

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Lifelong Learning Cabinet Member and Advisers
2.	Date:	24th June 2008
3.	Title:	The amalgamation of Rawmarsh Monkwood Infant and Junior Schools by the closure of Rawmarsh Monkwood Infant School and a change of age range at Rawmarsh Monkwood Junior School.
4.	Programme Area:	Children and Young People's Services Ward 10 - Rawmarsh

5. Summary

Rawmarsh Monkwood Infant School and Rawmarsh Junior School are both separate schools. The report to Cabinet Member and Advisers on 26th February 2008 approved a pre-statutory consultation on the proposal to amalgamate the two schools by closing the Infant School and changing the age range at the Junior School. Members have previously agreed to consult as appropriate where two schools meet the considerations for amalgamation which are described in the 'School Organisation Plan'. Pre-statutory consultations have been undertaken with School Governors, Staff and Parents, and copies of the consultation papers have also been sent to Ward Members. Statutory proposals have now stood for 6 weeks (from 18th April to 30th May) and objections to the proposed amalgamation have been received along with two petitions. The concerns expressed are that the amalgamation would be detrimental to the education of the pupils; there would be disruption and overcrowding. There was also concern that the loss of the land from the infant school site to possible housing or other use would have a detrimental impact on the local community, on the local environment and on wildlife.

6. Recommendation:

It is recommended that:

- 1) **The local Authority determines the proposal to amalgamation Rawmarsh Monkwood Junior School and Rawmarsh Monkwood Infant School by closing the Infant School and the expansion of the age range at the Junior School.**
- 2) **That the Secretary of State be informed accordingly.**

7. Proposals and Details

It is proposed to 'amalgamate' Rawmarsh Monkwood Infant and Rawmarsh Monkwood Junior Schools from September 2008. To do this, the Infant school will be closed and the Junior school will be expanded and will have its age range changed from 7-11 to 3-11 years. Rawmarsh Monkwood Junior will, therefore, become a 'through' primary school and will accommodate the same number of pupils as are currently accommodated within the two schools.

The new School would have 420 places (R-Y6) with a Nursery unit of up to 52 places (26FTE). (This is the combined numbers of the current two schools) The school would have an admission number of 60.

The principal objectives of amalgamation are:

- 1) to provide a continuous primary entitlement across the key stages; and
- 2) to provide a unified management structure with a single school ethos which will be more efficient and make more effective use of resources.

Considerations for amalgamation are described in the School Organisation Plan in the section on 'LEA Policies and Principles'. (These are described in the Appendix to this report).

There will be a vacancy for the Head Teacher's post at the Infant School, both schools are on the same site and the admission number of the two schools is 60 and the conditions for amalgamation are met.

Meetings were held at Rawmarsh Monkwood Junior School on the 28th February 2008 for the Governors of both schools. A meeting was held at Rawmarsh Monkwood Infant School on the 4th March 2008 for Staff from both schools followed by a meeting for Parents from both schools.

(The minutes of these meetings are attached to this report)

Following publication of the Statutory Notice (which has stood for 6 weeks) representations to the proposal have been received. These include a petition signed by 116 people (of these 38 were parents), individual petition slips signed by 113 people (10 of the names on the slips are repeated on the signed petition), a letter from the Local MP asking for further information and requesting a further meeting for concerned residents/parents from the 'Monkwood Against School Closure' (a group set up to oppose the amalgamation) and an email from a local resident whose child will be going to the school. (A further meeting has been held between Elected Members, Officers and representatives from the 'Monkwood against School Closure' group).

(Copies of all these objections are enclosed with this report).

A number of issues have been raised in the representations in the meetings and the following comments address the main issues raised:

1) Concern has been expressed, that the loss of the infant school site would be detrimental to the area, it would leave insufficient space at the junior school site for playing field space and that future housing development on the infant school site would be detrimental to the local residents and to local wildlife.

The Local Authority needs to comply with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) guidance on the amount of space required for playgrounds, hard and soft play, sports pitches and other recreational areas. Following concerns expressed at the pre-statutory consultation meetings calculations of the areas have been undertaken and these show that both of the school sites (including the Infant and Junior school playing fields) are still needed to provide sufficient hard and soft play space for the amalgamated school. This was reported to Members at the Lifelong Learning, Cabinet Member Meeting held on the 15th April 2008 before approval for the Statutory Consultation was given.

Council Minute No. 62 states:

(2) That, in view of a concern expressed at all meetings with staff, parents and Governors that the land the infant School was built on and the infant playing fields would be disposed of for housing, a suitable press release be issued clearly stating the LEA's view on this matter. Having investigated further, both of the junior and infant school sites would be needed to deliver sufficient playing field space for the amalgamated school.'

The above confirms that the whole site will be needed for the amalgamated school and that no land will become surplus to requirements as a result of the amalgamation. The woodland area is 'Ancient Woodland' and remains part of the school site. Wildlife would not be affected and would continue to be protected in the same way as it is now. Concerns expressed about the future use of the land are therefore unfounded.

2) Concern has been expressed that there would be overcrowding and that the building of an extension onto the Junior school building for the Infant pupils would impact on the education of the pupils.

The Local Authority has undertaken major building work at many schools and has substantial experience of managing building projects so that minimal disturbance takes place. The building of an extension onto the Junior School is unlikely to impact on the operation of the school and our experience show that building work often becomes an educational tool which is used by the school which adds to pupils understanding and it often become an exciting part of the school curriculum. The Infant pupils would remain in the existing Infant school and transfer into the new extension when it is complete. and there would be no overcrowding. There would be no disruption to their education and they would stay in situ in the current Infant building until the new building is complete. The only likely disruption to the Junior School would be occasional noise from the building site which would be screened off from the school. The Primary Capital Strategy has include funding for a new infant building attached to the Junior school provided approval for the amalgamation is given.

3) Concern was expressed that the case for amalgamated schools and for improved educational outcomes was not proven.

Advice has been provided to Governors, Staff and parents at the pre-statutory consultation meetings and further advice has been supplied under a 'Freedom of Information request'. The Local Authority also provided further advice on the benefits of amalgamation and on educational standards and this was sent to the Rawmarsh Monkwood Action Group and the Local MP in correspondence from the Assistant Head of School Effectiveness.

The key benefits can be summarised as:

- A single vision and consistent ethos to benefit pupils, staff and parents/carers
- Continuity, and progression of learning between 5 and 11 (3 and 11 in Rotherham schools)
- Unified leadership and management of curriculum, teaching and learning
- Enhanced range of staff expertise
- Consistency of approaches to inclusion and well being
- Effective relationships with children and parents/carers over the full primary phase
- Efficient use of resources - human and educational

The correspondence also included the Authority's Key Stage 2 performance results for the past three years. These show that Primary Schools consistently perform at a higher level than separate junior schools. This information is disputed by the Rawmarsh Monkwood Action Group who advise that the information they have on schools amalgamated in Rotherham since 2001 do not show that this is the case. The advice given is that variations between individual year groups within a school do not necessarily show how the school is progressing and that in the long term the evidence is that through primary schools do perform consistently at a higher level.

A number of issues were also raised at the meetings held with Governors, Staff and Parents. Officers from the Authority responded to the questions asked and the following comments address the main issues raised at these meetings:

1) Concern was expressed at all the meeting with parents that could not a new Infant School Head Teacher be appointed rather than one Head Teacher running both schools. The advice given was that it is the policy of the Local Authority that when the opportunity arises, separate infant and junior schools are brought together. The Authority is of the view that primary schools perform better and have higher educational attainment than separate schools. If the authority were to establish a new school the Authority would always prefer a through primary school. The advice from our school improvement service is that the most satisfactory schools are 3-11 schools and one major positive aspect being that it reduces anxiety at the transition from Y2 to Y3. For its size Rotherham has one of the highest number of separate infant and junior schools in the country.

2) Concern was expressed that the Head Teacher would most likely be based in one building and would not know all the children and that how could one Head Teacher give enough attention to all children. The advice given was that additional funding would be provided for four years to allow the school to have two deputy head teachers and that the new Head Teacher would spend time in each building. A staffing structure has to be put in place that ensures children have regular contact with the Head Teacher and that parents have access to senior staff to voice their concerns or problems. Rotherham has approximately 70 through primary schools and has successfully amalgamated 15 separate infant and junior schools.

3) Concern was expressed at the distance between the two school buildings. The advice given was that, due to the distance between the two schools, it would not be possible to physically link the schools and that the Authority would be look to provide an extension to the junior building to accommodate the Infant school pupils and this proposal would appear in the Primary Capital Programme. The authority would also look to see if any alterations needed to be made to staff or other accommodation.

4) Concern was expressed that staff may be expected to teach different age ranges. The advice given was that where teachers and support staff wished to work with a different age group they could be given the opportunity. Primary school teachers are trained to teach children aged 3-11 and it does not mean that infant teachers couldn't teach 11 year olds. Teachers are not going to be put into a class to fail, all staff are supported and the aim is to do what is the best for the children.

5) Some staff expressed concern that they were on temporary contracts and could be out of a job in September. The advice given that jobs were not at risk as a result of the amalgamation and that the two Head Teachers were already looking to confirm the staffing establishment for September. Advice was available to all from our Human Resources Team.

The benefits of amalgamation and creation of a through primary school outweigh the case put forward by the objectors to the amalgamation and the recommendation is that the schools are amalgamated with effect from 1st September 2008.

8. Finance

Financial savings, which arise, are savings on staffing, mainly from the loss of a Head Teacher's post from the school's budget. The 'Minimum Funding Guarantee' procedures protect the school budget in 2008-09 and the school will enjoy additional funding in the first year of the budget because of the saving on the leaving Head Teachers salary.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

If formal objections are lodged during the 'statutory consultation' the proposal will be determined by the Cabinet Member.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The major theme supported by the proposal is 'to ensure that everyone has access to skills, knowledge and information to enable them to play their part in society'.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Report to Cabinet Member and Advisers 26th February 2008 and 15th April (attached) minutes of the meetings held with School Governors, staff, parents and school council. The School Organisation Plan and the 'Education and Inspections Act 2006'.

The statutory consultation timetable is:

Publication of statutory notices	18th April 2008
6-week period for representations and objections closes	30 th May 2008
LEA decision	24 th June 2008
Implementation	1 st September 2008

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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S SERVICES

Proposal to ‘amalgamate’ Rawmarsh Monkwood Infant and Rawmarsh Monkwood Junior Schools.

1 The Proposal and its Purpose

The proposal is to ‘amalgamate’ Rawmarsh Monkwood Infant and Rawmarsh Monkwood Junior Schools from September 2008. To do this, Rawmarsh Monkwood Infant School will be closed and Rawmarsh Monkwood Junior School will be expanded and have its age range changed from 7-11 to 3-11 years. The school will, therefore, become a ‘through’ primary school, which will accommodate the same number of pupils as are currently accommodated within the two schools,.

The School would have 420 places (R-Y6) with a Nursery unit of up to 52 places (26 FTE). (This is the combined numbers of the current two schools) The new school would have an admission number of 60.

The principal objectives of amalgamation are:

- i) to provide a continuous primary entitlement across the key stages; and
- ii) to provide a unified management structure with a single school ethos which will be more efficient and make more effective use of resources.

Considerations for amalgamation are described in the School Organisation Plan in Section 4, ‘LEA Policies and Principles’. These are where:-

- 1) It is possible to accommodate all of the children on one site, thereby removing surplus places (if applicable).
- 2) The admission number(s) is already no more than 60, or can be reduced to no more than 60, by the associated removal of surplus places.
- 3) Both Key Stages are on the same site.
- 4) There will be a vacancy for one or both head teacher posts as a result of retirement or resignation.

2 Existing Situation: Numbers on roll and Capacity

2.1 Rawmarsh Monkwood Infant School

Net Capacity	=	173
Admission Number	=	60 (Admission Capacity 180)
Number on Roll (2008) (NOR)	=	130
Surplus Places	=	43

2.2 Rawmarsh Monkwood Junior School

Net Capacity	=	243
Admission Number	=	60 (Admission Capacity 240)
Number on Roll (2008) (NOR)	=	211
Surplus Places	=	32

3 **Development of Numbers on Roll**

Year	2007/08	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Infant	130	136	152	160	161
Junior	211	208	197	182	184
Total	341	344	349	342	345

4 **Advantages and Disadvantages**

The principal advantages of amalgamation arise from the continuous primary education entitlement

- removal of the school transfer at the end of key stage 1;
- provision of a whole school curriculum across the primary age range;
- A unified management structure with a single school ethos;
- the potential to remodel the staffing structure and to safeguard the staffing establishment when pupil numbers change across the key stages;
- a whole school approach to staff development across the primary phase;
- more efficient and effective use of resources, especially accommodation, when numbers fluctuate across the infant and junior phases.

The principal disadvantages of amalgamation are:

- the loss of the Head teacher of one of the schools which could impact upon accessibility to staff, parents and pupils (this may have particular relevance where schools serve areas of social and economic disadvantage);
- potential difficulties in bringing together two different sets of working practice;
- possible fear of and resistance to change amongst staff, governors and parents;
- in some (but by no means all) cases, a lack of staff expertise in teaching and management across the two key stages.

5 **Financial Implications**

Financial savings which arise are savings on staffing, mainly from the loss of a Head Teacher's post from the school's budget and the 'Minimum Funding Guarantee' procedures protect the school budget in 2008-09.

6 Consultation Timetable

Cabinet Member to
agree to consultation

26th February 2008

Pre statutory consultation period
including meetings with governors,
staff and parents

ends 20th March 2008

Report to the Cabinet Member

15th April 2008

Publication of statutory notices

18th April 2008

6 week period for representations and
objections closes

30th May 2008

LEA decision

24th June 2008

Implementation

1st September 2008