

Hollinswood Infant and Junior School Proposed Merger Consultation Meeting held at Hollinswood Infant School Wednesday 4th July 2012

Staff Meeting	4.00pm
Governors Meeting	5.00pm
Parents Meeting	6.00pm

In attendance representing Telford & Wrekin Council were:

- Jim Collins, Assistant Director - Education, Skills and Culture
- Kathy Swallow, School Organisation Admissions & Planning
- Maria Haywood, HR Consultant (4pm - 6pm)
- Jules Millington, School Organisation Admissions & Planning

Kathy began each meeting by explaining the process we have been through so far and the timetable for the remainder of the process, and what are considered to be the advantages of an all through primary school. Maria followed on from Kathy and explained the human resources aspect of the merger and the process that would follow should the merger be approved by cabinet on 26th July. At all meetings Jim Collins explained and reaffirmed the benefits of merging an infant and junior school.

The following questions and comments were raised during the **Staff** meeting:

Q: When the decision is taken to publish the public notice will this be based on the funding implications or on the responses from the consultation.

A: If the Cabinet decide to publish the public notice this will be the first indication that the merger will go ahead. The cabinet will have all of the responses from the consultation prior to the cabinet meeting on the 26th and will then weigh up the pros and cons and will decide whether they will proceed with the merger.

Q: What will happen to the savings generated by the process; eg the loss of a headteacher?

A: All savings are put back into the LA's School budget and will be distributed between the schools. Any monies remaining the balances of the 'closed' school will be transferred to the newly formed primary school.

Q: Who will have to pay the costs if there are any redundancies?

A: There were no redundancies following the two mergers last year, however if there were to be any redundancies the LA would absorb the costs.

Q: Is there any evidence that merged primaries perform better than separate infant and juniors?

A: It is too early to assess the schools that merged last year. During the process in Birmingham that merged 37 pairs of schools it was Jim's experience that the schools performed better.

Q: If there is no hard facts to support this theory, then this does not seem to be a good enough reason to merge.

A: Various examples of recent mergers eg Lawley, Dawley, Malinslee, Old Park have all performed better since they became a primary school.

Q: Had all previously merged schools moved into one building

A: Some had, but in the Birmingham scenario some schools had considerable distance between the sites, challenges were overcome to establish successful, workable primary schools. Good organisation and management were key to ensuring success.

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Q: Can you explain what effect the merger would have on funding, ie would the resource diminish due to the merger?

A: There will be a new funding structure from April 2013 and it not clear exactly how the funding will operate. However the new funding will be predicated by numbers of children on roll, which will not be affected by the merger, there is also a new pupil premium which could benefit Hollinswood.

Q: Will it automatically be the Infant school that will close?

A: It is normal to retain the remaining Headteacher and therefore we would expand the age range for the Junior school. This is not a take over it is a merger.

Q: How would the merger affect Ofsted and previous ratings.

A: Both schools are due for inspection and substantial amounts of work have been done since the previous inspections which would be recognised in any future inspection. If the infant was closed it would be likely that it would lose its 'outstanding' category.

Q: What other awards would the infant lose, basic skills award for example or can it be transferred?

A: This would have to be checked out. Collectively all the skills transfer into the new school strengthening the skills base of the school.

Q: Can we inspected by Ofsted during the merger process?

A: Whilst no guarantee can be made. Jim would request that a proposed inspection be deferred until the merger was complete.

Q: How will the new primary be organised eg: 2 deputies, 2 separate buildings same as at this point in time

A: Suggest that a governors working party be developed during the summer to consider the future workings of the school. They will decide what will be the best fit for the school. Location will be a factor, but until the working group is functioning we cannot answer the question.

Q: Do the governors decide the new staffing structure?

A: Once a structure is agreed the Governors will distribute the new structure to all staff and trade unions. There will be a four week consultation period. If there is more than one person for a post then it will be necessary to conduct interviews.

Q: Will pay grades be protected? Eg deputy head teachers?

A: Yes there will be a degree of protection, depending on the new staff structure.

Q: Will staff on maternity leave be considered and kept informed?

A: Every effort will be made to ensure that they are still part of the process. Staff on maternity leave have the same rights as all other staff.

Q: For those on holiday, how will the staff be informed of the outcome of the cabinet meeting.

A: The staff would like to be emailed. The Business Manager is to provide email addresses of those who would like to be informed on 26th July. LA will endeavour to email staff on 26th after the cabinet meeting.

Q: What other factors will be taken into consideration by the cabinet?

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A: Council policy, parental views, wider development of the Borough, the movement towards primary schools.

Q: When considering all the benefits and policies could it be decided to work cooperatively but remain as two separate schools?

A: Parental confidence in both schools has been demonstrated by the high percentage of pupils that already transfer between the two schools (98%). Consideration would be given to how best serve the people of Telford and Wrekin.

Q: Staff were concerned that the Infant school was currently rated as outstanding by Ofsted.

A: If infant 'closes' then the outstanding status would close. However the LA is certain that neither school has stood still since their last Ofsted and as the inspection framework had changed completely it was impossible to say what would be the outcome of a new inspection. If the merger proceeded it would provide the opportunity to work together to improve the outcomes across both phases.

Q: Some of the staff felt that a lot of the drivers and benefits of mergers did not apply in this instance and could not see why the merger should proceed.

A: The benefits of the merger were reiterated. All staff were urged to express their views via email, post and telephone and all this information would be fed back to the Cabinet.

Q: It was felt that the situation of the buildings were not conducive to a merger.

A: The issue of the buildings is not ideal, but the challenges are not insurmountable with a bit of creative management and organisation.

Q: Have any considerations been given to increased development in the area.

A: It is thought that there will be a lot of development around the Town Centre and this would undoubtedly impact on Hollinswood as this would be the nearest school. In the long term the school and its capacity would have to be revisited, in the short term it may be that creative landscaping may assist to integrate the two schools.

Q: Would there still be two separate entrances.

A: This would be a matter for the governors to decide.

Q: It was felt that if the two schools merged it may be confusing for visitors to ascertain where the entrance would be.

A: The re-branding grant could assist in improving the signposting.

Q: Parents are buying new uniform now, will they be required to buy new uniform again in January?

A: We would suggest that the re-branding grant could be used to assist with uniform and we would suggest that the new uniform would not be issued until September 2013 – but this would be a decision for the governing body.

Q: Should the staff give their views to the Governors.

A: All comments, views and statements should be sent to the LA, but the staff can always send their views etc to both the governors and the LA.

Q: Should the teaching staff issue a statement?

A: All views are important and any statement would form part of the consultation papers.

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Staff were very upset that the first they knew of the merger was the article in the Shropshire Star.

Press releases were sent out without the knowledge of Jim or Kathy who felt that it was regrettable that this had occurred. Every effort would be made to keep the staff informed about the outcome of the cabinet meeting on 26th July.

All staff were encouraged to have their say.

The following questions and comments were raised during the **Governors** meeting:

An apology was made regarding the erroneous report by the Shropshire Star.

It was explained that any savings from the merger would be fed back into the LA's school budget and would be redistributed amongst the schools only.

Q: Who will be responsible for funding any redundancies.

A: Response as before

Q: Would VR be an option for staff?

A: At the last two mergers all staff were retained, albeit some staff had a reduction in their working hours. If there were more staff than posts then VR would be available as necessary.

Q: Would there be reduction to the budget.

A: Response as before

Q: Who would decide the new structure

A: In previous mergers and working party of school governors, made up of representatives of from both governing bodies, would be formed and, working with HR, would develop the new structure. It had been suggested at the meeting at the Junior school on 3rd July that a working party could be formed during the school holidays to plan and prepare a new structure

Q: The Governors felt that this merger was very different from the last two as the buildings could not be joined.

A: It was felt that development in the Town Centre may increase need in the future and accommodation and capacity at Hollinswood may have to be revisited. Some of the governors felt that this was a way off.

Q: It was felt that the proximity of the buildings would severely impede a successful merger

A: The effectiveness of the buildings was not insurmountable and a primary school benefits greatly from a single assessment policy and curriculum planning across the key stages.

Q: If the merger was to proceed, would there be any money for landscaping?

A: There may be some monies available for landscaping – this would need to be investigated but there are lots of opportunities to improve the aspect of the school eg: forest schools

Q: Would staff at risk be eligible for redeployment

A: Every effort would be given to staff at risk to locate vacant posts within LA schools. We have had considerable success redeploying staff at risk in previous mergers.

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Q: Within the new staffing structure would there be the opportunity for a new class?

A: There would be the opportunity for staff to put an expression of interest during the structure consultation. The head teacher and governors would make the final decision on the new structure.

Q: What is the process to becoming an academy.

A: If we were to shut both schools, then there is an expectation that it will become an academy. We would be required to seek an expression of interest for sponsors. The LA is allowed to express a preference, but the final decision would lie with the Secretary of State. It is a lengthy process

Q: If we decided to pursue the academy route is it likely the school would be rebuilt?

A: The LA provide the building, the sponsor runs the school. There is no money in the budget at present to rebuild Hollinswood.

Q: The governing body are concerned about the Ofsted status of the Infants school

A: As there is a new inspection framework it is difficult to know what the outcome of any inspection would be. Significant improvements have been made to both schools since their last inspections, both schools are demonstrating improvements via the RAISEOnline data. As an ambassador for school improvement Jim would not promote any project that would diminish standards in any of our schools.

All governors were encouraged to submit their views during the consultation period.

The following questions and comments were raised during the **parent's** meeting:

Q: Is there any plans to rebuild?

A: Response as before.

Q: How would the merger affect ABC Nursery.

A: There is no intention to change the relationship between the school and the nursery. It is a relationship that the LA would encourage as an attached nursery provides a conducive preschool environment.

Q: Would there be any change in the start and finish time of the school day?

A: It would be a decision for the governing body. Perhaps the entrances could be reconfigured to assist parents that have children in both buildings.

Q: Are there other examples of mergers that have succeeded in two buildings.

A: In previous mergers we were able to link the buildings, however this is not always the case. The problems are not insurmountable. Sympathetic landscaping may be an option to link the two school buildings. Future development in the town centre may provide additional funds to adjust the buildings.

Q: How would staff be organised.

A: This would be the a decision made by the governing body.

Q: Who determines the head-teacher?

A: If the infant school closes there is already a head teacher in situ in the Junior school. If as in previous mergers both head teachers resigned we would need to advertise for a head teacher.

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Q: Who initiates the process in this instance (ie resignation of one Head teacher in linked infant and junior school.)

A: There is a rubric that states if the school is a community school then it is the LA that instigates a consultation. This differs from a Voluntary Aided or foundation school as the governing body can initiate the consultation process.

Q: How would you ensure that the workload of the new head teacher would remain manageable?

A: This would need to be taken into consideration within the new structure. Even as a merged school it would be an average size for a primary.

Q: Why change it if it is working so well at the moment?

A: The benefits of merging were reiterated.

Q: Some parents expressed concerns regarding bullying because of the extended age range of the children.

A: This is an issue that Telford and Wrekin take very seriously. We have 45 primary schools all of whom have dealt with these issues. As an Authority we are not aware of increased incidents and it is up to the senior leadership team within a school to address this issue. We are not aware of any increase in bullying due to school mergers.

Q: Would the dinner halls be merged?

A: This would be a decision made by the Governing Body.

Q: Is the merger a foregone conclusion.

A: No this is why we have consultation. All opinions will be listened to before the Cabinet make an informed decision.

Q: How will you ensure that KS1 standards are maintained?

A: All of the KS1 expertise will remain within the school. It would be the responsibility of the Head Teacher to appoint the correct staff to lead on KS1 and he would be able to monitor progress and keep up to date with changes in the key stage assessment process.

Q: A parent suggested that the views of the children should be considered.

A: We have recommended that the members of the school council be consulted and their views will be fed into the consultation process.

Q: Will the final decision be up to Board of Governors?

A: The process was reiterated. The governors were considered to be major consultees and their views would be considered. The merger could still go ahead if the governors were not in favour, the cabinet would consider the broad consensus. The consultation process considers all suggestions.

Some parents were not in favour of mixing young and older children.

Q: Would there be any help with set up?

A: There would be £10,000 re-branding grant. Per previous answer.

Q: Would the newly merged school receive support and be monitored?

A: Both the current infant and junior school have an attached advisor – Liz Smith, she is very familiar with the schools and her support would remain instrumental to the school.

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Q: Would a newly merged school be able to accommodate children with varying medical conditions

A: It is the responsibility of the Board of Governors of the new school to accommodate the learning needs of all pupils including mentors. What's in place at the moment will continue and if there are children with specific needs that require access adaptations (eg ramp) both buildings will be adapted to fulfil our duty of care for all pupils.

Q: Will the playing fields be retained

A: Yes.

Q: Large events such as sport days will involve large numbers of people.

A: Primary schools work very hard to organise successful sports events and to accommodate all age ranges.

Q: Again concerns about the Ofsted rating were raised.

A: Response as before

All parties were urged to get involved in the consultation and to express their opinions via phone, email or post.