

CABINET MEMBER FOR SCHOOLS IMPROVEMENT – 6 APRIL 2011

PROPOSAL TO EXPAND GROVE CE PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report by Director for Children, Young People & Families

Introduction

1. Grove CE Primary School has a published admission number of 15 children. For children starting school in September 2010, 21 parents listed Grove CE Primary School as their first preference, and the school agreed to admit more than their admission number to meet parental demand. Due to the high number of primary school applications within the Grove area, the school eventually accepted 29 children into F1. For September 2011 the admission number has been raised from 15 to 25, and it is now proposed to raise it to 30 from 2012 to create a full 1 form entry school.
2. In recent years the Wantage and Grove area has experienced a significant and sustained rise in primary pupil numbers, due to recent housing development within Wantage and also a rise in the birth-rate. Schools in the surrounding villages have been used to provide additional places.
3. In the next few years, work will start on a major housing development at Grove Airfield. We are currently planning to relocate Grove CE Primary School to the new development, and expand it as one part of our strategy to provide school places for the new housing. This will be subject to a separate consultation process. However, it is clear that more school places are already required in Grove, and to meet this need we plan to expand Grove CE Primary School now to become a 1 form entry school on its existing site, until a new site is available.
4. The accommodation of Grove CE Primary School is already in line with that required for a 1 form entry school, and additional accommodation will not be required.

Statutory consultation requirements

5. 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 circumstances in which statutory procedures must be followed when enlarging school premises.
6. Based on previous advice from the Department for Education School Organisation Unit (03/08/2009) - that if a school expansion is possible by using the school’s existing accommodation, but that alterations to use would

increase the net capacity calculation by 25% or more “statutory proposals are required, even though the building is not physically expanding” - it was expected that the proposal to expand Grove CE Primary School would need to pass through the usual five statutory stages for a proposal to expand a school. As such, an informal consultation was carried out in Grove started on 17 January 2011, and ran until 7 March 2011.

7. However, subsequent guidance from the DfE School Organisation Unit (25/01/2011) clarified that “statutory proposals are only required for a proposed enlargement of the premises of the school. So, if the additional pupils can be accommodated in existing classrooms then no enlargement of premises has occurred and, as such, statutory proposals are not required.” Instead, such expansions are subject only to the separate consultations requirements of the Admissions Code.
8. In the light of this revised guidance, statutory expansion procedures are not required for Grove CE Primary School. A report on the consultation which took place is therefore submitted to the Cabinet Member for Schools Improvement to note.

Representations

9. During the informal consultation phase (17 January – 7 March 2011) a meeting was held at the school for parents to discuss their concerns with a County Council officer and a consultation document was sent to parents of children at Grove CE Primary School, as well as to local councillors, other primary schools and early years providers in the Grove area; it was also available on the OCC website. Thirteen responses were received. Five respondents supported the proposal, five respondents opposed the proposal and three were neutral or broadly supportive with some concerns.
10. Reasons for supporting the proposal included:
 - More places are needed in Grove.
 - Children are currently being offered placements in other villages, making life very difficult for parents.
 - This school was previously 1 form entry.
11. The following concerns were raised:
 - The capacity of accommodation (4 respondents). *See paragraph 12 below.*
 - A preference from existing parents for the school to remain small (3 respondents). *See paragraph 13 below.*
 - Traffic and parking at the start and finish of the school day (3 respondents). *See paragraph 14 below.*
 - Effect on class sizes (1 respondent). *See paragraph 13 below.*
 - Need for more staff (1 respondent). *See paragraph 13 below.*
 - The size of play area for children (1 respondent). *See paragraph 12 below.*
12. With respect to accommodation, the school has previously operated as a 1 form entry school, and this expansion represents a return to full utilisation of

capacity. The site area is 10.3ha, within the DfE recommended range for a 1 form entry school.

13. With respect to school size, maintaining the school at 0.5 form entry would require future children to attend a school outside the village. One form of entry is not generally considered a large school, and moving to a full form of entry will bring benefits to the school in its budget and ability to arrange classes in single age groups. Class sizes at a 1 form entry school are not necessarily larger than in a 0.5 form entry school, as in smaller schools mixed-age teaching is usual, with class sizes still up to 30 (in Key Stage 1) and occasionally larger (in Key Stage 2). Additional staff would be recruited by the school.
14. With respect to concerns about traffic, although there will be more children attending the school, most will live within walking distance. Maintaining the school at 0.5 form entry would require future children to travel several miles to a school outside the village, and therefore expansion of Grove CE Primary School may reduce traffic issues. The school actively encourages parents to transport their children to the school responsibly, and has recently updated their travel plan.

Equality and Inclusion Implications

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

Financial and Staff Implications

16. As a result of expansion, the school will have higher revenue costs, which would be met from an increase in their per-pupil funding from the Dedicated Schools grant.
17. There are no capital costs associated with this proposal.

RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member is RECOMMENDED to note the contents of this report and confirm that the proposal to expand Grove CE Primary School should continue as described.

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Background Papers: Nil.

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April 2011