

DETERMINATION

Case Reference: STP/603

Proposal: To discontinue Redhill Infant School and Redhill Junior School, Castleford and to establish a new 3-11 community primary school.

Proposer: Wakefield Council

Date of Decision: 16 April 2014

Determination

Under the powers conferred on me in paragraph 10 of Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006, I hereby approve the proposals to discontinue Redhill Infant School and Redhill Junior School on 31 August 2015 and to establish a new 3-11 community primary school with effect from 1 September 2015.

The referral

1. On 6 March 2014 an officer of Wakefield Council (the council) wrote to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) seeking a decision on the council's proposal to cease to maintain each of Redhill Infant School (the infant school) and Redhill Junior School (the junior school), community schools (the schools) from 31 August 2015 and to replace them with a new community primary school with effect from 1 September 2015.

Jurisdiction

2. The council published proposals to discontinue the schools under Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the Act). Under Section 11(A3) of the Act the council also published a proposal to establish a new community primary school. The necessary statutory notice was published by the council on 16 January 2014. There is a typographical error in the date shown on the statutory notice regarding receipt of representations. The deadline is stated as being 26 February 2013 when the date should have read 26 February 2014. The notice states clearly that objections or comments may be made up to 6 weeks from the time of publication of the notice. I am satisfied that this error is unlikely to have impacted on responses.

3. I am satisfied that these proposals have been properly referred to me in accordance with Schedule 2 to the Act and that I, therefore, have jurisdiction to determine these matters.

Procedures

4. In considering these proposals I have had regard to all relevant legislation and guidance.

5. I have considered all the papers put before me including the following:

- reports to the cabinet of Wakefield Council and the minutes of the meeting recording its decision of 17 December 2013 to publish a statutory notice in respect of the schools;
- the statutory notice;
- copies of the questionnaire responses;
- prescribed information from the proposer as set out in the relevant School Organisation Regulations; and
- the comprehensive impact assessment

6. I have also visited Ofsted's website and studied data about the two schools and I have looked at website images of the location of the existing schools.

The Proposal

7. The proposal is to discontinue Redhill Infant School and Redhill Junior School and to establish a community school for children aged 3-11 years that will occupy newly built premises on the site of the junior school.

8. The proposer contends that the following benefits will result from the proposal, it will:

- build on the achievements gained at both schools by bringing together a larger team of staff to share expertise and experience;
- develop partnerships, by bringing the best people together, to ensure that every child can flourish and reach their full potential;
- create a school which meets the needs of all our children, our families and our community;
- remove transition at age 7 which means that children do not need to change schools at an important stage in their education;
- improve financial stability and support longer term improvements to teaching and learning; and
- provide an opportunity for a new school building for the pupils, staff and the local community.

Objections

9. The representation period for responses to the statutory notice closed on 26 February 2014. No objections or supportive responses were received by the proposer.

Background and Consideration of Factors

10. The schools each serve very disadvantaged areas and pupils have high levels of need. The children are mainly of white British heritage. The majority are in receipt of pupil premium funding. The existing school buildings are in poor condition and would be very expensive to continue to maintain and ensure fitness for purpose. The council believes that a move to one all-through primary school in a new building will help to raise standards and to do so in a way which will offer value for money. The council had previously anticipated being funded for a new school under a Private Funding Initiative, but has now had confirmation from the Education Funding Agency (EFA) that the new school will be delivered under capital funding within the "Priority Schools Building Programme" (PSBP). This outcome indicates the considerable need for a new school building.

Standards

11. The infant school was judged to be outstanding when inspected by Ofsted in March 2009. It has been inspected again by Ofsted at the beginning of April 2014 but the findings are not yet available. The end of key stage 1 assessments in 2013 indicated a small decrease in attainment of children at the infant school.

12. The junior school was judged to be inadequate when inspected by Ofsted in March 2012. Monitoring inspections in September 2012 and January 2013 found that reasonable progress was being made. In July 2013 Ofsted found teaching, pupils' behaviour, and leadership and management to be good and the school was removed from special measures. While pupils' progress was significantly improved it had not yet been sustained over time and the school was reported to require improvement. It was noted that senior leaders had enabled the school's weaknesses to be tackled quickly and effectively.

13. Both schools have high levels of disadvantage with more than half of pupils in each being eligible for free school meals. The proportion of pupils with learning difficulties or disabilities is much higher than average. The schools also have more than usual numbers of pupils entering and leaving during the year.

14. The council believes that replacing the two schools with one primary school will help to raise standards by removing the need to move school at age 7 years and because it will help staff to share expertise and best practice, and to develop their skills base to the benefit of pupils. Childcare services at the new school will be

maintained at present levels. Extended services are already offered and council staff will consider this in planning for the new school to ensure that sustainable childcare services are established.

15. Given the high levels of need and the degree of turnover of pupils I am satisfied that the continuity which would be offered by an all-through primary school should help to raise pupils' progress and attainment.

The Need for Places

16. The proposed school will provide for 420 places, the same overall number as the existing infant and junior schools. It will have an admission number of 60. There will be a nursery providing 39 full-time-equivalent places. This replaces the existing provision for children from 3 to 11 years rather than creating additional places. The new school will serve the same catchment area as the present infant and junior schools and all pupils are expected to transfer to the new school. The present numbers on roll are 172 at the infant school and 170 at the junior school. Based on these figures for the planned capacity of the new school it is likely to open with surplus places. However, this means that no children would be displaced and provides capacity for the school to accommodate more children.

Premises and Costs

17. The existing premises of the schools are described by the council as being in poor condition. The two schools are close together but on different sites one third of a mile apart. The proposal for a new community primary school is made by the council following its successful award by the PSBP. This will enable the building of a new all through primary school on the existing site of Redhill Junior School. The council is confident that the new school will provide a higher standard of accommodation and that this, coupled with eliminating the need to change schools at 7 years, should help to help to address the issue of standards.

18. The council reports that the size of the junior school site is sufficient to enable the new build to go ahead while pupils remain in the existing junior school buildings. All pupils would transfer to the new school on 1 September 2015. Records show that the council had carefully considered a number of options including significant investment in improving the existing schools' buildings, but assessments showed that £1million would need to be spent on each school over the coming five years for maintenance. The council considered "amalgamating" the two schools on the site of one or the other and extending the existing building to accommodate displaced pupils but this was too costly and did not represent value for money. The cost of the new school will be built through PSBP to the Department for Education's (DfE) standard school design. The new building will require approval through the local planning process. The council will have to provide for any additional space that it requires over and above that specified within DfE's design and submit this for planning consent. It will also have to provide for furniture and IT equipment as well

as any works required by planning such as revised access to school. The council has set a provisional budget of £500k for this work. It will also realise capital from the sale of the, as yet unvalued, infant school site.

19. I am persuaded that a new all-through school in purpose-built accommodation to DfE's design standard should offer a better, more appropriate learning environment for pupils and in a cost effective manner.

Consultation

20. Consultation took place between 23 September 2013 and 1 November 2013. The council sent consultation booklets and questionnaires to 660 people including pupils, parents, staff, governors, local residents and other stakeholders. Consultation included all statutory consultees and involved pupils.

21. A meeting held jointly for staff and governors on 30 September was attended by 56 out of a possible 82 invitees. The consultation also included invitations to public meetings comprising a formal round table meeting also held on 30 September 2013 which was attended by eight people, and informal drop-in meetings held on 2 and 3 October 2013 which attracted one and four people respectively. Of the 13 people who attended the public events the council reports that four were parents and one a local resident. The remainder of the eight were staff and governors. Sixty seven written responses were received by the council to their questionnaire.

22. The written responses showed that 39 out of 67 supported the proposal. This figure included both infant and junior school parents. Parents at both schools were also represented in the nine who responded opposing the proposal. Just over two thirds of respondents felt that there would be educational benefits by removing the need to move school at 7 years and the same proportion of respondents, representing parents, staff, governors and local residents felt that the proposal would have an impact on traffic in the area. Concern about traffic levels outside the school and road safety for pupils also featured in additional written comments. There were also respondents who wrote of their concerns at the standards in other schools which had "amalgamated". Responses from staff totalled a quarter of all those received. Concern about their job security featured prominently. Council documents acknowledge that there is likely to be some loss of posts where, for example, there is duplication of roles, but it plans to have a further consultation with staff as the staffing structure is being developed. The council's human resources adviser has also assured staff of support throughout the process.

23. I am satisfied that the consultation was carried out appropriately and that the council gave adequate opportunity for people to raise any concerns. There was majority support for the proposals and I note that the numbers expressing opposition were not large and that no objections were received following publication of the statutory notice. The council has made reasonable comment and plans for action in response to concerns raised during consultation. There is no body of evidence to

substantiate concerns that the establishment of a primary school in place of infant and junior schools lowers standards and the council will be providing the support of school improvement advisers to the new school. The council notes that planning permission to build a new school will not be granted without taking into consideration traffic and any risks to children. Travel officers will be working with the school to introduce traffic reduction schemes.

Other matters

24. There is still much to do before the building of the new school could commence which raises the question of what would happen if I were to approve the proposal before me and the new school is not completed on time. Representatives of the council have met recently with the headteachers and chairs of governors of the schools to discuss an action plan if the proposal is approved. They also considered the implications of the new school building not being ready on time. All those involved agreed that the implementation date should remain 1 September 2015 even if the schools had to remain on the two sites pending completion of the new premises.

Conclusion

25. I have concluded that the removal of transfer of pupils between schools at 7 years and the continuity and enhanced opportunities of an all-through primary education are likely to impact positively on standards. The improved premises of a newly built school should help to create an environment that it is more conducive to learning and the general education of pupils. I am persuaded that I should approve the proposals. The relevant parties have considered how to proceed in the event of the proposal being approved, but the building not being completed. I am satisfied that the implementation date should be 1 September 2015 in anticipation of the new building being ready for the children and staff, but that if there is a delay there will be suitable arrangements to continue in the present accommodation until the building work is completed.

Determination

Under the powers conferred on me in paragraph 10 of Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006, I hereby approve the proposals to discontinue Redhill Infant School and Redhill Junior School on 31 August 2015 and to establish a new 3-11 community primary school in their place with effect from 1 September 2015.

Signed:

Schools adjudicator: Dr Oona Stannard

Dated: 16 April 2014

