

DETERMINATION

Case reference: STP594

Proposal: To discontinue Arundel Court Infant and Arundel Court Junior Schools and establish a new community primary school

Proposer: Portsmouth City Council

Date: 6 August 2013

Determination

Under the powers conferred on me in Paragraph10 of Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006, I hereby approve the proposal to discontinue Arundel Court Infant and Arundel Court Junior Schools with effect from 2 September 2013 and establish a new community primary school with effect from 3 September 2013.

The referral

1. On 15 July 2013, the operations support manager wrote to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA) on behalf of Portsmouth City Council, the local authority (the LA), applying for a decision on its proposal to close Arundel Court Infant (the infant school) and Arundel Court Junior (the junior school) Schools (the schools) with effect from 2 September 2013 and establish a new community primary school with effect from 3 September 2013.

Jurisdiction

2. On 29 May 2013, the LA Cabinet Member for Children and Education approved the publication of statutory notices to close the infant school and the junior school on 2 September 2013, and to open a new community primary school on 3 September 2013. On 1 June 2013, having carried out the appropriate consultation, the proposer formally published the proposal. The notice was in the form required by the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the Act). I am satisfied that this proposal has been properly referred to me in accordance with Schedule 2 of the Act and that, therefore, I have jurisdiction to determine this matter.

Procedures

3. In considering this matter I have had regard to all relevant legislation and guidance.

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

- the record of decisions and supporting documents taken by the Cabinet Member for Children and Education of the LA at the meeting held on 29 May 2013;
- prescribed information from the proposer as set out in the relevant School Organisation Regulations;
- Ofsted Inspection reports of the two schools; and
- information about standards at the schools.

The Proposal

5. The proposal is to discontinue the infant school and the junior school with effect from 2 September 2013 and establish a new community primary school with effect from 3 September 2013 in the same premises.

6. The proposer contends that the potential benefits of this proposal are to:

- build upon both schools' successes;
- make the admissions process easier for parents and carers through a single application, rather than applying twice for infant and juniors separately;
- support recruitment and retention of staff;
- enable the school governing body to make efficiencies in the running of the amalgamated school, releasing more resources for staff;
- have one shared teaching and learning policy where practice and processes are the same across all key stages;
- have a better opportunity to build on the current sharing of resources and expertise across Key Stage 1 (infant) and Key Stage 2 (junior); and
- continue to build upon the access pupils and their families have, in terms of the Inclusion team for example, family learning, learning mentors, school nurse and home family link worker.

Objections

7. No objections or comments were received in response to the statutory notice.

Background to the Proposal

8. The infant school and the junior school share the same building on a single site. The schools have operated as a 'hard' federation with one head teacher and one governing body since 2008.

Consideration of Factors

9. I have considered the proposal afresh taking careful account of the arguments put to me by the proposer.

Standards

10. The junior school was inspected by Ofsted in June 2013 and found to be 'good'. Pupils make good progress and teaching is at least good and sometimes outstanding. The infant school was inspected in December 2010 and was found also to be good and improving.

11. The LA reports as follows on standards at the schools:

"Key stage 1- 3 year trend

There is an upward 3 year trend in attainment of reading, writing and mathematics combined and reported as Average Points. Writing and mathematics at 2 C+ in 2013 is significantly above the 2012 national average. Reading is broadly in line at this level. All outcomes at 2 B+ are broadly in line with national averages. Level 3 writing and mathematics are priorities for improvement. Pupils enter the school below average with many pupils significantly below .Progress at the end of key stage 1 from their starting points is at least good.

End of key stage 2 - 3 year trend

2013 progress in writing and mathematics is the best to date exceeding Fisher Family Trust (FFT) D estimates and 2012 national averages significantly. Progress in reading in 2013 has declined due to 7 pupils not achieving their 2 levels in this subject. However 15 pupils made 3 levels progress in maths, 13 pupils in writing and 11 in reading. Attainment at level 4+ in mathematics has exceeded FFTD estimates by 10 percentage points and is in line with FFTD estimates at level 5. Attainment in reading at level 4 + is between FFTB and FFTD estimates and in line with FFTB at level 5. Whilst attainment at level 4+ in writing is lowest it is in line with FFTD estimates and improved 11 PP on 2012."

12. The LA suggests that improvement in standards will follow from the amalgamation as:

- There would be one shared teaching and learning policy where practice and processes are the same across all key stages. This would avoid any dip in progress, especially between the transition from Year 2 to Year 3.
- Expectations for behaviour and learning would be more consistent than if the schools were operating in two separate ways. Tracking pupils' achievement, assessing and moderating pupils' books, approaches to planning and teaching styles would all be alike, making for greater consistency.
- A better opportunity would exist to build on the current sharing of resources and expertise across Key Stage 1 (Infant) and Key Stage 2 (Junior). Centralising resources would also support an enriched curriculum.

- Learning experiences will be enhanced through a continued emphasis on high expectations, high quality teaching and an enriched curriculum with the extra advantage of an all through primary education experience within one school environment.

13. I am satisfied that the proposal should enable the school to continue to improve the standards of education for pupils at the school.

Need for Places

14. The new school would provide 525 places for 4 -11 year olds, with 75 pupils in each of the seven year groups. The proposed new all through primary school would therefore be the same size as the combined infant and junior schools. The existing 80 place nursery will not be affected by the proposal, but will be affiliated to the new primary school. The admission arrangements will continue to be those of the LA. Children will have the advantage of moving directly to Key Stage 2 without further application. I am satisfied that the places are needed and that the children currently attending the two schools will have a place in the new school.

Finance

15. There is no capital cost involved with the proposal.

Travel

16. The travel arrangements for pupils attending the new school will be the same as those currently in place for the separate schools. There are no reported issues concerning travel to the new school.

Views of Interested Parties

17. The consultation on this proposal was carried out from 11 February 2013 to 15 April 2013. The consultation document was sent to all parents, staff, governors and a number of other stakeholders prior to the beginning of the consultation process. Public consultation meetings and public drop-in meetings were held during February for parents, staff and governors. A separate meeting for staff was also held. Education officers from the LA attended the consultation meetings for parents, staff and governors. In addition, meetings were held with staff and union representatives with officers from the LA's human resources department.

18. The governing body of the schools met on 30 April 2013 to consider the response to the consultation and agreed that they should proceed with the proposal to amalgamate; they confirmed their decision at the meeting 16 July 2013.

19. Details of the results of consultation received are set out below

	In Favour	In Favour	Against	Against
	Infant	Junior	Infant	Junior
Parent	19	18	1	
Governor		2		
Staff	2	3		
Other	1			
TOTAL	22	23	1	

Total Number of responses received: 46

Total Number in support of the amalgamation: 45

Total Number not in support of the amalgamation: 1

Comments Received

- Would not like to see this proposal lower the standards as this needs attention first
- Proposal seems like a natural progression for the school, should make two great schools one better school
- Hope this is not a way to get rid of staff
- Think the amalgamation will be great help to my son and the children who attend the schools which I regard as wonderful with excellent staff who perform their tasks above expectations
- Will make the whole school feel united officially

20. The consultation took place with a wide range of stakeholders, including all those who should have been consulted. The documents provided explained clearly the reasons for the proposal, a clear timescale and contained a useful list of frequently asked questions and answers. The consultation was carried out within the required timescale. I consider this consultation appropriate and that it met all requirements.

21. I have considered whether I should visit the school to meet with the parties. There were no responses to the statutory consultation and of the 46 responses to the initial consultation, only one was against the proposal. I have therefore concluded that there would be little purpose to such a visit.

Conclusion

22. I note that the school has been federated under a single head teacher and

single governing body for some time. Ofsted finds both the schools to be 'good'. There will be no impact on the number of places available and the LA has identified significant ways in which standards should continue to rise at the school if this proposal is agreed. I therefore conclude that that I should approve the proposal for these reasons and those given above.

Determination

Under the powers conferred on me in Paragraph 10 of Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006, I hereby approve the proposal to discontinue Arundel Court Infant and Arundel Court Junior Schools with effect from 2 September 2013 and establish a new community primary school with effect from 3 September 2013.

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Jill Pullen

Dated: 6 August 2013