

## **DETERMINATION**

**Case reference: STP/607**

**Proposal: To discontinue Copnor Infant School and Copnor Junior School, Portsmouth and establish a new community primary school in their place.**

**Proposer: Portsmouth City Council**

**Date of decision: 26 June 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 proposal to discontinue Copnor Infant School and Copnor Junior School with effect from 2 September 2014; and to establish a new community primary school on 3 September 2014.**

### **The referral**

1. Portsmouth City Council, (the local authority) (the LA), wrote to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (the OSA) on 20 May 2014 referring its own proposal made under sections 15 and 11 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the Act) for consideration under Schedule 2 to the Act. The proposal is to discontinue two community schools, Copnor Infant School (the infant school) and Copnor Junior School (the junior school), (the schools) on 2 September 2014, and to establish a new community primary school for pupils aged 4 to 11 years, on the current site of the schools, on 3 September 2014.

### **Jurisdiction**

2. Under Section 15 of the Act, local authorities may publish proposals to discontinue schools. Under section 11(A3) a local authority may publish proposals for the discontinuance of an infant and junior school and the establishment of a new community primary school to replace those schools. The admission authority is the LA and the Schools Adjudicator is the decision maker.
3. On 16 April 2014, having carried out the appropriate consultation, the LA published statutory notices, in the form required by the Act, to discontinue the schools on 2 September 2014 and to establish a new community primary school on 3 September 2014. The notices were in the form required by the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) (England) Regulations 2013. No representations were received and following the consultation period, the LA referred the matter to the OSA for a decision.

4. 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 the 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:
  - a) the formal request by the LA for a decision from the adjudicator on the proposal, dated 20 May 2014;
  - b) the consultation document on the proposals dated 24 February 2014;
  - c) notice of the six week pre-statutory proposal consultation dated 24 February 2014;
  - d) a copy of the report to Portsmouth City Council on 11 April 2014 on the outcome of the consultation which includes an analysis of responses to the consultation;
  - e) a copy of the Council's decision to proceed to statutory representation period (item 12 of minutes) of the meeting held on 11 April 2014;
  - f) a copy of the full proposals;
  - g) a copy of the statutory notice to discontinue the schools and to establish a new community primary school as published on 16 April 2014;
  - h) letters of support for the proposal from the head teacher of the junior school dated 4 June 2014 and from the head teacher of the infant school dated 5 June 2014; and
  - i) the most recent Ofsted inspection reports for both schools.

## **The Background and the Proposal**

7. The LA has an agreed policy to encourage the discontinuance of an infant and a junior school and the establishment of a primary school, often known as an "amalgamation" where it is appropriate to do so in order to realise what they describe as significant benefits that can be gained from the establishment of all-through primary schools.
8. The LA approached the governing bodies of the schools with a view to consultation on the proposals. The governing bodies of both schools agreed that in order to strengthen the capacity of both schools to

sustain improvement they would like to consider the views of the community and other schools on the proposal to discontinue the two schools and to create a single primary school, under the leadership of one head teacher and one governing body.

9. The LA has proposed that with effect from 2 September 2014, the schools are discontinued and that a primary school for children aged 4 to 11 is established to open on 3 September 2014. The new school would occupy the same buildings as the current schools and the LA proposes that there should be 690 children on roll allowing for three key stage 1 year groups each of 90 pupils and four key stage 2 year groups each of 105. This would provide the same number of places as are currently accommodated in the separate schools. The school will have a published admission number of 90 for admissions to the reception year.

### **Consideration of Factors**

#### **Standards of education**

10. The governing bodies of the schools and the LA's officers believe that the proposals would be in the best interests of the pupils and the local community. They believe that the establishment of an all-through primary school will allow for high levels of consistency to be achieved throughout a pupil's time at the school and will provide better capacity for sustained improvement. The proposals maintain that the removal of the need to change school at the transition point between key stages 1 and 2 will eliminate the achievement 'dip' that can often be experienced at this time and any anxiety felt by pupils. They further suggest that the tracking of pupils' progress and early intervention will significantly be enhanced for those pupils moving between key stages 1 and 2 and that expectations for behaviour and learning would be more consistent than if the schools were operating in separate ways. They believe that pupils will have greater opportunities to access aspects of the curriculum which might otherwise be denied to them because of the phase in which they are working. They suggest that some pupils in key stage 1 might be ready to access aspects of the curriculum in key stage 2 and a single school would facilitate the deployment of teachers into both key stages.
11. The infant school is currently identified by Ofsted as requiring improvement (July 2013) having previously been outstanding. Highlighted in the Ofsted report was the fact that progress in reading, writing and mathematics was not consistently good for pupils and that too much teaching required improvement.
12. The junior school was last inspected in January 2014 and was judged to be good overall having previously been outstanding. The report says that from starting points that are below average, pupils make good progress and achieve well; by the end of year 6, attainment is above average, and has risen over the last three years in all subjects, most notably in writing. Teachers are reported to create good working

relationships with pupils and set high expectations which create a positive climate for learning.

13. The LA's current policy is to consider amalgamation or reorganisation of schools where two or more of their published criteria apply. The criteria are;
  - a) the standards of pupils' achievement and / or welfare of pupils overall would be improved by the proposal;
  - b) the schools are on the same site or in close proximity to each other;
  - c) one or more of the schools currently has a surplus capacity in the region of 25 per cent or more, or is projected to reach that point in the foreseeable future; and
  - d) one or more of the headteacher posts has become, or will shortly become vacant.
14. The infant school is currently identified by Ofsted as requiring Improvement and should benefit from the proposals. The two schools are located adjacent to each other and draw pupils from the same community and there is a vacancy for the headteacher post at the infant school from September 2014. Criteria a, b and d are satisfied and therefore the proposals were initiated.
15. It is my view that replacing the separate schools with a single primary school has the potential to raise standards of education further, through the development of policies and procedures that secure continuity and consistency. The amalgamation provides the opportunity for the new single governing body and leadership team to address the improvement issues identified in the infant school's Ofsted report.

#### Leadership and vision

16. The LA reports that a single governing body with an agreed vision and set of values would enable the school's leaders to continue to drive up standards and promote continuity and progression in children's learning.
17. The LA further suggests that another benefit of amalgamation will be that parents and carers of children who attend the primary school will benefit from knowing one school and one group of staff; they will know and understand how the school works and will not have to adjust to the demands of a different school as their children get older.
18. The interim governing body has appointed the current headteacher of the junior school to the post of headteacher for the proposed new school.
19. I am satisfied that the proposals have the potential to provide continuity, progression and stability for pupils through key stages 1 and 2.

## Need for places

20. There are currently 270 pupils on roll at the infant school and 420 on the roll of the junior school. A new community school would offer 690 places for 4 to 11 year olds, with 90 places in each year group of key stage 1 and 105 places in each year group in key stage 2. The published admission number for entry to reception would be 90.
21. The intention is that pupils already attending the infant or the junior schools will be able to transfer automatically to the new community primary school, unless parents decide to seek a place at a different school. As a community primary school, the LA would be the admission authority and determine admission arrangements (the arrangements), as it does for the existing schools. It is not anticipated that the arrangements would change for the primary school. Currently the oversubscription criteria have looked after and previously looked after children; those with individual medical or social needs and a specified catchment area as the first three priorities. If not all children from the catchment area can be accommodated then priority is given first to siblings and then by distance from home to school.
22. The LA reports that the security of a guaranteed place in year 3 would be attractive for parents and carers if the two schools were to become one. It explains that Portsmouth has a growing school population and there are fewer school places in the city and less choice for parents and carers, particularly in the primary phase. A primary school would therefore be of significant benefit to parents and carers of pupils attending the two schools providing them with the certainty of a school place for their child throughout the primary phase.
23. Both schools are currently full and over-subscribed and I am satisfied that the suggested places are needed. There are no plans for expansion to the buildings and therefore I am of the view that it is appropriate that current admission number should be maintained.

## Community Cohesion and Travel to School

24. The impact of the closure of the two schools on the community is expected to be minimal, since it is envisaged that the majority of pupils would transfer onto the roll of the new community primary school.
25. As the children will travel to the same site and use the same buildings, it is envisaged that they will continue to use the same patterns of transport to school that they currently have.

## Premises and Costs

26. As the buildings and site will remain the same there are no immediate capital funding implications for the LA to consider in respect of the proposed new school.

27. The LA reports that there will be a better opportunity to build on the sharing of resources and expertise across key stages 1 and 2 which in turn would support an enriched curriculum. It is also suggested that the single governing body will be able to make efficiencies in the running of the new school (particularly in respect of finance, administration and caretaking but also in other areas such as pastoral care and information technology), releasing more resources for learning priorities. Overall there would be improved efficiencies in the financial management of the school as it will have one budget process.
28. I am of the view that the proposed school on the same site using the same buildings and facilities should provide the opportunity for more efficient financial administration.

### Consultation

29. The consultation on this proposal was carried out between 24 February 2014 and 4 April 2014. The consultation document was sent to all parents, staff, governors and other stakeholders and partners prior to the beginning of the consultation process.
30. Two consultation meetings were held at each of the schools and these were advertised in the local press for parents and the community. Meetings were held with staff and union representatives and with governors. During the consultation process 130 responses were received of which 124 were in favour of the proposals and three were neither in favour nor against the proposals. Three expressed concern about specific aspects of the proposals; one response from a member of staff was concerned that as an infant school teacher she would be expected to teach in a through primary school; two parent responses were concerned, separately, about the cost of school uniform and the large number of pupils on the roll of the new school. Each of the three negative responses was responded to by LA representatives. I am satisfied that the consultation process met requirements.

### Conclusion

31. The overwhelming majority of responses to the consultation support the proposal to replace the infant and the junior school with an all-through primary school. The governing bodies of the two schools are in favour of the proposals and there are detailed plans in place for the new governance and staffing arrangements. The LA's proposal to discontinue the schools and establish the all-through primary school has the potential to support further improvements particularly in the infant age year groups. The buildings will not change and therefore the capacity of the new school will enable all pupils in the current schools to transfer if they wish to do so.

## **Determination**

32. 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 Copnor Infant School and Copnor Junior School with effect from 2 September 2014; and to establish a new community primary school on 3 September 2014.

Date: 26 June 2014

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Mrs Ann Talboys