



DERBY CITY COUNCIL

**COUNCIL CABINET
5 APRIL 2005**

Report of the Director of Education

ITEM 13

St Andrew's Special School Foundation Stage Unit

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 To approve the publication of statutory notices for the closure of the Foundation Stage (FS) 1 unit at St Andrew's Special School from September 2005.
- 1.2 To delegate to the Director of Education the power to determine these proposals if there are no objections raised during the statutory notice period.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 At its meeting on 21 December 2004, Council Cabinet agreed to consult with parents, staff and governors and other local schools on the proposal to close the FS1 unit at St Andrew's Special School.
- 2.2 The consultation closed on 7 March 2005 and the response indicates that there is support for the closure.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 A consultation document and response sheets were sent to present parents of FS1 children and those whose children are on the waiting list for a FS1 place at St Andrew's Special School, and to the staff and governors of the school. The consultation document and response sheets were also sent to the other local schools which provide FS1 education and the two maintained nursery schools which have enhanced resource status (ERS) for FS1 children and other special school provision which provide FS1 places, including the Ronnie McKeith Centre at Derby City Hospital.
- 3.2 The parents' consultation document asked for parents' views on the proposed closure, where the nearest alternative school place might be and about appropriate provision for children with special educational needs (SEN). Professionals and school staff were asked to comment on the proposal to close the facility at St. Andrew's Special School.
- 3.3 26 responses were received, 10 from parents and 16 from governors and staff of the schools consulted, including St Andrew's Special School. The parents who responded all praised the skills of the staff and the quality of the educational provision and expressed sadness at the proposal to close the facility. Two parents raised an objection to the proposed closure. One parent felt that their statemented child had been well supported by the unit and the other felt that the closure could have a detrimental effect on the local community. Significantly, only one of the parents who responded had a child with special educational needs.

- 3.4 The staff and governors of other local schools agreed in principle to the closure, but expressed concern that support and training must be in place for staff to work with SEN children in mainstream FS units. Staff from the Local Authority pre-school and specialist support teams will work alongside staff to offer support and advice.
- 3.5 The staff and governors considered that the continuity of FS1 into FS2 and Key Stage (KS) 1 education is important for children's educational and social achievement.
- 3.6 The professionals who work with children with SEN and those who work within the Education Service all acknowledge the value of work within St Andrew's Special School, but also identify the need for continuity of provision and the need for inclusion into local mainstream school wherever possible. There are currently only four children in the nursery unit with statements of special educational needs.
- 3.7 All the current pupils except one will be transferring in September to other schools to continue their FS2 education. The one remaining pupil, who is currently undergoing assessment, will transfer to an alternative FS1 provision.
- 3.8 There was a consensus of opinion that the skills, knowledge and expertise of the staff must not be lost to Derby City Council but valued and used elsewhere in the city.
- 3.9 Two responses from the staff of St. Andrew's Special School expressed sadness at the proposed closure and expressed a wish for the Local Authority to relocate the FS1 unit and the current staff to another local school. There was a genuine concern for the staff who would be affected by closure.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The school could continue to provide a FS unit for FS1 pupils but this could compromise the quality of the education it provides for KS3 and 4 pupils and would limit the number of pupils attending and the accommodation available. The reorganisation of the school means that the continuity of FS education and progression into KS1 is no longer possible for children with SEN. Therefore, continuation of FS education within St Andrew's Special School is no longer appropriate. If the school continued to provide FS1 education the low numbers of children registered would not provide sufficient funding to support the current staffing levels and redundancy would need to be considered.
- 4.2 The provision could be relocated to another school with spare capacity. However, there are a significant number of surplus FS1 places within the area. Relocation of the unit would incur capital costs. It is not considered to be cost-effective to adapt existing facilities to create new places when surplus places already exist within the area. This option would not necessarily avoid redundancies amongst staff as these are dependent on pupil numbers.

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Background papers: Cabinet report 5 April 2005
List of appendices: Appendix 1 - Implications

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

- 1.1 St Andrew's Special School has received £11,531 for Foundation Stage education in its 2005/06 formula budget, based on current pupil numbers. The allocation assumes that the unit will continue for the summer term only. The current annual cost to the school of the salaries of the staff concerned is around £94,500.
- 1.2 Should any redundancies arise, this would be a charge against the central provision held within the Education Service.

Legal

- 2.1 From April 2004 all local authorities are required to provide a FS education place for all three and four year olds whose parents want one.
- 2.2 Closure or establishment of FS provision is subject to consultation and statutory notices. The timetable would be:

5 April 2005 – consultation outcome considered by Cabinet and decision made
Subject to the above:

April 2005 proposals published

April – May 2005 – two-month statutory notice period

14 June 2005 – Cabinet final decision (if required)

Late June 2005 – School Organisation Committee (if required)

July 2005 – closure (subject to the above)

Personnel

3. Four staff are currently employed in the FS unit. The Council and the governing body would do everything in their power to ensure employment at another school or within Early Years services delivered by the City Council. This would be within the constraints of governors' delegated powers and would be subject to normal consultation with staff and unions following agreed procedures.

Equalities impact

4. Pre-school children with special educational needs should be encouraged to access mainstream provision except in exceptional circumstances. The proposal to close the FS unit at St. Andrew's Special School will not affect children's ability to access a mainstream place in a local school. Children with SEN will be encouraged to access mainstream provision with additional support, or where appropriate an enhanced resource within a maintained nursery school or in a special school.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

5. The proposal comes under the Council's Objective of **a stimulating and high quality learning environment**, as it aims to provide an age appropriate environment, with consistency of transition between Key Stages and supports the needs of individual children with high quality and suitably qualified staff.