

PROPOSAL TO CHANGE THE AGE RANGE AT WHITE SPIRE SCHOOL

Responsible Cabinet Member: Councillor Nolan (Cabinet Member for Children and Families)

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Executive Summary:

In order to make significant changes to a maintained special School the governing body and the Council must follow a process prescribed by law. This process is in four stages:

1. Publish a statutory proposal
2. Formal consultation (four weeks)
3. Decision
4. Implementation (if appropriate)

Before commencing this statutory process, officers met with the School's governing body to discuss the proposal. The leadership team at the School and the governing body subsequently decided to publish a statutory proposal to change the age range at the School.

The formal consultation commenced on 23 February 2017 and a statutory notice was published on this date. The formal consultation ended on 24 March 2017.

This paper outlines the legal framework required of the decision maker for the third stage of the process, and recommends that the proposal is progressed to implementation.

1. Recommendation(s)

- 1.1 That the age range of White Spire School be lowered to the age of five to enable the School to offer eight additional places to pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 with effect from September 2017.

2. Issues

- 2.1 White Spire School is a community special School in Bletchley that currently caters for pupils aged from 7 to 19 years (Year 3 to Year 14) with a range of complex needs in addition to their Moderate Learning Difficulty (MLD). The School has been judged 'Good' with 'Outstanding' features by Ofsted. All pupils that attend White Spire School have a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education Health Care Plan. There are currently 134 pupils on roll at the School.

- 2.2 Before commencing this statutory process, officers met with the School's governing body to discuss and consider the proposal. The leadership team at the School and the governing body subsequently decided to publish a statutory proposal to change the age range at the School. When making a prescribed alteration to a special School to change the age range, the governing body can propose the change but the local authority is the decision maker.
- 2.3 The governing body and the Council are proposing to lower the age range at the School to 5 years so that the School would cater for pupils from the age of 5 up to the age of 19. This means that the School would be able to admit pupils into Year 1 and Year 2. One additional class would be added to enable eight places to be offered to pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 with effect from September 2017.
- 2.4 There are two community complex needs schools in Milton Keynes; White Spire School and Slated Row School which is located in Wolverton. Slated Row School is the only complex needs School that has provision for pupils in Year 1 and Year 2. Slated Row School is oversubscribed and this currently limits choice for parents of children in Year 1 and Year 2 who have complex needs in addition to Moderate Learning Difficulties as there is no alternative community complex needs school for these children. If there is no suitable alternative for these children in Milton Keynes, the Council would have to consider placing them in special schools outside the borough. This would have a significant impact on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budget and the Home to School Travel budget.
- 2.5 Lowering the age range at White Spire School would increase parental choice and enable the School to have a curriculum which follows through from Year 1 to Year 14. Young pupils would experience the specialist teaching and learning needed at a younger age, therefore improving their outcomes as young adults.
- 2.6 There would be no discernible impact on other schools and academies in the area as demand for places within this age range exceeds supply. Admissions to special schools are handled by the Council's SEN casework team who place pupils according to their type of need and age. Slated Row School, the only other school of this type in Milton Keynes, is supportive of this proposal.
- 2.7 A statutory consultation took place between 23 February and 24 March 2017. As prescribed in the DfE's Statutory Guidance, a notice was published in the local press and displayed at the entrances to White Spire School. The consultation, including the proposal document, was published on the School's website and was made available to stakeholders. Details of the consultation are included in Annex C.
- 2.8 There were 6 responses to the statutory consultation, 100% of respondents were in favour of the proposal (see Annex C). Themes of agreement were:
- More parental choice
 - Additional places at White Spire School will help to balance provision and improve planning for both complex needs schools

- Earlier intervention is a key to success for many of the young people with complex needs
- The nurturing and caring environment at the school will help pupils to flourish from an earlier age
- More parents and vulnerable children in the community will benefit.

3. Options

(a) Option 1 – Do nothing

The Council's high needs place planning identified a deficit of 241 places by 2020. This takes account of higher demand from population growth and the increasing complexity of needs in children and young people with SEN and/or disability. Data demonstrates a need for 40 additional places each year. The Council will not be able to meet its statutory duty to ensure sufficient School places if nothing is done.

(b) Option 2 – Approve the proposal with modifications

Responses to the formal consultation do not suggest a modification.

(c) Option 3 – The governing body and the Council proceed with the proposal to lower the age range at White Spire School

This is the recommended option. Pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 with a Statement of Special Education Needs or an Education Health Care Plan are currently not able to access the provision at White Spire School until they reach Year 3. Slated Row School is the only School in Milton Keynes that caters for pupils in Year 1 and Year 2 that have complex needs in addition to their MLD. Demand for places of this type exceeds supply. If there is no suitable alternative for these children in Milton Keynes, the Council would have to consider placing them in special Schools outside the borough.

4. Implications

4.1 Policy

Improving educational outcomes, and enabling everyone to achieve their full potential and experience choice and control are corporate priorities. Ensuring sufficient school places is a statutory duty.

4.2 Resources and Risk

Capital – Minor capital works are required to ensure the accommodation at the School is suitable for children in Year 1 and Year 2. A budget of £50,000 is available to undertake the capital project. No additional accommodation is required on the School site.

Revenue - Schools funding is part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) so this proposal does not directly impact the General Fund. However there are significant pressures on the high needs block of the DSG and the changes to government policy regarding the national funding formula means it is unlikely

that the Local Authority will receive extra funding to support the cost of additional places. Funding additional places at a local special school will be more cost effective than placing children out of area so this proposal ensures appropriate prioritising of high needs places.

Y	Capital	Y	Revenue	Y	Accommodation
N	IT	N	Medium Term Plan	Y	Asset Management

4.3 Carbon and Energy Management

Not applicable

4.4 Legal

This paper is written in accordance with guidance from the Department for Education '*Making prescribed alterations to maintained Schools – Statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers*' and '*Guidance for decision makers – Statutory guidance for decision-makers deciding prescribed alteration and establishment and discontinuance proposals*'. Both documents were published in April 2016.

The Council has two months from 24 March 2017 (the closing date of the statutory consultation) to determine whether the change should proceed.

4.5 Other Implications

Y	Equalities/Diversity	N	Sustainability	N	Human Rights
N	E-Government	Y	Stakeholders	N	Crime and Disorder

Background Papers: [DfE Guidance for decision makers](#)

Annexes: Annex A Statutory Notice
 Annex B Complete Proposal
 Annex C Summary of responses to the statutory consultation