
**SCHOOL ORGANISATION PROPOSALS - SPECIALIST PROVISION FOR
PRIMARY AGED PUPILS WITH SPEECH AND LANGUAGE
DIFFICULTIES, AND WITH BEHAVIOURAL EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL
DIFFICULTIES**

Purpose of Report

1. To provide Members with the opportunity to hear the views from a number of citizens who have expressed their comments and concerns at current Cabinet proposals for the proposed closure of Meadowbank School.

Background

2. The proposal entitled "Specialist provision for Primary Aged Pupils with Speech and language Difficulties, and with Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties, was approved by the Cabinet in December 2015 (copy attached at **Appendix A**). The report recommended the Cabinet to:
 - Authorise officers to consult on the proposal to remodel SEN provision specifically to respond to the falling demand for speech and language places and increased demand for provision of children with behavioural social and emotional needs through the closure of Meadowbank Special School by August 2017.

This will be supported by the following proposed changes:-

- An Increase in the capacity for mainstream support for children with speech and language needs;
- A change in the use of the Allensbank Specialist Resource Base (SRB) to provide additional places for pupils with severe and complex learning difficulties;
- An increase in the number of Nurture/Revolving Door classes in mainstream schools across the city.

- Note that prior to implementation of the proposal a further report will be provided to the Cabinet providing details of any objections received, the responses to those objections and recommendations for implementation or otherwise of the proposal.

The Proposal

3. The proposal responds to falling demand for speech and language places, and increased demand for provision for children with behavioural social and emotional needs. It entails:
 - The phased closure of Meadowbank Special School (this would require the supported transition of current pupils to mainstream school or Specialist Resource Base (SRB) with a strong package of support in line with their needs).
 - Increased capacity for mainstream support for children with speech and language needs.
 - A change in use of the Allensbank SRB to provide extra places for pupils with severe and complex learning difficulties.
 - An increase in the number of Nurture/ Revolving Door classes in mainstream schools across the city, to provide at least one setting in each of the six neighbourhood areas, including a Welsh medium setting (this development to include the existing classes at Springwood, Fairwater and Glan yr Afon, as well as new sites to be identified). These classes would provide a network of early intervention support for children with attachment difficulties, social and emotional needs, and children who are socially vulnerable due to their speech and language needs.

Interim Arrangements

4. Changes would be carefully planned in consultation with parents and professionals to take account of the needs of pupils attending each of the affected settings, to minimise disruption to their learning and to take full account of parental views.

5. The likely closure date for Meadowbank School would be August 2017. The majority of current pupils will have transferred to secondary school or reintegrated to a mainstream primary by that date. Remaining pupils would be offered a range of options, depending on their needs and on parents' views:
 - Transfer to the SRB at Allensbank

 - A supported programme of reintegration to their local mainstream school. This would include funded additional support from an appropriately trained teaching assistant, school-based therapy if this continues to be an assessed need;

 - Support from the specialist teacher service.

6. The proposed change of use at Allensbank School would be timed to take account of the needs and ages of existing pupils. The classes would continue to operate as a speech and language specialist setting until these pupils complete their primary education and transfer to secondary school.

Proposed Educational Benefits

7. The proposal would offer the following educational benefits:
 - Continued high quality support for speech and language pupils in mainstream schools, with an extended specialist teacher team.

- Reduce the number of school transfers for children with speech and language difficulties, by ensuring every child can be effectively supported in mainstream throughout their education.
- Significant expansion of Nurture and Revolving Door classes for children with behavioural social and emotional difficulties.
- Welsh medium specific provision for behavioural social and emotional difficulties.
- Expansion of SRB places for children with severe learning difficulties.

Alternatives considered

8. The option of keeping Meadowbank open as a speech and language special school has been considered and rejected because the school roll has fallen consistently over the last five years and there is no expectation that the trend will reverse. This places the future of the school at risk even if no action is taken.

Issues

9. The public consultation exercise was undertaken between 11 February 2016 and 23 March 2016. The outcome of the consultation exercise is still being assessed.
10. The Chairperson of the Committee has received correspondence from a number of citizens, who requested the opportunity to address the Committee. They wish to express their views on the proposals, and for Members to be aware of the impact they feel the closure of Meadowbank would have on the lives of children with a Speech and Language Impairment in Cardiff who receive at first hand the experience of the staff, pupils and the environment in which they work in.

11. The Chairperson has agreed to invite these members of the public to address the Committee. A copy of the documentation which they have sent for Member's consideration will be circulated prior to the meeting.

Scope of Scrutiny

12. The scope of this scrutiny is for Members to:

- Consider the views expressed at the meeting on the proposal;
- Pass on any observations, comments or recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Education and the Director of Education and Lifelong Learning, to further inform the outcome of the consultation process for the proposal, prior to its consideration by Cabinet.

Way Forward

13. To enable the Committee to receive the views, comments and concerns from Members of the public the following people have currently indicated that they wish to address the Committee:

- Faye Dale – Parent of a pupil
- Diana James – Teacher
- Suzanne Grover – Former Headteacher of Meadowbank School
- Councillor Gareth Holden
- Councillor Jayne Cowan.

Legal Implications

14. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All

decisions taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirement imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be fully and properly informed; (f) be properly motivated; (g) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (h) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

Financial Implications

15. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is recommended to:

- I. Consider the information provided in the report, views and comments from Councillors, citizens, and discussions at Committee;
- II. Consider whether they have any observations, comments or recommendations they wish to make to Cabinet prior to its consideration of the outcome of the consultation exercise.

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11 May 2016