

CABINET – 6 APRIL 2010

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

**OBJECTIONS TO THE PROPOSED CLOSURE
(DISCONTINUATION) OF HOLMFIELD PRIMARY SCHOOL,
LEICESTER FOREST EAST**

PART A

Purpose

1. To advise the Cabinet of the objections to the proposal to close (discontinue) Holmfield Primary School, the relevant statutory guidance, and to propose the closure of the School.

Recommendations

2. It is recommended:
 - (a) That the objections to the proposal to close (discontinue) Holmfield Primary School are considered and noted;
 - (b) That the commentary on the objections is considered and noted;
 - (c) That in accordance with Paragraph 8 of Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspection Act 2006 the closure (discontinuation) of Holmfield Primary School with effect from the end of the Summer Term 2010 be agreed.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. On 9 February 2010 the Cabinet approved the publication of a statutory notice proposing to discontinue Holmfield Primary School because, despite ongoing support from the Local Authority, the school was not making adequate progress to come out of 'special measures'. The HMI Monitoring Report of 11 December 2009 stated that "*inaccuracy in the assessment of pupil's work results in failure to identify the precise causes of underachievement and consequently the gaps in pupils' learning, particularly writing are not routinely addressed*". HMI also found that 'inspection evidence from pupils' books and work seen in lessons indicates that the (school's) assessments are over-generous and unreliable'. The School has 172 (56%) surplus places.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

4. If the Cabinet determines that Holmfield Primary School should be discontinued the School will close with effect from the end of the Summer Term 2010.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

5. The Cabinet authorised the public consultation on the future of Holmfield Primary School on 6 October 2009 and authorised the publications of a statutory notice to discontinue the School on 9 February 2010. The County Council is committed to putting the needs of learners first in its organisation of schools and raising standards.

Resource Implications

6. 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.
7. 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.
8. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

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

Officers to contact

Gareth Williams
Director of Children and Young People's Service
Tel. 0116 305 6300 email: gareth.williams@leics.gov.uk

Nigel Farrow
Assistant Director Strategic Services
Tel. 0116 305 6468 email: nigel.farrow@leics.gov.uk

Richard Thompson
Education Officer (Policy)
Tel. 0116 305 6351 email: richard.thompson@leics.gov.uk

PART B

Background

9. Holmfield Primary School was inspected by OFSTED in June 2008 and given a 'Notice to Improve'. Following considerable input from the Local Authority, a monitoring visit in January 2008 indicated that 'satisfactory progress was being made' to move the School out of the notice to improve. However, in June 2009 a further inspection found that the School required 'Special Measures'. This is the first time since OFSTED's inception in 1992 that a Leicestershire school which has been given a 'Notice to Improve' has gone into 'Special Measures'. 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 (HMI) and a report published on 11 December. This found that the School's progress since being subject to Special Measures in June 2009 was inadequate. The report found that *"inspection evidence from pupils' books and work seen in lessons indicates that the (school's) assessments are over generous and unreliable"*. The good quality of the support and the effectiveness of the interim leadership arrangements were recognised in the most recent HMI monitoring visit of March 10th. This contributed to an overall judgement of satisfactory progress against the key issues since the OFSTED inspection although standards were still judged to be very low and the School remains in Special Measures. The School has 56% surplus places.
10. At its meeting on 6 October 2009 the Cabinet authorised a public consultation on the future of Holmfield Primary School over 12 weeks. At its meeting on 9 February 2010 Cabinet considered the outcomes of the consultation and gave approval to the publication of a statutory notice to close Holmfield Primary School. The notice was published on 11 February 2010 and interested parties were invited to submit objections or comments on the proposal to close the school by March 25th. Objections and comments received to date are set out below, and any objections received after the publication of this report will be reported at the meeting.

Objections and Comments

11. Five objections and four comments have been received during the representation period. Any further objections and comments received before the end of the representation period will be reported at the Cabinet meeting. The objections and comments may be summarised as follows
 - The School is improving in its results
 - Local schools do not have the space for Holmfield pupils
 - Staff should be given the opportunity to turn the school round
 - Traffic will increase

- Closing a school should be a last resort and not done for financial reasons
- Holmfield is important to the community
- New housing will be built and the school needed
- Other schools should not be forced to take children
- Parents will find it difficult walking to other schools with young children
- Children will suffer from disruption
- The most recent HMI monitoring visit is positive about improvements
- The consultation process was flawed

Commentary on the Objections and Comments

12. The comments and objections query the capacity of local schools to meet the needs of Holmfield pupils. Research has shown that there is physical capacity and, depending on the exercise of parental preference for school places in the event of a closure, 3 currently unused teaching bases at Stafford Leys Primary School could be brought into use. The budget for these pupils would follow them under the existing funding scheme.
13. Reference is made to new housing requiring additional school places. It is considered unlikely, in the current financial climate, that there will be significant new housing in the short to medium term. In addition, a significant number of places in schools in the area are taken by Leicester City pupils (263) and in subsequent years as children from Leicester move into secondary schools, those places would become available to children whose families move into the schools' catchment area.
14. A number of objections express confidence in the School's ability to improve and argue that it should be given time to do this. However the School was given a Notice to Improve in June 2008 and was making unsatisfactory progress to come out of Special Measures in December 2009 without, in the opinion of the HMI Inspectorate, the capacity to improve. In addition, although Year 6 outcomes did improve, assessments of English and Mathematics outcomes for other children in Years 1 to 5 did not. The most recent HMI monitoring visit on 10 March indicated that good progress was being made against targets. It should be noted that this is linked to continuing substantial support from the Local Authority, the interim leadership of an experienced Headteacher, significant overstaffing, and very small class sizes. The prospect of appointing an experienced Headteacher in the longer term is not good.
15. Respondents refer to the distance to be walked by some parents and disruption for the children. The County Council's policy on home to school transport will apply, and any Leicestershire child who lives more than two miles safe walking distance from the nearest school with

places will receive free home to school transport. The safest walking distance from the furthest Holmfield catchment address to Braunstone Town schools is:

- Kingsway Primary 2.1 miles
- Millfield Primary 2.5 miles
- Ravenhurst Primary 2.2 miles

Pupils are inevitably unsettled by uncertainty and County Council staff will work with the Headteachers of local schools on transition arrangements in the event of a closure and when parental preferences are clear. A report will be made to Children and Young People's Service Scrutiny and Overview Committee on 31 March 2010 on the measures being taken to support pupils through transition. A significant number of parents in the current Holmfield catchment choose to take their children to other schools and children attend Holmfield from other catchments. A closure would be unlikely to increase traffic significantly above current levels. The consultation process was conducted in accordance with the 2006 Education and Inspections Act, Regulations, and Department for Children, Schools, and Families (DCSF) Guidance.

Other matters to be considered by Cabinet in deciding the proposal

16. Statutory guidance sets out the considerations which Local Authorities must take into account when deciding a proposal to close a school. These are set out below with comments as appropriate.

The Government's aim set out in its Five Year Strategy are the White Paper 'Higher Standards'

17. The Government wishes to see a system in which weak schools that need to be closed are closed quickly and replaced by new ones where necessary, and where the best schools are able to expand and spread their ethos and success. In the event of a closure Holmfield would be closed quickly and neighbouring schools would expand in pupil numbers. The school has 56% surplus places and a replacement school is not necessary.

'Boosting standards and opportunities'

18. In the event of closure Holmfield pupils would be attending successful schools.

Raising local standards of provision

19. In the event of closure there would be no failing schools in Braunstone Town and Leicester Forest East.

Special Educational Needs

20. There is no specific special educational needs provision at Holmfield. Review arrangements for pupils with statements of SEN will ensure continuity of provision.

'Fresh Start and Collaborative Restarts'

21. Holmfield Primary School currently has 56% surplus places and there is capacity in neighbouring schools. A 'fresh start' or 'collaborative restart' is not therefore appropriate in these circumstances.

'Diversity

22. In the event of the closure of Holmfield there would be no impact on the diversity of educational provision in the area.

'Balancing of Denominational Provision'

23. All Primary Schools in the Braunstone Town area are currently community schools.

'Every Child Matters'

24. In the event of closure Holmfield pupils would be transferring to schools where management and leadership are at least satisfactory; therefore the Every Child Matters outcomes would be achieved more effectively.

Provision for displaced pupils'

25. Depending upon the exercise of parental preference there will be sufficient capacity in local schools. Temporary accommodation may need to be provided for 12 months or so during the transitional period.

'Surplus Places'

26. Guidance indicates that "the Decision Maker should normally approve proposals to close schools in order to remove surplus places where the school proposed for closure has a quarter or more places unfilled and at least 30 surplus places and where standards are low compared to standards across the LA". There are 172 (56%) surplus places at Holmfield Primary School and it remains in Special Measures.

Impact on the community

27. Some social events take place at Holmfield School. A private nursery leases part of the building and the lease is due to expire at the end of the summer term. There is sufficient nursery capacity locally and the social events could transfer elsewhere. Extended school activities are not developed at Holmfield.

'Community Cohesion and, Race Equality'

28. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been conducted in the eventuality of a closure. The pupil profile reflects that of the community and no individual group will be disadvantaged. Alternative provision is available within a reasonable distance.

'Travel and Accessibility'

29. The arrangements for travel and distances are set out at paragraph 15 above.

'Equal Opportunities Issues'

30. The proposal to close Holmfield was predicated on the need to provide equal opportunities to have a satisfactory or good education for all children in the area. The EIA has not identified any discrimination arising from the proposal.

'Rural Schools and Sites'

31. Holmfield is not designated by the DSCF as a rural school.

Decision Making

32. In considering proposals for discontinuing a school the Decision Maker (ie the Local Authority) can decide to:
- reject the proposal
 - approve the proposal
 - approve the proposal with a modification (e.g. the closure date)
 - approve the proposal subject to its meeting a specific condition.

Conclusions

33. On the basis of the objections and comments, the statutory notice proposing the closure of Holmfield School, the commentary set out in this report, and statutory considerations, the Cabinet is invited to decide the proposal by approving closure (discontinuation) of Holmfield Primary School with effect from the end of the Summer Term 2010.

'Equal Opportunities Implications'

34. The proposal to close Holmfield School was 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 School Inspection in June 2009
Report from the monitoring inspection of Holmfield Primary School 9-10
December 2009.

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

Report to the Cabinet 9 February 2010 - the outcomes of consultation on the
future of Holmfield Primary School.

HMI Monitoring Visit Report 10 March 2010.