

**CONSULTATIONS AT PRENTON INFANT SCHOOL AND PRENTON JUNIOR SCHOOL**

1.0 **Executive Summary**

- 1.1 At its meeting in July, Cabinet decided to instigate consultations concerning the future of primary education in the Prenton area. This report describes the outcome of those consultations and recommends that notices be published with a view to amalgamation of the two schools with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2005, or the earliest practicable date thereafter.

2.0 **Background**

- 2.1 The issue of the future of primary education in this area was described in the July report to Cabinet, the relevant paragraph of which I include below.

*“While most 5 – 11 year olds across Wirral are taught in all-through primary schools there are still a number of separate Infant and Junior Schools in the former Birkenhead Authority. The Authority does not have a fixed policy with regard to the continuation of these schools but has taken the opportunity to review the situation from time to time when it has seemed opportune to do so at individual schools. This has normally been on the retirement of an existing headteacher. The headteacher of Prenton Infant School is due to retire at the end of this academic year. There have consequently been informal discussions with the governing bodies of both schools and their views sought as to whether it would be to the benefit of children in the area to re-organise the schools as a single all-through primary school. Responses have been mixed but there does seem to be sufficient grounds for consulting more widely and more formally so as to ensure that an opportunity is not missed. It should be emphasised that the decision to move to consultations by no means indicates an expected outcome. In previous consultations the outcome has on occasions been amalgamation, on other occasions it has deemed to be best to maintain the separate institutions. If the Cabinet is minded to approve the proposal to consult then in addition to following the necessary statutory procedures the results of any consultations will be considered at the critical stage by the Education and Cultural Services Select Committee. If the Council did decide following consultations to propose amalgamation then the proposal would be referred to the School Organisation Committee.”*

3.0 **The Consultation Process**

- 3.1 Meetings have been held with the governing bodies, staff and parents of both schools. Issues and questions raised by parents were noted and the record of the meeting is included at Annexe A to this report.

4.0 **Outcomes of the Consultation**

- 4.1 The views of each school are expressed in responses from the schools themselves and included at Annexe B to this report. These may be broadly summarised as follows:

(i) Prenton Junior School

The governing body of Prenton Junior School responded positively to the initial suggestion of possible amalgamation. The governors were appreciative of the opportunities for development that an amalgamated school would offer. Discussions with the governors focused particularly on the opportunity to offer consistent provision across the whole age range both in curriculum terms and in terms of other school policies such as uniform, and the provision made before and after the end of the school day. The governors were sensitive to the need in an amalgamated school to preserve the excellent aspects of ethos currently operating at both schools. Following their meeting with parents the governors forwarded the attached letter (Annexe B).

(ii) Prenton Infant School

The Governing Body of Prenton Infant School was initially more concerned at the prospect of possible amalgamation. The governors while recognising some of the logic and potential advantages of amalgamation, had particular concern for the needs of the youngest children. Their feeling was that an infant school could focus very specifically on those needs and they were concerned lest some of that focus could be lost in a larger, all-through primary school. Again the governors have forwarded a letter which is included in Annexe B.

5.0 **Comment**

5.1 The process of the consultation was relatively low key. The number of parents attending the parents' meeting was small compared to similar consultations in the past. This probably reflects the reality that from a parental perspective the amalgamation of these two schools, who already share a common building, would not constitute a major change for them. Both schools are well regarded and enjoy the confidence of the community. There are inevitably some concerns about possible disruptive effects of amalgamation. Whilst reassurances can genuinely be given regarding the very successful experiences of the Authority in previous amalgamations (which were more problematic involving changes of site and major building work), it is understandable that proposed change always provokes some uneasiness. Nevertheless the advantages of amalgamation would appear to be considerably greater than such potential disadvantages. From the perspective of the Authority as a whole this amalgamation would be a small but significant step in the rationalisation of primary school provision which is currently the subject of wide ranging reviews. In terms of the position at Prenton, while pupil numbers have been relatively stable to date it would appear unlikely that the schools will escape the general demographic trend. When numbers fall, as appears likely, the larger school would find it very much easier to manage the structural adjustments that schools need to make when faced with falling rolls. The wider context of workforce remodelling makes this a good time for a new school to be established out of two existing ones.

6.0 **Financial and Staffing Implications**

6.1 There are no direct implications for the Council's Revenue budget. The amalgamated and larger school will be more cost effective in terms of management and administrative costs (such as the requirement for only one headteacher and one set of service agreements etc). This is reflected in the formula for funding schools which would only provide one lump sum element. Overall therefore the effect at the school is broadly neutral but the efficiency saving is redirected automatically by the formula back into the Individual Schools Budget as a whole.

6.2 If approved there will be a need for some capital works to establish common administrative and staff work/social areas. It is expected that such works could be incorporated within the Education Capital Programme.

6.3 It would be for the new governing body (and in the interim a shadow governing body if proposals are approved) to determine the profile of expenditure at the school. If this had staffing implications then any staff not required would be redeployed under the agreed procedures.

#### 7.0 **Equal Opportunities Implications**

7.1 There are no significant Equal Opportunities implications.

#### 8.0 **Human Rights Implications**

8.1 There are no significant Human Rights implications.

#### 9.0 **Local Agenda 21 Statement**

9.1 The provision of efficient and effective education is a vital part of serving local communities. Inefficient use of resources is wasteful both in educational and physical resource terms.

#### 10.0 **Community Safety Implications**

10.1 There are none arising from this report.

#### 11.0 **Planning Implications**

11.1 Any building proposals which may arise from amalgamation would be subject to the usual planning consents.

#### 12.0 **Local Member Support Implications**

12.1 Prenton Infant School and Prenton Junior School are both in Prenton Ward.

#### 13.0 **Background Papers**

13.1 Previous Committee reports.

#### 14.0 **Recommendations**

14.1 That the Select Committee makes the following recommendations to Cabinet:

- (i) That notices be published proposing the amalgamation of Prenton Infant School and Prenton Junior School into a single primary school.
- (ii) If the necessary administrative arrangements allow, the date for the amalgamation shall be 1<sup>st</sup> September 2005; if this is impracticable then the earliest possible date consistent with necessary administrative and organisational preparations should be selected.

## Meeting with parents at Prenton Infant and Junior Schools

9<sup>th</sup> November 2004

25 present including governors/staff and Headteachers

Approx. 12 parents plus Chris Batman, David Armstrong and Gail Webb

### Introduction

Chris Batman      - Background  
                         - Procedure  
                         - Prenton context  
                         inc numbers  
                         capital  
                         funding  
                         timing

### Questions

- would the HT have more paperwork?
- does it make a difference having responsibilities across a larger staff?
- what are the pros and cons of the merger?
- budgets - flexibility
- what about building works
- hall too small?
- will it affect Year 6?
- is it just a cost saving exercise?
- school will lose capital?
- impact on staff - redundancies?
  - amalgamation?
  - career progression?
- opportunities for teachers to work across full primary phase?
- make up of shadow governing body?
- class sizes - will they change?
- falling roll will affect Infants first?
- need to hold onto the best parts of each school

1 hour meeting - no strongly negative views