

Wards Affected:

All Wards

ITEM 8**DELEGATED DECISION****13 JANUARY 2015****PROPOSAL TO MAKE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES TO ROMANS FIELD SCHOOL**

Responsible Cabinet Member: Councillor Miles, Cabinet member for Children and School Improvement

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Executive Summary

In order to make significant changes to a maintained school the council must follow a process prescribed by law. This process is in four stages:

- 1) Publication of a notice of a statutory proposal
- 2) Formal four week consultation
- 3) Decision
- 4) Implementation (if appropriate)

Before commencing this statutory process the law provides that there is a strong expectation on schools and the council to carry out an early consultation exercise with stakeholders about the principle of the proposal.

The council has completed an early consultation in relation to the proposed change of age range and removal of residential provision at Romans Field School with effect from September 2015. This paper intends to report the results of the early consultation process and recommends that the council proceeds to the first stage of the statutory process as above.

1. Recommendation

That a statutory proposal be published to change the age range of Romans Field School to offer educational provision for children aged 5-11 (years 1 to 6) and remove residential provision for all children with effect from September 2015.

2. Issues

- 2.1 Romans Field School is a community special school for children aged 7-13 (years 3 to 8) designated to admit children with Behaviour, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD). The school is located in Bletchley.

2.2 Numbers at the school as at September 2014 were as follows:

Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Year 7	Year 8	TOTAL
2	8	8	9	11	1	39

Provision below the current age range

2.3 There is currently no BESD provision for children aged 4 to 7 (years R to 2) in Milton Keynes. This is because it was been locally determined that, wherever possible, it is better for children of this age to be educated in their local mainstream school, to avoid the need for special place provision. However currently there are ten children who have been identified by professionals as being most appropriately educated in BESD special provision (seven in year 2 and three in year 1). Six of these children are being transported to out of borough special provision at a cost of approximately £40,000 per year as well as approximately £30,000 in additional placement costs. The other four are awaiting a place in Romans Field School next September when they reach an age at which they can be admitted.

Provision above the current age range

2.4 If, when children leave Romans Field School they continue to require a place at a special school, they normally transfer to Stephenson Academy. Stephenson Academy is an academy special school for children aged 13-19 (years 9 to 13) and also admits children with BESD with a statement of Special Educational Need (SEN) or Education Healthcare Plan. Stephenson Academy is located in Stantonbury.

2.5 In November 2013 Stephenson (MK) Academy Trust consulted with stakeholders about a proposal to lower the age range of Stephenson Academy to offer education to children aged 11-19 (Year 7 to Year 14). The proposal was that this change should be implemented with effect from September 2014. This would mean that both schools would be able to offer places to children in years 7 and 8. The council reviewed the proposal and was concerned that parents/carers may wish their children to leave Romans Field School at the end of Year 6, thus impacting on the viability of Romans Field School. Conversely if parents/carers did not choose to move their children at the end of Year 6 then Stephenson Academy may choose or need to admit children from other local authorities looking for this type of placement. This could result in limiting the availability of places for children leaving Romans Field School at the end of Year 8, meaning that Milton Keynes children may need to go to provision outside of the borough.

2.6 The council therefore wrote to Stephenson (MK) Academy Trust in December 2013 requesting that the trust considered delaying the implementation of its proposal until September 2015. The reason given was that this would enable the council to consider a change of age range to Romans Field School and, if required, carry out all processes to ensure that this was completed in line with relevant legislation.

- 2.7 In April 2014 Stephenson (MK) Academy Trust responded to advise that the proposal would be delayed until September 2015. The trust does not intend to carry out a new consultation but has yet to seek a change to the funding agreement from the Education Funding Agency (EFA).

The residential provision

- 2.8 Romans Field School offers residential provision to some of its children. This provision has offered respite residential care for a number of evenings of week for a total of 15 to 20 children, over the course of the academic year.
- 2.9 The demand for children to access this residential provision is reducing. A recent request to parents/carers about who might wish to take advantage of the provision generated very limited interest. There is no child currently attending Romans Field School whose statement of SEN requires that residential provision should be provided.

The Proposal

- 2.10 There are three elements to the proposal:
- a) Reduce the lower age range of the school to age 5 (year 1)
 - b) Reduce the upper age range of the school to age 11 (year 6)
 - c) Remove the residential provision

Early consultation

- 2.11 Pre-consultation about the proposal above took place between Monday 13 October and Sunday 23 November 2014, a total of six weeks.
- 2.12 A total of 121 consultation documents were sent out to a range of stakeholders associated with the school and the consultation was available on line, alongside an electronic response form. Two drop in sessions were also held at the school to give stakeholders the opportunity to submit views and discuss the proposal in principle. A full record of the consultation process and the views received is attached at Annex A.
- 2.13 Annex A shows that there was a very limited response to the consultation. Officers were concerned that responses were low the beginning of the consultation so parents and carers were contacted and encouraged to come to one of the two drop in sessions which were held at differing times of the day and the consultation was highlighted at staff meetings. No further formal responses were received as a result of this additional promotion of the consultation exercise.

3. Options

- 3.1 There are 3 options:
- (a) Do Nothing

There is a clear and continuing local need for BESD provision for younger children. If no action is taken, children aged 5-7 will continue to have to access provision at some distance from Milton Keynes. Travelling

such a distance away from the local community and parents/carers at a young age is not ideal.

The change at Stephenson Academy requires action if the provision at Romans Field School is not to duplicate what is on offer locally and risk the school's future viability.

The residential provision is no longer required. The existing accommodation could be used in alternative ways to the benefit of the school and would stand empty if no change is made.

- (b) Publish a statutory proposal to make elements of the proposed change.

There have been no formal responses to the consultation that suggest that any one element of the proposed change should not proceed.

- (c) Publish a statutory proposal to change the upper and lower age ranges of Romansfield School to offer education for children aged 5 to 11 and remove the offer of residential provision, **This is the recommended option.**

4. Implications

4.1 Policy

Offer local provision for children with BESD is fundamental to delivering the council's vision that our residents have access to all the services they need and have the support to access opportunities and enjoy a healthy and good quality of life.

4.2 Resources and Risk

Capital

Significant capital will not be required as internal remodelling of the current residential provision will be sufficient for the school to use the accommodation for the purposes of teaching and learning.

Revenue

Schools revenue funding is part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and the projected £30,000 savings to placement costs will therefore be realised within the DSG. The £40,000 currently spent on home to school transport would be a projected saving to the council's General Fund.

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

4.3 Carbon and Energy Management

Not relevant.

4.4 Legal

This proposal is subject to statutory procedures as established by The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013.

If approved, the next step will be for the council to publish a statutory proposal under Schedule 3 of The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013. This will appear on our website, as a notice in the press and outside the school. The notice invites the reader to request a copy of the full proposal which is prescribed to be very detailed. Following publication there is a formal consultation period of four weeks (length prescribed in law) within which comments and representations can be made to the council. Once that representation period expires, the council has two months to determine whether the change should proceed.

4.5 Other Implications

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

Background Documents: Schedule 3 of The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013

Annex: Summary of consultation responses