

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CABINET MEMBER FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

7 August 2018

Report of the Strategic Director for Children’s Services

EXTENSION OF AGE RANGE AT BAMFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL

1. Purpose of Report

To report the outcome of the statutory consultation on a proposal to extend the age range of Bamford Primary School from 4-11 years to 3-11 years in order that it can offer nursery provision.

2. Information and Analysis

Background

At a meeting on 26 April 2018, Cabinet agreed to a statutory consultation on a proposal to change the age range at Bamford Primary School. This followed an initial consultation carried out by Bamford Primary School, the responses from which were set out in that paper.

The Local Authority consultation document set out the proposal in detail, providing context to both the statutory process and the school setting, as well as specific information around staff and funding.

The consultation clearly demonstrated that the proposal has generated a lot of discussion within the local community, with very strong views being put forward both for and against the proposal. It is clear that the proposal is part of wider concern for the future viability, not just of the school and pre-school, but for the village as a whole. The potential impact upon the current provider of early years education in the village, Bamford Pre-school, was a key feature in the consultation responses. Many respondents are users of both the pre-school and the school and so whether they supported the proposal or not was not generally categorical. It is clear that both organisations are much valued and enjoy continued support and this strength of feeling has led to a high number of responses

being received.

A total of 39 responses to the consultation were received. These can be broadly broken down into 19 of general support and 20 opposing the proposal. In order to accurately represent the views of all respondents, all points have been collated and set out below, as those in general support and those opposing the proposal.

Support for the school extending its age range was based on a number of key points:

General

- 6 respondents simply provided general support for the proposal, as being in the best interests of children and the school.

Quality

- 10 respondents expressed satisfaction at the quality of the existing school provision. A wealth of positive features were cited, including high-quality external play and learning and on-site catering. The level of qualification of staff was also a strong factor, with the provision of a fully qualified EYFS teacher to be available to the 3 year and 4 year-olds prior to entering Reception. Advantages around constant professional training were also noted.
- 6 respondents cited the positive link between attainment and school nurseries, especially for disadvantaged children, with professional support from SEND and nurture being available at an early age.
- 5 respondents believed the proposal is based on a robust model offering smooth transition for pupils completing EYFS in a single setting before progressing to KS1.
- 4 respondents were happy that the proposal would allow the school to run 4 classes rather than 3, reducing the number of age ranges in each class. This was seen/considered as important for stability and staff retention.
- 2 respondents felt that 3 year-olds would benefit from the opportunity to learn from older children in the school.

Viability of the school

- 8 respondents felt that the proposal was fundamental to the survival of the school, in light of projected falling pupil numbers. The school is the heart of the community and a key feature of the

village. Many felt that it was a key attraction to current and potential residents.

Range of provision available to parents

- 11 respondents were excited about the opportunity for 3 year-olds to access Breakfast and After School club as part of the school early years provision. This would provide wrap-around care for 3 year-olds of working parents, who currently send children to provision outside of the village.
- 5 respondents felt that the proposal offered an additional and improved option for local early years provision, providing an increased range of choice for parents.

Reservations amongst generally supportive respondents:

- Of those respondents expressing general support, 1 expressed a clear preference for alternatives to be explored, joining with the Pre-school in some way.
- Another respondent also expressed concern about a potential negative long-term impact on the existing Pre-school. However, 2 respondents offered that the school has been pro-active in working with Pre-school, offering a range of support in the interests of joint working.
- 1 generally supportive respondent was concerned that if the pre-school provision was to close, then parents may opt for more extensive provision in other localities, which would in turn threaten the viability of the primary school.
- There was a general awareness of potential alternative models of delivery amongst generally supportive respondents which could see combined provision for 2-11 years.

Opposition to the school extending its age range was based on a number of key points

Lack of need for additional early years places

- Current sufficiency data from Derbyshire County Council Early Years Sufficiency Team indicates an over-supply of early years provision in the Hope Valley area. As the proposed early years provision at the school is not needed, it could experience sustainability issues. It is advised that opening early years provision at the school would likely cause the Pre-school to close. However, there is currently no other school-based early years

provision in the Hope Valley area, so this may fill a need in terms of parental preference.

General

- The responses by those generally opposed to the proposal were not overwhelmingly negative, with potential benefits, principally around provision of wrap-around care for 3 year-olds and a 4 class structure at the school being acknowledged.
- 6 respondents believe that the driver for the proposal is financial rather than what is best for all children.
- 3 respondents noted that both settings are rated Good by Ofsted and that both offer the same curriculum for Foundation Stage.
- As amongst the positive respondents, there was a keenness for the school to be able to continue to run 4 classes.
- There is a belief that a better solution should be achievable which would support children of pre-school & school age and the wider community better than the current proposal.
- 1 respondent expressed concern at the potential loss of overall capacity for early years places, should the Pre-school close and numbers rise.

Threat to sustainability of Bamford Pre-school due to reduced numbers

- All respondents opposing the proposal were concerned about the threat to the sustainability of Bamford Pre-school. Responses indicate that the Pre-school is considered to be valuable community asset which attracts people to the village. A high level of satisfaction with the Pre-school was evident, with good levels of parental satisfaction, especially around transition and flexibility.
- 10 respondents were concerned that provision for 2 year-olds could be lost from the village if the Pre-school were to close. 3 respondents noted that the loss of provision for 2 year-olds within the village would particularly affect low income families. It was generally felt that parents may opt to neighbouring schools with early years provision, in turn negatively affecting Bamford Primary School.
- 8 respondents noted that if even a few 3 year-olds were 'lost' to the school, this would have a negative effect on the Pre-school, with many also feeling that it wouldn't resolve the issue of reducing

numbers at the primary school.

- 5 respondents expressed concern at potential loss of jobs at the Pre-school and the impact on the Methodist Church who rely on pre-school income if the Pre-school were to close.
- 2 respondents stated that the village is too small to have competition for decreasing numbers of 3 year-olds.

Loss of distinct early years provision

- 10 respondents expressed concern at the 1:13 staffing ratio that would be provided for the 3 year-olds at the proposed school provision. There was a generally-held worry that this may not meet children's needs. It was felt that the lower ratio of 1:6, as at the Pre-school, is essential to support emotional and physical development.
- 7 respondents felt that the school model would be less nurturing, due to the environment and staffing levels.
- 4 respondents expressed concern over conflicting demands on teacher time, and how the needs for emotional and physical support for 3 year-olds could be met at non-teaching times.
- There were 7 specific concerns around the mixing of 3 year-olds with children of 5 years of age.
- 7 respondents expressed concern at potential disruption to the education attainment of older children caused by staggered entry and generally being amongst younger children.

Request for an alternative model to be considered

- 12 respondents showed a strong preference for a formal partnership between the Pre-school and school, ideally as one organisation, with school taking on management of the Pre-school and providing a full-day offer. This model is believed to be in operation in similar villages where a strong working relationship exists between both parties.
- A collaborative approach was seen as potentially involving less risk and more stability for both organisations, making the school more likely to be able to sustain 4 classes in the longer term.
- 3 respondents noted that there is no guarantee that the school could sustain 4 classes in the long-term, even with the extended age-range.

- There was concern that the proposal does not constitute a long-term solution. With declining pupil numbers, the school may need to revert to a 3 class system, meaning even larger numbers of age ranges within each class to the detriment of all children.
- 3 respondents expressed a desire to see a more holistic approach to provide 2-11 full-day provision within the village which would make the village more successful generally.
- Respondents on both sides linked the provision of education and housing with the future viability of the village.

Summary

- The assessment of sufficiency for early years places does not support the need for additional places in the area
- Whilst the proposal would secure the option of wrap-around early years provision for 3 year-olds which is currently lacking in the village, this needs to be considered alongside the potential loss of 2 year-olds' provision.
- There is a clear responsibility to ensure that provision can respond to declining numbers whilst meeting parental needs for wrap-around care and the current proposal does not meet that in its current form.
- A high number of respondents, from both sides of the debate, expressed a keenness for an alternative model of provision to be explored and there was a will that DCC help to steer this. This should look at securing full-day provision for 2–11 year-olds within the village and there was a clear preference that this would involve the Primary School and Pre-school working together.
- An alternative model could benefit working parents and also better aid the long-term sustainability of the school and wider village. There is a clear desire for the community to be involved in exploring options for collaborative working models such as those in place in similar localities.

3. Financial Considerations

It is proposed to accommodate the additional pupils within the existing school building. There are therefore no additional premises costs. If the proposal is implemented, the school will receive its funding for eligible

children under Derbyshire's Early Years Single Funding Formula (EYSFF). The school would receive funding based on hours' attendance by qualifying children as at the three School Census Points (January, May and October).

4. Human Resources Considerations

The school already has adequate staffing to make the alteration, including a fully qualified senior teacher to lead the Foundation Stage provision.

5. Legal Considerations

This proposal is subject to the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 that came into force on 28 January 2014. The statutory proposal was published on 10 May 2018 and was then subject to a 4 weeks formal consultation. The Local Authority is required to report the outcome of the formal consultation and a decision on the proposal must be made within a period of two months of the end of the representation period.

In considering this proposal the Cabinet Member must have regard to the Department for Education's 'Statutory Guidance for Decision-makers deciding prescribed alteration and establishment and discontinuance proposals' published in April 2016. The Cabinet Member will need to be satisfied that:

- An appropriate, fair and open local consultation has been carried out and that the Local Authority has given full consideration to all the responses received.
- Any necessary funding required to implement the proposal is available and that all relevant local parties have given their agreement.
- Assumptions have not been made that schools should be of a certain size to be good schools.
- The school can provide suitable outdoor space to enable physical education to be provided to pupils in accordance with the school curriculum; and for pupils to play outside safely.
- Consideration has been given to:
 - the quality and diversity of schools in the relevant area and whether the proposals will meet or affect the needs of parents, raise local standards and narrow attainment gaps.
 - admission applications and arrangement.

- accessibility planning. The proposed changes should not adversely impact on disadvantaged groups. The proposal should be considered on the basis of how it will support and contribute to the Local Authority's duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to school.
- the extent to which the proposal is consistent with the Department for Education's policy on Academisation.
- the community served by the schools, the views of different sections within the community and the impact on community cohesion
- The Public Sector Equality Duty. The Local Authority must have 'due regard' to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

Within one week of making a decision the Local Authority must publish their decision and the reasons for it, on the website where the original proposal was published and send copies to the Schools Adjudicator, the governing bodies, any trustees of the schools and any other body that they think is appropriate.

6. Social Value Considerations

Research has shown that Early Years education can deliver educational, developmental and social benefits, particularly where there is continuity in the educational environment.

7. Other Considerations

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, equality of opportunity, and environmental, health, property and transport considerations.

8. Background papers

A file is available within the Children's Services' Development Section.

Statutory Guidance for 'Decision-makers deciding prescribed alteration and establishment and discontinuance proposals' published in April 2016

9. Officer's Recommendation

It is recommended that the Cabinet Member:

- (i) Rejects the proposal to extend the age range at Bamford Primary School at this stage on the grounds that there is not a shortage of early years places in the area, and the proposed model does not respond to all the needs for early years provision.
- (ii) Recommends that Bamford Primary School works with the community and the pre-school to explore alternative delivery models.

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Jane Parfrement, Strategic Director for Children's Services