

CEO's presentation – Bromford Infant and Junior Schools.

Introduction.

The LEA has a duty to promote the best education for its pupils, not just those currently in a school, but future generations of pupils. It has had for many years a policy to encourage mergers as and when appropriate circumstances arise. In November 2000 the Education and Lifelong Learning Advisory Team received a report suggesting a more proactive approach to the merger of separate Junior and Infant schools.

The Council subsequently resolved, following a period of consultation in March 2001, that in principle it supported the desirability of all through primary schools where this is a feasible outcome. In addition it resolved that Officers of the Education Department visit a joint meeting of all the pairs of schools to establish when in the next seven years, they would merge. This in no way precludes mergers being triggered as they have in the past by virtue of the school Governors requesting the Local Education Authority to instigate a merger at the time of the resignation of a Headteacher. Indeed the LEA sees a Headteacher resignation, a school entering special measures, a school having surplus places, or the requirement for significant building works as being triggers for any school to consider merging prior to a date they may have set during the seven-year period. In particular the removal of surplus places at the time of a merger can benefit the family of schools in a locality reducing surplus in them all and also reducing mobility.

The department is in no doubt that there are long term benefits of mergers for all the reasons it has detailed around continuity for children and parents, delivery of the curriculum, staff development, ease of site maintenance, a common ethos and better use of resources. The CEO feels very strongly that one of the crucial factors in promoting all-through primary schools is the continuity it brings to schools, especially

for the most vulnerable children and those with special needs. It is a legitimate concern for an LEA to reduce the number of transfer points because of the potential to disrupt educational progress.

Educational Benefits.

Research undertaken by the Times Education Supplement and published on November 15th 2002 is of relevance to the Authority's position on continuity of children's education. The research showed that a large group of children, often a third, sometimes nearly a half, appear to make no progress or even go backwards during Year 3. Professor Jean Ruddick of Cambridge University, School of Education, suggest that the key stage transfer itself may be to blame. The Authority's view is that at this acknowledged difficult stage in a child's education to transfer between an Infant and Junior school could compound problems due to a change in surroundings and ethos and that an all-through school is better placed with single sets of learning and teaching policies and procedures to address this problem.

The department has undertaken its own research with Headteachers of most the 28 schools which amalgamated since 1994. None of these schools have regrets and indeed almost all the feedback has been positive. Some of the Headteachers have made themselves available as an advice group to give support to schools that are going through the process. The Authority shares these positive comments with Headteachers and Governors when it undertakes meetings with schools who have not yet merged. In addition, as part of a best value review of school places the department undertook a questionnaire of over 300 prospective parents in June 2000 entitled 'Which Primary School?' The questionnaire covered a wide variety of areas but specifically asked prospective parents about the type of school they would prefer. 57% preferred all-through primary schools, 15% preferred separate infant and junior

schools and 28% had no preference. The Authority is of the opinion that the merger of schools will ultimately lead to improvements in provision in the longer term and that any disruption accompanying the merger process can be managed.

Finance Implications

Revenue

Pupil led formula allocations of the combined schools remains unaltered as pupil numbers are unlikely to change.

The lump sum saving of one headteachers salary plus a minor amount of fixed clerical costs are recycled into the quantum schools budget share. Bromford Infant School receives an element for small schools which will cease; this formula allocation was intended only to assist in meeting the extra costs of being a small school.

If a school has a surplus as a separate Infant or Junior this is not lost it is transferred to the replacement school.

Standards Fund Issues

Entitlement to standards fund to the successor school will change, but this is not easy to quantify. The government has a policy from 2004 to mainstream grants, which will have the potential to effect all schools allocations.

Capital

In the first instance the basic need for a combined staff room will be addressed if necessary; if other works would also facilitate the management and operation of an amalgamated school, Education Officers will assist school management teams/

Governors, in drawing up longer-term proposals and seek ways to implement them over time using available funding resources.

Transport Implications

There are no transport implications arising from the proposed merger.

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