



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE CABINET  
MEMBER MEETING  
28 July 2010**

# ITEM 5

Report of the Strategic Director for Children and Young People

## **SCHOOL MERGERS – PROPOSALS FOR CONSULTATION**

### **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 At its meeting of 2 June 2009, Cabinet approved the policy of promoting school mergers whenever possible and appropriate, once consideration has been given to a range of factors and following the announcement of a forthcoming headship vacancy. The report also confirmed the Council's preferred model for the provision of primary education as an all-through (4-11) primary school, as opposed to separate infant and junior schools.
- 1.2 There is currently a need to consider whether to proceed to formal consultation regarding Redwood Infant and Junior Schools, where a head teacher vacancy in both schools is pending.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

2. To approve formal consultation on a proposed merger for Redwood Infant and Junior Schools. The consultation period would commence in September 2010, for a six-week period.

### **REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

3. There are clear potential benefits to be gained from a merger of the two schools, as identified by application of the criteria referred to in the previous report to Cabinet of 2 June 2009. A full analysis is provided below.

### **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 4.1 The report to Cabinet of 2 June 2009 outlined the potential advantages of all-through primary schools, rather than separate schools serving individual key stages (nursery, infant and junior schools). The advantages include continuity for pupils, flexibility and efficiency in terms of staffing resources and improvements in terms of admissions. Where separate infant and junior schools exist, some pupils attending the infant school may not be able to access a place at the linked junior school, due to the availability of places. This can cause significant disruption for pupils and frustration for parents.
- 4.2 The criteria to be considered when analysing the respective advantages and disadvantages of a merger are as follows:

- a) Any significant teaching or learning issues at either school, including recent Ofsted judgements.
- b) The stability of pupil numbers in the schools, including projected numbers and the potential size of the primary school.
- c) Any current or predicted financial issues in either school, which would affect the consistency and quality of provision.
- d) The availability of surplus places at both schools and others in the area.
- e) Issues around staff recruitment, especially at senior leadership level.
- f) Any relevant issues relating to the school buildings and/or site.

4.3 There may also be other issues to consider depending upon the individual situation at the school(s) concerned, but in all cases, the above criteria will be initially considered and used to shape any conclusion regarding a possible merger.

### **Analysis of the case for merger at Redwood Infant and Junior Schools**

4.4 The opportunity to consider the establishment of a primary school arises following the resignation of both head teachers at the end of the 2009/10 academic year. Analysis of the situation at the two schools is detailed below, in line with the criteria outlined above.

- a) Any significant teaching or learning issues at either school, including recent Ofsted judgments.

The Infant School was judged as a good school by OFSTED in 2008 while the Junior School was judged satisfactory in 2009. (See Appendix 1.) There are no significant standards issues at either school that would be significant in terms of merger.

- b) The stability of pupil numbers in the schools, including projected numbers and the potential size of the primary school.

The table below sets out pupil number information for Redwood Infant and Junior Schools based on the 2010 School Census.

<b>School</b>	<b>Number on roll – School Census 2010*</b>	<b>Net capacity</b>	<b>Surplus Places</b>	<b>% Surplus</b>
<b>Infant</b>	172	243	71	29%
<b>Junior</b>	239	300	61	20%
<b>Total</b>	411	543	132	24%

\* provisional figures

Pupil projections are suggesting that there may be a marginal increase in pupil numbers across this cluster of schools over the next five years.

In summary, numbers are stable and in line with the Council's preferred model of a 420 place primary school.

- c) Any current or predicted financial issues in either school which would affect the quality of provision.

The outturn for financial year 2009/10 is £44,082 under-spend at the Infant School and £61,869 under-spend at the Junior School.

Budgets for 2010/11 are;  
Infants £696,284  
Junior £827,721

The three year budget plan for the Junior school does show a deficit by 2011/12 as the recent fall in pupil numbers at the infants feeds through to the juniors. The combination of budgets would offer economy of scale and greater stability.

- d) The availability of surplus places at both schools and others in the area.

There are 132 (24%) surplus places across both schools, which is relatively high. No major housing developments are planned in the school's catchment area. However, a major housing development within South Derbyshire, on the edge of Sinfen, has received approval through the South Derbyshire Planning Inquiry. The proposal is for the catchment area of Grampian Primary School to be amended to include this development and the pupils will be accommodated through existing surplus capacity and a school expansion if necessary. The current proposal is for 500 properties which would generate around 140 primary school pupils. Although the development does not fall within the Redwood catchment area, it could result in a displacement of pupils into Redwood Infant and Junior School. The timescales for the development are not yet clear.

This level of surplus is not a significant issue in the arguments for or against merger, unless it is a feature of any future decisions within an area review which lead to closure of a neighbouring school and subsequent increase in overall numbers at the Redwoods to maximum capacity.

- e) Issues around staff recruitment, especially at senior leadership level.

None significant.

- f) Any relevant issues relating to the school buildings and/or site.

The schools share the same site, and the buildings are adjoining.

- 4.5 Having carefully considered all of the above factors, it is concluded that this option does offer clear benefits to pupils, as it would create the preferred size of two forms of entry primary school and so would attract all of the advantages outlined in the previous report to cabinet on school mergers. It is, therefore, proposed to proceed to formal consultation regarding a proposal to merge the two schools.

## **OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

5. The other option is to retain existing infant and junior schools as they are. This would waste the opportunity to improve continuity for pupils where clear benefits are envisaged.

## **Appendix 1**

### **IMPLICATIONS**

#### **Financial**

1. The amalgamation of the schools would have some minor financial implications. There would be some savings to the overall Dedicated Schools Grant in that the new primary school would receive approximately £40,000 less funding through the fair funding formula due to the loss of a base rate funding factor. This however is usually contained through savings as a result of economies of scale as a result of the amalgamation.

There would also be a reduction in some of the grants received by the new school, the most significant being devolved capital allocations with a reduction of approximately £18,000. This however is based on the current grant regime and it is very likely that these will change in the announcement of the next public spending round in the autumn.

The whole of the existing school site would need to be retained for the future, in view of the numbers of pupils involved, so there is no opportunity for selling off sites. The financial position in the schools concerned has been one of the factors given careful consideration to support the recommendations.

#### **Legal**

2. School 'mergers' do not feature within the relevant regulations. Instead, statutory procedures for closing one school and simultaneously expanding the age range of the linked school will be followed. Full consultation will be carried out with staff, governors and parents of all schools concerned. If, after consultation, Cabinet decides to proceed, statutory notices will be posted, containing details of the proposals, and there will be a six week period for the receipt of any objections.

#### **Personnel**

3. Larger primary schools offer greater stability, enhanced flexibility, improved teaching and learning and career prospects for teaching staff.

#### **Equalities Impact**

4. There is no direct impact upon equality issues arising from this report.

#### **Corporate objectives and priorities for change**

5. This proposal supports the Council's corporate objective of supporting everyone in learning and achieving.