

**CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES -
9 FEBRUARY 2015
CLOSURE OF THE COMMUNICATION & INTERACTION
RESOURCE BASE AT QUEENSWAY SCHOOL, BANBURY**

Report by Director for Children's Services

Introduction

1. This report follows a local consultation and a statutory notice period relating to the county council's proposal to close the Communication & Interaction Resource Base located within Queensway School, Banbury.
2. The consultation document (attached at Annex 1) was sent out locally from 19 September 2014 to 17 October 2014, with the help of Queensway School who distributed it to parents and other groups. The statutory notice (attached at Annex 2) was published by the Local Authority, in the Banbury Cake newspaper on 13 November 2014 and expired following 4 weeks of formal consultation on 11 December 2014. In accordance with legislation the notice was also posted at the school entrances and sent to the local library. A copy of the full proposal (attached at Annex 3) and the notices were sent to the governing body, county council teams, local councillors and made available on the Oxfordshire County Council website.
3. The decision-making power in terms of determining the notice lies with the Cabinet or can be delegated to the Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Families. In meeting as 'decision-maker' the Cabinet or Cabinet Member must have regard to government guidance and statutory timescales otherwise a decision can be referred to the independent Schools' Adjudicator for reconsideration. The decision must be made within 2 months of the close of the notice period.

Background

4. The resource base hosted by Queensway School was originally established for children with speech and language needs.
5. Queensway was the first "Language Unit" to open in Oxfordshire in 1978, being then a 'cutting-edge' local provision for pupils with communication needs, who required intensive speech therapy, linked to specialised teaching but were not severe enough for a special school placement. These pupils previously would have had to go out of county for specific intervention.
6. During the 1980s and 90s there were 16 language places for primary age pupils. Staff started doing "outreach" advisory work in other mainstream schools.

CMDCEF4

7. One noticeable pattern is that there has been a **consistent** cohort of pupils transported from Bicester.
8. The language provision has functioned alongside the Northern Hearing Impairment Team which is totally advisory. In the 1990s, the focus switched from resource bases to advisory support for inclusion in mainstream schools, numbers steadily dropped from 16 and the base has been empty since September 2010.
9. The number of primary school pupils across the Banbury area has risen and this trend is forecast to continue. Queensway School has admitted an additional form of entry since 2012. There is steep growth in pupil numbers in the north of the county generally. New schools are planned and the specifications for these include Resource Bases.

The Proposal

10. The county council proposes to close the Resource Base run by the SENSS team which is located within Queensway School. The reasons for this are:
 - The impact of earlier interventions, the breadth of specialist advisory support and the increasing expertise in schools and partnerships in the local area are all factors contributing to lack of demand for specialist places at the Queensway School base.
 - Schools in the partnership have shown they can meet the needs of all but the most complex pupils with C&I needs in their local schools with the specialist advisory support from existing services including SENSS. There is NO reduction in budget. Services are being deployed to intervene earlier and empower schools to meet the needs of pupils now and those who will join the school in the future.
 - The current need for resource base places in a more central part of North Oxfordshire and in particular for pupils in the Bicester area (who currently need to be transported to Oxford and / or Chinnor).
 - The specifications for new primary schools in the North where there is significant population growth include a resource base. These would be smaller, more local provisions enabling the LA to respond flexibly to need.

Representations

11. One response was received to the initial consultation, in support of the proposal. This was from the Headteacher at Frank Wise School in Banbury.
12. Two responses were received to the statutory notice, one of which was supportive. The other was from a county council SEN worker who raised a concern about provision for children in the area with communication needs. This concern was responded to by the SENSS Service Manager and the response is attached at Annex 4.

Legal background

13. The removal of SEN provision is subject to statutory procedures, as set out in “School Organisation: Maintained Schools. Guidance for proposers and decision-makers” (The Guidance) published January 2014. When reaching a decision, Cabinet Member must have regard to The Guidance, in particular paragraphs 19 – 25.
14. In terms of reaching a decision all proposals should be considered on their merits but the following factors should be borne in mind but are not considered to be exhaustive. The Decision Maker should consider the views of all those affected. Details of the consultation should be included in the proposals. The Decision Maker must be satisfied that the consultation meets statutory requirements. If the requirements have not been met, the Decision Maker may judge the proposals to be invalid and should consider whether they can make a decision on the proposals. Alternatively the Decision Maker may take into account the sufficiency and quality of the consultation as part of their overall judgement of the proposals as a whole.
15. The **effect on standards, school improvement and diversity**. The government aims to create a dynamic system shaped by parents that delivers excellence and equality, closing weak schools, encouraging new providers and popular schools to expand. Decision Makers should be satisfied that the proposals will contribute to raising local standards of provision and improved attainment and consider the impact on choice and diversity. They should pay particular attention to the effect on groups that tend to under-perform including children from certain ethnic minorities and deprived backgrounds.
16. **School characteristics**. The Decision Maker should consider whether there are any sex, race or disability discrimination issues that arise and whether there is supporting evidence to support the extension and take into account the existence of capacity elsewhere. The Decision Maker needs to consider the accessibility of the provision for disadvantaged groups as the provision should not unduly extend journey times or cost.
17. **Funding and land**. The Decision Maker should be satisfied that any land, premises and capital required to implement the proposals will be available.

Financial and Staff Implications

18. There are no financial costs to the closure of the Resource Base at Queensway School as no pupils have been taught within it since 2010 and there is no capital implication.
19. There are no cuts to budgets associated with this proposal.

Equality and Inclusion Implications

20. There is no impact on equality and inclusion as a result of this proposal as no children attend the Resource Base at Queensway School. As such, there is no evidence of a strong parental preference for such provision to be made in a resource base at Queensway School.
21. Oxfordshire County Council aims to provide a broad range of ways and contexts in which children with Communication and Interaction needs are supported. This includes early intervention, specialist support for mainstream schools and a continuum of Communication and Interaction specialist provision. This in turn means many more children can attend their local school rather than specialist provision elsewhere.
22. Wherever possible children are supported in their local area and the strategy is for each area of Oxfordshire (North, Central and South) to have at least one primary and one secondary Communication and Interaction Resources Base. There is specialist advisory support provided by SEN Support Services (SENS) for all schools.
23. Some partnerships of schools have also set up their own enhanced provision, ensuring specialist support when needed and developing high quality inclusive practice across the partnership. Schools in the Banbury partnership are committed to using specialist support to ensure they can meet the needs of pupils locally.
24. In light of the above, a flexible range of provision and support will continue to be provided in response to the needs of individual pupils and parental preferences in the area. The Local Authority as proposer can demonstrate that the alternative arrangements are likely to lead to improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of educational provision for children with special needs ("the SEN Improvement Test").

Decision

25. In considering the proposals for a school expansion, the Decision Maker can decide to:
 - Reject the proposals;
 - Approve the proposals;
 - Approve the proposals with a modification (e.g. the implementation date);
or
 - Approve the proposals subject to them meeting a specific condition (see the Guidance).

RECOMMENDATION

26. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to approve the closure of the Communication & Interaction Resource Base at Queensway School.**

JIM LEIVERS

Director for Children's Services

Annexes:

Annex 1: Consultation leaflet

Annex 2: Statutory proposal

Annex 3: Full proposal document

Annex 4: Response to concern raised

Contact Officer:

Diane Cameron – School Organisation Officer, School
Organisation & Planning, CEF. Tel: 01865 816445

February 2015