

NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE
CORPORATE DIRECTOR MEETING WITH EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

23 November 2021

PROPOSALS TO AMALGAMATE GROVE ROAD AND WOODFIELD COMMUNITY PRIMARY SCHOOLS, HARROGATE

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek Member approval to consult publicly on proposals to amalgamate Woodfield and Grove Road Community Primary Schools in Harrogate. This would create a single primary school operating on both school sites through the technical closure of Woodfield Community Primary School as a separate entity, and the enlargement of premises and expansion onto the Woodfield site of Grove Road Community Primary School.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Grove Road Community Primary School serves much of High Harrogate. The school is currently operating at capacity. Woodfield Community Primary School serves Woodfield and parts of the Bilton area of Harrogate. The school has been under-subscribed for a number of years.
- 2.2 Grove Road Community Primary School was last inspected by Ofsted in June 2018 through a short inspection, which judged the school to continue to be good. This followed a more detailed inspection in 2014.
- 2.3 Woodfield Community Primary School was inspected by Ofsted in January 2020, who found the overall effectiveness to be inadequate and the school became subject to special measures. Any maintained school that is judged inadequate by Ofsted is required to become a sponsored academy. If an academy sponsor cannot be found, a school judged inadequate usually has to close. Woodfield school was issued with a Directive Academy Order in June 2020 but the Regional Schools Commissioner has been unable to secure an Academy Trust to sponsor Woodfield school due to viability concerns.
- 2.4 Since January 2020, there have been considerable changes in staffing at Woodfield School. The current acting executive headteacher and acting head of school took up leadership at the start of the summer term 2020. The latest monitoring visit by Ofsted to Woodfield School in June 2021 found that leaders and managers are taking effective action towards the removal of special measures, and that the local authority's statement of action and the school's action plan were both fit for purpose. It is important to recognise the efforts of all those who have been involved in this improvement journey.
- 2.5 However, the current arrangements can only be temporary and the absence of an academy sponsor means the school faces an uncertain future. Therefore, work began earlier this year to assess how education provision within the Woodfield community could be preserved. The current proposals for amalgamation have been developed by members of the school governing bodies and LA officers. The two governing bodies carefully considered the proposals before autumn half term, and both agreed to ask the County Council to start a consultation. Both Governing Bodies see this as an exciting opportunity to enhance the facilities of Grove Road School, organising sustainable education across both sites aiming for the best possible provision for all pupils, and importantly ensuring that the Woodfield site continues to be used for education of the wider community.

3.0 SCHOOL PLACE SUFFICIENCY

- 3.1 As at November 2021 there are 49 pupils of mainstream school age at Woodfield Community Primary School and 292 pupils at Grove Road Community Primary School. Both schools also offer nursery provision for children aged 3 and 4. Current pupil numbers in each year group are set out below.

Year group 2021-22	Grove Road School	Woodfield School
Reception	40	6
Year 1	37	2
Year 2	40	11
Year 3	41	4
Year 4	43	12
Year 5	47	3
Year 6	44	11
Total	292	49

Places for children currently attending Woodfield School would be made available through the amalgamation with Grove Road. Parents could also express a preference for any alternative school.

- 3.2 Children living in both the Grove Road and Woodfield school catchment areas attend a range of primary schools, reflecting the choice of schools available nearby. There were 417 primary-aged pupils living in the Grove Road School catchment area in October 2020, and 31% attended Grove Road School. Children also attended a range of other schools, including St Peter's CE (15%) and St Robert's RC (14%).¹ There were 349 primary-aged pupils living in the Woodfield School catchment area in October 2020 and only 6% attended Woodfield School. Children also attended a range of other schools, including Richard Taylor CE VA (24%), Bilton Grange (22%) and Grove Road (16%).
- 3.3 Although pupil numbers at Grove Road have fallen slightly over the last few years, the school is operating around capacity. There are over 250 housing permissions in the school catchment area, and other land allocated for housing in the Local Plan (198 houses over a 15 year period). Depending on the pace of building and the extent of new pupils generated, numbers on roll at Grove Road may rise to over 300 over the next few years. The nature of the site and buildings, with limited playground space, a lack of playing field and rooms on several floors, would make expansion on the Grove Road site more difficult to achieve.
- 3.4 Pupil numbers at Woodfield School have fallen significantly in the last couple of years, and the number on roll is now 49, compared to 80 in January 2020 and 92 in January 2019. The LA forecasts numbers to remain in the 40s for the next few years. There are no significant housing permissions within the school catchment area, although there are several housing developments underway or planned (about 630 houses) outside the school catchment area, about a mile from the school.
- 3.5 As part of the amalgamation proposals, it is proposed to increase the Published Admission Number (PAN) of Grove Road Community Primary School from 40 to 50. The PAN is the number of school places that must be offered in reception each year.

¹ There is also a shared catchment area for Grove Road and Coppice Valley Schools, in which 17 % of primary-aged pupils living in the catchment area attended Grove Road.

- 3.6 If the proposals went ahead, there would be 350 primary school places available across the two sites of the amalgamated Grove Road School. As there are currently 280 primary school places available at Grove Road School, and 150 at Woodfield School, this would be an overall reduction of 80 places. Given current forecasts, including the likely demand from new housing in the catchment areas, and current patterns of parental preference, there would appear to be sufficient primary places available in the local area, as:
- Overall birth rates are falling in Harrogate district, from 1,425 in 2016/17 to 1,308 in 2018/19.
 - Pupils living in the Grove Road and Woodfield catchment areas attend a wide variety of primary schools, as noted above.
 - There would be scope to increase the PAN at Grove Road School at a later date, if required and subject to consultation through the Admission Arrangements consultation.
- 3.7 Grove Road Community Primary School has indicated that if the proposals went ahead, they would operate as a split site school:
- From September 2022, all Nursery children would be based at the current Woodfield site (Grove Road Nursery); all Year Reception to Year 6 pupils would be based at the current Grove Road site.
 - All families of children currently attending Woodfield school and who choose to join Grove Road Community Primary School can be accommodated at the existing Grove Road site
 - From September 2023, all Nursery children and Reception pupils (2023 cohort) would be based at the current Woodfield site (Grove Road Early Years); all Year 1 to Year 6 pupils would be based at the Grove Road site.
 - Growth is expected to continue so that eventually Grove Road Early Years and Grove Road Key Stage 1 would be located at the current Woodfield site and Grove Road Key Stage 2 would be accommodated at the current Grove Road site.

Some Targeted Mainstream Provision would also be based at the current Woodfield site, in addition to that already available on the Grove Road site. Additional capacity would be available on the Grove Road site for specialist provision such as Thrive (social and emotional wellbeing), science, humanities and drama.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

REVENUE

- 4.1 Pupil numbers determine the level of funding that a school receives. Woodfield School has projected in-year budget deficits of £119k in the financial year 2021/22, £103.3k in 2022/23 and £128.4k in 2023/24, and a forecast cumulative budget deficit of £98k in 2021/22, £201.4k in 2022/23, and £329.8k in 2023/24.
- 4.2 Grove Road School has projected in-year surpluses of £73.3k in 2021/2, £50.2k in 2022/3 and £69.5k in 2023/4, and a forecast cumulative budget deficit of £158.2k in 2021/2, £108k in 2022/3, and £38.6k in 2023/4. The school is currently forecasting to return to an overall budget surplus position by 31st March 2026.
- 4.3 Grove Road School has produced a long-term financial forecast to explore the viability of the amalgamation proposal. This model suggests that where the PAN is set at 50, the financial position can be sustainable over the long term. This is dependent on both pupil numbers and the level of staffing and there will always be some degree of uncertainty in any school financial forecast over the longer term. Should the amalgamation go ahead on 31 August 2022, any deficit on the Woodfield budget on that date would be absorbed by the County Council.

CAPITAL

- 4.4 The scope for site improvements are being explored, including reopening a gate at the rear of the Woodfield School site, to provide a shorter, safer walking route to and from both sites. Some capital works may be able to be funded from Section 106 developer contributions, while other funding may be a call on the Schools Condition Grant, for which the next allocation will be made from central government to the County Council in spring 2022.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Changing the structure of school provision requires the publication of statutory notices by the LA to affect a school closure, enlargement and expansion on to an additional site. Three school organisation proposals would be required, which would all be linked:

- Grove Road Community Primary School – enlargement of premises
- Grove Road Community Primary School – expansion onto an additional site (the Woodfield site)
- Woodfield Community Primary School – technical closure of the school as a separate entity

- 5.2 These proposals would follow the DfE’s statutory guidance for proposers and decision makers.² In particular, the proposals would need to ensure that the expansion onto an additional site is genuinely a change to an existing school and not the establishment of a new school, and demonstrate how the proposed arrangements are likely to lead to improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of educational provision for those children.

- 5.3 Under the schools causing concern guidance and related legislation,³ any maintained school like Woodfield that has been judged inadequate by Ofsted is required to become a sponsored academy. The Regional Schools Commissioner has been unable to secure an Academy Trust to sponsor Woodfield School due to viability concerns. Where the Secretary of State considers that a school would not be viable as an academy, it is expected the local authority will close the school and the Secretary of State can direct them to do so if necessary. Any proposal to close the school and cease education provision on the Woodfield school site would be consulted on separately. An academy order can also be revoked where a school has been re-inspected by Ofsted and judged Good or Outstanding, and the Secretary of State is satisfied that the improvement can be sustained without the support of a strong sponsor. As noted above, while Ofsted has recognised the improvements that have been made at Woodfield, the current leadership arrangements can only be temporary.

6.0 PROPOSED CONSULTATION PROCESS AND TIMESCALES

- 6.1 A draft consultation document is attached in Appendix 1.
- 6.2 All of the School Organisation proposals would follow the same expected timescales:

² DfE, *Making significant changes ('prescribed alterations') to maintained schools Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers* (Oct 2018) and *Opening and closing maintained schools Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers* (Nov 2019).

³ DfE, *Schools causing concern Guidance for local authorities and Regional Schools Commissioners on how to work with schools to support improvements to educational performance, and on using their intervention powers* (Sept 2020).

Executive Member approval to consult	Tues 23 November 2021
Call in period ends	Wed 1 December
Consultation period including public meetings	Thurs 2 December – Fri 28 January 2022 (including 6 weeks term time)
Executive Member report published	14 February
Executive decision to publish statutory notices (If approved the following timetable would apply)	Tues 22 February
Call in period ends	Wed 2 March
Statutory Notices published (4 weeks for representations to be made)	Thurs 3 March (Harrogate Advertiser published on Thursdays)
Representation period starts	Thurs 3 March
Representation period ends	Thurs 31 March
Final decision by County Council's Executive (or by the Executive Member if there are no objections to the statutory proposals)	Tuesday 19 April
Call in period ends	27 April
Implementation of proposals	31 August
The amalgamated school starts to operate on two sites	1 September

- 6.3 The County Council is the employer for staff at both Grove Road Community Primary School and Woodfield Community Primary School and the Governing Bodies will seek to protect employment as far as possible for staff currently employed at Woodfield. A separate HR consultation process for staff and their professional associations will commence in the spring term and the Governing Bodies will most likely propose an internal transfer of staff from Woodfield to Grove Road, following Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) (TUPE) principles.
- 6.4 Parents at Grove Road and Woodfield schools were notified on 21 October of the decision by the two governing bodies to ask the County Council to consult on an amalgamation proposal, prior to publication of an entry in the County Council's Forward Plan. Following enquiries from parents, and in consultation with LA officers, the two schools issued frequently asked questions to help answer general queries about the process, and how the amalgamation could work (Appendix 2).

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The Executive Member for Schools is recommended to give approval to consult publicly on proposals:

To amalgamate Grove Road Community Primary School and Woodfield Community Primary School in Harrogate from 1 September 2022. This would create a single primary school operating on both school sites through the technical closure of Woodfield Community Primary School as a separate entity, and the enlargement of premises and expansion onto the Woodfield site of Grove Road Community Primary School.

Stuart Carlton
CORPORATE DIRECTOR – CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S SERVICE.

Report prepared by John Lee, Strategic Planning Officer

Action AgreedExecutive Member

Date:

Action RequestedCorporate Director

Date:

Appendix 1: Draft consultation document

Appendix 2: Frequently asked questions