

DETERMINATION

Case reference:	STP/000544
Referral body:	London Borough of Hounslow Council
Statutory proposal:	To discontinue Cranford Infant and Nursery School and Cranford Junior School and establish a new community primary school.
Date of decision:	13 May 2011

Determination

Under the powers conferred on me by Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006, I hereby approve the proposal to discontinue Cranford Infant and Nursery School and Cranford Junior School from 31 August 2011 and establish a new community primary school from 1 September 2011.

The referral

1. On 21 March 2011 the London Borough of Hounslow Council (the Borough), the local authority (LA), referred to the Office of the School's Adjudicator (OSA) its proposal to discontinue Cranford Infant and Nursery School and Cranford Junior School (the Schools) and establish a new community primary school.

Jurisdiction

2. In a request to the Department for Education dated 23 July 2010, the LA sought exemption from competition requirements for the new community primary school. The Secretary of State granted consent to publish proposals for a new community primary school on 15 November 2010. In a notice dated 4 February 2011 the LA published its proposal to discontinue the schools from 31 August 2011 and establish the new school from 1 September 2011. The notice was in the necessary form as required by sections 15 and 10 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the Act) and the regulations made thereunder. I am satisfied that I have jurisdiction to consider this matter under the powers conferred by Schedule 2 to the Act.

Procedures

3. I have considered the proposal and have had full regard to the Act, other relevant legislation and the guidance given by the Secretary of State.

4. I have considered all the papers put before me including the following:
 - a. information and supporting papers relating to correspondence and meetings held during the preliminary consultations and formal decisions leading up to the publication of the proposal;
 - b. response to the statutory consultation;
 - c. prescribed information from the proposer as set out in the relevant School Organisation Regulations; and
 - d. responses to requests for information from me including the views of the governors of the Schools as recorded in the minutes of meetings of the governing bodies.

The Proposal

5. The proposal is to discontinue the schools with effect from 31 August 2011 and establish a new community primary school from 1 September 2011.

Objections

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

Background

7. The LA has a policy of moving towards a pattern of all through primary schools across the Borough. It regards primary schools as making better provision for pupils by providing for a consistent ethos across the school with planning and monitoring across all years so that there is less risk of pupils' attainment slipping back at a point of transition from one school to another; and as a larger school the larger budget and more staff there is the opportunity for the creation of more specialist staffing and management structure with the opportunity for staff to work across a wider age range. The policy is to consider moving from separate infant and junior schools to a primary school when opportunities arise.
8. On 24 June 2010 the headteacher of Cranford Junior School tendered his resignation such that his last day in post would be 31 August 2011. He noted the support of the governing bodies of the schools for the LA's strategy of amalgamating schools and expressed the hope that the early notice of his resignation would allow progress to be made towards amalgamation the Schools.
9. Despite the impression from the addresses of the schools that they may not be close to each other, the schools are effectively on the same site. The new school will occupy the same buildings on the same site. The new school would provide 630 places for Reception to Year 6 and have nursery provision of 39 full time equivalent (fte) places for children from age three. The admission number for Reception will be 90.

Consideration of Factors

10. I have taken into account material facts and other matters that I regard as relevant and as factual in coming to my decision.

Standards of Education

11. The infant and nursery school was inspected in February 2008. The overall effectiveness of the school was judged to be good, with all aspects inspected and reported on assessed as good. The report notes, however, "This good picture is clouded by only satisfactory levels of attendance because some families take long holidays abroad and their children miss valuable time in school." The junior school was inspected in January 2011 and was judged as satisfactory overall for its effectiveness and its capacity for sustained improvement. The report notes of the school, "It is now improving steadily after a period of instability and a high turnover of staff. School leaders and the governing body are rightly aware that raising attainment remains the first priority, particularly in mathematics and writing." The expectation for the proposed primary school is that high standards will be achieved across all age groups and the good progress made by pupils at Key Stage 1 will continue without interruption across the whole of Key Stage 2. The new school should build on the ethos of the existing schools and help the children to have high aspirations and achieve the highest standards of which they are capable. I am satisfied there is the potential for raising standards in the new all through primary school.

Need for places

12. The infant school has 270 places with 256 on roll and 76 children in the nursery and the junior school has 360 places and 277 pupils on roll. The new school would provide 630 places for children aged 4 to 11 years. The admission number would be 90 to Reception with 39 ft places in the nursery. At present the infant school has very few spare places and the junior school quite a large number of surplus places
13. Children currently attending the schools will transfer to the new school unless parents wish their child to move to a different school that has places available. Parents will no longer have to apply for a place to transfer from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 provision. The admission arrangements will continue to be those for community primary schools in the LA. I am satisfied that the places are needed over the coming years and that the children currently attending the two schools will have a place in the new school unless their parents wish to seek an alternative placement.

Finance

14. The merger of the two schools into a single school is not dependent on major work such as a new building and there are no capital costs involved. Nevertheless, there is likely to be some expenditure needed and the LA has agreed transitional protection arrangements for four

years to support the amalgamation process. The LA says that it expects this provision will be made available and I take the view that support for transitional arrangements should be honoured.

Views of Interested Parties and Community Cohesion

15. There has been much consultation on how to make the best provision for pupils. Consultation on the proposal took place during September and October 2010. A consultation leaflet inviting views was distributed to all those directly involved with the schools and other interested groups. Meetings were held and the views of parents, staff and governors were gathered.
16. The consultation arrangements were extensive and in my view appropriate. The views of all those directly involved with the schools and the wider community were invited and could be made in different ways. The leaflet provides factual information about the processes being followed and explained the purpose of the proposals.
17. The response to the consultation through the leaflet response form and attendance at meetings was: 169 written responses (85 from parents from the infant school and 70 parents from the junior school with 17 of the parents having children at both schools; 15 from staff [14 infant and 1 junior]; and 10 from governors [7 infant and 3 junior]). A total of 143 responses, 85%, were in favour (of which 66 were strongly in favour). Of the 19 responses disagreeing with the proposal 14 strongly disagreed; seven respondents offered no view. The consultation meetings were attended by 39 parents, 58 staff and 17 governors.
18. During the consultation positive comments noted the avoidance of the Year 2 to Year 3 transition from one school to the other with better ability for staff to track children's progress; a single strategic leadership with consistency of vision, ethos, strategies and outcomes; increased professional development opportunities for staff; the cost effectiveness of a single school; practical benefits for parents such as having only one school office to deal with; and improved community cohesion.
19. The concerns expressed were: a need to ensure older children do not bully younger ones in an all through school; greater workload for staff especially the headteacher and headteacher less accessible to parents; relationships between pupils, parents and staff can be very strong in a smaller school and have a particular focus on the key stage; staff in each key stage trained for their specific areas; need for a central unified team which means a single large space that would need building work; timetable for amalgamation tight for September for appointing a headteacher; and support for the headteacher of the infant school to take over the new school.
20. The LA responded to each of these concerns saying how they thought the different matters would be dealt with referring to the policies that would be in place, and strategies to be employed such as staggered break times. On concerns about size of the school, the LA referred to

other comparable schools in the Borough and ways in which the headteacher may choose to work. As children spend most of their time during the school day with their class and in their phase environment it was not anticipated that there would be a great deal of difference in the experience for the individual child and his or her parents. Teachers are trained to teach across the whole primary phase and it is for headteachers and staff to utilise the strengths and expertise of their staff to the best effect for the school and the staff. On a new space for all staff, there would be transitional funding available and the economies of having a single school would release money that the school could use as it chooses. The timetable at the time of consultation was considered to be sufficient to appoint a new headteacher and it is for the temporary governing body to make that appointment.

21. The responses by the LA to all except the timetable provide a measure of confidence that the change for the schools to become a single school should be achieved to the benefit of all concerned. I am satisfied that the concerns, except one, are such that while they need to be dealt with they are not such that I should reject the proposal. On the timetable for the change, I note that the consultation suggested the end of the statutory notice period would be 18 February 2011 with papers to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator immediately after that with a decision "Spring (hopefully late March)". The papers provided with the referral indicate that the decision to publish a statutory notice was taken on 9 December 2010. Given that the case was not referred to the OSA until 23 March 2011 the timetable in the consultation leaflet could not be met. Indeed the last response to a request from OSA for information from the schools was received on 6 May 2011, the papers posted previously on 27 April 2011 by one school having failed to arrive. As the LA's comments note in the consultation leaflet the Adjudicator has the power to change the implementation date if it was felt there is insufficient time to implement the proposals on the planned date. I refer to this below.

22. There were no responses to the statutory notice.

23. I am satisfied that the consultation was thorough and all who wished to make their views known have had the opportunity to do so. I am also satisfied that the views expressed at meetings and in writing were given due consideration before the LA decided to proceed with the proposal.

Travel

24. 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 issues concerning travel to the new school.

Other

25. The minutes made available to me of the meetings of the governing

body of the junior school indicate support for the new school. Those of meetings of the governing body of the infant school reveal that there was discussion initiated by the LA prior to the publication of the statutory notice about whether the changes to the schools should be as previously considered or a different way forward should be considered. These discussions resulted in the delay in the publication of the statutory notice and thus ultimately my consideration of the proposal.

26. I was concerned about the impact of the delay in making a decision on the proposal on the preparations being made by the temporary governing body for the new school and whether it is still realistic for the new school to open in September. I therefore consulted the Schools and LA inviting them to express a view that if I were minded to approve the proposal then the implementation date for the new school to open should be September 2011 or January 2012.

27. The infant and nursery school favour a new start for the proposed new school at the beginning of the academic year. The views of the junior school are split between making the change in September or in January with there being more time for putting things in place if the new school opens in January. The LA has outlined the preparations that have already been made for a start in September and what could be done if the start is delayed until January. I am satisfied that it is practicable for the new school to open in September and take the view that a clear start with the new school year is preferable for all concerned, especially the clarity that this gives parents and children.

28. I considered at an early stage when considering the referral whether I should visit the schools and hold a meeting to hear directly any views for and against the proposal. However, as the views of the schools and parents are almost entirely in favour and the concerns have been answered satisfactorily I concluded there would be little to be gained from a meeting.

Conclusion

29. I have concluded that I should approve the proposal for the reasons given above. The aim is to close the two schools and open a new school in the existing buildings. The potential benefits of working as a single school should enable the school to make ever better provision for its pupils. I have also concluded that despite the tight timescale the proposal should be approved for the dates published in the statutory notice.

Determination

30. Under the powers conferred on me by Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006, I hereby approve the proposal to discontinue Cranford Infant and Nursery School and Cranford School from 31 August 2011 and establish a new community primary school from 1 September 2011.

Dated: 13 May 2011

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: Dr Elizabeth
Passmore