

DRAFT DETERMINATION

Case reference: STP/000566 & STP/000567

- Proposals:**
- a. to discontinue Brocklewood Infant School and Nursery, and Brocklewood Junior School on 31 August 2012 and to establish a 3-11 Community Primary School on the same site on 1 September 2012.**
 - b. to discontinue Highwood Player Infant School (and Nursery), and Highwood Player Junior School on 31 August 2012 and to establish a 3-11 Community Primary School on the same site on 1 September 2012.**

Proposer: Nottingham City Council

Date of Adjudicator's Determination: 20 January 2011

Determination

Under the powers conferred on me by Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006, I hereby approve the proposals:

- a. to discontinue Brocklewood Infant School and Nursery, and Brocklewood Junior School on 31 August 2012 and to establish a 3-11 Community Primary School on the same site on 1 September 2012.**
- b. to discontinue Highwood Player Infant School (and Nursery), and Highwood Player Junior School on 31 August 2012 and to establish a 3-11 Community Primary School on the same site on 1 September 2012.**

The referral

1. On 18 November 2011 the authorised officer of Nottingham City Council (the City Council) referred the proposals to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator for determination.

Jurisdiction

2. The proposals include the establishment of two new community schools without a competition. On 23 November 2010 the Secretary of State for Education wrote to the City Council confirming his approval for the publication of notices for the establishment of two new primary schools without a competition, and pointing out that in such circumstances the Decision Maker is the Schools Adjudicator.

3. On 30 September 2011 Nottingham City Council published notices in accordance with the provisions of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the Act) for the closure of the Brocklewood and Highwood Player Schools, and establishment of two new primary schools serving children between the ages of 3 and 11 in the premises of the closing schools.
4. The City Council received no representations on this proposal.
5. I am satisfied that this proposal has been properly referred to me in accordance with Schedule 2 to the Act and that, therefore, I have jurisdiction to determine this matter.

Procedures

6. The proposals relating to the Brocklewood and Highwood Player schools were published in separate statutory notices. On the other hand, all local consideration of the proposals, including the consultations, dealt with them together. The issues and arguments are identical for the two sets of proposals. Therefore, in the interests of clarity and economy, I deal with them together in this determination.
7. In considering these matters I have had regard to all relevant legislation and the statutory guidance provided for Decision Makers by the Secretary of State.
8. I have considered all the papers put before me including the following.
 - Copies of the documents used by the City Council to inform interested parties of the consultation on the proposal and seeking the views of interested parties.
 - Notes of the meetings with governors, staff and others at which the proposals were discussed.
 - Reports to the City Council's Executive setting out the arguments for the proposals and reporting the outcomes of consultation.
 - The public notices of the proposal.
 - The detailed submissions made to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator in the prescribed format.
 - Responses to questions which I put to the relevant specialist officer of the County Council.
9. On 13 January 2012 I visited the schools directly affected by the proposals to view the buildings at first hand and to consider practical considerations relevant to the viability of the proposals. I met representatives of the City Council and of the schools.

The Proposal

10. In support of the proposals the City Council submits the following principal points.
- a. The creation of all-through nursery and primary schools will contribute to improved levels of attainment. Such an organisation facilitates transitions between key stages and enables staff to monitor and support children's progress through the primary years more effectively. The creation of a single team of staff working with children between the ages of 3 and 11 and will facilitate continuity and coherence for children's learning and welfare. A single organisation will lead to more consistent expectations and standards and will facilitate the sharing of professional expertise across the curriculum and the whole age-range.
 - b. A unified provision will enable families to build sustained relationships with a school, improving collaboration between school and parents.
 - c. The reorganised provision will be less expensive with the savings reinvested in primary schools in the City. The proposed new schools will also benefit from the savings, and the management of resources within the schools will be more flexible and cost-effective.
 - d. These views have been reflected in all primary school reorganisation decisions since 2002, leading to a position where 3-11 primary schools are the principal form of primary school organisation in the City.

Consideration of Factors

11. I have considered the proposal taking account the arguments made by the City Council, the records of the consultation process which led to the proposal and the guidance provided for Decision Makers by the Secretary of State.

Views of Interested Parties

12. It is clear that the City Council took a thorough and inclusive approach to informing interested parties about this proposal, seeking their comments on it at a formative stage. There was particularly careful consultative work with the staff and governors of the schools concerned. The records of the meetings demonstrate that concerns were dealt with honestly and clearly.
13. There were no objections to the proposals as published. At the informal consultation stage, however, a number of respondents expressed concern that the City Council was not in a position to provide additional capital resources to fund building adaptations which would facilitate the operation of the new schools.

Standards

14. I accept that the proposed reorganised provision is likely to contribute to the raising of standards, particularly through the opportunities for more sustained parental involvement and the sharing of expertise among teachers and other staff across the age-range to be served by the proposed schools.
15. The realisation of these benefits will critically depend on the quality of the leadership of the proposed new schools. I have been impressed by the commitment and expertise demonstrated by those I met at the schools, including City Council officers, staff and governors.

Admissions

16. The admissions authority for the new schools will be the City Council, as is the case for the existing schools. The admission arrangements, including over-subscription criteria will be as for the existing schools. All children currently attending the existing schools (except those in Year 6) will be entitled to transfer to the new schools.
17. The new schools will continue to serve the communities served by the existing schools.

Finance

18. The new schools are planned to operate in the buildings of the closing schools. The City Council has been clear from the outset of the consultation that it is not in a position to provide additional capital resources to fund building adaptations which might assist the launch of the new schools. I agree that the buildings are adequate for the purposes of the new schools and that the proposals do not depend on capital expenditure which cannot be met from the schools' own delegated resources. I note that the City Council has confirmed that surpluses accumulated by the schools identified for closure will be made available to the governors of the new schools. This will enable a number of internal changes in the use of space which will contribute to the successful operation of the new schools.
19. I agree that the proposed organisation of provision will enable the headteachers and governors of the schools to manage resources more flexibly and, therefore, more cost-effectively.

Conclusion

20. In view of the local support for the proposals and the likelihood that they will contribute to improved standards and to the more efficient use of resources, I have concluded that the proposals should be supported.

Determination

21. Under the powers conferred on me by Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006, I hereby approve the proposals:

- a. to discontinue Brocklewood Infant School and Nursery, and Brocklewood Junior School on 31 August 2012 and to establish a 3-11 Community Primary School on the same site on 1 September 2012; and
- b. to discontinue Highwood Player Infant School (and Nursery), and Highwood Player Junior School on 31 August 2012 and to establish a 3-11 Community Primary School on the same site on 1 September 2012.

Dated: 20 January 2012

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Andrew Baxter