



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the
EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Held: THURSDAY, 21 JULY 2005 at 5.30pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Johnson - Chair
Councillor Karim - Liberal Democrat Spokesperson
Councillor Waddington – Labour Spokesperson

Councillor Beck
Councillor Fitch
Councillor Kitterick

Councillor Panchbaya
Councillor Sood
Councillor Thompson

Co-opted Members (Non-Voting)

Mr Chino Cabon - Leicester Racial Equality Council

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13. ROPOSALS FOR THE CHANGE OF STATUS OF AVENUE INFANT AND JUNIOR SCHOOLS

The Service Director (Policy and Resources) Education and Lifelong Learning submitted a report which gave details of the outcome of a consultation concerning a proposal to amalgamate Avenue Infant and Junior schools into an 'all-through' primary school and sought Members views on the proposals. It was stated that if the proposals were agreed by Cabinet there would be a further opportunity for written representations following which, if any objections had been received, the proposals would be put to the Schools Organisation Committee for decision.

It was stated that the view of the Local Education Authority was that there were potential major educational advantages with amalgamation although there were some disadvantages. All the issues needed to be carefully considered in relation to the situation at an individual school. These, together with an analysis of consultation responses received, were summarised in the appendices to the report. The proposed amalgamation would not result in any savings to the LEA. The school would be able to access £400,000 for capital works which were only available should the amalgamation take place. In terms of grant for an amalgamated school £29,000 would be lost but this would be more than compensated for by reductions in costs. It was further stated that

the consultation responses had not been monitored with regard to race but the Services Director agreed to refer this issue for corporate consideration. In addition funding would be considered to ensure that an amalgamated school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Under Scrutiny Procedure Rule 7b Cathy Brown (Chair of Governors Avenue Infants School), and Stuart Parton (Chair of Governors Avenue Junior School) were invited to address the Committee.

Ms Brown stated that the majority of the governors of Avenue Infants were against the proposals on the grounds of lack of evidence, concerns about disruption and possible loss of focus on early years and Key Stage 1. She stated that she had herself been initially against the proposals but on consideration of the details now, on balance, supported them.

Mr Parton stated that the Avenue Junior governors supported the proposals and suggested that many parents already thought that the two schools were connected. He felt that the separation of the schools was an artificial barrier to increased communication. He felt that recent proposals put forward by government for community schools further strengthened the case for change. He stated that a meeting held with the two governing bodies and parents had been positive and showed that parents began to support the proposal once their fears had been alleviated.

Particular concerns were expressed by the Committee regarding:

- Any changes to the schools catchment / priority area
- The financial position of Avenue Junior in the light of its recent difficulties.
- The physical separation of infant and junior school facilities and classrooms.
- Whether an amount from the £400,000 could be set aside for emerging issues.
- If the proposals were agreed how parents with remaining concerns could be encouraged to support the change or accommodated if their concerns could not be alleviated.
- Job losses.

In response it was stated that the catchment / priority area would not change and that the financial problems in the junior school had been solved to the level that monies were being carried forward in addition to refurbishment works being carried out. In relation to the separation of children the school would be modelled as the governors and school staff wished. There were alternative schools in the area but it was felt important to continue to communicate with parents to put fears at rest with a view to increasing support. In relation to job losses there should be no change as a result of amalgamation to teaching staff but there may be reductions in administrative and premises staff as a result of it being a single school.

In accordance with Scrutiny Procedure Rule 7b Gary Garner (UNISON) was invited to address the Committee.

Mr Garner stated that he was concerned about possible job losses and a loss in teaching assistants hours as had occurred, in his view, at another school which had amalgamated.

In response it was suggested that any such changes may have been the result of changes other than amalgamation but the Service Director (Policy and Resources) offered to meet Mr Garner to consider the issues.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Committee expressed its support for the proposal to amalgamate Avenue Infant and Junior schools subject to consideration being given to the concerns raised at the meeting and detailed in this minute.

