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December 20, 2001

Mr P. J. Mooney
Strategic Manager – Schools and Chief Education Officer
County Hall
Aylesbury
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Dear Mr Mooney

Amalgamation of King's Wood Infant and Junior Schools

I write with regard to the Decision Report Ref: S33/01 and 31/01 to the Cabinet Member for Schools concerning the amalgamation of the above schools and the detailed representations made by the governors of the Infant School to the Cabinet Member for Schools following publication of these reports.

At the time of these submissions, I requested that, if the decision was not in favour of the Infant School, a report be provided detailing the specific reasons for the decision and the counter-arguments against the new school being established on the Infant School site. To date I have not received this.

Therefore, I would be grateful if you would provide this report, detailing the particular reasons why the Junior school was chosen in favour of the Infant School and a response to the arguments presented by the Infant School Governors. I have attached copies of the original submissions for your convenience.

In view of the fact that the two month formal consultation period is nearing its end, I would be grateful for a prompt reply.

I look forward to hearing from you shortly,

Yours Sincerely,

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December 20, 2001

Ian Snudden

Vice Chair of Governors

King's Wood Infant School

Amalgamation King's Wood Infant and Junior Schools

Introduction

This paper forms the response by the Governors of King's Wood Infant School to the Report to the Cabinet Member for Schools and is to be read in conjunction with the attached correspondence and Architects Report.

Following consultation with parents and a draft report recommending amalgamation of the two schools, the Governors agreed that amalgamation was the best course of action and that this was to take place in September 2002. The Governing Body has never disputed the benefits to be gained from having a combined school.

However, the Governors strongly feel that the infant school provides the best site for the development of the combined school as detailed in the subsequent correspondence with David Ayres, Head of School Organisation. This is attached. Following publication of the report, the date for amalgamation is also now an issue.

Therefore this representation to the Cabinet Member for Schools aims to show that the benefits to be gained from siting the new combined school on the infant school site far outweigh any disadvantages there may be and also illustrates the disadvantages to having an Easter amalgamation date.

Amalgamation Date

Initially, January 2002 was to be the date when the two schools were to be amalgamated. However this was amended when it was found that there would be insufficient time to serve statutory notices and to secure staff appointments. It was agreed between the two governing bodies that the most appropriate date would be September 2002. September provides a natural break in the academic year when end of year evaluation is completed, children have transferred and when possible new approaches, policies and planning can take place. Such a time will allow a smooth transition from one management to another, causing the least disruption. Additionally, it would allow staff to continue for a full year before considering their future employment.

Conversely, an Easter amalgamation will come in the middle of the administration of SATS tests, will cause disruption to children's education partway through the academic year and will allow eligible staff to leave as part of a redundancy package. This will prevent continuity of teaching at such an important stage in a child's development and will create a critical staffing problem at a time when it is considerably difficult to recruit staff; it will be nigh on impossible to recruit quality staff for only one term.

You will also appreciate that the infant school is in 'Special Measures'. This does not however reflect on the current staff who are determined to take the school out of 'Special Measures' on its own merits. We have an HMI inspection shortly and it is anticipated that an Ofsted inspection will be recommended for the Spring term. An Easter date will prevent staff from attaining this goal to which they have been striving for a long time. It is important for them that they are on an even footing with staff of the junior school and that they do not carry over any stigma of 'Special Measures'.

Finally, the governing body of the infant school **has not been consulted** on the amended date for the dissolution of the two schools and the establishment of the new combined school. It cannot be right that a date is set without such consultation,

particularly as we have a number of important concerns which, if not addressed satisfactorily, may have serious consequences for the continued education of our children.

Site issues

The Infant School Governing Body in response to the draft report has raised a number of issues and the attached correspondence document the discussions relating to the proposed site. The key points are re-iterated in this paper.

The Report's recommendation for the junior school site is based on a survey of the two sites by Property Management. A copy is attached. As part of their conclusions, the architects say that the infant school:

- a) will be easier to extend;
- b) will possibly need less construction work, this offsetting the identified maintenance requirements;
- c) presents fewer problems with regard to disabled access;
- d) is the more sheltered and secure site and;
- e) does not pose a significant problem in relation to general access by parents and children.

Conversely, the architects accept that there will be significant difficulties to overcome in designing the additional accommodation on the junior school site and especially making the site more accessible for the disabled. Therefore they state that it is with some reluctance that they recommend the junior school site.

The only key issue that the report appears to raise against the infant school site is that of the lack of space for a playing field for team games. There is no actual requirement for a playing field for team games for children at Key Stage 1 and 2. Also, within the National Curriculum, physical activity takes up a small proportion of children's time at school and with HM Government encouraging schools to sell off playing fields for development, it would seem that this is likely to be of even less importance in the future. However, the Governing Body, recognising that in fact physical activity is an important part of child development, would not want to lose an already existing facility and will accommodate any changes necessary to provide this. By removing part of the copse and possibly the patio area adjoining the school buildings, it is quite feasible to provide sufficient space for a playing field for team games.

The Report states that works to the copse would not be permitted. Confirmation has been received from Wycombe District Council, that the trees do not form any part of, or impact upon the Conservation Area and therefore, there would be no objection to their removal. However, the Governing Body would want to keep as much of the copse as possible to establish this as a nature trail and an area that enhances the overall learning environment.

However, the issue surrounding the playing field is not *the* key issue that has to be considered. The only reason that the governors have placed any emphasis on it at all is purely because it has been raised in the report. The Governing Body find it difficult to believe that the overriding issue determining the site of the combined school is that of sufficient space for team games, an activity that contributes a small but important

proportion to the overall learning and development of the child and which, as mentioned earlier, is not actually required until after Key Stage 2.

We feel that there are more important and long term issues to consider when determining the best site for the combined school including:

- a) the education of the children
- b) the overall learning environment;
- c) the safety and security of the children;
- d) the needs of the disabled and those with learning difficulties;
- e) the adequate provision of suitable accommodation and facilities for all children at various stages of their development.

With the move to inclusion within our schools becoming increasingly a priority, it is important that the buildings themselves are also 'inclusive'. Such a site should be easily accessible, not only for those with the obvious needs such as the visually impaired and physically disadvantaged, but also for those children who are dyspraxic (difficulties with muscle control/co-ordination) and those who have difficulties with motor planning and processing and memory. Very often a child will have more than one difficulty. For a child to meet their full potential, they should function as independently as possible alongside their peers. In order to achieve this, a school with a straightforward layout on a flat site is essential.

The infant school site has the potential to be developed into a more cohesive school with good access and flow around the school on one level, with specialist annexes for the foundation and nursery stages and increased development of the Language Department. The architects have recognised the potential future development of the site and the location of such annexes, with no significant problems with disabled access, adequate and easily extendable car parking and adequate pedestrian and vehicular access.

Resource implications

The only other issue raised by the report is the amount of work required to upgrade the school buildings which make the infant school site less attractive. £600,000 has been identified as the cost to refurbish the existing buildings. Having read the Property Condition Survey, it appears that the majority of costs will be to the boiler and heating system, roof, and windows and doors. As you will appreciate, the heating system would need to be upgraded to accommodate the additional buildings and some of the windows and doors would be changed as part of the extension work. The architect's report has stated that the reduced amount of new construction work coupled with the ease of developing the site would offset the larger identified maintenance requirements.

Secondly, a detailed feasibility study has not been undertaken and so comparisons cannot be made as to the overall cost of developing either site. Without this study, one site could not possibly be chosen over another based purely on an estimate of refurbishment costs, as so many other factors will need to be taken into consideration when looking at the total capital expenditure. The architects have already stated that there would be significant difficulties to overcome in relation to access for disabled children and in the overall design of the junior school site. These will inevitably need significant outlay to overcome. Additionally, although it has been predicted that the sale of the infant school site would generate enough capital income, there is no guarantee that this will cover the greater construction costs on the junior school site as market values will prevail at the time of sale.

Therefore, any decision as to which site is the most economically favourable should consider the overall project costs, both in design, construction and future expenditure rather than just on estimated refurbishment costs and estimated market values.

Conclusion

The governors, whilst still supporting the amalgamation of the two schools, strongly believe:

- a) that the date for the establishment of the new combined school be 1st September 2002;
- b) that the governing body be properly consulted on the amalgamation date;
- c) that every encouragement and support should be given to ensure that the infant school be taken out of 'Special Measures';
- d) that the playing field issue should not be the sole deciding factor in the final choice of site;
- e) that the long term considerations take priority, with the overall aim of providing and creating surroundings that are safe, secure and accessible, but most importantly, those that provide an enriching learning environment;
- f) King's Wood Infant School provides that site.

On behalf of the Governing Body

Ian Snudden

Acting Chair of Governors,

King's Wood Infant School