

- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals

FINAL DECISION **YES**

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

The Cabinet – 20th October 2005

Fast track to Foundation status for Primary Schools – DfES consultation

Report of the County Education Officer

Recommendation:

That the concerns outlined in paragraph 2 of the County Education Officer's report should be forwarded to the Department for Education and Skills on behalf of the Authority in response to the consultation on proposals to extend the fast track route for schools to acquire foundation status to primary schools.

1. Background

- 1.1 The Government have introduced regulations to allow community and voluntary controlled secondary schools to become foundation schools by a vote of the governing body, following consultation with stakeholders.
- 1.2 The governors of foundation schools:
- have formal ownership of their assets
 - are the direct employers of the school's staff
 - are their own admissions authority
 - have the power to publish statutory proposals for other changes, e.g. a change in age range, an increase in size, etc.
- These freedoms are the same as those for voluntary aided schools and must be exercised within a "framework of fair admissions and fair funding".
- 1.3 The Government are proposing to extend these arrangements to primary schools in line with their manifesto commitment and their policy of autonomy for schools outlined in the Five Year Strategy.
- 1.4 Currently schools wishing to change category must consult widely and then publish proposals for a six-week period giving interested parties the opportunity to make representations. The matter then falls for decision to the School Organisation Committee, or if there is no unanimous decision by the SOC to the Schools Adjudicator.

- 1.5 The proposals “streamline” these arrangements by:
- reducing the consultation period to four weeks
 - reducing the amount of prescribed information the governors must publish
 - allowing governors to determine their own proposals without reference to the SOC and without appeal.
- 1.6 These arrangements would not apply to schools which are the subject of intervention.

2. Response to consultation

2.1 The Government’s proposals for secondary schools were not well supported in the consultation and a number of concerns were raised. This consultation raises similar concerns:

- the Council supports the principle of autonomous schools but there is little evidence that schools are seeking this greater freedom. There are currently only 365 foundation primary schools in the country and only seven in Warwickshire.
- there is little evidence that these freedoms will contribute to raising standards, and indeed they could impact on the ability of local authorities to monitor standards and intervene and support to secure school improvement.
- a significant increase in the number of admission authorities and the number of schools responsible for publishing statutory proposals to effect changes in the pattern of school organisation makes the strategic planning role of the Authority and the monitoring role on behalf of parents and carers more difficult to achieve.
- the “Every Child Matters” agenda and the development of extended schools places great emphasis on collaboration and locality-based planning. Whilst the Government say that “increased autonomy for schools will help build their capacity to deliver extended services” there is a concern that these arrangements will not promote more locally based planning or collaboration and may provide additional workload for governors which distracts from the key agenda of raising standards.

2.2 The Cabinet are asked to confirm that the concerns outlined above should be forwarded to the DfES in response to this consultation.

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7th October 2005