



**CABINET**

**14 FEBRUARY 2017**

**DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION: LESLEY HAGGER**

**CABINET MEMBER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES:  
COUNCILLOR MATTHEW GOLBY**

<b>Subject:</b>	School organisational changes: Proposal to amalgamate Whitefriars Infant and Junior Schools (Rushden), and form an all-through primary school.
<b>Recommendations:</b>	Cabinet is asked to; <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Approve the 'technical' closure of Whitefriars Junior School in relation to the proposed amalgamation;</li><li>2. Approve the extension of age-range from 4-7 to 4-11 years of age at Whitefriars Infant School, to create a new, 'all-through' primary school with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017;</li><li>3. Delegates to the Director of Children, Families and Education, in consultation with the respective Cabinet member for Children and Education all necessary authority to effect the above.</li></ol>

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To provide Cabinet members with all the necessary information and a summary of the feedback received during the statutory four week period of representation, to make a fully informed decision on the recommendations listed above.

**2. How this decision contributes to the Council Plan**

The Council's vision is to make Northamptonshire a great place to live and work. This is achieved through increasing the wellbeing of your county's communities and/or safeguarding the county's communities.

This initiative specifically delivers increased wellbeing and/or safeguarding by ensuring that:

- People of all ages are safe, protected from harm and able to live happy, healthy and independent lives in our communities.
- Resources are utilised effectively and efficiently, in coordination with partners and providers.

**3. Background**

- 3.1 The manner in which a local authority can amalgamate a linked infant and junior school is prescribed in the DfE guidance documents, 'The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013' and the Department for Education (DfE) 'Opening and Closing Maintained Schools (April 2016)' guidance document, which govern school organisational changes of this nature.

- 3.2 The documents named above specify that the amalgamation of linked infant and junior schools must be achieved through the ‘technical’ closure of one of the schools involved and the extension in age-range of the other, which would then become a school with full ‘primary’ status.
- 3.3 A Cabinet Member decision was taken on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2016 to begin the commencement of the statutory consultation process in relation to the proposal to amalgamate Whitefriars Infant and Junior Schools. The decision was taken in response to a formal request from the respective Governing Bodies of the schools for the County Council to begin the required process. The reasons for this request and the benefits the proposal is expected to deliver are detailed in full in Section 3.9 of this report.
- 3.4 Following the initial six week period of consultation, a further Cabinet Member decision was taken on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016, to issue the relevant statutory notices associated with this proposal; the statutory notice of closure for Whitefriars Junior School and the statutory notice relating to the extension in age-range of Whitefriars Infant School, from 4-7 to 4-11 years of age;
- 3.5 Following the publication of the statutory notices relating to this proposal, a four week period of representation was conducted between 17<sup>th</sup> November and 15<sup>th</sup> December 2016;
- 3.6 Should approval for the proposed amalgamation be approved, Whitefriars Junior School would be discontinued with effect from 31<sup>st</sup> August 2017. Whitefriars Infant School would extend its age-range and become a full, ‘all-through’ primary school with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2017.
- 3.7 Should the decision be taken to amalgamate the two schools, the new primary school would continue to operate from the existing accommodation of the infant and junior schools, which currently share the same school site, located on Boughton Drive, Rushden.
- 3.8 It is anticipated that all current pupils attending either; Whitefriars Infant and Junior School at the time of the proposed amalgamation, would transfer to the newly amalgamated primary school, should the proposal proceed.
- 3.9 It is the belief of Northamptonshire County Council that the proposal would deliver the following benefits:
- A seamless transition between Key Stage 1 (infant) and Key Stage 2 (junior) - national data indicates that pupils educated in schools with full primary status record higher levels of attainment and progress.
  - Greater capacity to track pupils between Key Stages.
  - All-through primary schools are more attractive to prospective members of staff, allowing the school to attract candidates of the highest possible quality for future roles.
  - More development opportunities for staff, including shared training and an understanding of all Key Stages across the primary phase of education that will ultimately benefit pupils.

- Increased time for relationship between pupils, staff and parents to develop, allowing the school to better understand each individual child's needs.
- Increased financial viability in the longer term.

3.10 An analysis of Key Stage 2 data recorded by all Northamptonshire primary and junior schools clearly shows that pupil attainment is higher in county primary schools as opposed to junior schools. Please note, a comparison with previous years is not possible as 2015/16 was the first academic year in which this scoring system was utilised.

Northamptonshire Primary and Junior KS2 Results Comparison, Reading, Writing and Maths (2015/16)

School information*		Average KS2 progress by subject (average point score per child)			% of children achieving (a) at the expected standard and (b) at a higher standard in all subjects (RWM)	
School type	Cohort size (number of pupils in provision)	Reading progress (average)	Writing progress (average)	Maths progress (average)	% of children achieving the expected standard in Reading, Writing and Maths	% of children achieving a higher standard <sup>2</sup> in Reading, Writing and Maths
Primary <sup>1</sup>	6855	-0.6	-0.8	-1	52%	5%
Junior	1482	-1.8	-1.3	-1.8	49%	4%
All county primary provision	8412	-1.01	-0.89	-1.24	49%	4%

**Table 1:** KS2 Results for Reading, Writing and Maths for 2015/16, all Northamptonshire primary provision. Table compares results by school type (primary, junior and all). **Notes:** \* - includes local authority maintained schools and academies. **1** – 'Primary' includes primary phase of all-through schools. **2** – AHS = A higher (than expected) standard in given subjects (Reading, Writing and Maths here). **Source:** NCC GROUP/BIPI (01/2017).

Summary:

- In all individual subjects at KS2 (Reading, Writing and Maths) children in Northamptonshire primary schools are outperforming those in Northamptonshire junior schools (columns 3 to 5).
- Across the core subjects, the biggest gap is in Reading progress. Children in primary schools are receiving progress scores which are, on average, 1.2 points higher than those in junior schools.
- The percentage of schools with children reaching the expected standard in all core subjects is higher (on average) in primary schools than junior schools (52% in primary schools compared to 49% in junior schools).
- Similarly, the percentage of children achieving a higher (than expected) standard in all core subjects is higher in primary schools than in junior schools (5% compared to 4%).

#### 4. Consultation and Scrutiny

4.1 As the proposal to amalgamate any two schools necessitates the 'technical' closure of one of the schools involved, the consultation process that must be followed is

prescribed in the DfE guidance document ‘Opening and closing maintained schools’ and is specified below:

Stage	Description	Timescales
1	Consultation	Six weeks: 12 <sup>th</sup> September – 21 <sup>st</sup> October 2016
2	Publication of Statutory Notices	10 <sup>th</sup> November 2016 (Cabinet Member approval granted on 1 <sup>st</sup> November)
3	Period of representation	Four weeks: 17 <sup>th</sup> November – 15 <sup>th</sup> December 2016
4	Final Decision	Made at full NCC Cabinet meeting: 14 <sup>th</sup> February 2017
5	Implementation (if approved)	1 <sup>st</sup> September 2017

- 4.2 A full analysis of all the feedback received during the initial six week period of consultation was attached to the Cabinet Member report of 1<sup>st</sup> November 2016. 91% of all stakeholders who responded during the initial period of consultation stated that they were in favour of the proposed amalgamation of the two schools.
- 4.3 Of the remaining 9% of respondents, the majority of those who expressed their opposition to the proposed amalgamation did so on the grounds that the new school would be operating on a reduced budget. Should the proposal proceed, the newly amalgamated school would be required to operate on a reduced budget, for the reasons explained in section 7 of this report. The management of operating on a reduced budget would fall within the remit of the newly amalgamated school’s Governing Body. However, there are a number of mitigating measures that could be taken by the Governing Body and significant savings to be made through the employment of a single head teacher. Amalgamations provide increased financial viability in the longer term to the new primary school, as opposed to individual infant and junior schools. Please see section 7 for further details.
- 4.4 During the formal period of representation, following the publication of statutory notices, conducted between 17<sup>th</sup> November and 15<sup>th</sup> December, two formal representations were received. One representation was received from the Governing Body of Whitefriars Infant School, opposing the proposed amalgamation. The other representation was received from the Governing Body of Whitefriars Junior School, which expressed its full support for the proposal to amalgamate the two schools and form a new, ‘all-through’ primary school. Both representations received are attached to this report as Appendix 1 and 2.
- 4.5 The representation received from Whitefriars Infant School states that the Governing Body of Whitefriars Infant School met on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016 to vote on whether they wished to pursue the proposed amalgamation. The result of this vote was 5-3 against amalgamation. The reasons for this vote are fully detailed in Appendix 1 of this report, the main reasons stated revolve around the reduction in the school’s budget that would arise should the proposal proceed.
- 4.6 The representation from the Governing Body of Whitefriars Junior School stated that at a full Governing Body meeting held on 2<sup>nd</sup> November, the school’s Governing Body voted unanimously (8-0) in favour of amalgamation. The full reasons for this are

detailed in Appendix 2 of this report. The Governing Body stated they believed the amalgamation was in the best interests of both current and future pupils attending the school and that amalgamation would realise the best opportunity for improving standards and increasing levels of pupil attainment. The Governing Body also stated their belief that although the school would face a short-term reduction in funding, the efficiencies that could be realised from the proposed amalgamation would mean the new school would benefit from increased financial viability in the longer term.

4.7 It is the belief of NCC’s School Effectiveness team that an ‘all-through’ primary school model is preferable to the linked infant and junior model for the reasons stated in section 3.9 of this report. It is also the belief of the School Effectiveness team that larger schools are far more attractive in terms in attracting outstanding candidates for the role of Headteacher. Regardless of the outcome of this proposal, either the new primary school or both the linked infant and junior school will require new head teachers from September 2017 onwards.

4.8 It is recommended that Cabinet approve the proposal to amalgamate Whitefriars Infant and Junior Schools and form a new, ‘all-through’ primary school, for the following reasons;

- The proposal received high levels of support from stakeholders of both schools, during the initial period of consultation;
- Mitigating actions can be taken by the newly amalgamated school’s Governing Body, in relation to the concerns raised during the initial consultation period, should the proposal be approved;
- Although the Governing Body of the infant school have expressed their opposition to the proposal for financial reasons, it is the belief of both NCC and the Junior School that measures can be put in place to mitigate against the reduction in funding that would result from the proposal (see section 7);
- The Governing Body of the Junior School voted unanimously in favour of amalgamation;
- When taken as a whole, the joint vote of the respective schools’ Governing Bodies was 11-5 in favour of amalgamation;
- It is the belief of NCC that the proposal would deliver the benefits specified in full in the Cabinet Member report of 9<sup>th</sup> August 2016;
- KS2 data recorded in Northamptonshire in 2016 clearly shows that pupils educated within ‘all-through’ primary school settings, as opposed to junior schools, achieve higher levels of attainment and make better progress in each of the core subjects (Reading, Writing and Maths).

## 5. Equality Screening

Reason that no EqIA is required	✓ as appropriate
The paper is for information only	
The proposal/activity/decision has no impact on customers or the service they receive	✓
The proposal impacts upon staff but the proposed staffing changes will not affect the service that customers receive*	✓
Other (please explain further)	

\* where a proposal affects staff, the appropriate HR processes will be followed, which have already been subject to the EqIA process and will be compliant with HR legislation

## 6. Alternative Options Considered

6.1 Do nothing. This option was not progressed as it would have ignored the formal requests of the respective Governing Bodies of the schools involved to begin consultation on possible amalgamation. It is also the belief of the County Council that attending an 'all-through' primary school, as opposed to separate infant and junior schools provides the best possible educational outcomes for the schools and for pupils, as evidenced in section 3.10.

## 7. Financial Implications

7.1 The proposal to amalgamate the two schools will be cost neutral to the County Council. Under the schools current organisational arrangement the Infant and Junior School each receive a lump sum per academic year (currently set at £125,000) from the Schools Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Should the proposal be approved, the newly amalgamated primary school would receive 85% of two lump sums in the financial year following the amalgamation. In each financial year thereafter the school would receive one lump sum. Any savings realised by the proposed amalgamation would be recycled back into the Schools Block of the DSG. This money is ring-fenced for school use only and cannot be used for any other purpose.

## 8. Risk and Business Continuity Management

a) Risk(s) associated with the proposal

Risk	Mitigation	Residual Risk
Proposal not supported by stakeholders during initial period of consultation	Initial six week period of consultation has been conducted with all relevant stakeholders. Feedback received during this consultation has been positive in favour of the proposed amalgamation.	Green
Proposal not supported by stakeholders during statutory 4 week period of representation	Proposal is not supported by Whitefriars Infant School due to the reduction in funding described in section 7.1. Should the proposal be given approval the loss of funding would be offset through the employment of a single Headteacher and the newly amalgamated school would actually have increased financial viability in the longer term.	Amber

b) Risk(s) associated with not undertaking the proposal

Risk	Risk Rating
Pupils continue to record lower levels of attainment as a result of attending a junior school as opposed to an 'all-through' primary school as shown in section 3.10	Red
Lack of pupil progression and accountability between Key Stages 1 and 2, resulting from separate infant and junior schools being responsible for individual Key Stages, rather than one 'all-through' school being responsible for pupil progression across the entire primary phase of education.	Red
The linked infant and junior school convert to academy status with different academy sponsors, exacerbating the problems outlined above and increasing the chance of a pupil attending two schools with completely a different ethos and methods of curriculum delivery, which could impact adversely upon pupils' levels of attainment.	Amber

## 9. List of Appendices

- Appendix 1: Formal representation received from the Governing Body of Whitefriars Infant School.
- Appendix 2: Formal representation received from the Governing Body of Whitefriars Junior School.

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Background Papers:	Cabinet Member report: 9 <sup>th</sup> August 2016 Cabinet Member report: 1 <sup>st</sup> November 2016
Does the report propose a key decision is taken?	YES
If yes, is the decision in the Forward Plan?	YES
Will further decisions be required? If so, please outline the timetable here	NO
Does the report include delegated decisions? If so, please outline the timetable here	N/A
Is this report proposing an amendment to the budget and/or policy framework?	NO
Have the financial implications been cleared by the Strategic Finance Manager (SFM)? Have any capital spend implications been cleared by the Capital Investment Board (CIB)	NO – no financial implications Name of SFM: Jon Lee  NO – as above
Has the report been cleared by the relevant Director?	YES Name of Director: Lesley Hagger
Has the relevant Cabinet Member been consulted?	YES Cabinet Member: Cllr Matt Golby
Has the relevant scrutiny committee been consulted?	NO Scrutiny Committee: N/A

Has the report been cleared by Legal Services?	YES
	Name of solicitor: Duncan Bisatt Solicitor's comments:
Have any communications issues been cleared by Communications and Marketing?	YES Name of officer: Joni Ager
Have any property issues been cleared by Property and Asset Management?	YES Name of officer: Rob Scott
Are there any community safety implications?	NO
Are there any environmental implications?	NO
Are there any Health & Safety Implications?	NO
Are there any Human Resources Implications:	YES Should the proposal proceed there may be a possible restructure of Senior Leadership positions at the newly amalgamated school. However, this process will be managed by the Governing Body of the new primary school with the advice of their HR provider.
Are there any human rights implications:	NO
Constituency Interest:	Cllr Michael Tye (Rushden Pemberton West)