

PETITION AGAINST HAREFIELD SCHOOLS AMALGAMATION PROPOSAL

Cabinet Member	Councillor David Simmonds
Cabinet Portfolio	Education and Children's Services
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Papers with report	Appendix A

HEADLINE INFORMATION

Purpose of report	To inform the Cabinet Member that a petition with 353 signatures has been received opposing the proposed amalgamation of Harefield Infant and Junior Schools.
Contribution to our plans and strategies	Development and improvement of education in schools
Financial Cost	The proposed amalgamation would have a neutral impact on council budgets, but would result in efficiencies for the schools budget.
Relevant Policy Overview Committee	Education and Children's Services Policy and Overview Committee
Ward(s) affected	Harefield

RECOMMENDATION

That the Cabinet Member for Education & Children's Services notes the petition received and the views of the petitioners present at the Hearing.

INFORMATION

Reasons for recommendation

Under the Constitution the Cabinet Member can consider a petition within their portfolio area on behalf of the Cabinet. In this case the petition opposes the proposed amalgamation of Harefield Infant and Junior Schools.

Alternative options considered / risk management

Cabinet Member meeting with petitioners – 17 September 2009

None.

Comments of Policy Overview Committee(s)

None at this stage.

INFORMATION

Details of the petition received

The Petition under consideration at this hearing is from Harefield Junior School on behalf of a Harefield Infant and Junior School Governor. The petition states ***“We the undersigned oppose the forced amalgamation of Harefield Infant School and Harefield Junior School”***. It has 353 signatures, the vast majority being Borough residents. Ward Councillors have been notified of the Petition and the Hearing.

Supporting information

On 1st July 2009 Hillingdon Council published three statutory notices which in aggregate proposed the amalgamation of Harefield Infant and Junior Schools following the retirement of the infant school headteacher. The statutory consultation period ended on 11 August. The principal objectives and potential benefits of amalgamating infant and junior schools were identified in the report to Cabinet in March 2009 setting out the council's policy on amalgamations. In summary these were the potential for:

- efficiency savings
- improvements to the continuity and progression of learning between the ages of 5 and 11
- improvements to the consistency of approaches to inclusion and well being
- more efficient use of human and educational resources
- overcoming potential problems with headteacher / staff recruitment
- improved parental / family involvement
- benefits in curriculum delivery
- enhancement of staff expertise and experience, through accessing the whole primary curriculum
- creating a single school ethos, benefiting pupils, staff, parents and carers
- improvements to School Governor recruitment

The council conducted initial consultation between 13 March and 17 April 2009. 66% of respondents were completely against the proposals, whilst a further 31% were also against but supportive of amalgamation under some circumstances (e.g. new infant building or a different timescale). The council then conducted statutory consultation on the basis that all points of objection raised could be addressed by the council. The main objections raised during the initial consultation, together with the council's response, can be found at Appendix A. It should be noted that though it is hard to find definitive evidence of the impact of amalgamation on attainment, the research that does exist suggests that there is a dip in performance at key transition points and that there is little evidence that school size impacts on attainment.

Following the conclusion of the statutory consultation period on 11 August, the consultation responses have been collated and are being analysed for the 24 September Cabinet report in which the council will determine the proposals.

Cabinet Member meeting with petitioners – 17 September 2009

EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES

What will be the effect of the recommendation?

Research shows that parental support is a major contributor to children's achievement. School amalgamations can provide opportunities for effective and longer term relationships between children, parents/carers and teachers by building upon relationships that may have already been established in nursery/reception.

Research also indicates that the well-being of some children may be improved by removing the transition from infant to junior school, thus creating continuity of education. This continuity can also enable a more cohesive approach to Special Educational Needs, leading to a faster diagnosis of problems and consistency of support.

Wider benefits of school amalgamations are the potential efficiency savings and value for money gains. Any efficiency savings would be returned to school budgets, hence boosting the resources available to schools overall. It should, however, be noted that any amalgamation of separate schools brings with it some anxiety among staff, governors and the parent body which would need to be carefully managed.

Consultation Carried Out or Required

Initial consultation on the proposals was carried out between 13 March and 17 April 2009 and statutory consultation between 1 July and 11 August.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Legal

The statutory process relating to the proposed amalgamation of the Harefield Infant and Junior Schools is currently underway. As mentioned in the report the statutory consultation period has now concluded and the responses are in the process of being collated and analysed in readiness for determination by Cabinet.

In accordance with the Council Constitution, Article 7.08 (d) General Cabinet Member Delegations provides at paragraph 29 for the Cabinet Member to deal with petitions in their portfolio area in accordance with Council procedure.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Appendix A: Main objections raised in the initial consultation

Appendix A: Main objections made during the initial consultation

Point of objection	Frequency	Response
The proposed amalgamation is driven only by a desire to achieve efficiency savings.	353 respondents <i>[Please note this is from the initial consultation and not this petition which has a co-incident number].</i>	<p>The potential for efficiency savings is not the sole driver for amalgamation, as indicated in the pre-consultation letter. Potential amalgamation advantages include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuity of learning and ethos between the ages of 5 and 11, thus avoiding a potential performance dip on transfer between separate schools • Consistent approaches to inclusion and well-being • Easier headteacher /staff recruitment in the future • Greater opportunities for staff development across the full primary phase <p>Efficiency, however, has to be a factor in considering school configuration in the future. Where schools have seen growth of around 6% in funding in the last few years, budgets will rise by little more than 2% for the next few years. This means that the schools community will need to deliver more for less. If all current infant and junior schools were to be amalgamated, over £2m could be re-distributed to school budgets across the borough through the release of the fixed element of schools' budgets alone. There are, of course, no plans to do this in every case but as opportunities arise at individual schools.</p> <p>It is important to note that any efficiency savings achieved do not benefit the council in any way as they must be re-distributed to school budgets across the borough.</p>
An amalgamation would jeopardise standards	90 respondents	<p>It is hard to find definitive evidence of the impact of amalgamation on attainment. The research evidence which does exist suggests that there is a dip in performance at key school transition points and that there is little evidence that school size impacts on attainment.</p> <p>In terms of the Hillingdon context, there has only been one school amalgamation in recent years, Cowley St Lawrence CE Primary. Performance did improve post-amalgamation, though this is clearly only a sample of one. An analysis of CVA from KS1 to KS2 at Hillingdon junior and primary schools in</p>

Point of objection	Frequency	Response
		<p>2007 and 2008 shows higher scores for children attending primary schools.</p> <p>Both the local and national research evidence suggests that, at worst, an amalgamation is not likely to adversely affect standards.</p>
Efficiency savings overstated e.g. because the buildings are separate	85 respondents	The efficiency savings are based on the reduction in the fixed factor sum reflecting the reduced staffing costs in the future e.g. loss of a headteacher post, There would also be potential savings from streamlined procurement.
The schools will lose out financially because of the amalgamation	81 respondents	This concern relates to the fact that if the schools were to amalgamate, the single school would only attract one fixed factor sum of £121,000 rather than the two that the schools currently receive. The removal of this second fixed factor, however, merely reflects the fact that the cost base of a single school is lower than that of two separate schools e.g. only one headteacher and the potential for combined support staff and procurement efficiencies.
The advantages of a potential amalgamation have not been sufficiently explained in the case of Harefield Infant and Junior schools.	22 respondents	<p>The reasons for amalgamation cited above apply in most contexts, the main differentiating factor in some schools being a need to boost standards. There is no standards issue at the Harefield schools.</p> <p>Looking at the local context, Harefield Infant and Junior schools already have a joint governing body and therefore one of the major potential obstacles to amalgamation is already overcome. Their buildings, although separate, are adjacent. Although Harefield Infant is not currently suffering the headteacher recruitment problems common in infant schools across the country, there is no guarantee that this will be the case in the next few years when the headteacher at the junior school retires.</p>