



Office of
the Schools
Adjudicator

DETERMINATION

Case Reference:	STP638
Proposal:	To discontinue Springwell Infant & Nursery School and Springwell Junior School and establish a new primary school on the same site
Proposer:	London Borough of Hounslow
Determination:	29 November 2018

Under the powers conferred on me in Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013, I have considered the proposal to discontinue Springwell Infant & Nursery School and Springwell Junior School, two community schools in the London Borough of Hounslow, with effect from 31 August 2019, and to establish a new community primary school on the same site, on 1 September 2019. I hereby approve the proposal.

The referral

1. The London Borough of Hounslow (the local authority) wrote to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (the OSA) on 19 October 2018 seeking a decision on its proposals made under sections 15 and 11 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (the Act) for consideration under Schedule 2 to the Act. The proposals are to discontinue two schools, Springwell Infant & Nursery School (the infant school) and Springwell Junior School (the junior school), both community schools, on 31 August 2019 and to establish a new all-through community primary school and nursery for pupils aged 3 to 11 years within the existing premises of the schools on 1 September 2019.

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 establishment of a new primary school which is to replace

an infant and a junior school. When local authorities use these powers, the Schools Adjudicator is the decision maker by virtue of Schedule 2 to the Act.

3. Having carried out the appropriate consultation, the local authority formally published statutory notices on 14 September 2018. The notices were in the form required by the Act, to discontinue the schools on 31 August 2019 and to establish a new community primary school on 1 September 2019. The notices met the requirements of Schedules 1 and 2 to the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 (the Regulations). One comment was received during the statutory four week period for representation to be made, and the local authority forwarded the information specified in the Act and Regulations to the OSA.

4. I am satisfied that these proposals have been properly referred to me in accordance with Schedule 2 to the Act and the Regulations and that I have jurisdiction to determine this matter.

Procedures

5. In considering this matter I have had regard to all the relevant legislation and guidance, including the statutory guidance for decision makers, published in April 2016 and revised guidance published in November 2018. I have considered all the papers put before me, including the following:

- the formal request by the local authority on 19 October 2018 for a decision on the proposal;
- the local authority's "Schools Amalgamation Policy" published in January 2017;
- a copy of the complete proposals;
- a copy of the documentation used at the informal consultation stage;
- notes of the consultation meetings held with governors, parents, pupils and staff of the schools;
- copies of responses made to the consultation;
- the report made to the local authority's Cabinet Committee following the consultation;
- notification of the Cabinet decision made on 19 June 2018 to issue statutory notices in connection with the proposal;
- a copy of the statutory notice published in the "Chronicle and Informer" local newspaper on 14 September 2018; and

- a copy of the statutory notice displayed on the schools' premises.

I have also considered the most recent Ofsted inspection reports for each of the two schools.

The Proposal and Background Information

6. The infant and junior schools are two separate community schools serving part of the Heston area in the London Borough of Hounslow. Each school has a published admission number (PAN) of 120 and children attending the infant school are given the highest priority for admission to the junior school, after looked after and previously looked after children. The schools occupy separate buildings on adjoining sites. They had a combined roll of 800 children in May 2018, plus 86 in the nursery.

7. The proposals are to discontinue the infant and junior schools on 31 August 2019 and to establish on 1 September 2019 an all-through primary school providing places for children aged 3 to 11 years. The new primary school would have a PAN of 120 for Reception Year, providing for a total roll of 840 children, plus those in the nursery. The new school would open in the existing accommodation of both schools and I am told no significant modifications to the buildings would be required.

8. These proposals are in accordance with local authority policy as set out in the "Hounslow Council Schools Amalgamation Policy", issued in January 2017, which states: *"It is generally considered by the Local Authority that the amalgamation of linked infant and junior schools is a positive way to develop and progress school organisation."* The policy identifies several "triggers" for a discussion with the governing boards of separate infant and junior schools about the possibility of amalgamation. One of these is when a headteacher vacancy occurs in one or both schools. A vacancy for the headteacher at the junior school arose and is currently being filled on an interim basis. Following meetings with the two schools, the local authority commenced the statutory process for closing and opening maintained schools by undertaking a consultation exercise, which took place between 26 January and 16 March 2018.

Objections and representations

9. Having considered the 44 responses received during the consultation period, the local authority's Cabinet decided to issue statutory notices for the closure of the infant and junior schools and the opening of a new primary school. These were published on 14 September 2018 and the notice period ended on 22 October 2017. One response was received by the local authority from a neighbouring local authority which offered no objection to the proposal.

Consideration of factors

10. I have considered the proposals afresh taking account of the relevant statutory guidance. I have read all the responses made and considered the arguments put to me by the local authority as proposer.

Standards of education

11. The infant school was inspected in a short inspection in November 2017 and judged as 'good' by Ofsted. The inspection found that the leadership team has maintained the good quality of education since the previous inspection in December 2013.

12. The junior school was inspected in July 2015 and judged as 'good' by Ofsted. The inspectors reported that the headteacher is well supported by her leadership team and that governors understand their role in supporting the school. This has resulted in good teaching and improved achievement for all pupils.

13. During the consultation that was undertaken by the local authority between January and March 2018, meetings were held with governors, staff, parents and pupils of both the schools. The local authority set out the benefits that it perceived from the proposal to create an all through primary school in place of the separate infant and junior schools. These included:

- the opportunity for planning and assessment to take place across the whole primary age range;
- families have only to apply for admission into reception without the need to apply again for a school place in Year 3;
- transition between Years 2 and 3 will be smoother with less chance of "lost learning" when children have to change schools at the age of seven;
- the establishment of a consistent school ethos for children throughout the primary phase and a consistent approach to the curriculum;
- consistency of leadership and management across the key stages; and
- improved staff retention and recruitment due to the increased opportunities for career development that a larger school covering the whole primary age range provides.

14. I have noted that both the schools are judged by Ofsted to be good schools. The local authority has drawn attention to improved transition between Years 2 and 3 that will result from an all through primary school and the potential for further improvements that can be achieved by consistent leadership and management across the new school. I can see that the proposal for a new primary school has the potential to lead to increased achievement for children.

15. Some of those who expressed concerns about the proposal did so because they feared that the new school with four forms of entry would be too

large and children might find themselves feeling lost. The local authority response was that the schools will not be remodelled and that children would have the same level of familiarity with their surroundings as they have at present. The difference would be that one set of staff and governors would have an oversight over the school and could ensure consistent policies and practice. The new school governing board would be able to establish an appropriate leadership structure for the new school.

Admission Arrangements, Demand and Need

16. The infant and junior schools are community schools, and as the proposed primary school would also be a community school, the local authority would continue to be the admission authority and would set the admission arrangements for the primary school, as it does for the existing schools. The generic admission arrangements for primary schools in the local authority are the same as those for infant schools. Parents and carers would benefit from not having to make a separate application for admission to the junior school when children are seven years old.

17. The new primary school that is proposed would provide a total of 840 places across the primary age range, plus 52 full time places for Nursery children. The published admission limit will be 120 which the same as is in place for the current schools. The new school would be the same size as the combined existing schools and the nursery would remain unchanged. I consider this will not lead to difficulty in the number of places available for local children as there are currently a small number of available places in the current schools.

Equal opportunities, community cohesion, travel and accessibility

18. The local authority does not anticipate that this proposal will have a direct impact on the community because the new school will be in the same place and using the same buildings as the existing schools. It is likely that families will benefit from the improved continuity of schooling and the need to develop a relationship with one school, rather than two, for their children aged three to eleven. For children with special educational needs (SEN), a straightforward transition from Key Stage 1 to Key Stage 2 should also be an advantage, with no requirement to review their placement as they transfer to a new school. I have not identified any issues related to the Public Sector Equality Duty and none have been drawn to my attention.

19. No children will be displaced in this proposal because places at the primary school will automatically be offered to children on roll at the two existing schools. There would be no impact on the length of journeys between home and school as a result of the implementation of these proposals because the primary school would operate from the same premises and use the same entrances to the site.

Funding

20. The local authority does not anticipate that there need to be any significant modifications to the buildings of the existing schools. They are separate buildings with separate entrances but the sites adjoin each other so modification to the shared boundary is possible to allow pedestrian access between the two sets of buildings. The new school will benefit from some economies of scale in establishing one leadership team and shared office functions. There will be two school entrances so it will be necessary to ensure that a viable means of managing these is put in place. The existing infant school has some financial reserves which are earmarked for specific capital funding projects by the governing board. The local authority proposes that some of these should not go ahead until a plan for expenditure across the new school has been established in order to avoid unnecessary expenditure.

21. The local authority has explained that through the funding formula that it uses to fund its schools it is able to seek permission to make a lump sum payment to the new school. This would help with covering the cost of a staff restructure and some minor capital works if these are identified in the first years or so of the establishment of the new school.

22. As the new primary school is likely to be fully subscribed, or nearly so, with four forms of entry, that is, with a roll of 840 pupils, I consider that the proposals are financially viable.

Views of interested parties

23. Following discussions with the schools' governing boards, the local authority agreed to proceed to public consultation on these proposals. A consultation document was issued to all parents of children at the two schools and all members of staff. Pupils were consulted through the student councils. The consultation document included a section to be returned for written responses. In addition, the attention of appropriate stakeholders was drawn to the consultation documentation. These stakeholders included trade union representatives, diocesan authorities, local councillors and members of parliament. A series of meetings was held at both schools, for parents, members of staff, governors and pupils. In addition to the points and questions raised at the meetings, consultees were invited to make a written response. All the responses and discussions were recorded and reported to the local authority's Cabinet.

24. A total of 44 individual written responses to the consultation were received, 34 by post, nine by online survey and one by email. 38 of the respondents indicated that they agreed or strongly agreed with the proposals. A detailed response was made by the infant school governing board. It said that the board recognised what it described as the inevitable amalgamation and set out some concerns that it wished the local authority to address as part of the change process. The local authority responded to the points made.

25. Most of the supportive comments referred to the benefits of continuity of education. The six responses from those opposed to the proposals included:

- a a reference to the size of the new school and the lack of a single building for it;
- b a fear that standards would slip because of the size of the school and the difficulty of coordinating and monitoring teaching across 28 classes and, lastly,
- c a concern that this was change for the sake of change when the two schools worked well as they were.

26. The local authority responded to all the points made. All the comments made together with the local authority responses to the points were reported to the Cabinet.

27. The Cabinet of the London Borough of Hounslow met to consider the consultation and a proposal for the next steps on 19 June 2018. It decided to proceed with the proposal to publish a statutory notice about the change. The local authority published the statutory notice on 14 September 2018 in the "Chronicle and Informer" newspaper and on its website. All of the information required by The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 was included in the full proposals, copies of which were made available on request. The four-week period, during which representations could be made, ended on 22 October 2018. One representation was made in response to the notice. It was an acknowledgement from a neighbouring local authority that it had no objection to the proposal as it did not impinge on any of its schools.

28. I am satisfied that the local authority met the requirements relating to consultation and representation. Appropriate stakeholders had the opportunity to find out about the proposals and to express their views. 38 of the 44 responses indicated some positive support for the proposals. The local authority responded to the six comments that were opposed to the changes and provided some reassurance about how the concerns expressed could be mitigated.

Conclusion

29. These proposals are consistent with the policy of the local authority that an all through primary school should be considered as a replacement for a pair of infant and junior schools when a headteacher vacancy in one of the schools occurs. Most of those who responded to the consultation supported the proposal for change. I am satisfied that the requirements relating to consultation, decision making and the publication of statutory notices have been met.

30. I am satisfied that the proposals have the potential to improve standards of education for children in the area and that the financial matters linked to the proposal for change have been addressed satisfactorily. There are no issues relating to travel, admissions or the demand for school places. I therefore approve the proposals.

Determination

31. Under the powers conferred on me in Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013, I have considered the proposal to discontinue Springwell Infant & Nursery School and Springwell Junior School, two community schools in the London Borough of Hounslow, with effect from 31 August 2019, and to establish a new community primary school on the same site, on 1 September 2019. I hereby approve the proposal.

Dated: 29 November 2018

Signed:

Schools Adjudicator: David Lennard Jones