



Report to Leader (Education & Skills portfolio)

Decision Date: 18 November 2020

Reference number: ED04.20

Title: Proposal by the Local Authority and governing board of Maids Moreton Church of England School to expand its age range from an infant school to a combined school.

Relevant councillor(s): Cllrs: Warren Whyte, John Chilver, Sir Beville Stanier, Patrick Fealey, Robin Stuchbury, Angela Macpherson, Simon Cole, Timothy Mills and Charlie Clare.

Author and/or contact officer: Paula Campbell-Balcombe 01296 382896. Andrew Tusting 01296 382916

Ward(s) affected: Buckingham West and East

Recommendation: The Leader is recommended to agree to the proposal by the governing board of Maids Moreton Church of England (CE) School that the school from September 2021 expands its age range. The school presently takes children up to the end of Key Stage 1 (KSI) and if the proposal is agreed children would continue at the school until the end of Key Stage 2 (KSII). The school undertook a public consultation on the proposed change and then held a representation period for people to comment on the proposal and there was overwhelming support for the proposed change.

Reason for decision: The proposed expansion is part of a longer term LA plan to meet future demand for pupil places in relation to the emerging housing plan in the area. In line with Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance the governing board held a public consultation and then a four week representation period on their proposal to change status from an infant to a combined school. There was overwhelming support for the proposed change from governors, parents, staff and the local community.

Executive summary

- 1.1 The school's governing board supported by the Local Authority (LA) held a public consultation and then a four week representation period on a proposal that from 1

September 2021, the school expanded its age range to take children up to the end of KSII.

- 1.2 There was overwhelming support for the proposed change from parents, local community, staff and governors
- 1.3 The statutory guidance from the DfE on managing school changes such as the school's proposed change of age range, have been followed by the governing board by them holding a public consultation and then a four week representation period.
- 1.4 The governing board have previously consulted on a proposal to reduce its admission number from 30 to 15 and this change was agreed by the Schools Adjudicator in 2019 to reflect current admissions and allow the school to reorganise their classes more economically.
- 1.5 As the statutory guidance has been followed and there is overwhelming public support for the proposal, the Cabinet Member is recommended to agree to the proposed change of age range.

Content of report

- 1.6 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 DfE 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 Maids Moreton CE School governing board and the LA is in accordance with the current statutory guidance.
- 1.7 Discussions between the governing board and the LA in 2018 made it clear that the long-term future of educational provision at the school was dependent on two actions. Firstly to reduce the school Published Admission Number (PAN) from 30 to 15 and this was agreed by the Schools Adjudicator in 2019. Secondly the only long-term viable financial option for the school was to increase its age range so that it took children from Year R right through to the end of KSII, when they would transfer to secondary education. The school not being able to recruit children up to its PAN

of 30 has meant that over time it has suffered from uneconomic class sizes which has impacted adversely on its financial position.

Expansion to a 0.5fe primary school will enable Maids Moreton to put a balanced sustainable budget in place. Allocations for September 2019 (17 pupils) indicated that this was a realistic option. Expanding the school from an infant school to a combined school is also considered to produce the following benefits:

- Increased certainty for parents applying to the school and continuity for the children - removing the need for parents to move their children to another school at the end of Key Stage 1 which creates drop off issues as well as increased car use;
- Stability in pupil numbers and an increased budget to build resilience in future – safeguarding the long-term sustainability of Maids Moreton CE School;
- DfE guidance has a presumption against the closure of small schools and the need to carefully consider all alternatives to ensure the school continues to remain available to the community;
- Larger core of staff enables greater sharing of ideas and support with curriculum planning;
- Larger peer group for pupils to socialise and learn from each other;
- Enable the phased expansion of places in the longer term (i.e. if there were a need to expand capacity to accommodate longer term housing growth);
- Remove uncertainty in admissions at Year 3 for Buckingham Primary to enable more effective financial planning.

The governing board of Buckingham Primary school were made aware of the expansion of Maids Moreton CE School and minuted that they supported the proposed change.

There is forecast to be significant housing growth around Buckingham Town as part of the housing plans for the area. In Buckingham, land west of Moreton Road (BUC043 - 130 homes); land off Osler Way (BUC46 - 420 homes) and land east of Walnut Drive & west of Foscoote Road (170 homes in Maids Moreton - MMO006) are allocated in addition to the following sites allocated in the made Buckingham Neighbourhood plan:

- Land off Tingewick Road (BUC28 - 400 homes) – approved
- Tingewick Road Industrial Site (BUC52 – 100 homes) - approved
- Land north of St Rumbold's Well (BUC59 – 39 homes)
- Land between Bridge Street and Well Street (BUC64 – 28 homes)
- West Buckingham (BUC51 – 288 homes)

It is therefore vital if the LA is to maintain its statutory duty to ensure sufficient school places that Maids Moreton CE School is financially viable in the long-term and the planned expansion is a key part of that requirement. The proposed expansion is part of a longer term strategy to meet the needs arising from future housing growth. The second phase, subject to population growth, would be to expand the school to a

full one form entry (30 pupils per year group) school. Should this be required a further consultation and build programme would be undertaken.

- 1.8 If the change is implemented it would mean that the school would become a half form entry (15 pupils per year group) all-through primary school taking children from 4 years of age up to 11 years of age.
- 1.9 In line with DfE guidance on school reorganisations, the governing board held a public consultation from 3 June 2019 to 22 July 2019 on a proposal to expand the school's age range. A much higher than normal level of responses were received (197) and of these 96% of those responding were in favour of the proposal. Details of the consultation were sent to parents/carers, local councillors, local schools, staff, governors, Maids Moreton parish and parochial councils, Oxford Diocese, the local MP and a number of county council teams and other organisations connected to the school.
- 1.10 Following the end of the public consultation the outcome was assessed and in light of the overwhelming support for the proposal, and to secure the long-term future of the school, the decision was taken to seek planning permission for the necessary building work and to secure funding for the project.
- 1.11 Planning permission was granted in August 2020 and Property Board have agreed that the funds secured from S106 developer contributions from housing developments in the area and the LA's Basic Need funding will be used to fund the necessary building work.
- 1.12 As planning permission had been gained and the funding secured the decision was taken to move to the next stage of the DfE's statutory process on school reorganisations and in line with their statutory guidance the school published a statutory notice in the Buckingham and Winslow Advertiser, with a deadline of 16 October 2020 for people to make representations, (i.e. to comment on, object to or support the proposed expansion). 22 representations were received during the four week period: all expressed support for the proposal.
- 1.13 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.
- 1.14 The school had a short inspection by Ofsted in May 2017 when it retained its Good grading from 2012.

- 1.15 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 1 September 2021.

Other options considered

- 1.16 The only other option would be for the Cabinet Member not to agree to the change. However as 96 % of those responding to the public consultation were in favour of the change and 100 % of people who commented during the representation period supported the change, this would be contrary to parental choice. . Moreover, as the proposal is part of the LA's longer term strategy to meet the needs arising from future housing growth to not agree to the proposal could impact on the LA's ability to meet its statutory duty. The recommendation is therefore that the change is agreed.

Legal and financial implications

- 1.17 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 Maids Moreton 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 in the Buckingham and Winslow Advertiser inviting people to make representations on the proposed closure. In addition, advice has been sought on the contents of this report from the Principal Lawyer.
- 1.18 The proposed expansion of the school's age range would ensure the long-term viability of the school and enable the governing board to set a balanced budget and over time get back into surplus. Advice has been sought from the section 151 officer.

Corporate implications

- 1.19 The proposed change should not have a detrimental impact on the environment as it will not entail an increase in car traffic. It is likely that owing to the fact that parents will no longer have to potentially transport children to other schools at KSII it may in fact reduce the need for children to be taken to school by car and therefore have a positive impact on the environment. As part of gaining planning permission mitigation actions were put in place to ensure that the great crested newts identified in the school's pond are to be relocated.

Consultation and communication

As outlined in the report a public consultation took place as did a four week representation period. Both opportunities gave the local community a chance to raise any questions and comment on the proposed change of status. In addition a public meeting was held where all interested parties could view and comment upon the proposed building works in advance of the formal planning application being submitted. The local councillors were made aware of the proposals: Cllr Chilver commented "I fully support this proposal which has the strong approval of parents, staff, governors and the local community", Cllrs Whyte, Mills, Fealey and Macpherson all expressed their support for the proposal.

Next steps and review

- 1.20 If the proposal is agreed, the LA and the school will arrange to update the DfE's records about the change and inform the local community of the change.

Background papers

- 1.21 Attached is the board's statutory notice and additional information that was made public.

Your questions and views (for key decisions)

If you have any questions about the matters contained in this report please get in touch with the author of this report. If you have any views that you would like the Cabinet Member to consider please inform the democratic services team. This can be done by telephone 01296 382343 or email democracy@buckinghamshire.gov.uk