infant school and the junior school and simultaneously open a 'new' primary school for key-stage 1 and key-stage 2 pupils.
- 2.8 It is important to emphasise that, in relation to all of the above options, the concept of 'school closure' is purely an administrative process. The land and buildings at both the schools would continue to be used as normal – no building or school would be physically closed.
- 2.9 With reference to paragraph 2.6, the decision maker for options 'a' and 'b' is the

local authority and option 'c' is the school adjudicator. With all options, the local authority may withdraw the proposal after the consultation is concluded. If option 'c' is considered, it should be noted that there is no prescribed time scale for how long it will take the school adjudicator to make a decision.

- 2.10 Following the consultation, governors will consider the feedback and then make a recommendation whether to proceed with the proposal. The consultation findings and governors recommendation are presented to the local authority for formal decision.
- 2.11 Once a decision to proceed with the amalgamation is taken, a public notice must then be published. The purpose of the public notice is to confirm the final arrangements of the amalgamation proposal. Stakeholders then have a further four weeks to consider the matter. After the public notice period has concluded the decision maker (as outlined in paragraph 2.9) will be asked to finally approve or reject the proposal.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 There are two options for consideration:

- 3.1.1 **Option 1** To confirm that a consultation may be undertaken to seek stakeholders' views regarding the amalgamation of Berkeley Infant School and Berkeley Junior School.

That the proposed method for amalgamating the schools is to expand the age range of the Berkeley Junior School to include Foundation and Key Stage 1 and 'technically close' Berkeley Infant School.

- 3.1.2 **Option 2** Not to proceed with the proposed consultation.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 **Option 1: To proceed with the consultation.**

4.1.1 This option allows the LA to proceed with the consultation, ensuring that stakeholders' views are considered.

4.1.2 When governors decided to federate, they recognised it would help bring the schools closer together and help their partnership to become stronger. So, by becoming a single primary school this will allow the 'partnership journey' to continue to the next level, allowing governors to build on their solid foundations. It is envisage that a primary school will provide further scope to achieve the following, more quickly:

- Creation of a seamless transition from key-stage 1 (infants) to key-stage 2 (juniors).
- Increased scope for children to benefit from the potential of a wider range of resources and improved staff development.

- Greater opportunity for relationships between pupils, parents and the school to build over a longer period of time, allowing the school to understand better the needs of each pupil.
- Greater scope to create a single and continuous approach to the curriculum, such as single policies for handwriting, reading, maths and behaviour.
- Greater capacity to track pupil progress between key stages.
- More development opportunities for the staff, with shared training and the chance to work more closely across the curriculum and gain experience and understanding of all key stages .
- Greater opportunities for curriculum development.
- Greater cost effectiveness for the schools by creating economies of scale.

4.1.3 This option supports the LA's policy regarding school amalgamation as outlined in the document "A Framework for Developing a Sustainable Primary School Estate".

4.1.4 The proposal to expand the junior school and technically close the infant school retains the final decision with the local authority, which provides a level of control over decision timescales. If the proposal was to close both schools and open a new school, the decision would be taken by the schools adjudicator which may delay the final decision.

4.2 Option 2: Not to support the consultation

4.2.1 If the consultation was not undertaken, it would not be possible to amalgamate the schools. Therefore, many of the benefits associated with through-primary education will not be realised.

4.3.1 The views of parents, community members and staff members would not be known.

4.3.3 This option does not support the LA's policy regarding school amalgamation.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1 **Finance** - The cost of the consultation will be met from existing budgets.

5.2 **Staffing** - Any staffing issues will be identified through the consultation process. A separate consultation session will be arranged between LA officers, unions, governors and staff.

5.3 **Property** - Both schools would continue to utilise their existing buildings and land.

6. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT

6.1 The process for undertaking school mergers is governed by statutory processes and regulations. The procedures are established by Statutory Instrument "The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013", which came into force on 28 January 2014. The

regulations provides information on the processes involved in making significant changes to maintained schools

- 6.2 An integrated impact assessment is not necessary at this stage. If the amalgamation proceeds to the final stage, an integrated impact assessment will then be undertaken, having taken into account feedback from stakeholders.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

- 7.1 The LA has met with governors on a number of occasions to discuss various structural solutions, including amalgamation. Governors formally agreed that they wish to undertake a consultation process to seek stakeholders' views about amalgamation. Governors have been fully involved in the process and have been instrumental in determining the consultation proposal.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 That the Cabinet Member approves option 1: To confirm that a consultation may be undertaken to seek stakeholders' views regarding the amalgamation of Berkeley Infant School and Berkeley Junior School. To confirm that the proposed method for amalgamating the schools is to expand the age range of the Berkeley Junior School and 'technically close' Berkeley Infant School.

DIRECTOR OF PEOPLE

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

- 1) DfE: School Organisation Maintained Schools – Guidance for Decision-Makers. (January 2014)
- 2) DfE: School Organisation Maintained Schools – Annex A: Further Information for Proposers. (January 2014)
- 3) DfE: School Organisation Maintained Schools: Annex B: Guidance for Decision-Makers. (January 2014)
- 5) Statutory Instrument "The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations (2013).
- 6) Local Authority policy document: "Framework for Developing a Sustainable Primary School Estate."