

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET MEMBER FOR SCHOOLS AND LEARNING****DATE: 11 SEPTEMBER 2013****LEAD OFFICER: NICK WILSON, STRATEGIC DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES****SUBJECT: TO DETERMINE A PROPOSAL TO CLOSE THE SPECIALIST CENTRE FOR SPEECH, LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION AT THE ECHELFORD PRIMARY SCHOOL IN ASHFORD****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

Following a statutory consultation process by Surrey County Council, permission is sought from the Cabinet Member to approve the publication of Notices in respect of the proposed closure of the Specialist Centre at The Echelford Primary School.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that:

1. The Specialist Speech, Language and Communications Needs (SLCN) Centre is closed in January 2014.
2. No further admissions are made to the Specialist Centre with effect from September 2013.
3. Suitable alternative educational provision will be arranged for pupils currently on roll at The Echelford Specialist Centre. This will be done in conjunction with their parents/carers and the Local Authority maintaining Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision in order to enable their transition in January 2014 or sooner.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

There are a number of unfilled places at this Centre and it has not been full for a number of years. This is partly due to fewer SLCN pupils in Surrey requiring this sort of provision. There is also another more popular and successful Centre locally. The Echelford Governing Body has been unable to secure appropriate specialist teaching and leadership of the Centre and standards there are judged as being unsatisfactory at present. The proposed closure will enable the Headteacher and Governing Body to concentrate on raising standards in the mainstream school which currently also requires special measures and is becoming an academy. More suitable and effective alternative provision has been identified for the six pupils currently on roll.

DETAILS:**Business Case**

1. The Echelford Primary School is currently in an OFSTED category of concern as it needs to improve the quality of its educational offer to all pupils. The Head of the SLCN Centre resigned in 2012 and the Head Teacher of the school resigned in the spring of 2013. An executive Head Teacher from

another school has been appointed to oversee the rapid improvements required. It is very likely that The Echelford will become an academy as part of a Trust established with the Executive Head's own outstanding school.

2. The Executive Head has had great difficulty in recruiting suitable specialist staff for the SLCN centre, including a Head of Centre; and the roll has dwindled to only six pupils, four of whom are transported there from Hounslow Local Authority. The Centre was opened in 2006 with 12 places available but it has never been full. There is another SLCN Centre in the Spelthorne Borough at Spelthorne School, and so provision is available should the numbers of pupils requiring this type of support rise in the near future.
3. A consultation with stakeholders was held according to Department for Education (DfE) guidelines and this included a meeting at the school for parents and other interested parties. A number of individual meetings have also been held with parents of children attending the centre and with SEN officers of Hounslow Local Authority. The County Council has received no opposition to the proposed closure of the centre. The Head Teacher and the Governing Body of The Echelford School initially requested this closure and are in full support of this proposal.

CONSULTATION:

4. The consultation period ran from Monday 10 June 2013 for a period of six weeks up to Friday 26 July. This was publicised to parents of the children on roll in the mainstream school as well as to the parents and carers of children on roll at The Centre. A consultation document was drawn up outlining the reasons for the proposal and what alternative arrangements would be made for pupils requiring this kind of provision. This was sent to all stakeholders.
5. A public meeting was held at The Echelford School on 19 June at 5.30 pm. This was attended by approximately 10 parents. No written consultation responses were received and there was no opposition to the proposal. Parents of children attending the Centre have had individual consultations with Surrey County Council SEN officers and with Hounslow Officers, where appropriate, and they are generally satisfied with the alternative arrangements made for their children. Consequently their Statements have been revised to name other provision.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

6. There are no apparent educational risks involved in this proposed closure. However, if the closure is not approved there is the risk that the ongoing lack of specialist staff and experienced leadership in this Centre will impact negatively on the educational offer being made to the pupils on roll. This could also have an impact on the rate of general improvement in The Echelford School which is currently subject to HMI monitoring and an OFSTED re-inspection in due course.

Financial and Value for Money Implications

7. The DfE currently fund £10,000 per place for special education need provision. The place budget at Echelford is £100,000 (ten places). There is also an additional £18,000 income recouped from other local authorities. There is a risk that by closing the unit the County Council loses this £100,000

place funding. The guidance states that where a local authority is reducing place numbers and requesting that it should retain the funding released due to a re-organisation of provision, the criteria will be, that the local authority has demonstrated that:

- they will be providing for the same (or additional) number of places through other provision; or
 - that the re-organisation will bring medium term benefits in terms of increased choice, better outcomes or cost effectiveness.
8. Surrey County Council will therefore have to make a case to the DfE to retain the place funding by demonstrating one of the above criteria for the change..
9. These arrangements for annual review of place funding by the DfE are new and therefore their response to such proposals is unknown. If the place funding is lost then Surrey could still be faced with the need to fund additional in-school support for pupils who would otherwise have been placed in the unit, without retaining the funding previously allocated to the unit. However, given the high vacancy level at the unit and the current numbers for re-providing are small (two children) the financial risk may not be significant, but nevertheless the risk remains.

Section 151 Officer Commentary

10. The Section 151 Officer acknowledges that the school want the unit to close, so they can concentrate on other issues and that the unit usage is very low. However, there is a risk of the County Council losing the £100,000 place funding.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

11. The children attending The SLCN Centre at The Echelford each have a statement of Special Educational Need which has (or had) The Echelford named as the appropriate provision in part 4 of this document. Four of these statements are maintained by Hounslow Local Authority and two by Surrey County Council. As stated earlier in this report emergency statement reviews have been undertaken by the relevant Authority with parents and carers and the statements have been amended accordingly. Parents will retain their statutory right to appeal if they are dissatisfied with the new named educational provision.

Equalities and Diversity

12. All six pupils on roll have had suitable alternative educational provision made for them as part of this process in anticipation of the closure of this Centre. Four of the pupils are Hounslow residents and Hounslow Local Authority is therefore the responsible body in their cases. Negotiations between Surrey and Hounslow Officers have secured this provision in Hounslow in readiness for January 2014 or sooner. Of the two Surrey residents, one child will remain at The Echelford School to complete his primary education there with in class support. The other child has been allocated a place in an alternative Centre.

13. There are no specialist staff currently employed to work in the Centre, supply staff are being engaged at present on temporary contracts. Therefore no staff will lose their permanent post if the Centre closes.
14. No group with any protected characteristics under Equalities Legislation has been affected by this proposal as improved provision for the children with SENs has been made. The students are all covered by the general Equalities Impact Assessments (EIA) made by Surrey County Council in respect of its educational provision. No separate EIA has therefore been made.

Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children implications

15. All parents, including Corporate Parents, have been consulted about the general principle of closure of this centre and also the specific impact on their child's education. There have been no representations from the parents of Looked After Children to suggest that the centre does not close.

Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults implications

16. Safeguarding considerations have been taken into account in the proposal to close this Centre. It is believed that without sufficiently trained and experienced staff in post and without relocating the Centre to a more suitable place in the school, there was, and continues to be, a slightly elevated safeguarding risk which the staff have to mitigate.
17. The school has a Safeguarding policy in place which also covers the specialist Centre and the new Head Teacher has ensured that the six remaining children in the Centre are safe. The Centre, for example, has been moved from the top floor of the building to a more suitable classroom on the ground floor.

Climate change/carbon emissions implications

18. Closure of this Centre will reduce the daily taxi journeys into Surrey being made by the four Hounslow children. The nearest SLCN Centre is located in Stanwell which is close to Ashford and will serve this area of the county in future.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

- Subject to approval, public notices will be published at the earliest opportunity for a period of 6 weeks. After this a final report will be brought to The Cabinet Member's November meeting recommending closure of the Centre with effect from January 2014.
- The Public Notices will be placed on the Surrey County Council website and on the School website. A paper copy of the statutory notice will be published on the school gate. Responses will be invited via the Surrey County Council School Organisation email in box. The outcome will be communicated to affected parents and to the school in writing. The decision will be recorded on the SCC website along with other delegated decisions made at the November meeting.

Contact Officers:

Beverley Clarke, Joint Head of Additional and Special Educational Needs

01372 832593

Melanie Harris Schools Commissioning Officer for NE Surrey 020 8541 9556

Consulted:

The School staff, parents of pupils on roll both at the school and at the Centre, Hounslow Local Authority, the local County Councillor

Annexes:

Annex 1 – The Consultation Document

Sources/background papers:

OFSTED report <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/inspection-reports/find-inspection-report/provider/ELS/125071>

HMI report on The Echelford Primary School

The Section 8 Inspection (first Monitoring) report by HMI (February 2013)

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