

Report to: Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability

Date of meeting: 21 March 2016

By: Director of Children's Services

Title: Lewes Area Review of Primary School Places

Purpose: To note the outcome of the Lewes Area Review of Primary School Places and approve the resulting recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Lead Member is recommended to:

- 1) agree that the local authority takes forward statutory processes to consult on the closure of Pells CE Primary School by 31 August 2017;
 - 2) agree that the local authority takes forward statutory processes to consult on the closure of Rodmell CE Primary School by 31 August 2017;
 - 3) agree that the local authority enters into discussion with St Pancras Catholic Primary school and the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton to explore a Multi Academy Trust solution for this small school;
 - 4) note that The Lewes Co-operative Learning Trust, whilst at an early stage, has the potential to further develop partnership working across Lewes schools; and
 - 5) agree that the The Lewes Co-operative Learning Trust be used as a catalyst for partnership working across schools in the town to improve outcomes for all pupils.
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1 Background

1.1 In October 2014 the Lead Member agreed that a review of primary schools should be undertaken in the Lewes area. This was in the context of the Council's principles for planning the provision of education places in East Sussex as set out in the *Education Commissioning Plan 2014 – 2018*, and, the Council's strategy for school improvement *Excellence for All*; to ensure that there is sufficient provision to meet the predicted demand for places in the Lewes area and also to look more widely at the organisation of schools in the area to make sure they are well placed to deliver a high quality education to their local communities.

2 Supporting information

2.1 The area review process involved the preparation of data packs between autumn and spring 2015 and the holding of internal meetings with Officers and Diocesan colleagues in the spring and of stakeholder meetings in June 2015.

2.2 This process identified two schools, Pells CE Primary School (Pells) and Rodmell CE Primary School (Rodmell), where the information and evidence from the review suggested that the schools often struggle to meet their pupil admission number which impacts on the ability of the schools to secure financial stability and good outcomes for pupils. Further discussion with Pells, Rodmell and other schools in Lewes took place during Terms 1 and 2 to explore the options of federation or closure. The emerging final recommendations for the schools and Lewes as a whole are detailed in the Lewes Area Review – Final Report, attached at **Appendix 1**.

2.3 In addition, the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton is actively supporting its schools in considering developing diocesan multi-academy trusts. As a small school, a multi-academy trust would bring a number of benefits to St Pancras Catholic Primary School and make it more sustainable in terms of leadership and financial sustainability.

Pells CE Primary School

2.4 Pells has suffered from low preferences for many years. Having received a second 'requires improvement' Ofsted grade in February 2015 the school would be likely to be judged to require special measures if it is unable to secure a 'good' or higher grade at the next inspection. Federation is unlikely to increase the popularity of the school and none of the local schools have expressed a desire to federate with Pells. Amalgamation with other schools has also been explored but no other school has space to accommodate all the Pells' pupils on their school site and a split site school would create different management challenges. No other school has expressed an interest in amalgamation with Pells. The substantive headteacher left in December 2015 and it is considered highly unlikely that the school would be successful in recruiting a high quality headteacher given its circumstances and the local and national recruitment challenges.

Rodmell CE Primary School

2.5 Pupils travel from Lewes or Newhaven to attend Rodmell and very few children live in the village itself. The school is too small to be sustainable in the future and is already considering reducing the number of classes across the school. Federation with another school would not provide sufficient financial benefits to make the school more sustainable. The school currently has an unlicensed deficit budget. Despite these challenges the school received a 'good' judgement from Ofsted in November 2015. The substantive headteacher has recently resigned her position with effect from end of August 2016 and it is considered highly unlikely that the school would be successful in recruiting a high quality headteacher given its circumstances and the local and national recruitment challenges.

2.6 Given the circumstances facing each school, we believe the best solution is for both schools to close with effect from 31 August 2017. Were closure approved, arrangements would be made for displaced pupils to apply for a place at an alternative school in the local area. In the short term this would create pressure in some year groups but the pupil forecasts show that in the long term there would be sufficient school places across the area. Local schools who are part of The Lewes Co-operative Learning Trust have agreed to go over their published admission number in the short term to accommodate the displaced pupils.

2.7 It is considered there would be little impact on transport costs as a result of the schools closing. In many cases pupils would attend schools closer to their home address.

2.8 In line with the Council's 'Managing Change Policy' we would seek to minimise any compulsory redundancies as a result of the closure. If there are any school-based vacancies in East Sussex that are of interest to those staff at risk of redundancy, colleagues in Personnel and Training would liaise with the school(s) regarding the availability of staff to fill the vacancy, by seeking the agreement of the school to participate in the redeployment process. Both schools will be without a substantive Headteacher from September 2016 and interim leadership solutions will be used to fill these posts.

2.9 An Equality and Impact Assessment would be carried out as part of the statutory consultation process.

2.10 We have worked closely with the two Dioceses throughout the area review process and both Dioceses are supportive of the recommendations put forward. The Diocese of

Chichester has confirmed that its policy is to support schools with capital funding realised from the disposal and sale of school sites closed throughout the Diocese, with the Diocese looking to reinvest in locations impacted. However, this is not a guarantee and is dependent on legal commitments.

3. Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

3.1 *Excellence for All* sets the ambition for the Council to ensure that all children can attend a successful and high performing local school. To secure that ambition the Council must use its processes for planning and commissioning places as set out in the *Education Commissioning Plan*. The Lead Member is invited to note the outcome of the Lewes Area Review and, for the reasons set out in part 2 above, to consider the following recommendations:

- agree that the local authority takes forward statutory processes to consult on the closure of Pells CE Primary School by 31 August 2017;
- agree that the local authority takes forward statutory processes to consult on the closure of Rodmell CE Primary School by 31 August 2017;
- agree that the local authority enters into discussion with St Pancras Catholic Primary school and the Diocese of Arundel and Brighton to explore a Multi Academy Trust solution for this small school; and
- note that The Lewes Co-operative Learning Trust, whilst at an early stage, has the potential to further develop partnership working across Lewes schools and agree that the Trust be used as a catalyst for partnership working across schools in the town to improve outcomes for all pupils.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillors Ruth O'Keeffe and Carla Butler

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Lewes Area Review – Final report