

REPORT TO CABINET – 2 MAY 2006

**AREA SPECIAL SCHOOL FOR NORTH WEST
LEICESTERSHIRE**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

PART A

Purpose

1. The purpose of the report is to inform Cabinet of the outcome of the consultations relating to the proposed establishment of a new area special school in North West Leicestershire.

Recommendations

2. Members are recommended to agree to the publication of statutory notices to close Forest Way Special School, Coalville and to open a new Area Special School on the Castle Rock, King Edward VII and Warren Hills campus at Coalville in September 2009.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. The Council's Special Educational Needs Strategy includes an area approach on a phased basis involving five geographical areas. Cabinet agreed on 31 January 2006 to consult on an Area Special School for North West Leicestershire that would be based on the Castle Rock, King Edward VII and Warren Hills campus at Coalville.
4. The responses from the consultation were positive and supportive of the new Area Special School on the Castle Rock, King Edward VII and Warren Hills campus at Coalville and the closure of Forest Way Special School.

Timetable for decisions (including Scrutiny)

5. It is proposed that statutory notices should be published for the new Area Special School in the week commencing the 22 May 2006. This is to ensure that the target capital fund is not lost. The Area Special School was considered by the meeting of Education Scrutiny Committee on 27 February. The Committee noted and supported the Cabinet's decision of 31 January.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

6. The proposals in this report are in accordance with the policy framework approved by the County Council. The Cabinet agreed the strategy for Special Educational Needs on 13 January 2004.

Resource Implications

7. The funding available for the new Area Special School is £10m, £8m from DfES grant and £2m from match funding from the County Council. The approved three year capital programme includes provision for this school.
8. The Director of Resources has been consulted on this report.

Circulation Under Sensitive Issues

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PART B

Background

9. Leicestershire's Special Educational Needs Strategy describes an area approach, with five geographical areas across the County based on existing smaller collaborative groups of schools. This area approach supports collaborative and partnership working between mainstream and special schools, support services and other agencies.
10. The Special Educational Needs Strategy describes seven priorities for action to improve outcomes for children with Special Educational Needs. One of these priorities is the development of an area special school in each of the five areas, with the intended outcome of increasing the numbers of children in special schools having mainstream school experience.
11. The first area special school Birchwood, for pupils aged 3-19, in Melton Mowbray, opened in September 2004. This is located on the King Edward VII/Sherard Primary School campus which allows links between staff and pupils in the special and mainstream schools in each phase of education.
12. The second school will be in Hinckley. There is no mainstream campus in this area which has an upper school, high school and primary school together. The 4-14 section of the school is therefore being built on the campus of Redmoor High School which is across the road from Richmond Primary School. Building has started and is to be completed by September 2006. 14+ pupils will continue to be educated on the existing Dorothy Goodman site while further options are explored.

Consultations

13. A public consultation took place between 6 March and the 31 March. Two public meetings were held, the first on Tuesday 14 March at Forest Way Special School and the second on Tuesday 21 March at King Edward VII School, Coalville. In addition, meetings were held on 14 March with staff from Forest Way Special School and the Governors of Forest Way Special School.
14. The responses and concerns raised at the meeting are attached as Appendix A, the response to this is attached as Appendix B. 16 responses were received during the consultation period. Two respondents did not want the development to go ahead. The 14 other respondents were in favour of the development. Their main comments were:
 - Support for high quality provision for pupils with special needs.

- Concerns about special needs pupils being bullied by mainstream children when included into mainstream lessons.
- The need for small quiet rooms for assessments.
- The need for better pick up points.
- Support the idea of a site to facilitate inclusion at all age ranges.
- The need to include in the planning process, appropriate medical rooms and facilities to utilise extended school framework.
- Want staff from Forest Way to transfer to new school with the pupils.
- Concern about the closure of Forest Way Special School.
- The need to identify pupils with dyspraxia and/or dyslexia.
- Concerns about pool facilities, access and security.

Equal Opportunities Implications

15. The new school will improve educational facilities for children with special educational needs, both in the Area Special School and in the North West Leicestershire area.

Conclusion

16. The general consensus from the consultation process is that staff, parents and governors are happy with the proposed closure of Forest Way Special School and the opening of a new Area Special School on the Castle Rock, King Edward VII and Warren Hills campus at Coalville.

Background Papers

Special Educational Needs Strategy
Cabinet – 30 September 2005
Cabinet – 31 January 2006

Removing Barriers to Progress - A Strategy for Special Educational Needs
Cabinet - 13 January 2004

Review of Education Provision in the Vale of Belvoir
Cabinet - 23 November 2005

Area Special School
Cabinet - 20 December 2005

Appendices

Appendix A: Pointes raised at consultation meetings at Forest Way Special School – 14 March 2006

Appendix B: Responses to concerns raised at the consultation meetings on 14 March 2006.

APPENDIX A

POINTS RAISED AT CONSULTATION MEETING

Staff Meeting held at Forest Way Special School on 14 March 2006

A presentation was given by Charlie Palmer, Chris Bristow, Harry Dowling and Kate Waplington. The following questions were asked:

Staff employment

How long will the "at risk" process last for staff?
When will it happen?
Will it be closer to when the school is built?
Can you confirm that the new posts will have the same terms and conditions?
Will there be any break in service which will affect the pensions?
Will there be an interview process?

Dealing with change for children

Who will decide the change of the name of the school?
How will we deal with change for pupils?

Involvement in planning new school

We need certain changes to the school building.

Inclusion opportunities and links with mainstream school

What do we mean by inclusion opportunities?
Would staff be expected to go to mainstream schools?
Is it a two way process?

Capacity of the school

Will we have more children as we have more space?

Governors Meeting held at Forest Way Special School on 14 March 2006

Involvement in planning new school

Questions were raised about mini buses and taxis and how the building would affect the clearing process and the picking up and dropping off of children.

Issues to do with the building, issues to do with the input into the architects' drawing up of plans.

Governance of new school

Concerns were raised about the process for a shadow governing body.

Concerns raised at the parents meeting and public meeting on the 14 and 21 March 2006

Presentation was undertaken by Charlie Palmer, Chris Bristow and Kate Waplinton.

The following questions were asked:

Dealing with change for children

Will the school close before the other site opens?

Involvement in planning new school

What medical facilities would be provided?

What will the new music facilities be?

When it comes to the planning of the building is it a closed shop?

Travel to school and congestion on site is an issue. There are concerns if the entrance to the school is the current entrance to King Edward VII.

The site that you proposed is difficult for access.

Where is the new school proposed to be?

How much room is there for recreational activities?

What is to stop our children getting out when it is on a campus site?

Will there be any provision for after school activities?

Will the site be secure, there have been arson attacks on the proposed site?

Will there be on site security presence?

Is there the potential to enhance King Edward VII's facilities, i.e. sport facilities at the same time?

Inclusion opportunities and links with mainstream school

Mainstream children can be cruel to children with disabilities, but there needs to be linking with mainstream children and mixing with other people in the community.

If you are working more closely with other schools will that divert attention away from my child?

Would inclusion mean that mainstream pupils going to a special and then the resources for special school pupils are sucked out?

Attendance at Area Special School

You say that Emotional, Behavioural Disorder pupils will not be able to attend.

What happens if my child has this disorder and is already attending the school?

Will children be encouraged to go to the area school rather than the school that is best suited to them?

If another area special school is built in Loughborough would my child have to move?

How will pupils transfer?

Is money and building definite?

What happens when money runs out and is spent on Trident.

No one will be re-assured until there is a building.

Capacity of school

Will there need to be more space, and if there is more space will there be more children?

When will we know that there will be the new school, how can we be sure it will happen?

What happens if ten families move into the area and they all have children with special needs and the school is full?

Numbers have risen at other schools over the last four years and indeed at Forest Way, how can you start at the maximum capacity?

Governance of new school

In the interim will we be able to spend our capital money? And make changes for the pupils that are currently here?

Could the building be extended by the Learning and Skills Council's in a couple of years?

APPENDIX B

RESPONSE TO CONCERNS RAISED AT THE MEETINGS OF THE 14 MARCH 2006

Staff Employment

There are concerns that the process means that staff are put “at risk”. It was confirmed that the “at risk” period would be for a very short period and the process ensures maximum protection for staff.

This will be set out clearly in the Action Plan which will be formulated with the Personnel Department and Unions.

The shadow Governing Body will agree the plan and once the structure has been agreed they can move forward in a very short period of time.

The “at risk” period will be closer to when the new school is built and transfer is likely to happen. Staff would have the same terms and conditions and there will probably be the same structure which has just been reviewed, subject to governing body approval.

The Governing Body recognised that staff want to feel secure and they will make the transfer as easy as possible.

It is likely that the current job descriptions will not change and there will be no break in service and therefore no impact on pensions and no interviews.

Governance of new school

The Governing Body would make any decisions about change of name or keeping the name of the new school.

The shadow Governing Body would be formed from the current Governing Body.

The capital money for Forest Way Special School has already been spent and therefore there will be no new developments between now and the building of the new school. It is unlikely that the Learning Skills Council will extend the provision in the next couple of years.

Dealing with change of children

Staff, governors, pupils and the Local Authority felt it was important that the change was dealt with sensitively for pupils. Some pupils would be able to be involved in the planning of the new school, however, for others it would not be an appropriate activity.

It was also important that staff transferred with the pupils to ensure consistency and that the change to a new school was the only change rather than having to deal with new peers and carers.

Forest Way Special School will only close when the new Area Special School site opens.

Involvement in planning the new school

It was made clear by the Local Authority that staff, governors, parents and pupils where appropriate, would be involved in the planning of the new school building. As this is the third Area Special School a number of lessons had already been learnt from the building of Birch Wood Special School and the replacement of the Dorothy Goodman School and these would be incorporated into the new build.

Input would be given on the medical facilities, music facilities, recreational facilities and provision for after school activities. Planning permission would need to be sought that would address the issues of congestion and access to the site. Consultation has already begun on this issue with Highways and Transport and Maintenance. The security of the site is very important and this will be included in the planning.

Inclusion opportunities and links with mainstream

Inclusion opportunities would be arranged and organised in conjunction with the parents and only where appropriate to the pupil.

Inclusion is, and will continue to be, a two way process. It may be opportune for some pupils from the mainstream school to access some facilities at the special school, however, it was made clear that this would not be to the detriment of the pupils currently at the school.

Capacity of the school

The capacity of the new school is 125. This was agreed an appropriate number by the Head Teacher although Forest Way had increased in size over the last four years.

The Local Authority feel assured that the capacity is right for Forest Way Special School especially as this is the third Area Special School. There will not be the issues faced by Birch Wood Special School.

However, it is recognised that if a number of pupils move into the area at the same time the school would need to deal with this.

The Head Teacher feels that with the new space regulations and the potential planning of the site, it would be possible to deal with the capacity issue in an innovative way.

Attendance at Area Special School

It was made clear that although pupils with Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties as their principal area of need would not attend the school, there would be pupils who had this condition who also have other conditions. All pupils currently at the school would transfer to the new school.

It was confirmed that through the statementing process, pupils would not be expected to attend a school closer to them, although this is the anticipated end result of the full 5 Area Special Schools for pupils coming into the system. It was confirmed that pupils would transfer from Forest Way Special School to the new Area Special School.

Is money and building definite?

It was confirmed by the Local Authority that the money has been allocated for the new Area Special School and cannot be spent on anything else.

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