

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CABINET
MONDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2000 at 10.00 am**

**POSSIBLE AMALGAMATION OF OUGHTONHEAD INFANTS AND
OUGHTONHEAD JUNIOR SCHOOLS**

Report of the Director of Education

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Executive Members:- Derek Ashley
Keith Emsall

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 To consider the outcome of consultation on a proposal to amalgamate Oughtonhead Infant School and Oughtonhead Junior School in September 2001.
- 1.2 To authorise the Director of Education to publish a statutory notice and to undertake subsequent processes.

2. Summary/comments from Select Committee or Panel

- 2.1 The joint Governing Body of the two schools requested the consultation on the possibility of amalgamation.
- 2.2 There was little response to the consultation. The only letter received during the consultation period was from the newly separated Governing Bodies of both the Infant and Junior schools. It was in support of the amalgamation. The few people who attended the public meetings took the opportunity to raise questions about the management of children during breaks, the size of the proposed school and the special unit.

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2.3 The School Provision and Resources Panel considered the outcome of the consultation on Friday 8 September and recommended that the Cabinet and Executive Council be advised that it is their view that the Director of Education should be authorised to:

- publish a statutory notice to close Oughtonhead Infant School and Oughtonhead Junior School and to open a new 2 f.e. primary school with a nursery class with effect from 1 September 2001;
- to determine the proposals if no objections are received; and
- make comments upon any objections received to the Hertfordshire School Organisation Committee which would then be the decision making forum.

2.4 The proposal has also been agreed to by the relevant spokespersons.

3. Conclusion

3.1 The support of the two governing bodies and the lack of any significant adverse comment suggests that the amalgamation process should proceed.

3.2 The Cabinet is asked to consider the School Provision and Resources Panel's recommendation before final approval by the Executive Committee.

1. Background

- 1.1 On 13 April 2000 the Governors of Oughtonhead Infants School and Oughtonhead Junior School asked the Director of Education for consultation with parents and staff to commence about the possible amalgamation of the Infant and Junior Schools to create one primary school.
- 1.2 On 24 May 2000 the Education Committee agreed to the governors' request to undertake consultation.
- 1.3 A consultation document was produced following the Committee meeting. The document was distributed to all parents of children at both schools. Copies were also sent to the Governors and staff of the two schools and to the County Council's usual list of consultees and local Members. Copies of that document are available from Benjamin Wright in the Education Planning Unit (01992 555897).
- 1.4 Officers attended joint meetings of the governing bodies and of the staff at the two schools. Meetings were also held for parents and the local community at the Infant School on 29 June 2000 and at the Junior School on 26 June 2000.

2. Response to the Consultation

- 2.1 There was a low level of response to the consultation. Only one written response was received by the end of the consultation period : a joint response from the governing bodies of the two schools in favour of the amalgamation. It is attached as Appendix A. A further letter, from the Priory (secondary) School, was subsequently received but this did not indicate a preference for or against the proposed amalgamation.
- 2.2 19 and 11 people attended the public meetings at the Infants and Junior schools respectively. Tape recordings were made and are available from Benjamin Wright. Notes of meetings have been copied into folders in the Members' Rooms.
- 2.3 All but four people attending the meetings were either governors or employed at the two schools. The opportunity was taken to explore issues such as:
 - the management of young and older children during breaks;
 - the size of the school;
 - the continuation of the special unit;
 - parental rights to transfer children; and
 - building proposals.

3. The response to the issues raised

3.1 It is the LEA's policy to support amalgamations on the following educational grounds:

- more effective curricular planning across all age groups
- opportunities for interaction between staff and children of all ages
- greater breadth of staff experience
- increased opportunities for staff development
- easier transition for children from the infant to the junior key stages
- budget flexibility

3.2 The play arrangements of children of different ages would be a matter for the new school's management but it is usual for younger and older children to be separated but brought together for specific planned and managed activities.

3.3 The proposal does not include a change in the size of the schools. They will continue to serve a particular local area of Hitchin.

3.4 The proposals do not envisage changing the role of the special unit, which is for children of junior age with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

3.5 Parents would continue to be able to move their children to other schools in the area if places are available.

3.6 Proposals for building works to facilitate the operation of one school in two buildings had been formed in response to consultation with governors and staff. They met with approval.

4. Staffing implications

4.1 Headteacher and Deputy Headteachers posts must be advertised nationally, which would place existing substantive postholders at risk of redundancy. Only two staff would be affected in this case. The County Council operates a redeployment/redundancy scheme which would operate, if necessary.

4.2 The existing governing bodies have indicated that subject to pupil numbers and budget, they would wish to transfer all other staff to the new school. It may be necessary, however, to make reductions in staffing at the time of amalgamation. This would need to be the subject of further work by the shadow governing body and designate-management of the new school at the appropriate time. It may be necessary to make reductions in the level of staffing at the time of amalgamation.

4.3 The Infant School headteacher's post is currently vacant. Arrangements have been made for the headteacher of the Junior School to oversee both schools until either the schools are amalgamated or, if a decision is taken not to proceed, until the vacancy can be filled.

5. Financial implications

Revenue

- 5.1 The current statutory funding formula includes provision for the transitional funding of amalgamated schools on a standard basis. The amalgamation ultimately would create a revenue saving of £31,500 to the Authority in Year 3 and £63,000 in subsequent years at current price levels.
- 5.2 There may be potential one-off costs. Possible redundancy costs could be a maximum of £60,000. There could be potential redeployment revenue costs subject to the governors' subsequent decisions on staffing. However, past experience suggests that this is not a significant issue in most amalgamating schools.

Capital

- 5.3 Some minor capital works will be required to the buildings to create a central staff room, a covered way between the two school buildings etc. A feasibility study has indicated that the costs of such work would be £77,000 + fees and furniture and equipment. This will be funded from the annual 'Minor Works – Reorganisations' budget in 2000/2001.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The low response to the consultation indicates that proceeding with this proposal would not be controversial.

7. Next Steps

- 7.1 A decision is required by the Executive Committee on 18 September in order to achieve the following timescale for amalgamation:

Statutory notices published	25 September 2000
End of statutory notice period	25 November 2000
If objections are received, referral to the School Organisation Committee	December 2000
If approved, new school opens	1 September 2001

Background information referred to by the author whilst compiling this report

"The Future for Oughtonhead Infant and Junior Schools – a consultation document."

Notes of public meetings.

Responses to the consultation.

If you wish to know more about the issues covered in this report please contact Pauline Davis, telephone no. 01992 555865.