

Subject:	Amalgamation of Davigdor Infant and Somerhill Junior Schools in Hove to become an all through primary school from September 2015		
Date of Meeting:	09 March 2015		
Report of:	Executive Director of Children's Services		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Michael Nix	Tel: 290732
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Ward(s) affected:	Goldsmid ward		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

The special circumstances for non-compliance with Council Procedure Rule 3, Access to Information Procedure Rule 5 and Section 100B(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), (items not considered unless the agenda is open to inspection at least five days in advance of the meeting) were that the consultation period ended on 27 February 2015 and governing body responses were decided at meetings on 2 and 3 March 2015 taking into account a summary of responses to the consultation.

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT AND POLICY CONTEXT

- 1.1 It is proposed that Davigdor Infant and Somerhill Junior Schools in Hove amalgamate to become an all through primary school with effect from 1 September 2015.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to report on the outcome of consultation on this proposal and to seek approval to proceed to the next stage of the statutory process, which is the publication of Statutory Notices.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 To note the responses to the consultation undertaken regarding the proposal in 1.1 above.
- 2.1 To agree to the publication of the required Statutory Notices to progress this proposal.
- 2.2 That following the statutory notice period the matter is reported further to the meeting of the Children and Young People Committee on 1 June 2015 for a final decision.

3. CONTEXT/ BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Brighton & Hove City Council has had a policy, as set out in its Protocol for the Creation of an All-through Primary School, of supporting the amalgamation of infant and junior schools where appropriate since 2000. This policy was

reaffirmed in the new School Organisation Plan 2013 – 2017 adopted by the Council at its meeting on 27 March 2014. The Protocol states that the Council will consider merging linked infant and junior schools when the Head Teacher of one of the schools leaves. Each case for possible amalgamation is considered on its merits and any proposals for change are subject to public consultation. The consultation paper (Appendix 1) sets out the main reasons for this policy.

- 3.2 This proposal has come forward now because the Head Teacher of Davigdor Infant School is retiring and therefore leaving the school. At present Davigdor Infant and Somerhill Junior Schools operate as separate institutions on the same site, each with its own Head Teacher, staff and governing body. The majority of children transfer from the Infant School to the Junior School at age 7+.
- 3.3 Both schools have positive Ofsted judgements. Somerhill Junior School was graded 'good' with 'outstanding' leadership and management and 'outstanding' behaviour and safety of pupils in December 2014. Davigdor Infant School was graded 'outstanding' in July 2008 and as a result of desk top monitoring Ofsted has not found it necessary to re-inspect the school since that time.
- 3.4 In accordance with the Council's Protocol, in the Autumn Term 2014 officers discussed the future arrangement for Davigdor Infant and Somerhill Junior Schools with the two governing bodies, separately and then in a joint meeting. The two schools already work very well together. At the end of this process both governing bodies confirmed their support for consultation on a proposal to amalgamate the two schools.
- 3.5 The proposal is to create a four form entry community primary school for pupils aged 4–11 years by closing Davigdor Infant School and extending the age range of Somerhill Junior School. This should in no way be seen as a 'takeover' of one school by the other. It is the legal means by which a single primary school would be achieved and both schools would work together as equal partners in bringing it about. The Head Teacher of the Junior School would continue as the Head Teacher of the primary school. All pupils offered a place at Davigdor Infants for Sept 2015 will automatically start at the newly amalgamated school from that date.
- 3.6 A draft Statutory Notice can be found at Appendix 5. If the recommendation of this report is approved, it is proposed to publish the Notice on 11 March 2015.

4. ANALYSIS & CONSIDERATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 The alternative option would be for the two schools to continue to operate as separate infant and junior schools. The Council's policy is based on sound educational and organisational reasons and the rationale for the amalgamation has been strongly supported through the consultation.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The consultation document (Appendix 1) was issued on Monday 12 January. It was published online and was circulated to the parents, staff and governors of Davigdor Infant and Somerhill Junior Schools, to nearby pre-school settings and

via the Schools Bulletin to the Heads of all schools in the city. It was also circulated to local Councillors.

- 5.2 As part of the public consultation process two public meetings were held at Somerhill Junior School on Monday 19 January 2015 and at Davigdor Infant School on Wednesday 21st January 2015. The meetings were noted and a copy of the notes is included as Appendix 2 to this report.
- 5.3 This initial stage of the consultation ended on 27 February 2015. The responses to this consultation exercise have been collated and analysed and a summary is included at Appendix 3 to this report. Copies of all responses are available for inspection by members of the Committee in Members Rooms or from Roz Scott (email roz.scott@brighton-hove.gov.uk).
- 5.4 In summary 74 responses were received in support of the proposal and 26 were against the proposal by the end of the consultation period. Two further responses in favour of the proposal were received by post shortly after the deadline.
- 5.5 Those in support of the proposal were keen to benefit from a simpler, single admissions process and a smooth transition. Respondents were keen to see the school retain its nurturing environment under the leadership of a strong Head. Some felt that an all through school would create a more nurturing environment and some siblings preferred to be in the same school. Some made the point that there should be no further bulge years.
- 5.6 Those opposed to the proposal raised concerns about the school becoming too big, unwieldy and staff workloads being overstretched. They feared that the Head would not know all the children and would be distracted from consolidating improvements. Nine respondents were concerned that the school would lose money. Some felt the infant school was safe because it is separate, that transition between the two schools was not a problem and that it was good for children to have a fresh start at 7+. Some argued that the infant school needed a new dedicated Head Teacher to run separate school with close ties to the junior school. Several respondents felt that resources should be put into undersubscribed schools instead of admitting pupils based on distance alone, resulting in bulge years to schools that are already big. Some were concerned that the merger may result in the loss of senior managers and administrative staff.
- 5.7 The two governing bodies were provided with a summary of the responses to the consultation and considered their own response at meetings on 2 March (Davigdor) and 3 March (Somerhill). Both governing bodies decided unanimously to support the publication of a statutory notice of the proposal to amalgamate the two schools and their formal responses are attached as Appendix 4.

6. CONCLUSION

- 6.1 Public consultation about the amalgamation of Davigdor Infant and Somerhill Junior Schools has shown that there is a high level of support from parents, staff and governors for the proposal to amalgamate the two schools. Both governing

bodies have confirmed their unanimous support for the proposal. The proposal is in accordance with the Council's policy, most recently affirmed in the School Organisation Plan 2013 – 2017. It is therefore recommended that the Committee approves the publication of a statutory notice in respect of this proposal

7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 7.1 There are no direct implications as a result of the recommendation for publication of the statutory notice. Only if a decision is agreed to close one of the schools and extend the age range of the other will there be any financial implications

Finance Officer Consulted: Andy Moore

Date: 17/02/15

Legal Implications:

- 7.2 In order to achieve the proposed amalgamation it will be necessary to close Davigdor Infant School and extend the age range of Somerhill Junior School to cater for pupils aged from 4 to 11. Statutory notices will need to be published in accordance with the Education and Inspections Act 2006 as amended, and associated Regulations. Following publication there will be a period of four weeks during which any person or organisation can submit comments on the proposal to the Council. At the end of the representation period a decision must be made on the proposal within two months.

Lawyer Consulted:

Serena Kynaston

Date: 18/02/2015

Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 There are no equalities implications arising from this proposal. The City Council as admissions authority must treat all applications openly and fairly in accordance with the statutory School Admissions Code.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.4 There are no sustainability implications arising from this proposal.

Any Other Significant Implications:

- 7.5 None

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Consultation document

2. Notes from the public meetings held on 19 January and 21 January 2015
3. Analysis of responses to the consultation document
4. Responses from the governing bodies of Davigdor Infant School and Somerhill Junior School
5. Draft Notice

Documents in Members' Rooms

1. Individual responses to the consultation can be viewed by members of the Committee in Room 312, Kings House – please contact Roz Scott, roz.scott@brighton-hove.gov.uk or 01273 290736.

Background Documents

1. None

