

CABINET – 21 JUNE 2011

PROPOSAL TO EXPAND ST CHRISTOPHER'S PRIMARY SCHOOL, COWLEY

Report by Children, Education & Families

Introduction

1. St Christopher's CE Primary School has a published admission number of 45 children. For September 2010, 50 parents chose the school as their first preference. Due to rising numbers of children needing primary school places in Oxford, the school agreed to take more than its admission number in September 2009 and 2010, accepting up to 60 children into the reception class. At the January 2011 pupil census the school had 60 F1 children and 55 in Year 1.
2. Oxford city is experiencing rapid growth in pupil numbers, and Primary Care Trust records and the annual census of local children in early years settings show that the demand for places at St Christopher's CE Primary School is likely to continue to be above the planned admission number. Other nearby schools are also expected to be full or nearly full, and expansions are underway or planned for several other schools in the city.
3. For September 2011 the school's admission number has been published as 60, and 60 places have been allocated. We now need to decide whether to permanently expand the school to 2 forms of entry.
4. There are five statutory stages for a proposal to expand a school:
 - i. consultation;
 - ii. publication of a statutory notice;
 - iii. representation;
 - iv. decision;
 - v. implementation.

This proposal has completed the first consultation stage, and a decision is now sought as to whether to proceed to publication of a statutory notice and representation.

The Proposal

5. The proposal is to increase the admission number from 45 to 60 children, on a permanent basis from September 2012. This will eventually increase the school's total capacity from 270 children in Years 1-6 to a maximum of 360.

6. To accommodate this growth in pupil numbers, there will be some extension of the school's buildings, and a feasibility study is underway as to how this can best be provided.

Representations

7. During the informal consultation phase (5 November – 17 December 2010) a “drop-in” session was held at the school for parents to discuss their concerns with a County Council officer and a consultation document (Annex 1) was sent to parents of children at St Christopher's CE Primary School, as well as to local councillors, other primary schools and early years providers in the East Oxford area; it was also available on the OCC website. Thirteen responses were received.
- Eight respondents supported the proposal (though some with qualifications as noted below).
 - Three respondents opposed the proposal.
 - Two were neutral.
8. Reasons for supporting the proposal included:
- Expansion will provide school places for local children.
 - Expansion will cater for the increase in population.
 - Expansion will allow the school to teach in single age classes
 - The school site is large enough to support expansion.
9. The following concerns were raised:
- Traffic at the start and finish of the school day (3 respondents). *See paragraphs 10 and 11 below.*
 - The need for additional accommodation (3 respondents). *See paragraph 12 below.*
 - The school should not be expanded until it has been out of special measures for some time. The priority should be on improving the school's performance (3 respondents). *See paragraph 13 below*
 - The need for additional staffing and other resources (2 respondents). *Resourcing for the school will rise in line with pupil numbers.*
 - That the school should avoid the use of fair banding for admissions (1 respondent). *There is no intention to introduce fair banding.*
10. With respect to concerns about traffic, the County Council Development Control team reported that when planning permission was sought in 2010 for a temporary classroom at the site (an interim solution to housing the rising numbers), objections were submitted by local residents due to the additional pupils who would be attending the school and the subsequent increase in traffic. A Transport Statement was submitted for this application, and a unilateral undertaking was agreed with the school to contribute £6,000 towards the provision of improved pedestrian/cycle facilities in the area. A similar unilateral undertaking may be required for any further permanent or temporary building extension.
11. The feasibility study into the capital requirements of expansion is exploring options for an additional access to the school site, at least for pedestrians and possibly for vehicles to alleviate traffic congestion in Temple Road. The school

will also be required to update its travel plan to reflect the increased pupil numbers.

12. With respect to accommodation, the feasibility study will identify the statutory requirements for a 2 form entry school, and will also assess whether any non-statutory provision (such as a kitchen) can be provided in a cost-effective manner as part of the expansion. The school currently has 11 of the 12 Key Stage classrooms required for a 2 form entry school, in a mixture of permanent and temporary accommodation. However, it lacks other standard facilities such as a library, ICT room, studio, food technology room and small group rooms for inclusion and early intervention.
13. With respect to school standards, following an Ofsted inspection in May 2009 the school was placed under special measures because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education. A monitoring inspection visit to the school (December 2010) found that it was making good progress, and following a re-inspection in March 2011 the school was judged as no longer requiring special measures. Ofsted reported that *"it is a great credit to all who work in, and support, St Christopher's that during the past two years a successful and increasingly secure start has been made in reversing its previous history of underachievement. Under the very effective leadership of the headteacher and acting deputy headteacher, well-considered changes have been put in place to address the weaknesses identified in the last inspection report. As a result, there is a strong whole-school commitment to build upon the schools strengths and pupils' achievement is starting to improve rapidly. The school is now providing a satisfactory, and improving, standard of education for all its pupils."*
14. As objections in relation to the proposal have been raised, the decision on whether to publish a formal statutory proposal is referred to the Cabinet rather than the Cabinet Member for Schools Improvement.

Making a Decision

15. Sections 18 to 24 of the Education & Inspections Act 2006 and The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools)(England) Regulations 2007 (as amended) ["the Prescribed Alterations Regulations"] establish the procedures that must be followed when enlarging school premises. Local authorities also have a duty to have regard to statutory guidance, in this particular case 'Expanding a Maintained Mainstream School by Enlargement or Adding a Sixth Form: A Guide for Local Authorities and Governing Bodies ("the Guidance")'.
16. The Prescribed Alterations Regulations require proposers to consult interested parties and the Guidance lists these at paragraph 1.3. The Cabinet must be satisfied that the statutory consultation has been properly carried out prior to the publication of the notice. Annex 2 provides details of the County Council's consultation with the interested parties who are required to be consulted with under the Prescribed Alterations Regulations. The period of consultation is not prescribed by legislation, although the Guidance recommends a minimum of 4 weeks. The consultation period was in line with the Guidance having run

from 5 November to 17 December 2010, thereby exceeding the four week minimum requirement. The consultation was therefore carried out in accordance with the Prescribed Alterations Regulations.

17. A decision is now required as to whether to publish formal proposals for this expansion. If approved, a statutory notice would be published (probably in September), followed by a formal consultation period of four weeks. The decision-making power in terms of determining the notice will lie with the Cabinet, and a report will be put to the Cabinet Member for Schools Improvement if no representations are received, or to Cabinet if representations are received, for a final decision in due course.

Equality and Inclusion Implications

18. There are not considered to be any equality and inclusion implications arising from this proposal.

Financial and Staff Implications

19. The direct financial implication of this report is the cost of the statutory process recommended, which is planned for and met within the normal Children, Education & Families budget provision. There are no significant financial implications or risks at this stage. If the proposal proceeds, following statutory consultation there would be another report to Cabinet in due course seeking a final decision on whether to expand the school.
20. The longer-term financial implications of the current report are linked to the capital works that would be carried out should the proposals be approved. These will be the subject of a separate detailed project approval, and a further paper for decision will follow in due course, subject to the capital policies and processes laid down. The decision to proceed with the statutory process to expand the school is normally done prior to detailed project and funding appraisal, particularly where there is a demonstrable need as with this school. Resources for this expansion have been identified within the Capital programme 2010/11–2015/16 (existing demographic pupil provision – basic needs programme). There will also be on-costs for the school for additional staff and increased maintenance requirements.
21. Publication of a statutory proposal to expand the school requires confirmation from the local authority that funds will be made available for the necessary capital costs.

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to approve the publication of a statutory notice for the expansion of St Christopher's CE Primary School, Cowley.

MEERA SPILLETT
Director for Children, Education & Families

Contact Officer: Barbara Chillman, Principal Officer School Organisation,
Children, Education & Families, 01865 816459
May 2011