

Report to Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Decision to be taken on or after 7 August 2019

Decision can normally be implemented at least 3 working days after decision has been signed.

Cabinet Member Report No. ED08.19

Title:	Dagnall Church of England School: Proposed change of age range
Date:	30 July 2019
Author:	Sarah Callaghan (Director of Education) 01296 387849
Contact officer:	Paula Campbell-Balcombe 01296 382896
Local members affected:	Cllr Anne Wight: Ivinghoe

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Summary

Dagnall Church of England School is a Voluntary Aided Infant school situated on the border of Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Central Bedfordshire. The school's present capacity is 57, based on an Admission Number of 19. The school is currently projected to have 38 children on roll in September 2019.

The school's governing board and the Local Authority (LA) are proposing that from 1 September 2019 the age range of the school is changed. The present age range is 4-7 years of age and if the change is agreed the age range would become 4-11 years of age. The school would change from an infant school to become an all-through primary school and would at the same time reduce its admission number from 19 to 15.

The school held a public consultation from 23 February 2017 to 31 March 2017. Details of the proposed change were distributed widely to the local community, parents/carers, St Alban's Diocese and other interested parties, including local schools. The governing board received 40 responses to the proposed change. 37 or 93% of people replying were in favour of the change. A public meeting was also held at which over 15 people attended.

Following consultation with the governing board and in line with the Department for Education's (DfE) statutory guidance for such changes, a statutory notice was published on the 28 May 2019 in the Bucks Herald and subsequently in the Leighton Buzzard Times on 4 June 2019 and details of the proposed change placed on the school's website. The publication instigated a four week representation period for people to support, comment on or object to the proposal. 160 representations were received. 151 (94%) of those responding were in favour and 100% of the parents who responded were in favour of the proposed change of age range.

Recommendation

To AGREE that, as the Local Authority have followed the Department for Education statutory guidance, permission is granted for the proposed change of age range at the school.

To AGREE that the change takes place from 1 September 2019.

A. Narrative setting out the reasons for the decision

1. When a Local Authority or governing board wish to implement a prescribed alteration to a school that changes its status, they must firstly make people aware of the proposed change and then publish a statutory notice in a local newspaper and place details on the school website. The Department for Education guidance on such changes was republished in 2018: Making significant changes (prescribed alterations) to maintained schools, statutory guidance for proposer and decision makers 2018. A governing board, LA or the Schools Adjudicator must have regard to this guidance when exercising functions under the School Organisation Prescribed Alterations to Maintained schools (England) regulations 2013 (the prescribed alterations regulations). It should be read in conjunction with Parts 2 and 3 of the Education and Inspections Act (EIA) 2006 and prescribed alterations regulations. The process followed by Dagnall CE School governing board and the LA has followed the current statutory guidance.
2. If implemented the proposal would mean that the school's provision would change and that it would admit children to KSI and KSII. The school would build up over a period of time to its eventual capacity when full of 105. If the proposal goes ahead the school's admission number would also be reduced from 19 to 15.
3. In line with DfE guidance on school reorganisations the Local Authority and governing board held a public consultation from 23 February 2017 to 31 March 2017 on a proposal to change the school's age range by admitting KS11 children. During that period a public meeting was also held at which over 15 people attended. At the end of the public consultation 40 responses had been received. Of those responding 37 or 93% were in favour of the proposal and 2 (5%) were against, with 1 not stating a preference. Details of the consultation were sent to parents/carers, local county councillor, staff, governors, Dagnall and Edlesborough parish council, local schools, the school's MP and a number of County Council and other organisations connected to the school.
4. If implemented the change would mean that the school would be able to admit year 3 and year 4 children in its existing buildings which would allow sufficient time for the necessary building works to have taken place before year 5 and 6 children were admitted in subsequent years. The school's number on roll would build up over a period of time to its new capacity of 105. The proposal if implemented would assist the LA in meeting future demand for primary school places in the planning area.
5. Planning permission for the necessary building work and appropriate funding has already been obtained. At this stage the cabinet member decision paper is just too formally seek agreement on the change of age range. The present size of the school and the numbers of children on roll means that the school will physically be able to accommodate year 3 and year 4 children in the school, without any additional classroom space being required.

6. The piece of land that the school uses as a car-park and which access would be required by the builders to gain access to the school is not owned by the school or LA. The LA is presently in negotiation with the land owner to allow builders to access the site to undertake the necessary work. If access is not granted then it would not be possible to carry out the building works and the school would need to remain as an infant school.
7. One of the benefits of the proposed change would be that it would regularise the admission arrangements for KSII admission. Children presently leave Dagnall at the end of KS1 and the majority go to the feeder school of Edlesborough. But as the pupil numbers at Dagnall CE School fluctuate this makes planning for Edlesborough School for KSII classes very difficult and occasionally they either have very small unviable classes or larger ones of over 30 which is not popular with parents. The proposal if implemented would stop that situation arising and the feeder link with Edlesborough School would be removed which is supported by the Governing Body of Edlesborough School.
8. Following the end of the public consultation in 2017 the outcome was reviewed by the LA and the governing board. Before the statutory notice was published and a representation period held, there was a delay as the LA had to obtain planning permission and gain approval for the build programme expenditure. When the finance was in place and planning permission had been granted the decision was taken to move to the next stage of the DfE's statutory process. In line with their statutory guidance the Local Authority published a statutory notice in the Bucks Herald on 28 May 2019 and then in the Leighton Buzzard Times on 5 June. Following the publication of the statutory notice there was a four week period for people to make representations (i.e. to comment on, object to or support the proposed expansion). 160 representations were received during the four week period. 94% were in favour of the proposal and 6% were against. The main concerns expressed were over traffic and access issues. If the proposal is implemented the school will continue to advocate and support walking and other environmentally friendly ways of getting to school.
9. Agreement to the proposed change of age range should enable education provision to be maintained in the village. Failure to expand might put at risk the long-term future of the school, as increasingly parents support primary aged children staying onto to the end of KS11 at the same primary school, rather than having to move at the end of KS1. Safeguarding the long-term sustainability of Dagnall CE School would also ensure that there are sufficient school places in the local planning area to meet forecast demand.
10. The DfE statutory guidance states that the decision-maker (the LA) should be guided by the views of parents when taking a decision. Of those responding 43% of responses to the consultation period were from parents and 100% of parents were in favour of the proposed change. Similarly in the representation period 32 parents (20%) of those responding were parents and 100% were in favour of the proposal.
11. When making the recommendation the Local Authority has taken account of the Public Sector Equality Duty. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and forwarded to the Head of Equalities who raised no objection or comment. If the expansion takes place the school will continue to offer places to children of any faith or no faith and they will continue to welcome and support children and their families/carers with special educational needs and disabilities.
12. When the school was inspected by Ofsted in July 2018 it was given a Good judgement.

13. As the statutory process has been followed the Cabinet Member is recommended to agree to the change of age range at the school, effective from September 2019 subject to access rights being granted to enable building works to be carried out.

B. Other options available, and their pros and cons

14. The only alternative option would be to not agree to the change of age range.

15. 100% of parents who responded to the public consultation were supportive of the proposed change and 100% of parental representations supported the proposed change. Agreeing to the proposed change of age range would mean that the LA's actions were being guided by the views of parents. The DfE guidance is clear that the decision maker, in this case the LA, should give weight in any decision taken to the views of parents.

16. The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills is in the circumstances outlined above, recommended to agree to the change of age range at the school.

C. Resource implications

17. As the proposed change of age range is supported by the LA, the school would be entitled to apply for funding from the LA's pupil growth funds. The funding for the school as it builds up its numbers would come to the LA from the government's GAG funding for school. Advice has been sought from the Director of Finance and Procurement who supports the action proposed.

D. Value for Money (VFM) Self Assessment

18. Effectiveness: This approach will ensure that the Local Authority is able to effectively manage its resources

19. Efficiency: This approach will ensure that the Council does the minimum to satisfy its legal obligation in this area of work and meets its statutory duty to provide sufficient school places.

20. Economy: This approach has limited impact on service delivery.

E. Legal implications

21. When an LA or governing board wish to implement a prescribed alteration to a school that changes its status, they must firstly make people aware of the proposed change and then publish a statutory notice in a local newspaper and place details on the school website. The Department for Education guidance on such changes was revised in 2018. Making significant changes (prescribed alterations) to maintained schools: Statutory Guidance for proposer and Decision Makers 2018. A governing board, LA or the Schools Adjudicator must have regard to this guidance when exercising functions under the School Organisation Prescribed Alterations to Maintained schools (England) regulations 2013 (the prescribed alterations regulations). It should be read in conjunction with Parts 2 and 3 of the Education and Inspections Act (EIA) 2006 and prescribed alterations regulations. The process followed by Dagnall CE School governing board and the LA has followed the current statutory guidance.

In line with Department for Education guidance a public consultation was held, followed by the publication of a statutory notice by the Local Authority in the Bucks

Herald on 28 May 2019 and then in the Leighton Buzzard Times on 5 June 2019 inviting people to make representations on the proposed expansion and change of age range. In addition, advice has been sought on the contents of this report from the Head of Legal Services.

F. Property implications

22. Planning permission for the proposed build has been gained as well as agreement to the necessary funding for the appropriate building works if the proposal is agreed.

G. Other implications/issues

23. Under the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2007 the Local Authority is the decision maker for this proposal having regard to the relevant Department for Education decision makers statutory guidance. The Department for Education statutory guidance has been followed in the consultation process, the publication of a statutory notice and the subsequent four week representation period.

H. Feedback from consultation, Local Area Forums and Local Member views

24. The LA held a public consultation from 23 February 2017 to 31 March 2017 on the proposal to make the proposed change of age range. Following a review of the outcome of the consultation period the decision was taken to publish a statutory notice, followed by a four week representation period. The representation period ran from 28 May 2019 to 25 June 2019 and 160 representations were received. 94% of those making representations were in favour of the proposed change. Details of the proposal were sent widely to local organisations, the local county councillor, staff, governors, parents/carers, nearby schools, parish council, St Alban's, church and other appropriate parties.

25. Cllr Wight was contacted and stated that she was happy for the change to go ahead, as there appears to be strong support for it within the community.

I. Communication issues

26. The outcome of the Cabinet Member decision will be communicated to the school, governors, local community and other local parties.

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 that you would like the Cabinet Member to consider, or if you wish to object to the proposed decision, please inform the Democratic Services Team by 5.00pm on 6 August 2019. This can be done by telephone (to 01296 382343), or e-mail to democracy@buckscc.gov.uk