

DETERMINATION

Case reference: STP/599

Referral body: Portsmouth City Council

Proposal: To discontinue Milton Park Infant School and Milton Park Junior School, Portsmouth and establish a new 4-11 community primary school in their place.

Date of decision: 19 February 2014

Determination

Under the powers conferred on me in Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006, I hereby approve the proposal to discontinue Milton Park Infant School and Milton Park Junior School, Portsmouth and establish a new 4-11 community primary school in their place.

The referral

1. Portsmouth City Council (the council) wrote to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator on 24 January 2014 referring its statutory proposal to discontinue Milton Park Infant School and Milton Park Junior School and establish a new community primary school on the site of the existing schools from 2nd September 2014. The new school will cater for the pupils currently served by the two existing schools, and these proposals are related. I will consider them as such.

Jurisdiction

2. Under Section 15 of the 2006 Act, local authorities may publish proposals to discontinue schools. Under section 11 (A3) a local authority may publish proposals for the amalgamation of an infant and junior school into a new primary school. The Secretary of State's consent is not required and where the admission authority is the local authority, the Office of the Schools Adjudicator is the decision maker.
3. On 7 December 2013, the council published notices to discontinue Milton Park Infant School and Milton Park Junior School and to establish a new community primary school. The notices were in the necessary form as required in Schedule 5 to the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) (England) Regulations 2007 (the Regulations). No representations were received. Following the consultation period of six weeks, the council referred the matter to the Schools Adjudicator, and provided supporting documentation.

4. I am satisfied that this proposal has been properly referred to me in accordance with Schedule 2 to the Act and that, therefore, I have jurisdiction to determine this matter.

Procedures

5. In considering this matter, I have had regard to all relevant legislation and guidance.
6. I have considered all the papers put before me including:
 - documents detailing the proposals;
 - a copy of the statutory notice;
 - the summary of the consultation on the proposals;
 - related papers submitted to the council's Cabinet; and
 - the most recent Ofsted inspection reports for both schools.

The Proposal

7. The proposal is to discontinue Milton Park Infant School and Milton Park Junior School and to establish a single primary school in their place. There would be no change to the existing nursery provision. The new school would be a 4-11 mixed primary school providing 420 places for 60 pupils in each of the seven year groups. The current combined net capacity of the two schools is 420 places. The proposed new all through primary school would therefore be the same size as the combined infant and junior schools. There are currently 350 pupils on the combined roll. The proposal is to close the two existing schools on 1 September 2014 and open the new school on 2 September 2014.
8. Milton Park Infant School and Milton Park Junior School are two separate schools sharing a school building and site. The proposed new school would occupy the existing site and buildings.
9. Since 2008 the two schools have formally operated as a hard federation under one single governing body and one senior leadership team. All the pupils on roll at the two existing schools at the proposed time of discontinuance would be offered a place at the new primary school which would be established in the existing buildings. The buildings would be able to accommodate all the pupils on roll.

Consideration of Factors

Background

10. The two schools in question have now operated as a formal federation with one head teacher and one governing body since 2008. They are seen as one entity locally and it is thought that this proposal would formalise that perception.

Standards of education

11. Milton Park Infant School was last inspected in June 2011, when it was judged to be good. The report says; "Milton Park Infant School is a good school. It is on a journey of sustained improvement and has many strengths, with a few areas in need of improvement."
12. Milton Park Junior School was last inspected in November 2012 when it was judged to require improvement. The report says; "Although leadership and governance have ensured an upward trend in achievement, it is not yet good."
13. The council is of the view that formal amalgamation would support school improvement. It maintains that all-through primary schools both ease the transition between Key Stages 1 and 2 for pupils and enable planning and management of the curriculum for continuous and cumulative learning with no transition dips.
14. It considers that parents benefit from a single admissions process and ensured continuity when their children complete the infant stage.
15. The council says that amalgamation would also make the recruitment and retention of staff easier as primary schools offer better career development opportunities for staff.
16. The proposed school would have one budget, one audit and one inspection. This would save time and money and enable administrative efficiencies, so that more resources could be spent on teaching and learning.

School roll

17. There would be no change to the number of places provided. The new school would offer 420 places for 4-11 year olds, with 60 in each of the 7 year groups. It would admit boys and girls. The existing nursery provision would be unchanged.

Premises and Costs

18. The current site and buildings would be used by the new school. Accessibility to the site and buildings is good. There are no estimated additional premises costs associated with amalgamation.
19. Under the current funding arrangements, both schools receive a lump sum funding allocation of £140,000. When the two schools close, the new school would only be eligible for one lump sum allocation. Proposed changes to the funding arrangements for 2012- 15 include transition arrangements for schools amalgamating. This would enable the new primary school to retain 85% of the two lump sums in the financial year following the year the new school is established.

Community cohesion

20. The school will be fully inclusive. It will educate its pupils in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, anti-bullying and freedom from prejudice. It will continue to work in close partnership with other schools across the city.

Consultation

21. The consultation on this proposal was carried out between 23 September 2013 and 11 November 2013. The consultation document was sent to all parents, staff, governors and other stakeholders and partners prior to the beginning of the consultation process. Public consultation and drop in meetings were held for parents, staff and governors. In addition, meetings were held with staff and union representatives.

22. Fifty five responses were received. All were in favour of the proposal.

Conclusion

23. I agree that the proposed discontinuance of the two schools and establishment of one new school will rationalise the current situation. It also has the potential to support improvement for the reasons outlined by the council as well as offering better continuity to parents. There are no additional premises costs associated with the proposal and although the new school will receive less lump sum funding than the two predecessor schools, it should be in a position to balance this over time by reducing its administrative costs. I therefore support this proposal.

Determination

Under the powers conferred on me in Schedule 2 to the Education and Inspections Act 2006, I hereby approve the proposal to discontinue Milton Park Infant School and Milton Park Junior School and establish a new community primary school on the site of the existing schools from 2 September 2014.

Dated: 19 February 2014

Signed:

Adjudicator: Janet Mokades