

Cabinet

Amalgamation of Ridgeway and Round Oak Schools

14 May 2020

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 That Cabinet approves the amalgamation of Round Oak and Ridgeway Schools
- 1.2 That Cabinet authorises the Strategic Director for Communities to take such steps as he considers necessary to enable the amalgamated school to open from September 2020

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 Ridgeway Special School is for primary aged pupils. The site of the school is small and there is no scope for further building. Round Oak School is for secondary aged pupils. It has a much larger site and there are significant opportunities for development. Extra places could therefore be provided 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. By merging the two schools but continuing to operate over the two sites, the additional demand can be balanced across the two phases.
- 2.3 Amalgamation of the two schools also has other benefits. A single all-through school will lead to economies of scale, enabling school leaders to make more efficient use of resources, ensure that children progress well and achieve good outcomes. All other areas of the county have all-through special schools.
- 2.4 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.

- 2.5 When amalgamating two schools, the only legally acceptable process is for one school to close and the other expand. In this case, Ridgeway School is popular and over-subscribed. Round Oak has many unfilled pupil places and some Warwick parents are transporting their children to Welcombe Hills School in Stratford which is now over-subscribed. In August 2019, the Governing Body of Round Oak was replaced by an Interim Executive Board.
- 2.6 The proposal is therefore that the schools should amalgamate by Round Oak closing and Ridgeway expanding.
- 2.7 In accordance with statutory guidelines, an initial consultation was carried out between 3rd February and 1st March 2020 to consider how key stakeholders felt about the principle of amalgamating the two schools. This included meetings at both schools for staff and parents and a letter describing proposals was sent to stakeholders. The consultation was sent to local council members and Members of Parliament.
- 2.8 Written feedback is summarised in Appendix 1.
- 2.9 When written and verbal feedback from all stakeholders was considered, Education Services SLT felt that the opinion of stakeholders was broadly in support of the merger but that two issues which had been raised needed to be considered. The first was that the proposed name of the merged school would be Ridgeway School. This was of particular concern to pupils and parents of Round Oak School since most had known Ridgeway as the primary school and pupils had left that school to go to secondary school.
- 2.10 The use of the Ridgeway name was also perceived by some parents and staff at Round Oak to indicate more of a takeover than an amalgamation. This perception would be unhelpful since the intention is to create a culture in the new school where all staff, pupils and parents feel equally valued.
- 2.11 The second concern was that current leaders in the two schools may not have the capacity to lead and manage the merged school. These matters were considered by leaders and governors of both schools together with WCC officers supporting the process. It was agreed that pupils and parents should be consulted on a name for the merged school and that governors from both schools should work together to agree an appropriate staffing structure for the merged school. This would include a new senior leadership team to support the current headteacher of Ridgeway in leading and managing the provision across the two sites.
- 2.12 It was further agreed that the current substantive headteacher of Ridgeway School would be the best person to lead the new school.
- 2.13 Pupils in Year 6 at Ridgeway and their parents would be most affected by the proposal to merge the schools. Parents of these pupils welcomed the plans, and several have subsequently changed their minds about sending their children to schools in a different area.

- 2.14 The statutory public consultation took place between 9th March and 3rd April. Details were published in the press and on the Warwickshire CC website. Proposals were sent to the parents and staff of both schools and all democratic representatives in the area. Feedback was collated and evaluated by Education Services SLT. A summary of written evidence is attached in Appendix 2. Only 10 people responded in writing to this phase of the consultation, but overall feedback was supportive of proposals with 8 in support and only 2 against.

3. Financial Implications

- 3.1 When the schools are merged then they would operate as one school over two sites. Almost all staff would work at one or other of the two sites and there would be little additional expense in paying for transport between them. The only other cost to merging the schools would be in making changes to signage and stationery with the new school name. These costs would be more than offset by savings. Although per pupil funding would be unchanged, the amalgamation would allow pupils easier access to facilities on both sites and economies of scale would mean a lower proportion of funding is spent on overheads. For example, only one headteacher and business manager would be needed whereas currently there are two. Therefore, more resources can be allocated to addressing the needs of pupils and helping them to make academic progress.
- 3.2 Ridgeway school cannot expand on its existing site to respond to the increase in demand. The proposed merger with Round Oak offers the opportunity to build more capacity on one site and the flexibility to move pupils e.g. pupils in Years 5 & 6, to the new buildings. This is the most cost-effective response. The alternative would be that primary schools in other areas would need to expand. This would mean higher transport costs and inconvenience to pupils and parents.
- 3.3 In the current academic year, Round Oak School has been receiving support from WCC officers through a sustainability action group (SAG), which has had oversight of recovery of its budget position, working with the Interim Executive Board (IEB). It is projected that the school will have a reduced residual deficit at closure. The merger will allow the creation of a staffing structure across the two sites which will be financially viable for the foreseeable future. The Local Authority would have statutory responsibility for any residual deficit at point of closure.

4. 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 the Round Oak site ensures that the process of creating new classrooms can be done in the most efficient way, reducing the impact on the environment.

5. Supporting Information

- 5.1 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. Alternative solutions are likely to involve additional cost. For example, 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.
- 5.2 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 schools.
- 5.3 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.

6. Timescales associated with the decision and next steps

- 6.1 Decision to be released on 21/05/2020
- 6.2 The amalgamated school will open, if agreed, on 1/09/2020

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Comments made during initial consultation 3rd February – 1st March 2020

Appendix 2 – Consultation responses 9th March to 3rd April 2020

Background Papers

None

Supporting Papers

1. [WCC SEND & Inclusion Strategy](#)
2. [Annual Sufficiency update](#)

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The report was circulated to the following members prior to publication:

Local Member(s): Councillor Pam Williams, Councillor Parminder Singh Birdi

Appendix 1

Comments made during initial consultation 3rd February – 1st March 2020

Concern	Number of responses
Don't agree with new name	20
Concerns about how the school will be led & managed	17
All through provision is better	5
Needs two heads	5
Change of uniform difficult for pupils	4
Concern about recruitment process	2
Concerns regarding specific staffing matters	2
Round Oak closure will be bad for staff and pupil morale	2
All through provision is not desirable	1
Concern about traffic and building work	1
Negative effect on Ridgeway	1
New school will be too big	1
Off-site services	1

Summary of support or opposition to merger during initial consultation 3rd February – 1st March 2020

In support?	Local resident	Parent - other school	Parent-Ridgeway	Parent-Round Oak	Staff-Ridgeway	Staff-Round Oak	DNS	Grand Total
Neutral		1	2	1		4	1	9
No	1		1	8		1	6	17
Yes			7	1	1	2		11
	1	1	10	10	1	7	7	37

Appendix 2

Consultation responses 9th March to 3rd April 2020

Agree with merger	Number of responses
Yes	8
No	2
DNS	0