



CABINET – 9th FEBRUARY 2010

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG
PEOPLE'S SERVICE**

**OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF
HOLMFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL, LEICESTER FOREST EAST**

PART A

Purpose

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet of the outcomes of the public consultation on the future of Holmfield Primary School and of the current position regarding the School, and to seek approval to publish a statutory notice proposing the closure of the School.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended:
 - (a) That the outcomes of the public consultations on the future of Holmfield Primary School be noted;
 - (b) That the current position of Holmfield Primary School and the contents of the HMI monitoring inspection report of 11 December 2009 be noted;
 - (c) That approval be given to publish a statutory notice to close Holmfield Primary School;
 - (d) That during the period allowed for representations following the publication of the statutory notice, action be taken to prepare an in-year variation to the admission arrangements to re-draw the catchment areas for Braunstone Town primary schools to encompass the Holmfield Primary School catchment area.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. Since the Cabinet last received a report on Holmfield Primary School on 6 October 2009, significant efforts have been made to improve the position of the school. The school was first identified as requiring Special Measures (the most serious category) by OFSTED in June 2009 after having been given a notice to improve. The HMI Monitoring Report of 11 December

found that subsequent progress had been inadequate for the reasons explained in paragraph 11 below. The school remains in Special Measures, which means that 'it is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school'. On 26th January 2010 the school had 111 pupils on roll compared with 152 in October 2009. For the reasons set out above, it is considered that a statutory notice should be published to close the School.

4. A single catchment area for all Braunstone Town schools, including the former catchment area for Holmfield, would have the advantage of formalising parental preferences in a way that matches the current pattern of intake for these schools and retains Winstanley as the catchment High School for Holmfield.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

5. If the Cabinet authorises the publication (in the local newspaper, at the school and the nearest library) of a statutory notice for closure there is a six week representation period following which any objections will be reported to the Cabinet on 4 May for determination. (In the event of there being no objections the matter can be determined by the Director of Children and Young People's Service.)

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

6. The Cabinet authorised the public consultation on the future of Holmfield School on 6 October 2009. The County Council is committed to putting the needs of learners first in its organisation of schools and raising standards.

Resource Implications

7. Any school deficits or surpluses revert to the Local Authority Schools Budget in the event of closure or amalgamation. This balance would revert to the Schools Budget, a deficit would result in a charge to the budget and a surplus would provide additional resources. Any redundancy costs resulting from a Cabinet decision would revert to the Local Authority and may be funded from the Schools Budget.
8. In the event of a school closure appropriate measures would be put in place to limit the exposure to a deficit at the point of closure
9. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on this report.

Circulation Under the Local Issuers Alert Procedure

Mr. D. R. Parsons CBE, C.C.
Mrs. J. Fox CC
Mrs. J. A. Dickinson CC

Officers to contact

Gareth Williams
Director of Children & Young People's Service
Tel: 0116 305 6300
E-Mail: Gareth.Williams@leics.gov.uk

Nigel Farrow
Assistant Director Strategic Services
Tel: 0116 305 6468
E-Mail: Nigel.Farrow@leics.gov.uk

Richard Thompson
Education Officer – Policy
Tel: 0116 305 6351
E-Mail: Richard.Thompson@leics.gov.uk

PART B

Background

10. Holmfield Primary was inspected by OFSTED in June 2008 and given a 'Notice to Improve'. This meant that 'the school required significant improvement because it was performing less well than, in all the circumstances, it could reasonably be expected to'. Following considerable support from the Local Authority a monitoring visit in January 2009 indicated that 'satisfactory progress was being made' on the action plan to move the school out of the 'Notice to Improve'. The school was given a further inspection by OFSTED in June 2009, which found that the school required 'Special Measures' because it was failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school were not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school. This is the first time since the OFSTED's inception in 1992 that a Leicestershire school given a 'Notice to Improve' has gone into 'Special Measures'.
11. On 9 and 10 December 2009 the school was subject to a further monitoring inspection by another member of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Schools. The report published on 11 December found that the school's progress since being subject to Special Measures in June 2009 was inadequate. The report found that improvement in standards and achievement in English, Mathematics and Science was inadequate. It found that inadequate progress was made in improving the proportion of good or better teaching by using assessment effectively. In addition inadequate progress had been made in developing the skills of school leaders and subject managers so that they are able to accurately evaluate the school's effectiveness, identify the precise causes of underachievement and secure high quality teaching and learning. This last judgement relates to the finding that 'inspection evidence from pupils' books and work seen in lessons indicates that the (school's) assessments are over-generous and unreliable'. Only progress in ensuring that statutory policies are in place and reviewed appropriately is described as satisfactory.
12. External support is described by OFSTED as 'broadly satisfactory'. Support from the Local Authority has been ongoing since the 'Notice to Improve' judgement was made. The Chair and Vice Chair of Governors have attended a number of training sessions, including those regarding Performance Management, School Self- Evaluation, Finance, Health & Safety and Understanding Data. However, few other Governors have attended planned training sessions that had been arranged, by the Governor Development Service. The service continues to offer support.
13. School improvement training sessions for the headteacher and her staff were offered to address the key issues identified in the OFSTED reports. However, often attendance was limited. A mentor headteacher from another school provided the headteacher with good support.

Consultation

14. At its meeting on 6 October 2009 the Cabinet authorised a public consultation on the future of Holmfield Primary School. Consultation took place over 12 weeks on the following 4 options:
- Option 1: Maintaining the Status Quo
 - Option 2: Closure
 - Option 3: Amalgamation
 - Option 4: Federation with another primary school
 - Option 5: Close and re-start.
15. The preferred option for the Local Authority was stated at the outset of the consultation as Option 2 because of the rapid decline from 'Notice to Improve' to 'Special Measures' and because of the large number of surplus places at the school 172 (60%) based on 111 pupils currently at the school against an admission number of 287.
16. A detailed breakdown of consultation responses is attached at Appendix A. The overwhelmingly favoured option by respondents was Option 1 – to maintain the status quo (184 – 79.3%), with little or no interest being shown in Option 3 or 4. The majority of respondents are linked to Holmfield including 52 pupils responding on the website.
17. The more frequent comments made in addition to stated preferences for options may be summarised as follows:
- The people at Holmfield really care for children
 - The school is improving in its results
 - Parents refer to children who have done well at Holmfield
 - Local schools do not have the space for Holmfield pupils
 - The staff should be given the opportunity to turn the school around
 - It is the responsibility of the County Council to ensure that pupils at other local schools are not adversely affected by large class sizes
 - Closing a school should be a last resort. It should not be done for financial reasons.
 - Holmfield is important to the community. If it does not improve by the next monitoring visit it should be closed and re-started
 - New staff should be brought in
 - New housing will be built and the school will be needed
 - Amalgamation is not an option – why close a school that is doing well to amalgamate it with Holmfield
 - The community needs Holmfield as a community resource
 - Stafford Leys is a large school and could not cope with the traffic and extra pupils
 - Other schools should not be forced to take the children as this would reduce standards

- There should be a new start with new staff and Local Authority support for a substantial minimum period.
 - Closure seems the best option for the future of children’s education even though it means extra pressure on other schools
 - The real reason for proposing closure is to sell the site for building
 - The Kidaroo nursery should stay at Holmfield
 - The number of children driven to school will increase
 - Parents with difficulty in walking to school with young children
 - This proposal may be setting a precedent that, when a school fails to improve when put in an OFSTED category, closure is the appropriate response.
18. Responses from pupils overwhelmingly supported Option 1. At a meeting with 115 pupils at the school on 13 January an overwhelming majority were opposed to the school’s closure and supported the school and its staff. Pupil comments on the consultation website included the following:
- “The school has helped me to read more. Before I came to Holmfield I wouldn’t even pick up a book. My teacher encouraged me.”
 - “The school is fine as it is; there is nothing wrong with it. All the school meals are healthy; everyone is really nice and friendly.”
 - “I have had a good education at Holmfield. The teachers have taught me lots of things in lessons. My teacher has helped me to learn more about subordinate clauses and complex sentences, so I know I am working at an age appropriate level.”
 - “I don’t want the school to close down. I won’t see my friends and will have to make new ones.”
 - “I like this school, I enjoy the hot meals. I enjoy our large playground and the field. I like the teachers as they are nice and not too strict.”

Commentary on most frequent responses

19. A significant number of responses, particularly, from local schools other than Holmfield express concern about the capacity to provide for Holmfield pupils. Research has shown that there is physical capacity and, depending on the exercise of parental preference in the event of closure 3 currently unused teaching bases at Stafford Leys Primary School where the catchment area borders Holmfield’s catchment area could be brought into use. The budget for these pupils would follow them under the existing funding scheme.
20. A large number of comments refer to new housing requiring additional school places. It is unlikely, in the current financial climate, that there will be significant housing development in the short to medium term. In addition a significant number of places in schools in the area are filled by Leicester City pupils (263) and in subsequent years those places would be available to children whose families move into the school catchment areas. This

figure together with migration between schools suggest that this will not be a significant problem

21. A number of responses express confidence in the school to improve and refer to its successes. However, the December HMI monitoring visit (by a different inspector from the previous visit) makes it clear that this is unlikely and that the school's assessments of pupils' work are over-generous and unreliable.
22. The table below details the furthest straight line distance (as the crow flies) that would be used when allocating school places if a decision is taken to propose closure. For the purpose of this exercise the furthest address within Holmfield School's catchment area to other Braunstone schools has been used.

Table 1: The distance from the furthest Holmfield catchment address to Braunstone Primary Schools

	Kingsway	Millfield	Ravenhurst
Straight line Distance	1.2 miles	1.80 miles	1.83 miles

For those who are current pupils at Holmfield School and need to be placed at any of the above schools the LA's policy on Primary school transport will apply. A child resident at the furthest address would qualify for transport assistance, because for assistance, distance is based on the safest walking route.

Table 2: The safest walking route from the furthest Holmfield catchment address to Braunstone Schools

	Kingsway	Millfield	Ravenhurst
Safe Walking Distance	2.1 miles	2.50 miles	2.2 miles

Therefore, any child who is placed at a Braustone school from Holmfield School's catchment area and who has to walk over 2 miles from their home address (which is a safe walking route) will on application be eligible for transport assistance.

23. Pupils are inevitably unsettled by uncertainty and a number of parents have moved their children (36) to other schools. This means that there are now 56% surplus places at the school. The genuine pupil concerns need to be balanced by the need to improve the quality of the education they are receiving.

Transition of Existing pupils

24. Following the representation period if, the Cabinet determines that Holmfield should close, parents will be asked to apply for a place at their preferred school and, where there is capacity, places will be made available. For the year groups where there is not capacity within the Braunstone schools (Kingsway, Millfield and Ravenhurst) places will be made available at Stafford Leys School, Leicester Forest East where

additional accommodation will be provided if necessary. The usual school admissions appeal process will apply.

25. Pupils who transfer from Holmfield to Stafford Leys will then transfer to South Charnwood High School after year 5 and for the remaining High School years and then transfer to Bosworth College, Desford. Normal eligibility rules for transport will apply, which means that on current eligibility criteria most pupils will be eligible for free transport.

New Intakes and Future Intakes

26. If the Cabinet agrees to proceed with the closure of Holmfield, an application will be made for an in-year variation to the admission arrangements to create one catchment area for all the Braunstone Town schools, which would include the former catchment area for Holmfield.
27. This will have the advantage of formalising parental preferences in a way that matches the current pattern of intake for these schools and retains the catchment High School for Holmfield as Winstanley. There will in the medium term be space available in the Braunstone Town schools generally as the number of catchment pupils in Braunstone Schools currently is 1608 compared with 1718 places available. The net effect of this would be that there will be fewer places available for pupils living in the City.

Conclusions

28. In the light of the recent HMI monitoring report and the failure to improve leadership, teaching quality and standards the Cabinet is recommended to approve the publication of a statutory notice to propose the closure of Holmfield School as indicated in paragraph 2 above.
29. The notice requires a 6 week representation period and the proposal must be determined within 2 months of the close of the representation period by the Local Authority.

Equal Opportunities Implications

30. The proposals in this report are designed to ensure that all primary aged pupils in the Leicester Forest East and Braunstone Town areas have access to a good or satisfactory school.

Background Papers

OFSTED Inspection Report on the Holmfield Primary School Inspection in June 2009.

Report from the first monitoring inspection of Holmfield Primary School on 9 – 10 December 2009.

Report to the Cabinet on 6 October 2009 on the future of Holmfield School.

Appendix A

Breakdown of Holmfield Primary School Consultation Responses to 15 January 2010 by source

Responses to the Website

	From people connected to one of the schools	From other community members	Total
Option 1	80 (including 52 pupil responses)	46	126
Option 2	6	2	8
Option 3	0	0	0
Option 4	0	1	1
Option 5	9	4	13
None	2	5	7

Written responses

	Stafford Leys	Kingsway	Millfield	Holmfield	Ravenhurst	Total
Option 1	2	1	1	54	0	58
Option 2	1	1	2	0	0	4
Option 3	0	0	0	0	0	0
Option 4	0	0	0	1	0	1
Option 5	4	0	2	2	0	8
None of the above	4	0	0	0	1	5

Some respondents ticked more than one option

Written Responses not linked to the above schools

Option 1	10
Option 2	0
Option 3	0
Option 4	1
Option 5	1
None of the above	0
Total	<u>12</u>

Totals for Options

Option 1	194
Option 2	12
Option 3	0
Option 4	3
Option 5	18
None of the above	<u>17</u>
Total	<u>244</u>

Other Consultations

Staff Meeting 15 October '09: 22 members of staff, 5 Professional Representatives

Governors Meeting 15 October '09: 5 governors from Holmfield, 1 from Winstanley CC

Parents Meeting 15 October '09

6.15 p.m.: 35 Parents

7.15 p.m.: 19 Parents

Meeting with pupils at the school on 13th January 2010 attended by 105 pupils where pupils expressed their support for the schools and opposed the closure

Petition handed to the Leader of the Council on 6 October 2009 containing 248 signatures of which 95 (38%) are listed as parents.

Letter from the Governing Body of Kingsway Primary School expressing concern about Option 2

Letter from the Governing Body of Ravenhurst Primary School expressing concern about Option 2

Letter from the Governing Body of Millfield Primary School

Meeting of Stafford Leys Primary School Governors 28 October 2009 (and minutes) expressing concern about Option 2 and finance.

Letter from the Town Clerk on behalf of Braunstone Town Council objecting to the proposal that Holmfield School should close