

DETERMINATION

Case reference: STP/575

Proposal: to expand the premises of Featherstone Primary School, Birmingham with effect from 1 September 2013 to provide 420 pupil places with an admission number of 60

Proposer: Birmingham City Council

Objectors: a number of local residents

Date of Adjudicator's Determination: 11 June 2012

Determination

Under the powers conferred on me by the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) Regulations 2007, I hereby approve the proposal that Featherstone Primary School be expanded to provide 420 primary school places with an Admission Number of 60 with effect from the modified implementation date of 1 September 2013.

The referral

1. On 10 April 2012 the authorised officer of Birmingham City Council (the City Council) wrote to the Office of the School Adjudicator, referring a proposal to enlarge by expansion the premises of Featherstone Primary School, a community school, such that the capacity of the School be expanded to 420 pupil places, with an admission number of 60.
2. In view of the time which has elapsed since the proposal was first made, it is not now feasible that it be implemented for September 2012. In referring this matter to the Schools Adjudicator the City Council also submitted that the implementation date for the proposal should be modified to 1 September 2013.

Jurisdiction

3. On 12 January 2012, having carried out the appropriate consultation, the City Council formally published the proposal. The notice was in the required form.
4. By the end of the period for the submission of objections, the City Council had received three individual letters of objection and one letter of objection signed by 72 individuals. As these objections related principally to planning and highways matters, the proposer decided to seek planning consent before proceeding to determine the proposal. By the time this was achieved, the two months allowed for local determination, as specified in paragraph 31 (4) of Schedule 5 of the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) Regulations 2007 (the Regulations) had expired, requiring the City Council to refer the matter

to the Schools Adjudicator under paragraph 31 (5) of Schedule 5 of the Regulations. It did so on 10 April 2012.

5. I am satisfied that this proposal has been properly referred to me in accordance with the requirements of the Regulations and that, therefore, I have jurisdiction to determine this matter.

Procedures

6. In considering this proposal I have taken account of the relevant legislation and of the guidance provided in these matters by the Secretary of State.
7. I have considered the documents provided for me including:
 - The City Council's proposal and supporting documents including demographic information and plans for the extension of the School's buildings;
 - The School's comments on the proposal and supporting documents relating to home to school travel arrangements and standards;
 - The letters of objection submitted to the City Council; and
 - The most recent Ofsted report on the School.
8. On 10 May 2012 I visited the School to see the situation at first hand and to explore some of the issues in greater depth with the Headteacher, the Chair of the School's governing body and a representative of the City Council.

Consideration of Factors

Need for Places

9. The School is oversubscribed with applications from families living in the area which it serves. As the School has been unable to admit these pupils, some children have to undertake undesirably long journeys to other schools in the City. Neighbouring schools are also full. The pupil number projections provided by the City Council demonstrate that this trend will continue. I am satisfied that there is a clear need for additional places across the City and in the area served by the School in particular.

Standards

10. The School was found to be satisfactory by Ofsted when it conducted its most recent inspection. It noted the early positive impact of a new and energetic leadership team.
11. The Headteacher has clear and feasible plans for managing an increase in pupil numbers, and sees significant potential benefits arising from the broader base of

resources and staff expertise. These developments should reinforce the wider improvements he has been implementing.

12. The City Council has approved plans to create eight new classrooms in a two storey block. Other improvements include the refurbishment of some existing facilities and reconfiguration of office space. I consider that the extension and remodelling of the building are likely to result in an improved learning environment for all the pupils at the School, and thus to contribute to continuing improvements in children's experience and attainment.
13. Financial provision to fund the development has been included in the City Council's capital programme.

The View of those Consulted

14. The governors of the School strongly support the proposal, and it has been welcomed by parents.
15. There have been objections, focussing principally on the impact of the expansion on the School's neighbours, particularly in respect of road traffic in the road leading to the School. Many of the issues relating to road access are properly matters for the highways and planning authorities, and the objectors' concerns have been considered through those channels, leading to the granting of planning permission for the expansion and the proposed buildings.
16. I note the significant efforts of the governors and, in particular, the Headteacher to mitigate any inconvenience caused to neighbours, including measures to reduce the number of families bringing their children to school by car. The proposals for improved on-site parking for staff will also contribute to this mitigation. The entrance to the school will be reconfigured to give greater visibility and the pupil entrance will be improved through separating vehicular and pedestrian access.
17. Whilst the concern of neighbours is understandable and the School will have to remain vigilant on the travel to school arrangements, I do not judge these considerations to be of such significance as to undermine the expansion proposal, especially in view of the outcome of the planning application.

Implementation Date

18. It is clearly not now feasible to implement this significant change for September 2012. The City Council is right to be proposing that the date be modified to September 2013. I note that the governors support this modification to the initial proposal.
19. The City Council will need to amend its admission arrangements for 2013 to reflect the higher Admission Number.

Conclusion

20. In view of these considerations, I have concluded the proposed expansion should be approved, with a modified implementation date of 1 September 2013.

Determination

21. Under the powers conferred on me by the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) Regulations 2007, I hereby approve the proposal that Featherstone Primary School be expanded to provide 420 primary school places with an Admission Number of 60 with effect from the modified implementation date of 1 September 2013.

Date: 11 June 2012

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Andrew Baxter