To Parents/ Carers, Staff Governors and Members of the Local Community of Woodlands Infant and Junior Schools

4 December 2015

Proposal to Amalgamate Woodlands Infant and Woodlands Junior School, Hunt Road, Tonbridge, Kent TN10 4BB by 1 September 2016

Kent County Council (KCC), together with the Governing Bodies of Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School, is consulting on a proposal to amalgamate the two schools in order to create an all-through primary school. The process of amalgamation will entail the establishment of a “new” community primary school, which would:

- Provide 630 places for children aged 4 to 11 years
- Have a published admission number (PAN) of 90 for entry into Reception Year.
- Open in the existing accommodation of both schools
- Open with effect from September 2016.

This proposal is in line with Kent County Council policy as set out in the Commissioning Plan for Education Provision in Kent 2015-2019*, which states “when the opportunity arises, the local authority will consider the possibility of either amalgamation of separate infant and junior schools into a single primary school”.

The aim of this public consultation is to seek the views of the wider community on the educational merits of this proposal. The public consultation will run from 4 December 2015 until 20 January 2016. There will be a public meeting on 6 January 2016 which will give you an opportunity to make your views known and to ask any questions you have.

This is the early stage of the consultation process and no final decisions have yet been made. The consultation process is designed to establish the views of parents and carers; pupils; governors; staff; the local community and other interested parties.

**Indicative Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>6 January 2016</td>
<td>Public Consultation Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 January 2016</td>
<td>The deadline for sending in a response to the consultation</td>
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<td>21 January 2016</td>
<td>Following the consultation, all views received, either by post, email or at the public meetings will be reported to the Education and Young People's Cabinet Committee.</td>
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<td>January to March 2016</td>
<td>The Cabinet Member decides whether to continue with the proposal. If so, KCC will publish a public notice for a four week period in a local newspaper and at the school. During this time comments and objections can be made about the proposal.</td>
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<td>By April 2016</td>
<td>The proposal, including the outcome of the consultation and public notice, is referred to the Schools Adjudicator for a decision.</td>
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<td>By end July 2016</td>
<td>Final decision</td>
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<td>Sept 2016</td>
<td>Implementation, subject to agreement</td>
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At the end of the consultation period a report summarising the responses received during the consultation will be sent to the Education and Young People’s Services Cabinet Committee for consideration and the Cabinet Member for Education and Health Reform, who will then decide whether to proceed with the amalgamation proposal and publish statutory proposals in the form of a public notice. The public notice would be published in a local newspaper and for a period of four weeks following the publication date any person can comment on the proposals. The proposal, together with all the consultation information and outcome will be forwarded to the Schools Adjudicator, who will make the final decision.

This document gives you details of the proposal and information on the background and current position. There is a form at the end of this document which we ask you to complete and return to us by 20 January 2016.

The Governing Bodies of both schools have met with the County Council and agreed that amalgamation of the two schools to create an all-through primary school would be the natural progression for the schools, which will secure benefits for staff and pupils. The formal process for amalgamation would effectively mean the discontinuance of Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School and the establishment of a “new” primary school.

1. **What are the benefits of amalgamation?**

   There are a number of benefits when amalgamating two schools; these are primarily educational and set out below.

   **Benefits for Children**
   A primary school that provides education for children aged 4-11 benefits from:
   - A consistent educational philosophy from when a child first enters the school until they move on to secondary education.
   - A more coherent delivery of the National Curriculum from Foundation Stage through to the end of Key Stage Two.
   - A consistent approach to the ways in which children are taught.
   - Greater ability to safeguard the needs of all pupils.
   - Seven uninterrupted years of education without a potentially unsettling transition to another school.
   - Easier sharing of good practice across the whole school.
   - Increased pupil attainment

   **Benefits for Parents/Carers**
   In an all-through primary school parents and carers are able to develop a longer term relationship with all of those involved in the school, including the Headteacher and support staff. School policies are the same throughout the primary years. For example:
   - How children with special needs are supported
   - Arrangements for open evening and school events
   - School closure days, etc.
This means parents and carers know what to expect. Over time the staff build up a good knowledge of children and their families as they progress through the school, creating a sense of the school as a ‘family’, which in turns helps develop trust and confidence.

Another benefit to parents is that there would no longer be a requirement to apply for a Junior School place for Year 3 after September 2017.

**Benefits for Staff**

Opportunities for staff development will be further enhanced by amalgamation enabling both teaching and support staff to draw upon their current expertise, experience and specialist knowledge in order to share and develop best practice more effectively.

The proposal would enable the two current schools to merge and strengthen their performance so that there is greater consistency in policies and practice. It will also enable the further development of community links and the extended schools programme.

2. **What will the admission criteria be for the new school?**

   If the new primary school goes ahead, the planned admission number (PAN) at Reception age for the school will be 90. The new primary school would continue to offer a total of 96 places Year 3 to Year 6 by offering 6 places over-PAN in these year groups. The oversubscription criteria for admission to the primary school will be the same as it is currently for the Infant School.

   - All pupils who are attending Woodlands Infant and Junior Schools at the time of their proposed closure in July 2016 will automatically have a place in the new primary school from September 2016 as appropriate.
   - For 2016 admissions, parents will need to continue to apply for Reception Year and Year 3 places as usual. In the event that the proposals proceed, parents will receive a letter confirming that their child has been admitted to the new primary school.
   - From 2017 admissions pupils in Year 2 would automatically transfer to Year 3, without the need for an application.

3. **What about the governing bodies of the existing infant and junior schools?**

   Following the retirement of the Headteacher of Woodlands Infant School, the Governing Bodies of the Infant and Junior Schools formed a ‘soft governance arrangement’ which meant they organised themselves into a Strategy Group to look at the future of both schools. Whilst the Governing Bodies remain separate, the Strategy Group had certain delegated powers. The Strategy Group reached an agreement that Mary Priestley, Headteacher of Woodlands Junior School, would be appointed Interim Executive Headteacher across both schools. This arrangement was formalised in a document called a Memorandum of Understanding. Since September both schools have already seen the benefits of this approach, particularly in terms of staffing. However, this ‘soft Federation’ arrangement has limitations as the school budgets remain separate and joint decisions/recommendations in specified agreed areas can be agreed but not all.
If the proposal to amalgamate the schools proceeds a temporary governing body will be set up to oversee the process of establishing the new school including:

- Formalising the staffing structure (a separate consultation will be held with staff)
- Formally appointing a Headteacher
- Deciding on the school name
- Agreeing policies for the new school and
- Making arrangements for the handover to the full governing body of the new school.

Should the proposal proceed, a new document that records the name of the School and the constitution of its governing body will be established. This document is known as an Instrument of Government.

4. Will staffing arrangements change/Will the current Headteacher remain the same?

Yes, it is proposed that Mary Priestley remain as Headteacher for the new Primary School. No staffing changes or alterations to terms and conditions are planned as a result of these proposals.

5. How will the integration of the pupils from the two schools happen?

If a decision is made to establish the new primary school, the infant and junior schools will begin to hold ‘getting to know you’ events for the pupils, staff and the parents/carers.

Children attending the new school will probably notice very little difference on an everyday basis. For the majority of the time they will be in their own classroom with their friends and their teacher. At certain times the whole school will want to come together, such as celebrating important events and whole school assemblies which help create the feeling of a whole-school community. The new governing body will want to ensure that safe and secure arrangements are in place for the children on the infant site to access the junior site and vice versa.

6. What are the Financial Implications of Amalgamation?

The financial arrangements governing school amalgamations are set out in the Schools Revenue Funding 2016 to 2017 Operational guide July 2015. A web link to the guidance is set out here: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/schools-funding-arrangements-2016-to-2017

Included in Kent’s funding formula is a lump sum for all Kent primary schools regardless of their size. Woodlands Infant School and Woodlands Junior School currently each receive lump sum funding as separate schools. Should the amalgamation proceed the ‘new all-through School’ would eventually receive one lump sum. Funding protection will be applied for two years to enable the school to achieve the economies of scale from being one larger primary school.

For example, if an amalgamation takes places for 1 September 2016

- In the year of the amalgamation the two schools keep their lump sums 2 X £120k
- In the year after the amalgamation April 2017 to March 2018 – the school will get 85% of the combined lump sum = £204k.
- From April 2018 to March 2019 the school will get 1 lump sum £120k
7. **How can I give my views?**

There are a number of ways to give us your views on this proposal:

- At the public consultation meeting being held at the Junior school on 6 January 2016 where there will be the opportunity to ask questions and complete a response form.
- By emailing: school.consultations@kent.gov.uk
- You may hand your response form in at Woodlands Infant School/Woodlands Junior School offices.
- By sending the attached response form to Jared Nehra, Area Education Officer for West Kent, KCC, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone ME14 1XQ.

We have completed an Equality Impact Assessment to see if the proposal could affect anyone unfairly. We welcome your views on the assumptions we have made and the conclusions we have drawn. To view the document, go to: www.kent.gov.uk/schoolconsultations

If you have any concerns about how the change might affect children at the new school or the local community, do come and talk to us at the consultation meeting being held on 6 January 2016 at 7pm, Woodlands Junior School, Hunt Road, TN10 4BB
EDUCATION RESPONSE FORM
Proposal to Amalgamate Woodlands Infant and Woodlands Junior School,
Hunt Road, Tonbridge, Kent TN10 4BB by 1 September 2016

Please return no later than midday 20 January 2016

Do you agree with the proposal?  Yes☐ No ☐ Undecided ☐

Which of the following best describes you?
Parent(s)/Carer(s)☐ / Member of Staff ☐ /Governor ☐ / Pupil ☐ /Other☐

Which school are you involved with?
Woodlands Infant School ☐ / Woodlands Junior School ☐ /Both Schools ☐ /
Another local school ☐ / Other interested party ☐ …………………………..(please state interest).

COMMENTS

Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary

Name (Optional) .......................................................... Address: ...........................................

Please complete this response and return it by midday 20 January 2016:
• By email school.consultations@kent.gov.uk
• Hand it in at either Woodlands Infant or Woodland Junior School Office
• Post it to Jared Nehra, Area Education Officer, KCC, Area Education Office (West Kent) Sessions House, County Hall ME14 1XQ

Note: Kent County Council is a data controller under the Data Protection Act 1998 and will comply with the requirements of the Act at all times. We will ensure that your personal information is processed fairly and lawfully and in this instance used only for the purpose of validation, which will enable a fair and just consultation.