

# ABBOTSFIELD SCHOOL: DETERMINATION OF STATUTORY PROPOSALS

<b>Cabinet Member</b>	Councillor David Simmonds
<b>Cabinet Portfolios</b>	Deputy Leader of the Council Education & Children's Services
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<b>Papers with report</b>	Appendix containing copy of notice and full proposals published by the Governing Body.

## 1. HEADLINE INFORMATION

<b>Summary</b>	Statutory proposals have been published by Abbotsfield School for the school to become co-educational from September 2016. The purpose of this report is set out details of the proposal, the process followed and responses to the consultation so that Cabinet may determine (decide) the proposals.
<b>Contribution to our plans and strategies</b>	<b>Putting our Residents First: <i>Our People; Our Built Environment</i></b> High quality school places as close to home as possible helps to put our residents first.
<b>Financial Cost</b>	None directly.
<b>Relevant Policy Overview Committee</b>	Children's, Young People and Learning.
<b>Ward(s) affected</b>	Hillingdon East, Barnhill, Botwell, Brunel, Charville, Heathrow Villages, Pinkwell, Townfield, Uxbridge North, Uxbridge South, West Drayton, Yeading, Yiewsley (the wards from which pupils generally apply to Abbotsfield).

## 2. RECOMMENDATION

**That Cabinet approve the proposal for change of gender at Abbotsfield School from boys only to co-educational, with a modification of the implementation date to 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017.**

### **Reasons for recommendation**

The school is under-subscribed and there does not appear to be sufficient demand for a boys' only school to be viable.

## **Alternative options considered / risk management**

Legally, the Council, as decision-maker, can do one of the following:

- Reject the proposal.
- Approve the proposal without modification.
- Approve the proposal with modifications (having consulted the school Governing Body).
- Approve the proposal (with or without modification), subject to certain prescribed conditions.

## **Policy Overview Committee comments**

None at this stage.

## **3. INFORMATION**

### **Supporting Information**

#### **3.1 Details of Proposal & Background Information**

The proposal that needs to be determined is for Abbotsfield School to become co-educational (mixed sex). It is currently boys only, except in the 6<sup>th</sup> form which is already co-educational. Under the published proposals, the school would have become co-educational from September 2016. It was proposed that the change would be implemented in stages, beginning with the pupil intake for the September 2016 school year. Existing year groups would remain boys only. From September 2016, each Year 7 intake would be mixed and therefore the school would be co-educational in all year groups in September 2020.

As stated below, the school is to be re-built. At the time of the publication of proposals, the school had anticipated completion of its new buildings at the start of the 2016/17 academic year or shortly thereafter. However, this is not achievable and the completion of the buildings is now expected to be achieved around March/April 2017, with handover of the buildings for May 2017.

In theory, the school could still become co-educational from September from 2016. However, it has requested a change in the implementation date to September 2017 for the following reasons:

- Implementation before the new buildings are completed would mean that it would be more difficult to market the school to girls and parents and make it less likely that the school would achieve a significant proportion of girls in the first year of mixed-sex intake. This would impact negatively on the successful implementation of the school's plans into the future.
- There would be a negative impact upon academic progress as the school will not have full facilities to meet the needs of girls.

In the light of the above, it is has been recommended that the proposal is approved subject to a modification to the implementation date. Therefore, the first mixed sex intake would be September 2017 and the school would then become co-educational in all year groups in September 2021.

The school is also proposing to expand to 9 forms of entry from September 2016. This is to meet additional demand for school places, forecast to arise as the high birth rates from 2008 onwards are reflected in secondary school rolls.

A successful bid was made under the national Priority Schools Capital Programme for the re-building of the existing school. The Council has provided additional funding for expansion, replacement accommodation for the school's specialist resource unit, and for rebuilding of the Vocational Training Centre which is based on the school site. The whole school will have new facilities and, as part of this project, this will be for a co-educational school. In recent years, the school has been under-subscribed and there does not appear to be sufficient demand for a boys' only school to be viable.

Changing a maintained school from single-sex to mixed sex requires a formal statutory process, which is described in section 3.2.

### 3.2 Overview of Statutory Process

Most types of changes to maintained schools require a statutory process, as set out in the School Organisation Regulations 2013 and in guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE). This includes proposals to change schools from single to mixed sex. As Abbotsfield is a Foundation school, it is able to publish its own proposals but the Council is the decision-maker. The Governing Body is also proposing expansion from 6.5 to 9 forms of entry from September 2016 but an enlargement of a school does not require a statutory consultation process.

The stages of the statutory process are as follows:

Stage 1	<b>Publication</b> (of proposals)	1 day.
Stage 2	<b>Representation</b> (formal consultation)	Must be four weeks.
Stage 3	<b>Decision</b>	The decision-maker must decide proposals within two months of the end of Representation Period or the decision defaults to the Schools Adjudicator.
Stage 4	<b>Implementation</b>	As specified in the statutory notice, subject to any modifications agreed by the decision-maker.

Under the Council's Constitution, where objections to a school organisation proposal have been received, the decision is taken by the Cabinet.

Within four weeks of the decision being made, the following bodies have the right of appeal to the Schools Adjudicator - the local Church of England and Roman Catholic dioceses and the school Governing Body.

In accordance with statutory guidance, the Governing Body undertook a period of non-statutory consultation and, following consideration of responses, it decided to commence the statutory process.

Under separate legislation, the school has consulted on the related changes to its admission arrangements.

### **3.3 Consultation Responses**

Three written responses to the pre-statutory consultation were received, one of objection. Further details are set out at paragraph 4. No responses were received during the formal consultation (Representation) period.

### **3.4 Consideration of Proposals**

Statutory guidance includes specific guidance for decision-makers, to which they must have regard. The decision-maker should consider the views of those affected by the proposal, or who have an interest in it, including cross-LA (local authority) border interests. The decision-maker should give greatest weight to stakeholders most directly affected by the proposal. The guidance sets out some of the factors that decision-makers should consider when determining proposals. All proposals must be considered on their individual merits.

Factors (i) to (xi) are those that the DfE considers relevant to all proposals and therefore each has been addressed in turn.

#### **(i) Consideration of Consultation & Representation Period**

The decision-maker needs to be satisfied that requirements have been complied with and must consider all views submitted, including support, objections and comments.

Comment:

The Governing Body has undertaken consultation in accordance with statutory guidance. The published proposals contain the required information. A notice of the proposals was published in a local newspaper as required.

#### **(ii) Educational Standards & Diversity**

Decision-makers should consider the quality and diversity of schools in the relevant area and whether the proposal will meet or affect the aspirations of parents; raise local standards and narrow attainment gaps. The decision-maker should also take into account the extent to which the proposal is consistent with the government's policy on academies.

Comment:

The proposal will mean that there will no longer be single-sex secondary provision for boys in Hillingdon and to this extent there will be less diversity of provision. However, locally there appears to be little demand from parents for single sex boys' provision and there has been very little response to the proposals, which would suggest that there is generally no strong feeling that the school should remain boys only. Overall, evidence suggests that boys are more likely to perform better at mixed sex schools. Abbotsfield sixth form is already co-educational. It is expected that a co-educational school will generally be more popular with parents. Higher numbers of pupils on roll would benefit the school financially and hence the resources available for pupils. The re-building of the school represents a unique opportunity for the school to create a new and sustainable identity for the future.

There is nothing in the proposal that is in conflict with academy policy.

(iii) **Demand**

The decision-maker should consider the evidence for any projected increase in pupil population and any new provision opening in the area.

Comment:

See (iv) below.

(iv) **School Size**

Comment:

Separately, the Governing Body is also proposing to increase the school size by a further 75 admission places each year from 2016. This is to accommodate a rising demand for school places, as the larger primary cohorts (which largely resulted from increases in birth-rate and inward migration) reach secondary school age.

(v) **Proposed Admission Arrangements**

Before approving a proposal likely to affect admissions to the school, the decision-maker should confirm that the admission arrangements of the school are compliant with the School Admissions Code.

Comment:

None of the proposed changes conflict with the School Admissions Code.

(vi) **National Curriculum**

All maintained schools must follow the National Curriculum unless they have secured an exemption for groups of pupils or the school community.

Comment:

The school will continue to follow the National Curriculum.

(vii) **Equal Opportunity Issues**

The decision-maker must have regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty of LAs/governing bodies. The decision-maker should consider whether there are any sex, race or disability discrimination issues that arise from the proposed changes. There should be a commitment to provide access to a range of opportunities which reflect the ethnic and cultural mix of the area, while ensuring that opportunities are open to all.

Comment:

The proposal would remove the choice of single-sex boys' secondary education within the Borough. However, the proposal would increase choice for girls and the outcome of the consultation does not suggest that there is strong local feeling in favour of Abbotsfield remaining single sex.

(viii) **Community Cohesion**

When considering a proposal, decision-makers must consider its impact on community cohesion, taking into account the community served by the school and the views of different sections within the community.

Comment:

It is not considered that the proposal will have a detrimental impact upon community cohesion.

(ix) **Travel & Accessibility**

Decision-makers should satisfy themselves that accessibility planning has been taken into account and the proposed changes will not adversely impact on disadvantaged groups; a proposal should not unreasonably extend journey times or result in too many children being prevented from travelling sustainably; the proposal should be considered on the basis of how it will support and contribute to the LA's duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to school.

Comment:

No impacts upon journey times or modes or travel are anticipated as a result of the proposal.

(x) **Capital**

The decision-maker should be satisfied that any land, premises or capital required to implement the proposal will be available and that all relevant parties have given their agreement. A proposal cannot be approved conditional to funding being made available.

Comment:

Abbotsfield School is being rebuilt with funding from the Government's Priority Schools Programme. Additional funding is being provided by the Council to facilitate expansion, enhancements to the specification, and for the vocational training centre. The new facilities will be for a co-educational school. As a Foundation school, Abbotsfield is the freeholder.

(xi) **School Premises & Playing Fields**

All schools are required to provide suitable outdoor space for physical education and play.

Comment:

The proposals do not involve any reduction in outdoor space.

**Financial Implications**

Abbotsfield School has seen a reduction in pupil numbers in recent years (2015/16 funding for KS3 & KS4 is based on 376 pupils as per the October 2014 census, compared with 391 pupils

in 2014/15). As the majority of school funding is pupil number led any increase in numbers would have a positive impact on the amount of funding available to the school.

However, it should be noted that pupil number growth is not funded until the following financial year as the pupil data from the October school census is used to calculate the individual schools budget share. The Local Authority currently holds a Growth Contingency Fund within the DSG in order to provide financial recompense to schools throughout the relevant financial year to cover the cost of agreed and planned growth. Schools Forum can agree to use this contingency to fund planned pupil number expansion as part of the DSG budget setting process.

#### **4. EFFECT ON RESIDENTS, SERVICE USERS & COMMUNITIES**

##### **What will be the effect of the recommendation?**

There is insufficient demand for boys only education and the proposal will increase the choice of school for girls. Co-educational provision will be more sustainable and therefore of more benefit to pupils generally.

##### **Consultation Carried Out or Required**

The school undertook **pre-statutory consultation** in November/December 2014. Information was sent to parents, major stakeholders and staff. A consultation evening was held on 2<sup>nd</sup> December and was attended by 8 parents. Verbal feedback at the meeting was positive, though parents wished existing pupils attending Abbotsfield School (Year 7 to Year 11) to continue to be taught in single-sex classes. Three written responses were received, of which two were in favour of the proposal. The third response was against the proposal for the following reasons:

- There would then be no 'boys only' school in Hillingdon.
- Two boys' only schools in a neighbouring borough are over-subscribed.
- It may not be possible for parents seeking single-sex education for boys to access this provision in another borough.
- Abbotsfield (and neighbouring Swakeleys) are unique in the Borough in being the only single sex state-funded schools.
- The history of Abbotsfield would be lost.
- Swakeleys would still be an option for girls whose parents sought a single sex education.
- Falling pupil numbers at Abbotsfield reflected other factors (position in school league tables, lack of resources and the 'run down' appearance of the school).

The Governing Body considered the outcome of the consultation and, at its meeting of 5<sup>th</sup> January 2015, agreed to proceed with formal proposals. Subsequently, it has requested a change to the implementation date and this is reflected in the Recommendations.

**Formal proposals** were published by the Governing Body on 16<sup>th</sup> February 2015. These are appended to this report. No responses were received during the Representation period.

## **5. CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

### **Corporate Finance**

Corporate Finance has reviewed this report and the financial implications contained therein, noting that there are no direct financial implications as a result of the proposal to become a mixed sex school from the 2017 intake. Transferring to a mixed sex secondary school will utilise vital space in the Borough enabling the Council fulfil its obligation in continuing to provide a school place for all children, with positive pupil number growth anticipated from this proposal being Government funded.

Corporate Finance further notes that proposals and budget for the new school buildings estimated for completion in early 2017, financed through a mixture of Government Grants and Council Resources, have been prepared on a co-educational basis.

### **Legal**

The Council's Cabinet is being asked to approve the proposal to change the status of Abbotsfield School from a single sex boys' school to a co-educational school. The proposed date for the change to be implemented is the 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017.

The statutory basis for prescribed alternations to maintained schools, and publication of proposals, is set out in sections 18 and 19 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013, which came into force on 28 January 2014, set out the process that is to be followed.

The report sets out the statutory consultation process that has been followed, as prescribed by the 2013 Regulations, and responses to the same.

Under the Council's Constitution, Cabinet has the appropriate authority to agree the recommendations proposed at the outset of this report.

### **Corporate Property and Construction**

As set out in the report.

### **Relevant Service Groups**

None

## **6. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

DfE Guidance 'School Organisation, Maintained Schools' January 2014  
Abbotsfield School Consultation documents



# ABBOTSFIELD SCHOOL

The governors of Abbotsfield School proposes to change the 11-16 status of the school from single sex (boys) to coeducational, from 1st September 2016.

Further details can be found on the Abbotsfield School website (<http://www.abbotsfield.hillingdon.sch.uk>) or at the school.

Anybody can object to, or comment on, the proposal. The consultation ('Representation') period is for four weeks, starting on the publication date and ending on 13th February 2015

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