

**HATTERS LANE**

To: Policy, Performance and Finance Panel

Date: Tuesday 18 July 2000

Author: Director of Education

**A PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. To update on progress since Education Committee on 13 April 2000.
2. To invite the Panel to endorse the steps being taken.

**B PROPOSED ACTION**

3. **The Panel is asked to note this report.**

**C RESOURCES APPRAISAL**

4. There was a "financial appraisal" at Appendix 5 to the report to Education Committee on 13 April 2000 which estimated that the revenue costs of supporting Hatters Lane across the two financial years 2000/2001 and 2001/2002 could be up to £800,000 - including the writing off of the final budget deficit.
5. The revenue costs of supporting the school during financial year 2000/2001 have already been allowed for within existing approved budgets and within the planned time of appropriate Officers and Advisers.
6. A Finance Plan will need to be drawn up to support the school from the point of "Fresh Start" onwards. This will need to be done with and owned by the new Governing Body.
7. There are significant potential costs that could arise from decisions that will need to be considered on improvements to the facilities at Hatters Lane School. These are being estimated.

**D SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

8. At its meeting on 13 April, the Education Committee received a very detailed report about Hatters Lane; gave the issue serious and sympathetic consideration and adopted a set of resolutions aimed at working towards improvement of education for the Hatters Lane area. The remainder of this report takes the form

of a commentary on progress made on each of the Education Committee's recommendations, turn by turn.

**9. Resolution 1**

**That, with great regret, the Committee authorises the Director of Education to move ahead the formal process of closure at Hatters Lane School as a free-standing school;**

- Officers have explored with the DfEE the various issues surrounding formal closure. A Planning Group involving Officers and the school is working on an Action Plan to bring the school up to formal closure and re-opening.
- Formal consultation on the proposal to close will be staged during the autumn.
- Tina Barnes (Deputy Headteacher, Great Marlow School) has been appointed Headteacher on a temporary basis for the coming academic year. Linda Melton (Headteacher, Wye Valley School) is continuing to provide support as consultant headteacher and mentor. Both have attended, with Officers, DfEE invitation conferences on supporting and fresh starting schools in special measures.

**10. Resolution 2**

**To support the Director of Education and the Governing Body of Hatters Lane School in putting together and delivering a post-Ofsted Action Plan that will seek to improve educational standards at the school in the short term.**

- The Ofsted inspection identified the following three key issues (KI) for Hatters Lane and the LEA to address:-
  - KI1 - Ensure that teaching has a greater impact upon learning;
  - KI2 - Establish good leadership and management;
  - KI3 - Improve pupil behaviour and motivation.
- These key issues are being tackled through a School Action Plan and LEA Commentary and Statement (see Appendix 1). Although there remains a long way to go; the initial evaluation of the progress made at the school is good.

## 11. Resolution 3

**To support the Director of Education and the Governing Body in making the management and staffing arrangements to carry the school through to 31 August 2001 and which will contribute to improving the quality of education provided.**

- (a) The Acting Headteacher from November 1999 to Easter 2000, set out a package of temporary salary enhancements to ensure the retention of existing staff up to August 2001 and to enable the recruitment of new staff for the period up to closure.
- (b) These measures were necessary in order to:
  - ensure that teachers did not leave their posts for new jobs during the school year prior to closure and hence destabilise the staffing complement;
  - encourage new staff to fill vacancies in a closing school in Special Measures.
- (c) During the current term, Linda Melton has been supported by the additional appointment of Tina Barnes, initially by secondment from Great Marlow School. They have been managing the school jointly, as Co-Acting Headteachers, each with distinctive responsibilities.
- (d) The experience of running and supporting Hatters Lane School over the past two months has been invaluable in pointing some of the ways to the future. It was essential to bring in a full time experienced Headteacher from November onwards. This worked extremely well in the interests of Hatters Lane children and the school and operated from November 1999 to Easter 2000. I would hope the Committee will feel able to record its gratitude to the Governing Body of Wye Valley School for its generosity in releasing its Headteacher to support a neighbouring school in difficulty; and I would hope that the Committee would express its deep appreciation of the professional skill and commitment of Linda Melton, in stepping so willingly into the breach at Hatters Lane School.
- (e) The acting management arrangements at Hatters Lane School could not continue beyond Easter 2000 without much more formal arrangements being made to cover the gap left in Wye Valley. We were fortunate enough to be able to engage as full time Acting Head, the then Deputy at Great Marlow School. Since Easter, Hatters Lane has been managed on the basis of Tina Barnes exercising the direct staff, pupil and curriculum management and development work, with Linda Melton acting as mentor/consultant and having responsibility for planning next steps on the future of the school. This division of responsibilities has also worked well in allowing the one senior

professional to concentrate upon the school's standards agenda; and the other to concentrate upon the strategic and organisational issues for the future. It is planned to continue this management arrangement for academic year 2000/2001, while the organisation model for the new Fresh Start school is worked out for adoption by the new interim governing body, which will need to be formed by December 2000.

## **12. Resolution 4**

**To pursue the outstanding options for securing the future of quality secondary education for Hatters Lane pupils; and to welcome the idea that the Partnership Option should include a "break clause" whereby the parties to the arrangement would have the opportunity to review its success and change the arrangement if appropriate; and to report to the next meeting of the Education Committee.**

- (a) The purpose of the "Partnership Model" was to recognise the smallness of size and therefore educational and financial vulnerability of Hatters Lane School now and over the next few years and to seek to strengthen it by borrowing on a formal basis from another, established school. With the encouragement of the Committee, a great deal of work has been done involving Officers, the Acting Headteacher of Hatters Lane School and representative Governors of the potential "partner" school. (See Appendix 2).
- (b) Throughout this work, it was clear to all concerned that there were significant pros and significant cons to the idea for formally linking two schools. Ultimately, we came to the conclusion, shared by the representative Governors of Wye Valley and Hatters Lane, that a partnership model which involved significant elements of joint management and joint decision making but across distances, could be significantly damaging to the interests of both schools with the result that it served the interests of neither.

## **13. Resolution 5**

**To welcome the idea of exploring how the future of upper school provision for the Hatters Lane area could be brought to focus more clearly upon "key skills" within a curriculum and could develop a strength in particular curriculum specialism for example, technology - possibly in collaboration with other educational institutions.**

- The importance of a curriculum that fulfills statutory requirements while concentrating upon key skills is recognised by the Hatters Lane Governing Body and its management.

**14. Resolution 6**

**To welcome the idea of establishing a small task group or "commission" whose remit would include: to explore how best to provide an appropriate and improving level of education for primary and secondary age children in High Wycombe.**

- The Commission has met twice, to date. It seeks to range widely to obtain the views of others before reaching any conclusions of its own. It has agreed a position statement (see Appendix 3) and has prepared a list of organisations, stakeholders and interested parties from whom it wishes to seek evidence before making recommendations to the Education Committee in October.
- The Commission intends to maintain a media presence to ensure that information reaches as wide an audience as possible.

**16 Resolution 7**

**To report to the Committee in October 2000 on those issues that would need to be addressed in order to improve educational standards and rationalise school provision, where appropriate.**

- There will be a detailed report to Committee in October.

17. In effect, we are working up a new school "Fresh Start" model that is appropriate to the circumstances of the Hatters Lane area and to the Buckinghamshire secondary school system.

18. Great improvements have been made to the circumstances of Hatters Lane School over the past two terms but the situation remains that the school needs to be brought out of "special measures" and, for that to happen, then the following need to apply:

- i. The stability, quality and continuity that the management arrangements now in place have brought to Hatters Lane need to be continued or replaced in at least as effective a form;
- ii. The ability to attract and retain quality teaching staff needs to be improved which means that the school would need to be supported for a number of years in maintaining a staffing establishment over and above what a budget based upon its actual pupil numbers could provide;

- iii. Educational standards at the school need to be improved (as outlined in the Action Plan) so that parents and the community regard this as an improving school to which they would be content to send their children;
  - iv. The admission to the school needs to double from the 70 or so admitted to Year 7 in September 1999 to 120+.
19. For all the above to happen, local, community attitudes to the school need to be changed. Some of that may be happening already but the school must expect such change in attitudes will be a gradual and medium term issue. Above all a change in local attitudes may well depend not just upon what Hatters Lane School actually provides and actually achieves; but upon what it is perceived to provide and perceived to achieve. The school is in competition with all other schools in the area for admissions and it is quite clear to the school that many parents and children, are put off from enrolling at Hatters Lane School by the poor quality of some of the facilities and the out-dated nature of much of the accommodation. (Members will recall from earlier reports that Hatters Lane was built some 60 or so years ago as separate boys and girls schools under the one roof with separate entrances, separate small gymnasias and separate small school halls).
20. In order for Hatters Lane to be able to compete successfully with its neighbours in a school system which is hierarchical and where parents do compare facilities as between school, there is a need for capital investment in the school. There is also a need to consider providing other community facilities alongside the school. These issues are on the agenda of the Wycombe Commission. In the meantime, the following avenues are being explored.
- (a) The Authority was allocated a New Deal for Schools 4 (NDS4) capital grant by the DfEE of £360,000 for 2000/2001 to be spent on specific maintenance works at the school (including boilers, roofs and windows). In looking to reorganise and improve laboratories and workshops, we have just obtained written DfEE approval for up to £200,000 of this sum to be used for improvement of laboratories and workshops.
  - (b) Over the lifetime of New Deal for Schools programme, we have submitted bids to the DfEE on behalf of Hatters Lane to a total value of some £1.6 million. This had been at the Director of Environmental Services estimate of the range of costs necessary to bring the fabric of the school building and the teaching accommodation up to an appropriate standard. In addition some Members may recall the great efforts made by the school, in discussion with the County Council and the District Council over some 3 or 4 years to try to secure funding for a sports hall. This would have replaced the existing inadequate boys and girls gyms.

21. Work involving the school, Environmental Services and Babbie outlined a plan to upgrade science and technology facilities and, in the longer term, to improve PE and sports facilities and generally to improve the whole school and its appearance.
22. In this connection, the DfEE recently announced a new capital grant available to support "City Academies" and "Fresh Start" schools, although the terms of this new grant are that it only appears to apply to fresh start schools once they have been fresh started. We have taken up this issue directly with the DfEE with some encouragement - to press the point that the ideal time to use a capital grant in support of fresh start school is before it fresh starts. (I will update Members on the outcome of DfEE contacts over capital, as we have them).
23. As the Wycombe Commission progresses, it will need to take in possibilities of wider uses for the Hatters Lane site; ideas for community uses and, possibly, other contributors to and users of school sites.
24. We have approached a number of private contractors to explore the possibility of externalising the management of the school. Some contractors have expressed a general interest in considering providing a management team for a school such as Hatters Lane. It is clear that an arrangement of this sort would require such a company to profit from the arrangement so that the total cost would be at a premium. This needs to be worked on further but it is instructive to note that management stability and direction; and full staff recruitment have been achieved already.

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