

# **LONDON BOROUGH OF BRENT**

## **Meeting of the Executive**

**20 June 2005**

### **Report from Director of Education, Arts and Libraries**

For action

Wards affected:  
**PRESTON**

### **Report Title: The Future Organisation of Wembley Manor Infant and Wembley Manor Junior Schools**

Forward Plan ref: **EAL05/06-003**

#### **1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 This report sets out the findings of the public consultation process (informal stage) on the options for the future organisation of Wembley Manor Infant (with a Nursery) and Wembley Manor Junior schools. The questions are should the schools be expanded and / or should the schools be amalgamated?
- 1.2 This report requests the Executive's approval to proceed with the proposal to publish statutory notices under section 28(1) and 29(1) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998: to amalgamate the Infant and Junior schools as one 4 Form Entry (4FE) primary school by:
- discontinuing Wembley Manor 3FE Infant and 3FE Junior schools with effect from 31 August 2006;
  - establishing a new primary school with effect from September 2006, initially with a capacity of 3FE (with nursery) on the same site, expanding to 4FE (with nursery) in January 2008 in new buildings on the same site.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

The Executive is requested to:

- 2.1 Note the outcome of the informal consultation referred to in paragraphs 3.14 – 3.20 of this report;
- 2.2 Authorise the Director of Education, Arts and Libraries to publish notices required under sections 28(1) and 29(1) of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, for the proposal to
  - discontinue Wembley Manor 3FE Infant and 3FE Junior schools with effect from 31 August 2006;
  - establish a new primary school with effect from September 2006, initially with a capacity of 3FE (with nursery) on the same site, expanding to 4FE (with nursery) in January 2008 in new buildings on the same site.
- 2.3 To authorise the Director of Education, Arts and Libraries to determine these proposals on behalf of the Council, if either there are no valid statutory objections to the Council's proposals or if the valid statutory objections have been resolved within 6 weeks of the publication of the proposals; alternatively, should there be any objection, submit them for a decision by the School Organisation Committee (SOC), as the body with statutory powers to determine these changes.

## **3.0 Detail**

### **Pressure on School Places**

- 3.1 There is already pressure on places in the two schools in the Wembley area. Owing to the Wembley development programme and the extensive housing developments that are being built, more families will be arriving and their children will need extra school places. It is estimated that by 2014 (in an unpublished analysis by the LEA that supersedes the latest School Organisation Plan), a total of five more forms of entry will be needed across schools in the north of the Borough.
- 3.2 The Council has a statutory duty to provide school places, to match such places as closely as possible to demand, and to support and challenge schools to provide the best possible standard of education for pupils.

### **School Buildings: Efficiency, Sustainability, Suitability**

- 3.3 The existing school buildings are in a poor state of repair. Nearly half of the classroom accommodation is in temporary huts which are now approaching the end of their lifespan. They are insufficient and

unsuitable. Repair work has been undertaken, and any additional remedial work is likely to be cost ineffective.

### **Primary Schools: Standards and Amalgamations**

- 3.4 The majority of primary schools in Brent are all-through schools. Many LEAs across the country have a policy of amalgamating infant and junior schools because of the advantages of all through education. This Council is unaware of any new separate infant or junior schools as apposed to primary schools being established in recent years. There are good arguments for the amalgamation of schools and examples of their success across the country. Birmingham LEA is an example of an authority which has been proactive in amalgamating its separate infant and junior schools with some success (see para 3.12).

### **The Consultation Process**

- 3.5 The proposal is, should the number of school places at the schools be expanded from 3FE to 4FE, and also should the schools be amalgamated to make one primary school (see details in 3.8 to 3.11). Initial consultation has taken place on the proposals for the future organisation of Wembley Manor Infant and Junior schools. The Options are outlined in paragraph 3.8.

By statute there are informal and formal consultation processes to follow.

### **Informal Consultation**

- 3.6 The consultation process started in January 2005 with a combined Governing Body meeting of both schools. A smaller group of four governors from each school was later formed as a joint working party to take the project forward. Their work programme has included meeting fortnightly, having delegated authority from their respective governing bodies to discuss and agree the consultation process with the LEA, contribute to the work programme and report back to their respective governing bodies at regular intervals. In May 2005 representatives from the joint working party made visits to two 4FE primary schools in the London Borough of Newham to gain first hand experience of the organisation of large schools. Both schools received positive reviews.
- 3.7 The wider consultation process began in May with the consultation document being issued to all interested parties. On 18 May 2005 a meeting was held for parents of both schools. The consultation documentation (distributed to all concerned in April 2005) was also issued to all schools in Brent, neighbouring boroughs, Trade Unions, Teachers Panel, Wembley Residents Association, the Diocesan Boards, One Stop Shops and Libraries in Brent, Councillors and the Early Years Group. The deadline for responses was 3 June 2005.

- 3.8 The majority of responses were in favour of the need to expand school places in addition to renewing the school buildings. The LEA consulted on four options for the future organisation of the schools. They are:
- Option 1 the two schools remain as separate 3 form entry infant and junior schools;
  - Option 2 the two schools amalgamate to create an all through 3 form entry primary school;
  - Option 3 the two schools expand to become separate 4 form entry infant and junior schools;
  - Option 4 the two schools amalgamate to create an all through 4 form entry primary school.
- 3.9 Option 4 is the Director of Education's preferred option. There are advantages and disadvantages to option 4, but Director's view is that the advantages considerably out weigh the disadvantages as listed below:
- (1) All through schools provide continuity for pupils and parents by removing the stress of transition from infant to junior school.
  - (2) An all-through school would be better placed to provide the curriculum in a continuous and coherent way, with planning covering all 3-11 year olds.
  - (3) There would be a co-ordinated, whole school approach to issues such as behaviour and parent involvement.
  - (4) With a large number of children on site a single school management would help to ensure all aspects of school life are well run.
- 3.10 Other advantages include:
- A single structure is more cost efficient especially in the long run
  - It is easier to deliver extended school provision
- 3.11 The disadvantages of an all-through school are:
- Initially amalgamation will cause some upheaval. It will take time to develop a common identity and shared vision for the new school.
  - There will parental anxiety about the large size but this can be overcome by an effective school design.
  - High standards of school leadership and organisation are crucial to the success of any school, but the need for them, is intensified in a large school.
- 3.12 There are considerable benefits for all-through provision and although it cannot be guaranteed that this will lead to improved standards there

is good evidence that this is likely to do so. There is evidence from other LEA's on the benefits of amalgamating infant and junior schools. For example, Birmingham LEA is at an advanced stage in its amalgamation programme after amalgamating a significant number of its 46 pairs of infant and junior schools in the last few years. Extracts from the Birmingham Chief Executive Office presentation and the Results of the Birmingham LEA First OFSTED After Amalgamation report are attached (appendices 3 and 4).

- 3.13 In putting the amalgamation forward as a preferred option for Wembley Manor Infant and Junior Schools it should be noted that this does not imply that all separate Infant and Junior schools in Brent should be amalgamated. Decisions need to be taken on the particular circumstances of each case. In the case of Wembley Manor Infant and Junior there is the need for expansion and the opportunity of providing a new school which can be purpose-designed as a primary school.

**The Informal Consultation Outcome**

- 3.14 The closing date for written responses was 3 June 2005. At the close of business on 3 June 2005, 94 written responses were received, 55 from parents, 24 from staff of schools throughout the Borough, 8 from Governors and 7 from others. The Governing Body of each school submitted their separate responses (see 3.17 – 3.18). The responses received from 'others' included Brent UNISON and the London Diocesan Board for Schools. The findings are as follows:

Of the approximately 800 consultation papers issued the receipt of 94 represents a return of approx 11.75%, which is disappointingly low.

- 3.15 The preference for different options were:

	<b>Option 1</b>	<b>Option 2</b>	<b>Option 3</b>	<b>Option 4</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Parents</b>	9	7	34	7	<b>57</b>
<b>Governors</b>	0	0	6*	1	<b>7</b>
<b>Staff +</b>	2	0	18	6	<b>26</b>
<b>Others</b>	0	0	2	2	<b>4</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>94</b>

\* Governors are also classed as either: parents, staff or others  
 + staff includes headteachers from other schools in Brent

The above shows that of those that responded:

- 81% support the expansion of the schools from 3FE to 4FE (options 3 & 4).
- 75.5% prefer separate schools for now (options 1 & 3). Some have stressed that this is their preferred option until further evidence is provided. Others have suggested separate schools with shared facilities.
- 25% are in favour of an amalgamated school (options 2 & 4).

### **Issues Raised by the Consultation**

3.16 The main reasons given for each option are attached with the LEA's response (see Appendix 1). The main thematic issues (gathered from the parents' meeting and written responses) and a summary of the Director's responses are as follows, the full replies can be found in Appendix 1:

**Issue 1: The site is not big enough for 900 pupils.**

**Response:** The Wembley site is 30064m<sup>2</sup>. This is bigger than the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) guideline for a 4FE school which is 25220 to 29980m<sup>2</sup>.

**Issue 2: Playtimes will not be safe for the youngest children.**

**Response:** The layout of the building will be designed in such a way that there is separate, secure play provision for the Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 (KS1) and Key Stage 2 (KS2).

**Issue 3: There are not many 4FE primary schools in the country.**

**Response:** Site constraints often limit how large schools can grow in urban areas. The largest primary schools in the country are found in London. Newham has 5 out of the 10 largest schools in the country.

**Issue 4: Small schools perform better than large schools.**

**Response:** There is no national correlation between school size and performance. There is evidence that both small and large schools can perform well. In the case of 4FE schools, an analysis of the Key Stage 2 results in the ten largest schools in the country shows a number of them adding significant value.

**Issue 5: Separate infant and junior schools perform better than primary schools.**

**Response:** To analyse results, schools are grouped according to free school meals, pupils in the early stages of learning English, pupils coming from deprived neighbourhoods and pupil mobility. In Brent, there are no significant differences in the performance of separate infant and junior schools and that of primary schools, when we compare schools which are similar.

**Issue 6: There are no benefits from amalgamation and no evidence that an amalgamated school will improve standards.**

**Response:** Many LEAs across the country have a policy of amalgamating infant and junior schools. It appears that no new infant and junior schools have been established

in recent years. Birmingham LEA, for example, has a proactive policy of amalgamation. In 1999 it had 46 pairs of separate infant and junior schools. It has proceeded to amalgamate those schools because it is in no doubt that there are long term benefits of mergers such as continuity for children and parents, delivery of the national curriculum, staff development, ease of site maintenance, a common ethos and sense of purpose. Where amalgamations have taken place in Brent, standards have risen. A recent new build amalgamation of two three form infant and junior schools in a nearby urban Authority resulted in significantly improved and sustained attainment levels.

**Issue 7: Large schools do not function as well as smaller schools.**

**Response:** 4FE schools can function very effectively. Visits to two of the largest primary schools in the country by governors and staff from Wembley Manor Schools confirmed this to be the case.

**Issue 8: There will be no economies of scale in the 4FE amalgamated school.**

**Response:** Economies of scale can be quite significant in larger schools. There can be obvious economies such as: staffing, resources, running costs etc

**Issue 9: Why not build two separate schools with shared facilities.**

**Response:** This is an option but more costly than one primary school as not all facilities could be shared. The more facilities are shared the greater the co-ordination necessary. One school eliminates the need for this.

- 3.17 The Governing Bodies of each school have responded as separate bodies. Wembley Manor Infant School Governing Body have stated that they wish to support the expansion of the school to 4FE and support the provision of the new school buildings they also wish to support the retention of two separate schools (option 3) owing in their view, to a lack of sufficient evidence to convince them that a merger is in the best interest of the infant school and the community it serves. The evidence is now set out clearly in the Director's response above and in a file of supporting documentation will be made available for viewing in the two schools.
- 3.18 Wembley Manor Junior School Governing Body stated that they accept the need to expand from 3FE to 4FE. They support the need for new school building(s), and they will consider whether to support an amalgamation or two separate schools once they have received further information and that the case for a very large amalgamated

school has not yet been convincingly made as they believe the Brent funding formula places a merged school at a financial disadvantage. In response to this point, the joint working group reviewed a financial model at one of its meetings which illustrated that the budget for an amalgamated school compared favourably with that of another 4FE all-through school visited by members of the working group, who considered the school to be successfully run.

3.19 Although provision has been reserved for the scheme - see 4.0 – Financial Implications, (based on Option 4 the Director’s preferred option), the LEA has made a submission for funds under Targeted Capital Funding (TCF) in order to deliver a co-located Children’s Centre, enhance extended school provision and develop ‘home connectivity’. This is a measure to enable children from less privileged backgrounds (those on Free School Meals and other benefits) equal access to the schools on line learning resources. That is, allow those who would not otherwise be able to afford ICT at home, to connect to the school’s web based curriculum resources, as well as allowing parents to access to relevant data and information concerning their children.

3.20 The Brent Teachers’ Panel have responded to the consultation by saying they believe the Council should have followed a pre-Local Management of Schools and pre 1991 agreement which provided for consultation exercises to be overseen by a joint Education Committee/Teachers’ Panel. The Panel have been informed that the agreement is outdated and no longer in force, but that the Panel’s views are welcome. The Panel have asked for further meetings of staff at the schools with representatives of the Panel present and this can be arranged if the Executive agree to the next round of consultation.

**Formal Consultation**

3.21 The next step in any procedure to reorganise the schools is to publish a statutory notice in the local papers, libraries, the Town Hall and on the school gates (see Appendix 2). There will then be a 6 week period for anyone to write in to make representation on the proposals. If there are no statutory objections then the Local Authority will determine the proposals, however, if there are objections then all written objections, suggestions, comments and support will then be sent to the School Organisation Committee to consider. The Committee will make the decision probably in September or October 2005. If it SOC cannot make the decision the matter will go to the Schools Adjudicator.



3.22 The timetable for the formal consultation is as follows:

Publish Statutory Return	by 27 June 2005
Representations (six weeks)w/c 1/8/05	30 July 2005
Decision	September / October 2005
Begin to recruit Headteacher Designate	September 2006
Amalgamated school starts	September 2006
4FE school opens	
school moves new building	1 January 2008

3.23 The Executive report requesting approval to invite expressions of interest and tenders for the proposed architectural and consultancy service contract in respect of the proposed development of the schools, was approved by the Executive in their meeting in May 2005.

#### **4.0 *Financial Implications***

4.1 On 28 February 2005 the Council agreed to a capital budget provision which included resources for the newbuild of Wembley Manor Infant School and Wembley Manor Junior School totalling £10m between 2005/6 and 2007/8. This reserve provision was based on cost consultancy in early 2004. A submission has been made to the DfES under the TCF programme (competitive bidding) for Capital resources to deliver this scheme (based on Option 4 - the Director's preferred option); the ability to co-locate a children's centre, and wider facilities for extended schooling (referred to in 3.19) is dependent on the success of the funding submission.

4.2 There will be economies of scale in running the site as one school. For example there will be one headteacher. In the long term therefore the amalgamated school will be able to devote more of its resources to its pupils. If the school expands, the additional pupils will generate substantial additional funding.

4.3 The budget of the school would be determined by the devolved funding formula and the total cost contained within the overall Individual Schools Budget (ISB). There will be a proposal for a formula change – to be consulted on with all schools in the autumn – that will provide transitional funding for merging schools, again to be contained within the ISB. There will be no additional revenue cost to the Council arising from the proposal.

## **5.0     *Legal Implications***

5.1     As indicated in the above recommendations, proposals to require a school to close or for a new school to open require statutory notices under the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, formal statutory consultation and then decisions of the Schools Organisation Committee. The timetable for this process has also been set out above in this report.

## **6.0     *Diversity Implications***

6.1     There are no diversity implications contained within this report, however:

- this proposal to amalgamate the schools to form one all-through school will be in line with the majority of primary schools in Brent which are all-through schools.
- the proposed increase in school places will be a benefit to families moving into the area who are increasingly finding it difficult to find a local school place for their children.
- the new building will comply to Disability Discrimination Act regulations. The existing buildings currently do not comply.

## **7.0     *Staffing/Accommodation Implications***

7.1     The temporary governing body would need to draw up a staffing structure for the new school. The headteacher and deputy headteacher posts would be advertised nationally. All other posts in the new school, both teaching and non-teaching, would be ring-fenced in the first instance, with staff employment protected. With expansion of pupil numbers, there is likely to be an expansion of posts rather than a reduction. Dependent on the new staffing structure, there are likely to be increased opportunities for promotion.

7.2     The existing school buildings are in a poor state of repair. Up to 40% of the pupils of the schools are housed in temporary accommodation, which has either reached the end of its useful life or will in the next 2 to 3 years. The main buildings are built of a light weight construction and will need considerable investment in the next 5 years. The existing buildings do not meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 and do not lend themselves easily for adaptations to meet the act. (see 3.3).

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 This report has examined the issues raised by the consultation. As to expansion the consultation response, though small, favours this proposal. The need is clearly there and the site is large enough. There are strong reasons to proceed to formal consultation on expansion.
- 8.2 Given the need to expand and given the opportunity for a brand new purpose-designed building there are strong grounds for amalgamation of the schools. The objective educational reasons have been discussed in the report:
- Continuity of curriculum planning and assessment
  - Removal of problems of transition at 7 years old
  - Opportunities for the deployment of staff expertise for the benefit of all students
  - Evidence of successful amalgamations in the past
  - Opportunities for the best management of a site catering for 900 pupils.
- 8.3 The issues raised in the consultation have been carefully considered and they can be satisfactorily addressed.
- 8.4 The opportunity of a new building is a critical factor, since that will enable the best design of an amalgamated school to be built. In addition to the strong educational arguments for an amalgamation this is the best value for money option.
- 8.5 It is disappointing that there has been a low level of responses to the consultation but given that low level and the fact that the Governing Body of the Junior School has not yet taken a view on amalgamation it is right that the proposal should go to the next stage of formal consultation.

### ***Background Papers***

1. Consultation documentation
2. Executive Report approved on 23 May 2005 – Wembley Manor Junior and Infants Schools – Procurement of Architectural and Consultancy Services

## **Appendices**

1. Appendix 1 – LEA’s response to the comments made at informal consultation
2. Appendix 2 - Statutory Notice
3. Appendix 3 - Birmingham Chief Executive Office Merger Presentation
4. Appendix 4 – Results of the Birmingham LEA First OFSTED After Amalgamation report

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