

Division(s): Kidlington South Also affecting: All Kidlington
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## **CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION & FAMILIES – 8 DECEMBER 2014**

### **PROPOSAL TO CLOSE WEST KIDLINGTON NURSERY SCHOOL AND EXTEND THE AGE RANGE AT WEST KIDLINGTON PRIMARY SCHOOL TO EFFECT A MERGER**

**Report by Director for Children's Services**

#### **Introduction**

1. West Kidlington Primary School and Nursery School share a governing body and a Headteacher, however for the purposes of financial accounting and Ofsted inspection they are separate establishments.

#### **The proposal**

2. The introduction in April 2011 of the Early Years Single Funding Formula, which funds eligible children attending settings, rather than the number of places provided (as previously), means there is now no financial advantage in the two establishments being separate.
3. This proposal's intention is to maintain the same level of high quality early years places while improving the financial viability and long term future of this provision. To do this, it is proposed that the Nursery School closes as a separate establishment, and the Primary School age range is extended to include 3 year-olds, effectively "merging" the two establishments into one.
4. In practical terms, there would be no alteration on the ground that parents, children or teaching staff would notice. All provision would remain in the same accommodation as it is currently. The change proposed is purely administrative in nature.
5. In removing the need to duplicate work (e.g. preparation for two separate Ofsted inspections and managing two separate budgets for the two establishments), the aim is for back office and management staff time to be freed up and processes streamlined to make them more efficient.

#### **Consultation**

6. Oxfordshire County Council carried out a consultation on the proposal from 9 September 2014 – 21 October 2014. A consultation leaflet (Annex 1) was distributed to parents of children at both the Nursery and Primary Schools, as well as to local councillors, partnership schools and early years providers

including childminders in the area, libraries, local Early Intervention Hub and dioceses. It was also available on the OCC public website, together with full details of the various ways of responding.

7. Three responses to the consultation were received:
  - Two respondents supported the proposal in principle,
  - One respondent opposed the proposal in principle.
8. The reason given for supporting the proposal was that the financial benefit to the establishments made it a sensible way forward and would help support the maintenance of high quality Nursery provision.
9. The concerns raised by the respondent objecting were:
  - That the proposal was to close a Nursery rated Good by Ofsted.
  - That if the nursery age children were on roll at the Primary School, parents would think they did not have to apply for a place in Reception year as they were already attending the school.
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10. However the respondent who objected did perceive that the Single Funding Formula was an issue of concern for the Nursery School as a separate establishment.
11. The County Council shared the objection with the Primary School and responded to it as follows:
  - The Primary School is also rated Good by Ofsted, and no change to staff or provision is anticipated as a result of this proposal.
  - The Nursery and Primary admissions policies are not the subject of the proposal, which will have no effect on access to a place. Children at any nursery, whether that be a private nursery or pre-school, a school nursery class or an attached nursery school must still apply separately for a school place at the appropriate time. Parents of children attending West Kidlington Nursery School must apply for a place to start primary school in Reception year group at the appropriate time, and this will not change as a result of this proposal.
  - As there are limited opportunities to vary the Early Years Single Funding formula from the prescribed rules is beyond the control of the county council and the establishments, it is prudent to organise the schools in a way that minimises any detrimental financial impact and so supports the safeguarding of the nursery provision for the future. These proposals aim to protect existing high quality provision, and are not a threat to its continuance. The county council has a duty to ensure sufficiency of early years provision.

## **Making a Decision**

12. This proposal has completed an initial consultation stage, and a decision is now sought as to whether to proceed to publication of a statutory notice.

13. The proposal is being made under The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools)(England) Regulations 2013 and Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools Regulations 2013 that came into effect on 28 January 2014. Local authorities also have a duty to have regard to statutory guidance, in this particular case 'School Organisation, Maintained Schools: Guidance for proposers and decision-makers' ("the Guidance").
14. The Guidance requires proposers to consult interested parties initially for a minimum of 6 weeks. The consultation period was in line with the Guidance having run from 9 September 2014 – 21 October 2014. The consultation was therefore carried out in accordance with the Regulations.
15. Although it is not a requirement, Local Authority officers are submitting an initial report to the Decision Maker following the public consultation stage. This is because it is felt that the closure of an establishment, although no change will result on the ground, is a proposal requiring thorough scrutiny.
16. A decision is now required as to whether to publish a statutory notice for this proposed merger. If approved, a statutory notice would be published in a local newspaper, online, and around the schools' sites. This would be followed by a formal representation period of four weeks as required under the Regulations, during which time any person may comment on the proposals. The decision-making power in terms of determining the notice will lie with the OCC Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Families, and a report would be submitted for a final decision in due course.

### **Equality and Inclusion Implications**

17. As this proposal constitutes no change other than administrative, it has no implications in terms of any change to equality and inclusion.

### **Financial and Staff Implications**

18. The direct financial implication of this report is the cost of undertaking 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 carry out the merger.
19. The financial implications of this report are anticipated to be positive, as the reduction in time and work required by management and staff in maintaining two separate establishments should result in time and cost efficiencies.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

20. **The Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Families is RECOMMENDED to approve the publication of a statutory notice for the**

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**closure of West Kidlington Nursery School and the linked extension of  
age range of West Kidlington Primary School.**

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Annex 1 Consultation leaflet