



Derby City Council

COUNCIL CABINET **6 September 2017**

ITEM 8

Report of the Cabinet Member for Education
and Skills

Proposal to merge Brackensdale Infant and Brackensdale Junior Schools to form a primary school

SUMMARY

- 1.1 At its meeting of 2 June 2009, Council Cabinet approved the policy of promoting infant and junior school mergers whenever possible and appropriate. The report confirmed the Council's preferred model for the delivery of primary education as an all-through (4-11) primary school, as opposed to separate infant and junior schools. This model offers significant advantages in terms of continuity for pupils, alongside flexibility and efficiency in respect of staffing resources. The current policy is to consider 'mergers', when an opportunity arises due to a headteacher vacancy occurring in either an infant or junior school.
- 1.2 An opportunity has arisen to consider a merger of Brackensdale Infant and Brackensdale Junior Schools due to there being a headship vacancy at the Infant School following the retirement of the headteacher in July 2017. The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, at a meeting on 24 May 2017, approved the commencement of initial consultation on the proposal to close the infant school and simultaneously expand the size and age range of the junior school to create an all-through primary school from January 2018.
- 1.3 Initial consultation on the proposals took place over a six week period with consultation papers circulated to all key stakeholders and interested parties. Meetings were also held with staff and parents as part of the consultation process. A summary of responses received is set out in Appendix 2 of this report and a copy of the Consultation Document is attached as Appendix 3.
- 1.4 Due to the majority of support shown in the consultation responses, and the Council's policy of promoting mergers wherever possible and appropriate, this report recommends that Council Cabinet considers giving approval to move to the next stage of the consultation process, which involves the publication of a statutory notice and a further four week representation period.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 To approve the publication of a statutory notice on the proposal to 'merge' Brackensdale Infant and Brackensdale Junior Schools to form an all-through primary school from January 2018.

- 2.2 To delegate authority to determine the proposal to the Strategic Director of People Services if no objections are received and, if objections are received, to bring a further report to Council Cabinet for a decision.

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| REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION |
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- 3.1 There are clear benefits to be gained in merging the schools to create an all-through primary as outlined in this report. Council Cabinet has previously approved a policy of promoting infant and junior school mergers wherever possible and appropriate.
- 3.2 From the consultation responses, there has been a majority of support for the proposal. Of a total of 50 respondents, 45 (90%) expressed support for the proposed merger. A breakdown of consultation responses is set out in Appendix 2 of this report.

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| SUPPORTING INFORMATION |
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- 4.1 School mergers do not feature within the relevant regulations. Instead, mergers can be achieved through statutory procedures to close one school and simultaneously expand the age range of the linked school. The choice of which school should close and which should expand is usually based on which school has a headteacher vacancy, with that school usually the one proposed for closure.
- 4.2 With regard to Brackensdale Infant and Brackensdale Junior School, the opportunity to consider a merger arises due to there being a headship vacancy at the infant school following the retirement of the headteacher in July 2017. The merger would be achieved through proposals to close the infant school and simultaneously expand the age range and size of the junior school.
- 4.3 There is a well established national preference for primary schools with full foundation stage provision, rather than separate schools serving individual key stages (nursery, infant and junior schools). This is based on evidence suggesting there are significant advantages of continuity, flexibility and efficiency. The main advantages are:
- A single primary school makes the transition of pupils between years 2 and 3, from infants to juniors, smoother and better for pupils and their families, with less chance of 'lost learning' at the beginning of year 3.
 - The possibility to create a single and continuous approach to the curriculum, such as single policies for handwriting, reading, maths and behaviour.
 - School budgets are based mainly on the number of children in a school. If these go up and down year to year, it causes instability and can lead to a shortage of funding. The effects of this are often more pronounced for smaller schools as larger schools are more able to deal with fluctuations, for example leading to redundancies or lack of funds to purchase books, refurbish ICT equipment etc.
 - A larger school has more capacity to introduce remodelled posts, such as a site manager or school business manager. This releases the head and senior managers to concentrate more on the business of raising achievement for all children.
 - More development opportunities for the staff, such as shared training and the chance to work more closely across the curriculum and gain experience and understanding of all key stages.

- 4.4 Brackensdale Infant and Junior Schools provide enhanced resource places for children on the autistic spectrum or with speech and language disorders. There are no proposals to make any changes to this provision as a result of the proposed merger. Parents of children in the enhanced resource provision were consulted with as part of the initial consultation and no comments related to this provision were received.

4.5 Analysis of the case for a merger

The opportunity to consider the establishment of a primary school arises due to there being a headship vacancy at the infant school following the retirement of the headteacher in July 2017. At its meeting on 2 June 2009, Council Cabinet approved a set of criteria to be considered when analysing the respective advantages and disadvantages of a merger. An analysis of the situation at the two schools is detailed below, in line with this criteria:

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

There are no significant teaching and learning issues at either school. The Ofsted judgements for the schools are as follows:

Infant School

The school was graded as good for overall effectiveness at its most recent Ofsted inspection in 2015. The report commented that pupils of all abilities make good overall progress and that all parents spoken to were very pleased with the quality of care and education their children received.

Junior School

The school was graded as good for overall effectiveness at its most recent Ofsted inspection in 2015. The report commented that all groups of pupils are making good progress and governance is good.

The stability of pupil numbers in the schools, including projected numbers and the potential size of the primary school and the availability of surplus places at both schools and others in the area.

The table below sets out pupil number information for the mainstream roll at Brackensdale Infant and Junior Schools based on the 2017 School Census. The schools also have pupils on roll in their Enhanced Resource Provision for children on the autistic spectrum or with speech and language disorders. This provision is not included in the net capacity assessment, and has its own, separate accommodation.

| School | Number on Roll | Net capacity | Surplus Places | % Surplus |
|--------|----------------|--------------|----------------|-----------|
| Infant | 178 | 180 | 2 | 1% |
| Junior | 247 | 240 | -7 | -3% |
| Total | 425 | 420 | -5 | -1% |

There are very few surplus places at the infant school and none at the junior school. The schools' currently each have an admission number of 60. This could increase to 75 to provide school places for children from the Kingsway housing development, which is currently under construction and is in the Brackensdale Infant and Junior normal area. The proposal to increase the size and admission numbers of the schools, or single school if the 'merger' goes ahead, will be consulted upon separately.

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

There are no significant financial issues at either school. 5

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

If the two schools do merge, they will operate within existing buildings, and any new buildings as part of the proposal to expand the schools to create additional classrooms.

Issues around staff recruitment, especially at senior leadership level.

There are currently no significant issues.

- 4.6 The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, at a meeting on 24 May 2017, approved the commencement of formal consultation on the proposal to close the Infant School and simultaneously expand the Junior School to create an all-through primary school from January 2018. This consultation period has now come to a close and Appendix 2 sets out an analysis of the consultation responses. Of a total of 50 respondents, 45 (90%) expressed support for the proposed merger. Having regard to the above factors and consultation responses, the recommendation is that the proposal to merge the schools should proceed to the next stage of the consultation process which includes the publication of a statutory notice.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 There is an option to retain existing Infant and Junior Schools. This would result in a missed opportunity to improve standards and continuity for pupils in those schools where clear benefits are envisaged.

This report has been approved by the following officers:

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| Legal officer Financial officer Human Resources officer Estates/Property officer Service Director(s) Other(s) | Emily Feenan, Principal Lawyer, Legal Services Alison Parkin, Head of Finance – People Services Liz Moore, Strategic HR Manager None Gurmail Nizzer, Acting Director of Commissioning |
| For more information contact: Background papers: List of appendices: | Gurmail Nizzer, Director of Commissioning (Acting) and Head of School Organisation and Provision, tel. 01332 642720, email Gurmail.nizzer@derby.gov.uk Appendix 1 – Implication Appendix 2 – Summary of consultation responses Appendix 3 – Consultation Document |

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| IMPLICATIONS |
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Financial and Value for Money

- 1.1 The financial implications of one school closing and the other extending its age range are in some respects different from the closure of two schools and their replacement by a single new school. For most of the funding streams, the allocation for the “merged” school will be based on that of the school extending its age range, only with greater pupil numbers.
- 1.2 As far as the Schools funding formula is concerned, there will be a reduction of approximately £30,000 in terms of the current formula, across the two schools because of the removal of flat rate factors allocated to each school. The current regulations allow the merged school to retain 85% of the Base funding for the two schools which is currently set at £100,000 per school (85% = £170,000 retained). The 85% protection is for one year only. The reduction in funding will be more than offset by the reduced costs of only having one Headteacher. Beyond that, the schools may be able to make further savings in the longer term.
- 1.3 Savings can be achieved by amalgamating schools in terms of a joint single leadership and back office support functions, opportunities also arise from joint procurement and single service contracts.

Legal

- 2.1 School ‘mergers’ do not feature within the relevant regulations. Instead, mergers can be achieved through statutory procedures to close one school and simultaneously expand the age range of the linked school. The process involves consultation, publication of a statutory notice and consideration of the responses received. Subject to the outcome of this process, the implementation date is likely to be April 2014.
- 2.2 The statutory process for the proposal is prescribed under sections 15, 16, 19, 21 and Schedule 2 Education and Inspections Act 2006, and as set out in the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2007.

Personnel

- 3.1 The Council expects the budget for the merged schools will be sufficient to maintain sustainable levels of staffing set within the budgets of the separate schools. If a merger of the two schools does proceed, the Governing Bodies of the two schools will work very closely together following a decision on the merger.

Equalities Impact

- 4.1 None arising from this report.

Health and Safety

- 5.1 None arising from this report.

Environmental Sustainability

- 6.1 None arising from this report

Property and Asset Management

- 7.1 The schools' currently each have an admission number of 60. This could increase to 75 to provide school places for children from the Kingsway housing development, which is currently under construction and is in the Brackensdale Infant and Junior normal area. If the two schools do merge, they will operate within existing buildings, and any new buildings as part of expanding the school to create additional classrooms.

Risk Management

- 8.1 If the proposal goes ahead, there will, inevitably, be a period of adjustment while the new structure settles down. On a day-to-day basis there will be no change in routine or provision in either school. It is anticipated that the children will benefit from the potential of a wider range of resources and improved staff development.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 9.1 The proposal supports the Council priority outcomes of 'Enabling individuals and communities, and Raising achievement and skills'.

**Proposal to merge Brackensdale Infant School and
Brackensdale Junior School to form a primary school
Summary of consultation responses**

Of a total of 50 respondents, 45 (90%) expressed support for the proposed merger.

The table below sets out a summary of consultation responses:

| Type of Respondent* | Total Number of Responses | 'Yes I agree with the proposal' | 'No I don't agree with the proposal' |
|---|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Parent / Carer - Infant School | 11 | 11 | 0 |
| Parent / Carer – Junior School | 15 | 15 | 0 |
| Parent / Carer – Infant and Junior School | 9 | 9 | 0 |
| Governor – Junior School | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| Governor – Infant and Junior School | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| Member of Staff – Infant School | 4 | 2 | 2 |
| Member of Staff – Junior School | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Member of Staff – School not stated | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Other | 2 | 0 | 2 |
| Total | 50 | 45 | 5 |

The key comments made in relation to the merger can be summarised as follows:

The following comments were made in support of the proposal:

- It is a logical thing to do and will benefit both schools
- This is the best way forward for the schools and will definitely benefit the children
- It will be beneficial having the same inset days and parents' evenings
- Staff expertise could be shared more freely, leading to better practice
- It will enable a uniform approach and better transition between Years 2 and 3
- A consistent approach will raise standards and provide a more enjoyable learning journey for all pupils
- Unified assessment processes will lead to less lost learning
- It will lead to less upheaval for children, staff and parents and a more stable learning environment
- There will be more funding for long term educational goals

- It will not be necessary for parents of a child in the infant school to apply for a place for their child at the junior school

The following queries / concerns were raised:

| Query / Concern | Response |
|---|---|
| The consultation document states that staff contracts and conditions of service will not be affected. There is already a large difference in contracts offered to support staff at the two schools. How long will your guarantee of no changes apply for? | Staff contracts and conditions of service will not be directly affected by a merger. If a merger of the two schools does proceed, the Governing Bodies of the two schools will work very closely to consider staffing following a decision on the merger. The Council is not aware of any proposals to change staff contracts or carry out restructuring at the schools. However, any such proposals would need to be carried out in accordance with regulations. |
| The consultation document lists perceived benefits, but no detrimental effects. Many of the development opportunities listed are already in existence. | The benefits of primary schools over separate infant and junior schools are generally accepted. The schools are already working together, but one primary school will create new opportunities. |
| Development opportunities for staff will only be seen as opportunities if they are requested by staff or can be turned down with no comeback. | If a merger of the two schools does proceed, the Governing Bodies of the two schools will work closely to consider the opportunities available for staff. The chance to gain experiences across key stages and curriculum areas is generally seen as positive. |
| Infant school staff will have upheaval if a merger goes ahead and again when the current junior head (as head of the merged school) retires. | It is normally the case that where two schools merge due to the retirement of one headteacher, the other headteacher becomes head of the new school. |
| Learning is lost due to the six week holiday, not the transition between Years 2 and 3 | A single school would enable a smoother transition between Years 2 and 3, and a single and continuous approach to the curriculum will reduce lost learning between the infant and junior phases. |
| There should be one building to house all year groups to maximise a safe and secure environment. As this isn't the case, serious consideration should be given to the decision to merge. | A merged school would operate from the existing buildings, but it would be considered as a single school site and the necessary safeguarding and security procedure would be put into place. |
| Hope that the merger will reduce the cost of school meals. | It is unlikely that a merger would reduce the cost of school meals, as the costs of providing school meals would not be affected by the merger. |

Consultation Document on the proposal to merge Brackensdale Infant School and Brackensdale Junior School

Tuesday 13 June 2017 to Tuesday 25 July 2017

To:

Parents, Staff, Governors, Trade Unions, Derby City Councillors (Ward Members), Derby City Diocesan Authorities and Local MP

Please let us know your views on our proposal to merge Brackensdale Infant School and Brackensdale Junior School to form a single primary school

Background

It is generally accepted that all-through primary schools offer certain advantages when compared with separate infant and junior schools. The benefits 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.

Derby City Council is consulting on a proposal to 'merge' Brackensdale Infant School and Brackensdale Junior School to form a single primary school, within the existing school buildings, from January 2018. The Governing Bodies at Brackensdale Infant School, and Brackensdale Junior School both support this proposal to create a primary school.

The opportunity to consider the establishment of a primary school arises due to the retirement of the Headteacher of Brackensdale Infant School in July 2017. A merged primary school, of course, also provides the opportunity to continue to raise standards for our young people. The benefits in forming a primary are outlined in more detail below.

This consultation document tells you the reason for our proposal and how the decision making process works. Please take time to read the document and let us know your views and comments on the attached Consultation Response Form. The closing date for responses is **Tuesday 25 July 2017**. We hope you find the document helpful and informative.

What is the proposal?

A 'merger' is the joining of two or more schools into one, with a single governing body and headteacher. This would be achieved through the "closure" of the Infant School and the simultaneous expansion of the age range of the Junior School to form a single 3 to 11 primary school. Benefits of the 'merger' proposal are set out in the next section of this paper.

The schools' currently each have an admission number of 60. It is likely that there will be a proposal to increase the admission number to 75 in the future, to accommodate children from the new housing development at Manor Kingsway, which is in the schools' catchment area. If a separate school expansion proposal does move forward, it will be consulted on and new classrooms will be provided to accommodate the additional pupils, working closely with the school(s).

If the two schools do merge, they will operate within existing buildings and any new buildings provided to accommodate an increased admission number if the separate school expansion proposal moves forward.

What are the benefits?

The main benefits are:

- A single primary school would make the transition of pupils between years 2 and 3, from infants to juniors, smoother and better for pupils and their families with less chance of 'lost learning' at the beginning of year 3.
- Parents of Infant school children would not be required to apply for a place at the Junior school if the schools were to 'merge' to become an all-through Primary school. In an all through *Primary* school children would move from year 2, to year 3, in the same way they would transition from any other school year to the next.
- The possibility to create a single and continuous approach to the curriculum, such as single policies for handwriting, reading, maths and behaviour.
- A single governing body bringing a single culture and ethos across the 3 to 11 age range.
- School budgets are based mainly on the number of children in a school. If these go up and down year to year, it causes instability and can lead to shortage of funding, job losses etc. This is often worse for smaller schools. Bigger schools, such as primaries, are better placed to cope with the fluctuations.
- One school uniform, the same policies and procedures, the same dates for staff training days and parents' evenings.
- A larger school has more capacity to introduce remodelled posts, such as a site manager or school business manager. This releases the Headteacher and senior managers to concentrate more on the business of raising achievement for all children.
- More development opportunities for the staff, such as shared training and the chance to work more closely across the curriculum and gain experience and understanding of all key stages.

- Better access for pupils and the families to extended services and facilities.
- Pupils having access to both schools gives greater opportunity to share resources and gives greater space for extended learning opportunities for all ages.
- The opportunity for both schools to keep improving and moving forward.

What will it mean for the children?

All of the above should have a positive impact on the quality of education that children receive. There will, inevitably, be a period of adjustment while the new structure settles down. On a day-to-day basis there will be no change in routine or provision in either school. It is anticipated that the children will benefit from the potential of a wider range of resources and improved staff development.

What will it mean for the Enhanced Resource Provision?

Brackensdale Infant and Brackensdale Junior School both provide enhanced resource places for children on the autistic spectrum or with speech and language disorders. There are no proposals to make any changes to this provision as a result of the proposed merger.

What will it mean in terms of organisation?

- There should be no immediate change in the way in which the schools are organised as a direct result of merger.
- The new school will receive a single budget based on pupil numbers. Conversion to a primary school gives, in the longer term, the Headteacher and governors greater flexibility in allocating staff and resources.
- The primary school would maintain the status of community school and there will be no change to admissions criteria. Children in year 2 would automatically have a right to transfer to year 3 without having to re-apply for a place.

What will it mean for the staff?

Again, very little on a day-to-day basis, but a merger will create greater stability and security. Apart from a change of school name to a primary school, staff contracts and conditions of service will not be affected.

An initial meeting on the proposal for staff at both schools took place on Tuesday 6 June.

What will it mean for parents/carers?

A merger will mean that the schools will continue to operate as usual and that parents/carers of pupils at both schools will continue to receive the same high level of quality provision. Parents/carers will not have to apply for a place in the junior part of the school once their child is on roll in the infant part of the school.

A meeting for parents on the proposal has been arranged to take place on **Thursday 22 June in the junior school hall at 9.15am.**

What will it mean for the Governing Body?

On an agreed date, the Governing Bodies at Brackensdale Infant School and Brackensdale Junior School will end, and be replaced with one Governing Body.

What happens now?

The consultation period starts on **Tuesday 13 June 2017** and ends on **Tuesday 25 July 2017**. Following this, Council Cabinet will consider the consultation comments and will decide whether to progress to the next stage of the process.

If proposals are to be taken forward, there will then be a further four week statutory consultation period. It is anticipated that a final decision would then be made by the Local Authority in October 2017 on whether to merge the schools. If merger does proceed then the primary school will be in place for January 2018.

How can I get more information on the proposal?

We are very interested in your views and welcome your comments. Please respond to us by using the Consultation Response Form attached to this paper. Should you wish to discuss any specific aspects of this proposal, please contact:

School Organisation and Provision Team
People's Services Directorate
Tel: 01332 642723
Email: yourcityyoursay@derby.gov.uk

Let us have your views

Your views are very important. Please do let us know what you think and whether you agree or disagree with the proposal by **Tuesday 25 July 2017**.

You can make your views known in the following ways:

- by completing the attached Consultation Response Form and returning it to us at the address provided at the end of the questionnaire.
- by using the online consultation response form at www.derby.gov.uk/brackensdale
- by sending an e-mail to yourcityyoursay@derby.gov.uk

Consultation Response Form: Proposed Merger of Brackensdale Infant School and Brackensdale Junior School

Your views are very important, please do let us know what you think.

Please tick the relevant box.

I am a:

Parent / Carer of an Infant school child

Parent / Carer of a Junior school child

Governor - Infant

Governor - Junior

Member of Staff - Infant

Member of Staff - Junior

Other (please state)

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I support the merger of Brackensdale Infant School and Brackensdale Junior School to form a primary school

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OR

I do not support the merger of Brackensdale Infant School and Brackensdale Junior School

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Please add your comments below and attach additional sheets if necessary:

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Please return your response form to:
School Organisation and Provision Team, Derby City Council, The Council House, Corporation Street, Derby, DE1 2FS
or email your comments to yourcityyoursay@derby.gov.uk
by **Tuesday 25 July 2017**



All information provided will be treated in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. We will only use this information to help in the decisions made on the proposed merger of Brackensdale Infant School and Brackensdale Junior School.