



Buckinghamshire County Council

Report

Cabinet Member for Schools

Decision to be taken on or after
5 November 2001

Cab Member Report No. S31 / 01

Date 30 October 2001

Title Future arrangements for primary education at King's Wood Infant and King's Wood Junior schools, High Wycombe

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Electoral Divisions Affected Bowerdean and Daws Hill – Mr I Bates
Oakridge and Tinkers Wood – Mr T Fowler
Green Hill and Totteridge – Mrs V Letheren
Marsh and Micklefield – Mrs C Martens
Cressex and Frogmoor – Mrs L Clarke
Keep Hill and Hicks Farm – Mrs J Wassell

Summary

- 1 To report on the outcomes from the initial public consultation on proposals to amalgamate King's Wood Infant and King's Wood Junior School to create a 420 place combined school with a nursery/early years facility and other facilities as appropriate with effect from April 2002.

Recommendation

Approval be given for the statutory notices to:

- a) Discontinue King's Wood Infant School with effect from 31 March 2002
- b) Discontinue King's Wood Junior School with effect from 31 March 2002
- c) Establish a new combined school with effect from 1 April 2002
- d) Establish the new school on the site of King's Wood Junior School

A. The decision required, and why it is needed

- 2 The Wycombe Commission, a working group set up by the Education Committee to look at educational provision in the eastern part of High Wycombe, made the following recommendation, amongst others, in its report dated November 2000:

"Amalgamate King's Wood Infant and King's Wood Junior Schools to create a two-form entry combined school with nursery provision and community facilities"

Accordingly, the governing bodies of the two schools requested discussions with the Authority concerning the possible reorganisation of the two schools into one combined school on a single site and, came to the conclusion that they would wish to consult with governors, staff, parents, public and other interested parties on the proposal to provide a 420 place combined school with a nursery/early years facility and with other facilities as appropriate to replace both schools.

3 It was the conclusion of both of the governing bodies and the officers involved that the schools would be stronger educationally and financially if there were reorganisation of provision and the creation of a single school. It was also felt that a more effective service could be provided leading to increased pupil attainment and the raising of standards. Accordingly a more effective use of resources could be achieved. A new combined school of 420 places would be stronger

a) educationally because:

Children would join the new school at the Nursery stage and continue their education at the same school until they are old enough to go to secondary school. Evidence from performance in the SATS tests suggests that moving a child from an Infant School to a Junior School disrupts his or her education

In a combined school, the approach to teaching Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2 will be the same due to a common educational ethos and close collaboration between the teachers coordinating subjects across Key Stages. The children thus benefit from another form of continuity that would help them maintain their progress.

Having more staff in a school means that individual teachers are more able to specialize in both coordinating subjects and on managerial roles. For example, teachers have special roles of 'subject leader' in addition to their classroom teaching roles. In a combined school subject leaders can lead a subject over a wider range of years than they can in the two separate schools. This would improve the co-ordination of teaching throughout the school. There is the potential to increase expertise, professional stimulation and to improve career prospects.

At the same time there is greater flexibility in the way in which the school can be staffed, and the staff can more readily offer a broad education to the children.

b) financially because:

The combined school will be a larger school than either the infant or the junior school, and because of this there will be more capacity to respond flexibly to budget pressures

Because only one building and one site is to be maintained, there are potential savings to be made on premises related expenditure.

There is likely to be less expenditure required in terms of senior management, administrative and caretaking staff because only one headteacher and one administrative team and caretaking team will be required.

- 4 From the outset it was also recognised that the proposals, in order to be implemented, would require extensive adaptations and remodelling of one of the schools and it was envisaged that any adaptations and capital improvements required directly as a result of the proposals would be funded by resources generated as a result of the disposal of the site of one of the schools. An initial period of consultation was undertaken between 5 June and 5 July 2001 and included the circulation of a consultation document to the parents of all children at the two schools and the staff of the two schools along with meetings for staff and parents.

B. Recommended action, and the reasons for this

To publish statutory notices to:

Discontinue King's Wood Infant School with effect from 31 March 2002.

Discontinue King's Wood Junior School with effect from 31 March 2002

Establish a new combined school with effect from 1 April 2002

Establish the new school on the site of King's Wood Junior School

- 5 The recommendation to establish a 420 place combined school is being made because there is good evidence that the quality of provision that the Local Education Authority and school could provide for children in the King's Wood area will be improved as the result of such changes. The proposal also leads to a more effective deployment of resources, a reduction in spare and unfilled places and is consistent with the LEA's policy of combining wherever possible separate infant and junior schools.

- 6 We propose that the new combined school be developed on the current junior school site because:-

A combined school of 420 places and nursery (etc) needs an area of between 1.6 and 1.8 hectares to provide enough space for accommodation and playing field area. The infant school site is 1.77ha and the junior school site is 1.79 ha. Therefore both sites, on the face of it, are sufficiently large.

Whereas the infant site has the advantage of being the more level, the professional advice received is that the playing field area on the infant school site is significantly deficient and that it is unlikely that any proposals to enlarge that area by cutting down part or all of the large copse which occupies a significant proportion of the infant school site will be permitted.

There are also a number of issues to do with the amount of work which would be required to upgrade the infant school building which make the prospect of establishing the new combined school on the infant school site unattractive.

- 7 The junior school and the junior school site therefore offer a better location for a 420 place combined school. Property Management accept, in arriving at this conclusion that there will be significant difficulties to overcome in designing the additional accommodation and making the site more accessible but, there is a considerably greater practical and financial probability of overcoming these difficulties.

C. Other options available, and their pros and cons

- 8 a) Retain the status quo, and leave the two schools separate. There are, however, significant concerns regarding the future viability educationally and

financially of the two schools if they continue to run as separate institutions which have been identified both by the Wycombe Commission and through the recent work of the two governing bodies and the Authority.

- b) The option of locating the new school on the infant school site has been discussed above.
- c) The option of relocating the schools to a new site in the King's Wood area has been considered briefly but a search of the area has failed to come up with a suitable site. It is also unlikely that such an option would represent good value for money because a new site would have to be purchased and then the build of a new school financed.
- d) A final option to be considered was the possibility of embarking on a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme involving all of the schools (both primary and secondary schools) in the south east of High Wycombe. The lead-in time to such a project, however, is considerable and it is unlikely that the Authority would be likely to secure PFI credits before the financial year 2005/06. We do not have the luxury of waiting through this period of time. Also there should be sufficient money generated by the disposal of one of the school sites to bring the combined school building and site up to the expected standards and for the provision to serve the community well for the next 25 to 30 years.

Resource implications

- 9 A detailed feasibility study will be done as and when the decision is made to go ahead with this scheme. Our current experience indicates that for a 420 place combined school to be built on the site of the current junior school, by adapting current buildings and with some new build, appropriate to DfES standards for a school of this size up to £1.75M will be required
- 10 Typically new build will cost between £1k and £1.3k per sq m with the "average" being £1.2k.
- 11 The remodelling/adaptation work will be less per sq m-typically £400-£500. These costs however reflect what would be expected for a "normal" site and do not cover what might be required if there are particular difficulties encountered on the site.
- 12 For the remodelling and upgrading of Kingswood Junior we could need:
 - 6 classrooms at 54 sq m
 - A nursery/early years facility at 100 sq m
 - SEN and/or Community facilities at 100 sq m
 - Some remodelling/upgrading of existing teaching accommodation (mechanical and electrical, insulation, windows, ICT cabling, minor changes in layout etc in order to meet current building standards)
 - Upgrading and extension of staff and administrative accommodation
 - Adaptations for disabled access
 - Playground upgrades/extensions
 - Car parking extensions.
 - Set down/pick up points and cycle facilities dependent on the requirements of the School Travel Plan

- 13 The scheme would need to be paid for from the income generated by the sale of the other school site. The scale of income would depend upon the state of the land sale and housing market at the time, but current estimates are, that the sale could raise between £3m and £3.5m.
- 14 There are also revenue implications some of which immediately affect the school because they are to do with the level of staffing but there are also implications relating to the reduction in spare and unfilled places and the demand on the County Council in having to support a smaller number of schools.
- 15 On present pupil numbers combining the two schools into a single 4-11 combined school would lead to a reduction in budget share of £46k as compared with the two separate budget shares.

E. Other implications

None

F. Feedback from consultation and Local Member views

- 16 Both Governing Bodies have received the feedback from the consultation and have had the opportunity to discuss the recommendations set out in this paper.
- 17 Both Governing Bodies have formally confirmed that they are in agreement with the recommendation that the schools should be closed and a new 420 place combined school be established.
- 18 The Governing Bodies differ however in the choice of site for the establishment of the new school. The Governing Body of the Infant School continue to be of the view that the Infant School site is the better option as they believe that the difficulties relating to necessary repairs and the provision of sufficient playing field areas can be overcome in such a way as to make the use of the site a viable and favoured option. The view of officers involved continues to be that, on balance, the junior school site is the better option.
- 19 No comments have been received from local Members other than in their capacity as governors of the two schools.
- 20 A final decision on the matter will be made after the end of the two month objection period. This will be done either by the Cabinet Member (if there are no objections to the proposals) or by the School Organisation Committee/the Schools Adjudicator (if there are objections).

Please also see annexes.

G. Communication issues

- 21 The decision to go to a period of formal consultation through the publication of statutory notices will be communicated to the governing body of both schools involved who are the parties immediately affected. The governing bodies in turn will communicate with the school staff and pupils.

H. Other issues

None

Background Papers

None

Decision Taken:

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Decision Not Taken:

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Reason: _____

Your questions and views

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this paper please get in touch with the Contact Officer whose telephone number is given at the head of the paper.

*If you have any views on this paper which you would like the Cabinet to consider, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Head of Cabinet Support by **5.00 pm on Friday 2 November 2001**. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 382966), Fax (to 01296 383441), or e-mail to cabinet@buckscc.gov.uk*