

Report to Cabinet

13 March 2024

Subject:	Highfields Primary School – Making Significant Changes (Prescribed Alterations) Consultation Outcome for Change of Age Range
Cabinet Member:	Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education, Councillor Simon Hackett
Director:	Director of Children and Education, Michael Jarrett
Key Decision:	Yes
Contact Officer:	Rachel Hill, Project Officer, School Organisation Rachel_Hill@sandwell.gov.uk

1 Recommendations

1.1 That in connection with the proposed prescribed alterations to change the age range of Highfields Primary School, Beeches Road, Rowley Regis, B65 0DA (the school) from 3 – 11 years old to 5 – 11 years old, approval be given to the:

- i) publication of the appropriate Statutory Proposal;
- ii) subject to no objections being raised during the statutory representation period for the Statutory Proposal, that the Director of Children and Education be authorised to make a final decision on the proposal for the prescribed alterations at Highfields Primary School, in conjunction with the Monitoring Officer and Assistant Director – Legal & Assurance and in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education; and
- iii) in the event that any objections are raised during the statutory representation period for the Statutory Proposal, that a report is submitted to the Cabinet Member for Children, Young




People and Education with full details of representations received to inform a final decision on the proposal.

2 Reasons for Recommendations

- 2.1 The school has experienced a drop in nursery place applications for some time because as a maintained school nursery it cannot provide the flexibility that a lot of parents need.
- 2.2 In February 2023 the governing body decided to close the nursery temporarily for 2023/24 academic year due to it not being financially viable. At the start of the 2023/24 academic year the governing body reviewed its decision to temporarily close the nursery and are now requesting a permanent closure of the nursery and a change of age range. The change of age range will not affect the pupil admission number therefore the same number of places will be available for Reception to Year 6.
- 2.3 An initial consultation was completed between 13 November 2023 and 11 December 2023. Consultation has been completed and 10 responses were received and having taken the representations into account, and no further action being required, subject to Cabinet approval to this report, statutory proposals to change the age range will be published for 4 weeks.

3 How does this deliver objectives of the Corporate Plan?

	<p>The Best Start in Life for Children and Young People</p> <p>The recommendations in this report support:</p> <p>B9 We will provide enough good school places that offer families choice and confidence that their children can experience high quality education and achieve good outcomes.</p> <p>B10 We will work with schools and other learning providers to improve educational outcomes for children and young people.</p>
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B15 We will work with partners to ensure early help is available to children and young people at the earliest opportunity depending on their need.

4 Context and Key Issues

4.1 Highfields Primary School has a 60 place Nursery which offers parents morning or afternoon sessions (30 pupils in each session) and is open during the school day; 9.00am to 3.20pm, term time only. The school employs a class teacher and two members of support staff.

4.2 In September 2022 of the 60 places available at Highfields Primary School's Nursery class, there were 27 on roll, all attending the morning session. Over the past five years numbers on roll have shown a downward trend.

Year	Number of children in AM session	Number of children in PM session	Total
2022/23	27	0	27
2021/22	21	12	33
2020/21	19	6	25
2019/20	27	12	39
2018/19	27	20	47

4.3 In 2022/23 nursery staff were redeployed across school in the afternoon due to no PM session being run.

4.4 As with all maintained schools Highfields Primary School receives a budget for its Nursery class based upon the number of children who attended in the previous financial year.

4.5 The Authority greatly values the early years provision offered at Highfields Primary School, but the sustainability fund that is available will not be enough to make up the shortfall in places.



4.6 In February 2023 the governing body discussed the future of the nursery provision and voted unanimously to proceed with closing the Nursery from September 2023 and deploy staff to support teaching and learning for Reception, Key Stage 1 and 2. The Council is now seeking a permanent closure of the Nursery.

Consultation (Customers and other Stakeholders)

4.7 The DfE regulations: 'Making Significant Changes ('Prescribed Alterations') to Maintained Schools' requires that when the Local Authority is proposing a significant alteration, i.e., a change to the age range, it must consult upon the proposal and make a formal decision to make the alteration permanent.

4.8 Initial consultation ran from 13 November 2023 to 11 December 2023. The consultations were published on the Council's Consultation Hub and published in the Express and Star on 11 November 2023 and available on the Express and Star's website for a further 14 days. All Sandwell schools were also consulted.

4.9 10 responses to the consultation were received. 7 responses were in support of the closure;

"I agree to the closure. Numbers had fallen and parents who did use it were not committed to sending their child regularly using it when they wanted to, more like a playgroup. However, time still had to be invested chasing attendance and safeguarding around absences. Parents want full time provision."

"There is not the demand for non full time nursery places without wrap around care."

"I agree to the consultation, so all sides of the proposals can be heard."

"Presuming this means to continue starting reception at age 4, it seems like a sensible decision. The nursery as it was didn't meet our needs so we chose one with 8am-6pm provision and I believe many other families were in the same position. Seems sensible for school to be able to focus on core age range of Reception to Year 6. Even better if this decision allows focus to be given to continuing and hopefully extending wrap around care to help meet parents' needs for children aged 4-11."



“It is having negative implications for other year groups with staffing etc. There are not enough children to maintain the Nursery”

4.10 3 responses from parents/carers disagreed with the closure;

“It causes too much disruption to have to find a suitable pre school in the area and then the move child to attend highfields reception-no smooth transition for the child.”

“I disagree as I have a toddler who should of been starting nursery Sept 24. I think early years in schools sets them up for normal school routine. School early years provides routine & familiar faces that they'll see for years helps with them settling in.”

“Not all parents need or want 30 hours of childcare in a private nursery setting. My older child attends highfields so when my younger daughter is due to start nursery in September, she won't be able to have the same journey and opportunities. She won't have the school environment until reception as i cant be in 2 places at once. I don't feel that private nurseries give the same learning opportunities as a school. There aren't many schools without nurseries nowadays and I feel that this will affect the school numbers in general. I would be interested to know what has been done to try and save the school nursery.

Also if the age is changing from 5 does that mean children who are due to start reception as a 4 year old wont be able to?”

4.11 A place at a school nursery does not guarantee a place in Reception. A child must start full-time education once they reach compulsory school age, on 31 December, 31 March or 31 August following their fifth birthday - whichever comes first. However, schools are required to provide places for children in the September following their 4th birthday. Although the age range is 5-11 years admission into Reception at age 4 will continue.

4.12 The school is funding staffing and resources for a 60-place nursery but only filled 27 places in 2022/23 and 33 in 2021/22. The funding for those children does not cover the cost of staffing or resources.

School received £4.23 per pupil per hour for up to 15 hours per week, which equates to £2,411 per pupil for 2022/23.



4.13 Total cost for staffing in 2022/23 for a 60-place nursery was £112,478. Total income from 27 filled nursery places for 2022/23 equated to £65,097. A deficit of £47,381. These figures do not take into account any overheads, general running costs, cost of learning resources, equipment and materials. The deficit is having to be met from the school budget.

4.14 The council’s sustainability fund is not enough to cover 30 empty places.

5 Alternative Options

5.1 Do nothing and keep the age range at the existing range of 3-11 years – this would be a detrimental impact on the school’s budget and resources.

5.2 Retain the existing age range of 3-11 years, but reduce the Nursery to 26 places, 13 AM session / 13 PM session. The Governing Body has considered reducing the overall capacity of the Nursery to fewer places but in the long term, does not consider there is sufficient demand to provide a sustainable solution for future years.

5.3 Combine the school’s Nursery and Reception classes to form an Early Years / Foundation Unit. The Governing Body has considered the option but for the reasons stated in para. 4.11, the financial viability of operating a unit model would create additional financial concerns for the school.

6 Implications

Resources:	<p>Financial and Staffing There will be no effect on staffing. Early Years staff will be redeployed across the school to support children aged 5-11 years improving the educational outcomes of those children.</p> <p>Land / building implications – There will be no effect on the building or land. The nursery accommodation can be used by the school for intervention space for the children.</p>
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<p>Legal and Governance:</p>	<p>Any proposed changes to the age range of a school must be carried out in accordance with the Statutory Guidance issued by the Department for Education, 'Making Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools'. The guidance requires the local authority to undertake a statutory consultation for a period of at least 4 weeks.</p> <p>The guidance is issued in relation to any exercise of functions under The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 ('the Prescribed Alterations Regulations') and should be read in conjunction with Parts 2, 3 and Schedule 3 of the Education and Inspections Act (EIA) 2006 and the Prescribed Alterations Regulations. The proposal is also subject to and assessed as compliant with the requirements of the Establishment and Discontinuance Regulations and The School Organisation (Removal of Foundation, Reduction in the Number of Foundation Governors and Ability of Foundation to Pay Debts) (England) Regulations (2007) ('the 'Removal Regulations').</p>
<p>Risk:</p>	<p>The Corporate Risk Management Strategy has been complied with – to identify and assess the significant risks associated with this decision / project. This includes (but is not limited to) political, legislation, financial, environmental and reputation risks.</p> <p>The Cabinet has a statutory duty under the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013 to make a decision on a prescribed alteration proposal.</p> <p>Based on the information provided, it is the officers' opinion that there are no current "red" risks that need to be reported with regards to this proposal.</p> <p>One risk has been identified on the project risk register; report not being approved</p>



	The risk has been assessed and mitigating measures are in place.
Equality:	<p>An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed. The recommendation has a positive impact on age as the school budget can be utilised to better support pupils in Reception, KS1 and KS2. The impact on disability is positive as nursery staff have been redeployed and can therefore provide dedicated and direct support to pupils who may have a disability.</p> <p>There is a neutral impact on other characteristics. The nursery has no children currently attending the service. Families will have access to the family information service where they can receive advice and guidance on other service providers that are available across Sandwell.</p>
Health and Wellbeing:	The closure of the nursery will provide more internal and external space available for reception and KS 1.
Social Value:	<p>There are no staff redundancy's proposed as staff will be redeployed across the school.</p> <p>Resources will be used to improve the educational outcomes of the pupils.</p>
Climate Change:	No impact on climate change.
Corporate Parenting:	<p>The report recommendations will enable the age range of Highfields Primary School to be reduced from 3-11 years to 5-11 years.</p> <p>The closure of the nursery will lessen the financial burden on the school budget and provide better outcomes from children age 5-11 years and will fulfil the role of Corporate Parenting by supporting the care and safeguarding of all children throughout their time attending the school, from Early Years through to end of Key Stage 2.</p>

7. Appendices

None



8. Background Papers

None

