

CABINET

7 NOVEMBER 2017

REPORT OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

PROPOSED CLOSURE OF ACKLINGTON CE FIRST SCHOOL BY GOVERNING BODY OF JCSC FEDERATION

REASONS TO SUPPORT GOVERNORS PROPOSAL - DECISION

1. The council has an obligation to protect schools in isolated rural areas where pupil numbers are very low and the nearest schools is many miles away, however this school has 5 neighbouring schools within 5 miles, the nearest being only 1.3miles away. Each of these schools is relatively small and each has spare capacity. It is not easy to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum in a very small school and although the school currently is rated good by Ofsted it continues to need significant support from the federation to ensure that children receive the social and emotional interaction they need.
2. Parents in Acklington generally do not choose Acklington school instead they choose one of the other neighbouring schools. There are 28 children in the catchment area but very few attend the school.
3. The school has poor accommodation and it would take around £167,000 to refurbish it,
4. Pupil numbers have been very low for many of years; in September 2012 there were 18 children on roll; in September 2015 there were 12 pupils and in November 2017 there are 8 pupils. No children have joined the Reception or nursery class in September 2017.
5. In spite of action taken by the James Calvert Spence Federation to attract additional pupils to the school, the majority of pupils living in the school catchment area of first school age attend other local schools through parental choice.
6. Cabinet agrees with the Governing Body of the James Calvert Spence Federation that the continuing reduction in the school's budget as a result of the continuing fall in pupil numbers will have a detrimental impact on the ability of the school in the future to sustain the broad and balanced curriculum that the pupils deserve in line with their peers.
7. The school's budget is forecast to be in deficit of £40,000 for 2017/18 and with no children joining the school in September 2017, the deficit is predicted to continue to grow in 2018/19 and 2019/20.
8. Therefore, while Cabinet has been mindful of the specific statutory requirements in relation to the closure of rural schools, and its decision making powers, it believes that it is in the best educational interests of the pupils to close Acklington CE First School.
9. However, Cabinet believes that the Governing Body's proposal to close the school on 31 December 2017 is not in the best educational interests of the children and therefore proposes the modification of the closure date of the school to 31 August 2018 as recommended by the Family and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
10. Furthermore, Cabinet requests officers to review arrangements at other local first schools with a view to ensuring a place for all children currently on roll at

Acklington CE First for 1 September 2018. There is sufficient capacity within other first schools across the Coquet Partnership for parents to exercise their parental preference for other schools, including at other faith schools.

11. The proposal to close Acklington CE First School was brought forward by the Governing Body of the James Calvert Spence Federation and supported by the Diocese
12. The consultation on this proposal has been appropriate, reasonable and robust.