

# **Proposed Decision to be made by the Portfolio Holder for Education and Learning on or after 17 January 2020**

## **Consultation on the Amalgamation of Round Oak School with Ridgeway School**

### **Recommendation**

That the Portfolio Holder for Education and Learning agrees to the undertaking of a public consultation on the amalgamation of Round Oak School and Ridgeway School.

### **1.0 Key Issues**

- 1.1 The Annual Education Sufficiency Update published in June 2019 shows that in the Warwick/Leamington (Central) area of Warwickshire, an additional 78 special school places will be required by academic year 2022/23. Some of these places will be provided by expanding the number of Specialist Resourced Provision places (in mainstream schools) but the vast majority will need to come via an expansion of the two existing special schools in the area.
- 1.2 Ridgeway School is a special school for primary aged pupils. The site of the school is small and there is no scope for further building. Round Oak School is a special school for secondary aged pupils. It has a much larger site and there are significant opportunities for development. All the additional demand could therefore be met through an expansion of Round Oak School. However, this would allocate new classrooms to secondary aged pupils only, when there is also a demand for primary places. The amalgamated school would occupy both sites and hence additional demand can be balanced across the two phases.
- 1.3 Amalgamation of the two schools also has other benefits. A single all-through will lead to economies of scale, enabling school leaders to make more efficient use of resources to ensure that children progress well. All other areas of the county have all-through special schools.
- 1.4 The SEND and Inclusion strategy pledges that children and young people with SEND will make good progress and transition smoothly into the next stage of their education. By combining the two schools, the transition from primary to secondary will be far smoother because pupils will be moving within the same school.

## **2.0 Options and Proposal**

- 2.1 Should the amalgamation not take place, the need for additional special school places in the primary phase will need to be met in some other way. Places could be purchased in independent special schools. This would involve considerable extra cost. Alternatively, a primary special school in another area could be expanded but that would mean that some pupils would have to travel further and there would be additional transport costs.
- 2.2 When amalgamating two schools then one school must close and the other expand. In August, the Governing Body of Round Oak was replaced by an Interim Executive Board. It is therefore recommended that Round Oak should close, and the age range at Ridgeway School should be altered from 3-11 to 3-19.
- 2.3 Any closure or change to the age-range of a community special school must be carried out in accordance with the Statutory Guidance issued by the Department for Education 'Opening and closing maintained schools.' The guidance requires the local authority to undertake a statutory consultation for a period of at least 4 weeks, with the proposals published both online and in a local newspaper, as well as to the governing body, the parents of registered pupils at the school, and anyone else considered appropriate. The local authority should then make its decision within 2 months of the end of the consultation period.

## **3.0 Financial Implications**

- 3.1 In December 2017, Council approved the allocation of £250,000 capital funds to reconfigure existing classrooms in both schools to create around 28 more places (numbers dependent on the individual needs of the pupils). This work is yet to be undertaken.
- 3.2 Should the amalgamation be approved, feasibility work will be undertaken into the enlargement of the site and identified funding presented to cabinet at a later date.

## **4.0 Environmental Implications**

- 4.1 The amalgamation allows the demand for additional special school places to be met in the most efficient way. Alternative solutions are likely to lead to pupils travelling further to school and hence increased cost and environmental damage
- 4.2 Developing provision on one site ensures that the process of creating new classrooms can be done in the most efficient way, reducing the impact on the environment.

## 5.0 Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

- 5.1 In order to meet the time scales for this change to be implemented for September 2020, consultation needs to take place during January to February 2020.
- 5.2 The results of the consultation will be included in a future Cabinet report for approval, followed by implementation (if agreed) from September 2020.

## Background papers

None

## Supporting Paper

Education Sufficiency Annual Update 2019

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This report was circulated to the following members prior to publication.

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