

DETERMINATION

Case reference: STP/000569

Referral body: Liverpool City Council

Proposal: To discontinue Rudston Community Infant School and Rudston Community Junior School with effect from 31 August 2012 and to establish Rudston Community Primary School with effect from 1 September 2012.

Date of decision: 31 January 2012

Determination

Under the powers conferred on me in Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006, I hereby approve the proposal to discontinue Rudston Community Infant School and Rudston Community Junior School with effect from 31 August 2012 and to establish Rudston Community Primary School with effect from 1 September 2012.

The referral

1. Liverpool City Council (the Council) wrote to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator on 9 January 2012 referring its statutory proposal to discontinue Rudston Community Infant School and Rudston Community Junior School with effect from 31 August 2012 and to establish Rudston Community Primary School with effect from 1 September 2012. The new school will cater for the pupils currently served by the two existing schools, and these proposals are related. I will consider them as such.

Jurisdiction

2. The law requires that a competition should normally be held in connection with the establishment of a new school. However, the Council sought and obtained (in a letter dated 8 November 2011) the consent of the Secretary of State to publish its own proposal without holding a competition. A condition of such consent is that the proposal should be determined by an adjudicator rather than by the Council itself.
3. On 24 November 2011, the Council published notices to discontinue Rudston Community Infant School and Rudston Community Junior School and to establish a new Community Primary School. The notices were in the necessary form as required in Schedule 5 to the School Organisation (Establishment and

Discontinuance of Schools) (England) Regulations 2007 (the "Regulations"). Following the consultation period of six weeks, the Council referred the matter to the Schools Adjudicator, and provided supporting documentation.

4. I am satisfied that this proposal has been properly referred to me in accordance with Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the Act) and that, therefore, I have jurisdiction to determine this matter.

Procedures

5. In considering this matter, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and guidance.
6. I have considered all the papers put before me including:
 - documents detailing the proposals;
 - consent letter dated 8 November 2011 from the Secretary of State;
 - the summary of the statutory consultation on the proposals;
 - related papers submitted to the Council's Cabinet; and
 - the most recent Ofsted inspection reports for both schools and the Ofsted interim assessment for Rudston Infant School.

The Proposal

7. The proposal is to discontinue Rudston Community Infant School and Rudston Community Junior School with effect from 31 August 2012 and to establish Rudston Community Primary School with effect from 1 September 2012. This would be a 4-11 mixed primary school with an admission number of 60, providing 420 places.
8. Rudston Infants currently has 177 pupils on roll and a net capacity of 176. Rudston Juniors has 241 pupils on roll and a net capacity of 239. Thus there are a combined 418 pupils currently on roll and a current net capacity of 415 places. All parents of children at the existing schools would be offered places at the new amalgamated Rudston Community Primary School. Parents would also be advised that they were free to send their children to any other school with places available.
9. The proposed new school would occupy the existing site.

Consideration of Factors

Background and Standards of Education at the School

10. The Council is reviewing its primary schools to ensure that every child is educated in a good school. The Rudston schools are both in the next phase of the review but this proposal has been brought forward because the head teacher

of the Infants School has retired. The head teacher of the Junior School became the head teacher of both schools in September 2011. If the proposal is approved, the process of recruiting a permanent head teacher for the new school will begin during the next academic year.

11. Rudston Infants School was last inspected in May 2007, when it was judged to be good. In July 2010, the school's interim assessment judged that performance had been sustained and that the next full inspection could therefore be deferred.
12. Rudston Junior School was last inspected in November 2010 when it was also judged to be good.
13. The Council's school organisation policy states that "where separate infant and junior schools share a site and where numbers on roll permit, the Authority will facilitate the creation of an all through primary as and when the opportunity presents itself". It believes that there are substantial benefits to children, staff and parents of all through primary schools compared to separate infant and junior schools. In the authority's view, these include better planning and curriculum continuity, less transition stress for children and parents and wider opportunities for staff leading to enhanced teaching capacity and better standards. An additional benefit is greater flexibility in the use of resources.

The School Roll and Pupil Projections

14. With a combined 418 pupils on roll, both schools are currently running at 100% capacity. Pupil numbers are projected to remain stable over the next four years at around 420 with no surplus places.
15. At two forms of entry (admission number 60) the proposed new school would replicate the number of places currently offered at the two existing schools which have a combined capacity of 415 places.

Consultation

16. The Council carried out a thorough consultation about the proposal. Views were sought from all concerned including pupils, many of whom responded. Meetings were held for staff, governors, pupils and parents.
17. Staff in the infant school submitted a number of concerns and questions and a second consultation meeting was arranged. Following this, they submitted an alternative proposal for a soft federation leading to amalgamation in two years. This proposal was considered and whilst many of the points in the submission were accepted, it was felt on balance that the aims and objectives could be met more effectively by the original proposal underpinned by an effective change management process.
18. One parent responded stressing the need for the process to be handled with sensitivity. The interim director assured her that the wellbeing of the children would be paramount and that communication with pupils, parents and governors would be a key focus for the change management group set up to oversee the process. The change management group would have equity of representation

from both schools to ensure that the process was one of bringing two schools together drawing on best practice from both schools to form a new school, as opposed to a 'junior takeover' of the infants.

19. The Governing Bodies of both schools support the proposal.

Buildings

20. The two existing schools share a sizeable site. The new school would require a joint staffroom and some work would need to be done on the kitchen and canteen arrangements. Hence a feasibility study is currently being undertaken in order to establish the cost of the works that are planned around improvements to the kitchen/canteen and a joint staffroom. These costs will be met from the 2012/13 capital allocation to the Council .

Finance

21. If the proposals are approved, the schools would receive one lump sum premises allocation instead of two (a reduction of approximately £55,000) and would receive an additional amalgamation funding of approximately £57,000. Both figures are for 12 months. The newly amalgamated school could ordinarily expect to save in excess of £55,000 per annum as a result of reduced expenditure compared to the two predecessor schools and amalgamation funding would be for the first two financial years only.

School links and Community Cohesion

22. The Ofsted report for Rudston Junior School says that, "Pupilsmake an outstanding contribution to the school and local community. The school council is representative of all pupil groups and together with the choir, orchestra and numerous sports teams, are excellent ambassadors for Rudston."

23. The report for the Infant School says that pupils "contribute well to the school and wider community. Links with a local school for pupils with behavioural problems are strong. Year 2 pupils, referring to their working relationship, made the perceptive comment, "We help each other."

24. A full range of extended services is currently provided on site or by referral to off-site provision. It is envisaged that these services will continue to be provided by the proposed new school, including childcare, a varied menu of activities for pupils, holiday provision and parental and wider community access. The new school will continue to develop strong links with other agencies working in support of children and families, particularly those within the community. The new community primary school would cement and expand the links that already exist and thus increase community cohesion.

Conclusion

25. I am satisfied that the proposed amalgamation will build upon partnership which is already in place. I agree that it has the potential to raise standards through greater curriculum continuity and enhanced teaching capacity. Both governing bodies and almost all those who responded to the consultation supported the

proposal. There are limited resources for building work, so creative solutions will need to be found to use the accommodation and site of the two schools for a single school. In line with its policies, the Council has successfully implemented a number of similar mergers over the last few years. I am therefore confident that it has the capacity to ensure that this proposal is carried through well.

Determination

26. Under the powers conferred on me in Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006, I hereby approve the proposal to discontinue Rudston Community Infant School and Rudston Community Junior School from 31 August 2012 and establish Rudston Community Primary School with effect from 1 September 2012.

Dated: 31 January 30 2012

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Janet Mokades