

CABINET
MONDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2004 AT 2.00 P.M.

**PROPOSED CLOSURE OF LITTLE FURZE PRIMARY SCHOOL,
SOUTH OXHEY**

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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Executive Member: Robert Gordon

Local Member: Jane Hobday

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with the results of the consultation about the proposed closure of Little Furze School on 31 December 2004 and the opportunity for children on roll at that date to complete their primary education at Oxhey Wood School.
- 1.2 Any comments from the CSF Education Panel of 9 September will be reported verbally at the Cabinet meeting.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The need to review surplus places in South Oxhey was set out in the Hertfordshire School Organisation Plan 5.
- 2.2 Little Furze School became a focus early in the review because:-
 - the school was placed in “special measures” following the Ofsted inspection in November 2003
 - it has been adversely affected by a decline in its numbers on roll and is at risk of becoming financially unviable
 - the situation has adversely affected the school’s ability to recruit staff
 - there are surplus primary school places in the area.
- 2.3 In making the proposal consideration has been given to
 - whether or not there would be sufficient primary school places in South Oxhey, and
 - providing an appropriate alternative for the pupils at Little Furze.
- 2.4 103 responses were received of which 54 were from parents, 35 of whom were Little Furze parents. Of the 103 responses, 77 were

against the proposal, 11 were for the proposal and 15 did not express a view. Neither school governing body nor head teacher expressed a view about the closure of Little Furze and only one response has been received from a member of staff of either school. However the governors of Oxhey Wood School indicated verbally that they would be pleased to co-operate with the Council.

2.5 The results of the consultation exercise are being considered by the Education Panel on 9 September and their comments will be reported verbally to Cabinet.

2.6 A number of parents have chosen to move their children from Little Furze to other schools (some across the county boundary) rather than wait for the implementation of the LEA proposal i.e. to transfer all the pupils from Little Furze to Oxhey Wood in January 2005. Therefore it will no longer be necessary to increase the admission limit at Oxhey Wood from 51 to 60 and some of the proposed capital works will not be needed. The estimate for the required capital expenditure is now reduced to £1.5m (it was originally 2m). The works required are listed in section 8.6 of this report.

3. Conclusion

3.1 The results of the consultation process are set out in more detail in paragraph 5 below. Cabinet is asked to decide whether or not to publish a statutory notice to close Little Furze School with effect from 31 December 2004.

4. Background

4.1 The need to review surplus primary places in South Oxhey was set out in the Hertfordshire School Organisation Plan 5.

4.2 Pupil forecast figures for schools in South Oxhey are as follows:

PRESENT CAPACITY	PROPOSED CAPACITY	2004/05	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11
1610	1400							
FORECAST		1231	1190	1191	1144	1127	1106	1100

4.3 Little Furze School was identified by Ofsted in November 2003 as requiring "special measures", whilst Oxhey Wood School had a satisfactory Ofsted inspection in February 2004.

4.4 A copy of the consultation document is attached as appendix A to this report. It explains, as does the table above, that there would be sufficient primary school places in South Oxhey if Little Furze were to close, and sets out the proposal for the transfer of those children on roll at the time of the proposed closure to Oxhey Wood School .

- 4.5 The estimated number on roll at Little Furze for Autumn 2004 is now down to between 40 and 50. This has changed from the figure published in the consultation document because some children have already left the school and all of those offered places in nursery and reception for September 2004 have now found places at other schools.

5. Results of consultation

Category of respondent	RESPONSES			
	Total	For closure	Against closure	Don't know/nil
Parents -Little Furze	35	0	32	3
Grandparents – Little Furze	4	0	4	0
Staff –Oxhey Wood	1	1	0	0
Parents – other South Oxhey schools	19	4	13	2
Grandparents – other South Oxhey schools	2	1	1	0
Governors – other South Oxhey Schools	2	1	1	0
Governing bodies – other South Oxhey schools	1	1	0	0
Headteachers – other schools	2	1	0	1
Teacher (visiting) VI class	1	0	0	1
Pre-school – Little Furze	1	0	0	1
Other pre-school	1	0	1	0
Local residents	13	1	11	1
Ward councillors	2	0	2	0
Former parents,pupils, staff, governors– Little Furze	10	1	8	1
Other –association with schools not stated	7	0	4	3
Other – LEA	1	0	0	1
Other – community use Little Furze	1	0	0	1
TOTAL	103	11	77	15

- 5.2 The responses have been made available to view in the members room.
- 5.3 2000 consultation documents were circulated. The number of responses received was 103. Of those who responded 77 were against the proposal to close Little Furze School.

6. Analysis of the consultation responses

- 6.1 The responses have been grouped into 13 sections below (6.2) to (6.14) according to the number of times individual points of concern were raised. The response to each concern is shown in italics in each case.

- 6.2 Thirty-six comments were made about the unfairness of closing Little Furze as opposed to another school in South Oxhey.

This is an intervention around standards. The DfES require that all LEA's to consider the need for retaining any school which is in Special Measures. Where there are surplus places in any area (as in this case) it is very difficult to justify keeping the school open. It would also be difficult to justify closing a different school when Little Furze is not only in special measures but is having great difficulty attracting staff.

- 6.3 Thirty-one positive comments about Little Furze were received, ranging from satisfaction with pupil achievement to expressions of appreciation of the pleasant environment and the swimming pool.

While recognising the significant efforts made by the school, the pupil achievement comments are not supported by the Ofsted report which followed the November 2003 inspection.

- 6.4 Twenty-one comments referred to the waste of money, particularly with the expenditure on refurbishing the school after the fire.

The damage caused by the fire was made good with insurance money.

- 6.5 Twenty comments expressed concern about pupils going to Oxhey Wood, including concerns about class size, travel, the timing of the move and how accepting Oxhey Wood children would be of Little Furze children.

The consultation document indicated the number of pupils in each year group if all the Little Furze pupils were to transfer to Oxhey Wood. It is felt that a delay in implementation would result in a further decline in morale and a new acting head teacher would have to be found for Little Furze. Children transferring from Little Furze to Oxhey Wood would move with their friends and measures to encourage integration would be set up. However a number of parents have already decided to move their children to other schools so there will be fewer transferring to Oxhey Wood than first anticipated.

- 6.6 Eighteen comments referred to the need for sufficient places and parental choice, and four comments were received about the possible impact on other schools in the area.

The forecasts as shown in paragraph 4.2 shows that sufficient places will be available in South Oxhey in the foreseeable future. There will continue to be some surplus in the area, which will give parents a choice of primary school. Some Little Furze children may take up spare places at schools other than Oxhey Wood if their parents wish it, and indeed already have.

- 6.7 Fifteen comments related to the unfairness of judging Little Furze at a difficult time (i.e. when there were a number of temporary mobile classrooms on site after the fire which occurred in the summer term 2003).

The school was already underachieving before the fire in the summer of 2003.

- 6.8 Fourteen comments expressed concern about alternative accommodation being found for other groups currently accommodated at Little Furze, such as the opportunity and visually impaired and hearing impaired classes.

These classes serve the whole of the South West Herts area. Alternative accommodation will be found within the area and it may be possible to relocate all these groups to Oxhey Wood.

- 6.9 Twelve comments related to concern about future use of the site and possible vandalism.

Arrangements for security of the site will be made by Hertfordshire Property Services.

- 6.10 Nine suggestions were made as to how Little Furze could be improved.

Improving Little Furze at this stage is not a viable option, with staff shortages and the number of spare places.

- 6.11 Six suggestions were received for alternative action following the closure of Little Furze, such as spreading pupils and the £2m (see para 8.1) among other local schools, while nine suggestions for improving rather than closing Little Furze were received.

Many parents have already obtained places at other schools. The proposal enables children to transfer with their friendship groups to Oxhey Wood.

We are currently investigating the possibility of providing a behaviour support co-ordinator to work with all the South Oxhey primary schools.

In recent years there has been significant investment in both Warren Dell and Greenfields schools. There will be a bid for some capital investment at Woodhall School in 2005/06.

- 6.12 Six comments expressed dissatisfaction with the consultation process.

The public was consulted in the usual way through the publication of a consultation document with a response form and the opportunity to attend two surgeries and a public meeting.

- 6.13 Two comments (one from a school governing body) suggested reducing Oxhey Wood to a 1FE school because of the number of surplus places in the area.

Hertfordshire is working towards a 2FE primary school model as a principle in primary reviews and therefore it is not felt to be appropriate to reduce the size of Oxhey Wood. However in response to the fact that a number of parents have already moved their children from Little Furze to other schools, there will be no need to expand Oxhey Wood to 2FE at this stage.

- 6.14 One comment asserted that the Council has failed to ensure high standards in the whole of South Oxhey through neglect and lack of investment.

- 6.15 No response has been received from the Little Furze Governing Body or the acting head teacher.

- 6.16 The Governing body of Oxhey Wood School expressed no view on the closure of Little Furze but indicated that, if the school were to close, they would be pleased to work with the Council to accommodate the remaining pupils from Little Furze at Oxhey Wood School.

7. Analysis of the surgeries and the public meeting

- 7.1. As part of the consultation process, two surgeries and a public meeting were held at Little Furze School on 6, 7 and 12 July respectively. No one attended the first surgery and one person attended the second. Approximately 70 people attended the public meeting. The number of parents estimated to be at the meeting was about 20.

- 7.2. The views expressed at the public meeting broadly reflected those of the written responses.

8. Accommodation Issues for Oxhey Wood School

- 8.1 Oxhey Wood School was originally built as a 2FE school and is well placed to accommodate the pupils estimated to be on roll at Little Furze in December 2004. When formulating the proposal, it was intended that two classrooms would be brought back into school use and that other refurbishment and some rationalisation of administrative spaces would be necessary to provide the accommodation deemed suitable for a 21st century 2FE school. The estimated cost for these works was £2m.

- 8.2 At the time of the proposal it was anticipated that the total number of pupils requiring places at Oxhey Wood in January 2005 would be 346.

However, because some pupils have already moved to other schools only about 50 pupils are now expected to transfer in January 2005. Therefore, Oxhey Wood School will be able to accommodate the other groups (Visually Impaired, Hearing Impaired and Opportunity Class) currently occupying space at Little Furze as well as the additional pupils from Little Furze School.

- 8.3 It is noted that pupil numbers in South Oxhey are currently decreasing at a faster rate than previously predicted. A number of pupils are leaving the area either for other Hertfordshire schools or for schools out of the County.
- 8.4 Therefore it is considered unnecessary to increase the admission limit at Oxhey Wood from 51 to 60 as originally proposed. The two unused classrooms will not need to be brought into use and the cost of remodelling and refurbishment is now estimated at £1.5m.
- 8.5 Oxhey Wood is an important strategic location for the area as a whole. Even if there is a further review this site would be appropriate to retain because it can accommodate a 2FE Primary School.
- 8.6 The necessary capital works involve the creation of a nursery classroom by reducing the size of the second school hall, rationalising the administrative spaces, creating a new safe entrance, meeting all the new building regulations in terms of the disability discrimination act, health and safety, etc. Provision of additional ICT, food technology space and a nurture group room are all included in the brief as is the upgrading of services and other repairs and maintenance.

9 Financial implications – Revenue

- 9.1 Appendix C attached shows the estimated revenue implications of the proposal.
- 9.2 The figures shown include savings in lump sum and premises funding in school budget shares based on the operation of the LEA funding formula. The transfer of pupils to Oxhey Wood Primary is likely to result in an abnormally high level of protection funding under the Government's Minimum Funding Guarantee (MFG), which would offset the savings shown. It has been assumed that the DfES will agree to an exception in the normal operation of the MFG. If the DfES do not, the savings shown in the table would not be achievable.

- 9.3 The estimated revenue implications are:

Financial year	2004/05 £000	2005/06 £000	2006/07 £000	2007/08 £000	2008/09 £000	Long Term £000
Central Budget	145	60	14	14	14	8
School Budget Shares	(24)	(97)	(97)	(97)	(97)	(97)

9.4 Under DfES rules resources from school budget share savings have to be redirected elsewhere in the schools budget.

9.5 The costs for redundancies, uniforms and site security would be met from the provision for such costs within the base budget.

Background information referred to by the author:

Consultation Document, June 2004 (Appendix A)

Consultation Response Summary (Appendix B)

Financial Implications table (Appendix C)

School Organisation Plan 5