

CABINET– 28 NOVEMBER 2017

Report on the Progress of Chiltern Edge School

Report by Director of Children's Services

Introduction

1. Chiltern Edge School is an 11 -16 school located in the village of Sonning Common in close proximity to the Caversham area of Reading. It has capacity for around 1,000 pupils but currently has only c.500 on roll. Of these, around 150 live in Oxfordshire with nearly all the rest coming from Caversham. The school has been operating with in-year deficit budgets for a number of years and has accumulated a debt of in excess of £¹/₂ million. A consultant head teacher was employed by the County Council to work with the school's leadership to produce an in-year balanced budget and a plan to repay the debt.
2. In March 2017 the school was inspected by Ofsted and rated inadequate overall and inadequate in terms of the effectiveness of leadership and management, the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and in terms of outcomes for pupils. Consequently Chiltern Edge School was placed in Special Measures, and on 3 May 2017 the DfE issued an academy order to convert the school to sponsored academy status. The Regional Schools Commissioner is responsible for finding a suitable academy sponsor.
3. Given both the severity of concerns raised by Ofsted, and the significant risk that a strong sponsor might not be identified in a timely manner, the council conducted an informal consultation on the school's future, and a report on this was considered by Cabinet on 18 July 2017. At that meeting, Cabinet resolved not to proceed at that time with the publication of a statutory notice proposing the closure of Chiltern Edge School but to commission an external review of the progress made by October 2017 towards addressing the weaknesses identified by Ofsted and the construction of an in-year balanced budget and consider a further report on the progress identified by the external review at its November meeting.

Progress on identification of an academy sponsor

4. Discussions continue with Maiden Erlegh Trust, a Multi-Academy Trust based in Wokingham, regarding it becoming the academy sponsor for Chiltern Edge School. It has submitted a proposal to the DfE for consideration at a Head

Teacher Board scheduled for November. An update will be provided to Cabinet at the meeting.

Progress on improving Chiltern Edge's financial status

5. The school's carry forward from 2016-17 was a net deficit of £561,256, a significant worsening from the opening balance (1 April 2016) of £204,216. The new head teacher and Interim Executive Board have submitted a revised budget, which demonstrates the school's ability to balance the budget in the 2017/18 financial year. They have also completed a major staffing restructure which should reduce the structural deficit in future years. The school budget plan excludes the cumulative deficit to date and the severance costs incurred in meeting the new staffing structure (estimated at around £200,000). These amounts are expected to be financed by the council. Latest budget monitoring for 2017-18 (September 2017) has been received from the school and currently shows the school continues on track to spend as per the budget plan. However, it should be noted that there is little contingency within the budget plan.
6. Chiltern Edge's future financial health is dependent on attracting and retaining sufficient pupil numbers. On the deadline for on-time applications for 2018, Chiltern Edge had received fewer applications from Oxfordshire families than in 2017, despite there being slightly more primary pupils in the corresponding transfer cohort. Langtree School has received slightly more first preference applications, despite its primary feeder population being stable, so it would appear that there has been a slight shift in preference from Chiltern Edge to Langtree. However, these figures only include Oxfordshire applicants, and as Chiltern Edge admits significant numbers from Reading, until the Reading application data is available, we do not have an accurate indication of the eventual pupils numbers the school could expect.

Applications for the 2018 Year 7 transfer, at the date of the on-time deadline:

School	2017 1 st prefs	2016 1 st prefs	2017 2 nd prefs	2016 2 nd prefs	2017 3 rd prefs	2016 3 rd prefs
Chiltern Edge Admission number 120	12	24	9	25	15	21
Gillotts Admission number 180	172	179	40	41	23	12
Langtree Admission number 120	114	105	83	78	22	34

7. Longer term, pupil numbers at the Oxfordshire feeder primary schools do not indicate sustained growth in demand; the scale of housing proposed in the local area of Oxfordshire would be expected to generate relatively modest numbers of additional secondary school pupils. However, Reading Borough Council advises that it expects significant growth in secondary school pupil numbers over the coming years, not all of which can be absorbed by Reading schools. It will be increasingly dependent on school capacity outside Reading,

including at Chiltern Edge, and advises that from 2019 onwards the number of Reading pupils being allocated places at Chiltern Edge School would be estimated to increase by 40-60 per year, i.e. up to two additional forms of entry. Such an increase would increase the financial sustainability of Chiltern Edge School, but it would remain vulnerable to changes in the supply of, and demand for, school places outside Oxfordshire.

Progress on improving Chiltern Edge's academic performance

8. Attainment 8, Progress 8 and standard passes in English and Maths are the main performance measures for schools this year. Last year, pupils completing Key Stage 4 at Chiltern Edge achieved results in line with or better than the national average for these three measures. This was not the case in the previous year.
9. An external independent review of the school was carried out on 30 and 31 October 2017. The report opens with "This is an improving school. Leaders are taking effective action to address the issues raised by the most recent Ofsted inspection report." Senior leaders are congratulated on the pace of change that is leading to improved educational provision for its pupils. However, the report goes on to say, "the school remains fragile following recent extensive changes and challenges since being placed in special measures". This is largely due to the uncertain future of the school, the pace of change and the interim nature of some staff. The report is attached at Annex 2.
10. The review provides confidence that senior leaders of the school have the capability and capacity to sustain the continued improvement required to secure good outcomes for its pupils. It is now important to make clear the future of the school in order to secure further improvement.

Financial and Staff Implications

11. Should the recommendation of this report be accepted, and the school remain open, there are financial and staff implications in continuing to support the school to improve and maintain key positions on the IEB. £30k will be spent between September 2017 and March 2018; this level of costs would continue until academy conversion is completed. However, should a decision be made to close the school, significantly higher costs would be incurred against an unknown timeline.
12. If the school becomes a sponsored academy, any cumulative debt at that time would fall to the county council. If the school does not become an academy, the council would expect the school to repay its debt over an agreed time period.

Equalities Implications

13. Should the recommendation of this report be accepted, and the school remain open, access for all groups to education would be maintained, and there would be no equalities implications.
14. Should a decision be made to close the school, a statutory notice would be published which would be accompanied by a Service and Community Impact Assessment, assessing the impact of the proposal on any relevant community, but with particular emphasis on groups that share the protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010 (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership). The assessment would also consider the potential impact on individuals and communities (such as carers, rural communities and areas of deprivation), staff, other council services, other providers of services and other / partner organisations.

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- (a) note the content of the external review of progress made by the school towards addressing the weaknesses identified by Ofsted;
- (b) note the progress made by the school in creating an in year balanced budget;
- (c) note progress made in identifying an appropriate academy sponsor for the school;
- (d) resolve not to publish a statutory notice proposing closure of Chiltern Edge School.

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Background papers:

- Annex 1: Cabinet report 18 July 2017
Annex 2: External review of progress

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