

Future Organisation of Longfield First School and Longfield Middle School

Proposal Evaluation

The representative Steering Group established by the two governing bodies has developed this Proposal Evaluation document to provide sufficient information for stakeholders to understand the proposals and to be able to give an informed opinion.

The Proposal Evaluation covers a range of issues related to the proposed joining together of the two Longfield schools. This Proposal Evaluation is based on the investigations and research undertaken by other schools that have conducted consultations and has been adjusted to reflect the circumstances of Longfield First School and Longfield Middle School. Research is incorporated within a number of the sections of the Proposal Evaluation.

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1 Harrow Council's Amalgamation Policy

When specified circumstances apply, Governing Bodies of all separate First and Middle Schools are required to amalgamate the two schools unless there are compelling and overriding reasons not to. Harrow presents the key educational factors in its case for the joining together of two schools as follows:

- Organisational structure is aligned with the National Curriculum Key Stages. Planning across Foundation, Key Stages 1 and 2 as a coherent whole for the primary phase provides greater flexibility across and between Key Stages.
- Reducing the number of changes for children in a school system strengthens continuity and progression for children and families in the primary phase, both in terms of the curriculum and pastoral experience. This reduction in the number of school moves is important, particularly for children with special educational needs.
- Greater opportunities are created for older children to take on responsibility. For younger children the presence of older children provides aspirational role models and also mentoring support.
- Teachers and classroom staff have access to the whole primary curriculum. This supports and informs whole school planning, assessment, pastoral systems etc and provides opportunities for wider staff development and experience across the full primary phase.
- Growing National evidence shows that all-through primary schools create more consistency between year groups and key stages in learning planning and assessment.
- *"Where primary education is provided in separate key stages, there is generally very little effective curriculum continuity and progression. In such situations the scope for discontinuity of learning is increased".*

(Educational Management Information Exchange).

It is also possible that improvements in the children's educational experience may result, as there will no longer be a transfer between schools at age seven and a wider range of teaching and support staff will be available within the combined school.

2 The School Size and Ethos

A combined Longfield School in September 2010 would have up to 630 pupils, based on three forms (90 pupils) per year group Reception to Year 6, plus attached nursery class.

Research has been reviewed by other schools on school size and its impact on attainment and on the role of the Headteacher. The focus of evidence presented below is on large schools. However, this is not to say that smaller schools cannot be successful.

School size and attainment

There are studies that suggest children perform better in larger schools, however this does not allow for most special schools being small and the range of successful organisations of schools. Harrow for example, has one and two form combined schools, and two and three form entry separate schools; other boroughs have some 4 form entry combined schools.

There is also some evidence from the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) that would suggest improvement in performance in bigger schools (David Bell¹ of Ofsted reported that Schools with over 400 pupils are more often judged to be very good or excellent than other schools). What is reassuring, however, is that there is no evidence that children perform badly in large schools.

In initial consultations with parents carried out by other schools, parents raised concerns that the 'homely atmosphere' of the school may be lost. However, for most children, it may be considered that school does not extend beyond their classroom, or at most their year group. This would not change in a bigger school. The view of David Bell of Ofsted is that what children experience in the classroom has the most major impact on what they achieve and size alone is unlikely to damage this relationship.

Leadership

Parents at other schools have also expressed concern regarding the 'watering down' of the Headteacher's abilities. However, this need not be a problem if there are effective management structures in place. The "Leadership in Large Primary Schools"² study is one of the most relevant pieces of research on this issue. Of the 404 Headteachers asked, and 26 amalgamated schools visited, the findings were that the Headteacher's leadership can become more detached. However the majority of Headteachers did not agree that it was very hard to sustain a primary ethos or that there was a danger of the school becoming impersonal, nor did they believe that children can be overwhelmed by the size of the school.

¹ Former Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools

² 'Leadership in Large Primary Schools' by Geoff Southworth & Dick Weindling (2002). For the purposes of this study on leadership and management of large primary schools, 404 heads of primary schools with 400 or more children were surveyed. In support of the advantages of larger schools, their research states that: "*The advantages of large schools over smaller schools were seen as: much more staff expertise; more opportunities for peer support, and greater financial flexibility.*"

The Headteachers and deputies surveyed for the purposes of the study were of the view that the leadership advantages of a larger school over smaller schools outweighed the disadvantages. The conclusions of the study were that leadership in large schools involves a blend of shared leadership (where the head works with a small number of senior staff), that the Headteachers and deputies need to be highly skilled at developing leaders, and that good structure and effective communication were key to a successful school.

3 Premises, site and accommodation issues

Where schools are based on the same site, economies of scale may arise following amalgamation, as a result of being able to have a single reception area and a combined office. There may be other changes to the premises that would enhance the workings of the school as a combined school.

Harrow Council has commissioned architects to complete School Strategic Masterplans for all primary sector schools. The School Strategic Masterplans will provide a long-term strategy for the development of school sites that will be achieved as funding becomes available. This will be a rolling programme and it is expected that plans for all schools will be completed in approximately 18 months. If the decision is made to combine the two schools, Harrow Council would give priority to this masterplan work being completed as soon as possible so the premises planning for the combined school can be progressed within this strategic context.

Funding for any improvements would be through the school devolved formula capital funding over a few years and hopefully combined with other funding such as part of a Government investment initiative or possibly funding from Harrow Council.

4 Governance

A process would be put in place to ensure that the combined school has a governing body that reflects the size, age range and ethos of the combined school.

5 Finance Issues

Overall, joining together of two schools is generally viewed as budget neutral at least, and that there need be no net loss to schools. This position would be achieved by a combination of impacts. For example, a reduction in salary overheads by having one Headteacher set against the loss of one fixed sum element and one formula capital lump sum, although the fixed sum element would be protected for the first year of the combined schools.

6 Staffing Issues

Opportunities and potential benefits include:

- An all through primary school has benefits for teachers, providing them with access to the whole primary curriculum. This supports and informs their own planning, for the current stage that they are working in, and provides opportunities for wider experience across the full primary phase.
- An all through primary school can provide greater opportunities for subject leadership, management and career development for all staff. This is a positive aspect in respect of recruitment and retention.
- As part of the process to establish an all through primary school, a it is likely a new staffing structure would be established. This could provide the opportunity to remodel the school workforce in line with the Government's workforce reforms.

The combined school would have the same number of pupils overall, and there would be a similar staffing need. The staffing structure for a combined school would reflect the needs

of the size, ethos and age range of the school and it is likely there would be some changes for some staff over time. If Harrow Council Cabinet decides to amalgamate the two schools, thinking would begin about bringing the two staff groups together and about an appropriate staffing model for a combined all through primary school. A review of the staffing structure for the combined school would follow confirmation of the appointment of a Headteacher. Any new staffing structure would be subject to consultation with all staff and their professional associations/unions and appointments would be made over time to the new staffing structure.

No redundancies have arisen in the schools that have been joined together to date and there is no reason for the situation to be different in this instance. There are mandatory provisions within teachers' pay and conditions that provide safeguards for teachers where there are changes to Teaching and Learning Responsibilities (TLRs). In recent times, some teachers have had TLR positions reduced under the statutory regulations that include a mandatory sliding-down scale of salary protection.

The post of Head Teacher for the combined school would be ring fenced to the substantive Head Teacher. A process would be developed to satisfy the governing body that the post holder has suitable qualifications, experience and ability to undertake the role.

7 Harrow Local Authority policy regarding School Reorganisation

One of Harrow Council's corporate priorities is to extend community use of schools while making education in Harrow even better. School reorganisation and changing the ages of transfer to schools is central to achieving this vision.

Harrow Council has agreed school reorganisation proposals that will change the ages of transfer from September 2010. From September 2010, separate first schools will become infant schools (Reception to Year 2), and separate middle schools will become junior schools (Year 3 to Year 6).

This will have implications for separate Longfield schools from September 2010. Year 3 will move up to the junior school, with the infant school having only three year groups. It is expected that this will have an impact for the infant school budget as it is based on pupil numbers.

8 How amalgamation would be legally effected

Legislation provides a framework for consultation, publication and determination of statutory notices in respect of proposals for schools, including the establishment of combined first/infant and middle/junior schools. There is provision to join together separate first/infant and middle/junior schools and create a combined school through two legal routes. Both routes retain all existing pupils and staff.

The options are to close both schools and open a new school, or to close one school and extend the age range and expand the capacity of the other school. However, under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, local authorities are required to apply to the Secretary of State for consent to establish new schools without a competition. Therefore to avoid any risk to the continuation of these successful schools, which may arise through competition processes, the local authority proposes in this consultation that the age range of the junior school is extended and the capacity expanded, and the infant school is closed. This is based on the fact that the infant school will not have a substantive Headteacher from September 2010. The closure of the infant school would be a technical process coinciding with the immediate extension of the age range and expansion of the capacity of the junior

school to create a combined primary school with the same pupils and teachers in the same buildings on the existing site.

9 Conclusion

Both schools have worked together for many years. Each school is very highly thought of in the local community and more widely and it is important that we build confidently on the foundations already laid in each school. The schools have differing individual strengths and our work would recognise what is good in each school to build an even better school for our children.