

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET****DATE: 24 SEPTEMBER 2013****REPORT OF: LINDA KEMENY, CABINET MEMBER FOR SCHOOLS AND LEARNING****LEAD OFFICER: NICK WILSON, STRATEGIC DIRECTOR SCHOOLS, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES****SUBJECT: PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT AND SCHOOL EXPANSION IN THE FARNHAM AREA****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

Pilgrim's Way Primary School is located within a mile of South Farnham Academy. It has been underperforming and undersubscribed in recent years and although it is no longer in special measures it continues to obtain results that are beneath National Floor Targets in some areas and remains of a significant concern to Officers. The County Council has entered into discussions with the Governing Bodies of both schools whom are in agreement to place Pilgrim's Way under the management of South Farnham Academy via a multi academy trust which will be expected to have a transformative effect on the reputation and quality of education outcomes of education at Pilgrim's Way school. Improvement in the popularity of Pilgrim's Way School will provide increased future capacity in the South Farnham area.

The South Farnham Academy is a very popular, successful and oversubscribed school and would be able to accommodate further pupils to meet current and future demand if adaptations to the infrastructure at its Key Stage 1 site (the former Bourne Infant School) are made. There is not an immediate need to increase places however future planned housing development will create demand. The more immediate issue in the area is the varying performance of the schools causing under and oversubscription in the schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that:

- (1) Approval is given for the South Farnham Academy to enhance leadership alongside developing and implementing a sustainable school improvement programme at Pilgrim's Way school.
- (2) Approval is given to transfer £750,000 from an existing scheme in the capital programme for capital investment in the South Farnham Academy to facilitate an increase in capacity in the area, via both schools, through added infrastructure and the proposed leadership improvements.
- (3) Approval to the above is based on tangible and monitored improvements that South Farnham Academy will implement at Pilgrim's Way within 2 academic

years. These improvements will be monitored by the local authority and Babcock 4S

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

Progress and outcomes for pupils at Pilgrim's way school are of significant concern and early indications from the 2013 performance results show that previous improvements have plateaued. A poor Ofsted judgement is now a very serious possibility. Officers are confident that this leadership intervention will rapidly realise improvements to underperformance.

South Farnham Academy is a very popular and oversubscribed school and its long term success indicates its ability to support and lead improvements at Pilgrims Way school. The ability to admit more pupils overall into successful schools will ensure greater stability for the area and support the Council's aspirations to provide appropriate facilities for local children in Surrey. This scheme of adaptation at the Academy's Bourne site which will facilitate the provision of a further form of entry, increasing from 2 to 3 forms of entry, supports the expansion of popular and successful schools and will meet future demand. Combined with reputational improvements to Pilgrim's Way through its sponsorship by the South Farnham Academy represents a whole locality solution to the quality and quantity of school places in the area.

DETAILS:

1. Pilgrims' Way is located less than a mile from South Farnham. It is regularly undersubscribed and has a poor local reputation and a history of "special measures". Between 2011 and 2012 results showed improvement but there is concern that recent results indicate this improvement is not sustained. Approximately 40% of pupils in Year 6 in the 2012/13 academic year were entitled to pupil premium. This is significantly higher than the Surrey County Council average of approximately 16%. Those pupils achieving level 4+ in mathematics, reading and writing is expected to be significantly lower than this group nationally and in other Surrey Schools when the results are published. (They have not been validated at the time of writing).
2. Over the last 20 years South Farnham School has thrived first as a junior and now as a primary school. It has received impressive national recognition.
3. Pilgrim's Way school will be inspected in the coming academic year.
4. The DfE increasingly looks to local partnerships where these are possible to manage the improvement at schools such as Pilgrims Way and successful academies are approached to undertake that role. South Farnham's imprimatur is likely to have a decisive and immediate effect and its involvement will dissolve much of the parental resistance to the current Pilgrims Way School. South Farnham has successfully helped other schools facing difficulty and we are confident it can bring about rapid and constructive changes. Discussions have taken place with the DfE about the local authority proposals for the South Farnham area and they are in agreement with our approach. If we do not take this proposal forward we can expect the DfE to instruct us to deploy an academy partner at Pilgrim's Way.
5. This local sponsorship solution is considered to be the most appropriate option to improve the educational performance of Pilgrim's Way school and

will be facilitated in conjunction with the countywide improvement work being undertaken by Babcock 4S. South Farnham has been clear that it is willing to enter into our proposed arrangements with investment at its Bourne site. Should they decide not to go ahead with the planned proposal they would not be likely to suffer significant reputational damage but we can assume the DfE would seek an alternative academy partner. The DfE have indicated to us they have little confidence in finding a more appropriate partner than South Farnham

- 6. The cost of the adaptations at The South Farnham Academy was not incorporated in the current education capital programme as the preferred options for improvement in the area had not been determined when the programme was set. However in the current programme there is a scheme at a school in the wider Farnham area where the scope can be changed which will release the funding required for the adaptation proposed at the South Farnham Academy.

CONSULTATION:

- 7. An academy, as its own admissions authority can choose to increase its provision of school places without seeking approval from the Local Authority. Surrey has positive relationships with its Academy leaders and the Cabinet Member for Schools and Learning agrees the rationale for facilitating further provision at South Farnham. This could meet demonstrated parental demand and provide an opportunity to reorganise the wider educational offer in the Farnham area including the improvement of a school with a poor local reputation.
- 8. The DfE may intervene where they believe a school is of concern. In the case of Pilgrims Way School DfE officers have supported the approach that Surrey is proposing to manage school improvement by taking it into the South Farnham Academy Trust.
- 9. We are aware from correspondence from parents that additional places at South Farnham Academy will be welcomed.

RISK MANAGEMENT AND IMPLICATIONS:

- 10. If approval is given to the proposals in this paper an academy chain will be established quickly and once operating as such any improvement at Pilgrims Way will need to be robustly monitored and key milestones agreed and put in place to report progress. South Farnham has an excellent record of school improvement work and has a strong interest in as well as ability to improve Pilgrim’s Way, due to the intention that the schools operate as long term partners in a single trust
- 11. Doing nothing at this stage will result in a saving for the schools basic need capital budget as funds will not be redirected to facilitate adaptations at South Farnham’s Bourne site. Against this however, poor performance at Pilgrims Way would not be immediately addressed via a local solution, nor would the problems caused by over and under subscription in the area be addressed.
- 12. It is possible that the DfE would intervene and direct an academy chain of their choice to take leadership of the school. The academy chain of choice

would probably be The South Farnham Academy but the timing of this decision would be uncertain and in the meantime the poor performance at Pilgrim's Way will remain without action.

13. Were Pilgrim's Way to close it would be necessary immediately to place one form of entry of its current pupils. This would not be possible in the immediate area at present and when future demand arises probably from 2018, possibly earlier, we would need to acquire further premises

Financial and Value for Money Implications

14. Essentially two problems can be addressed with the proposal: an immediate issue regarding school quality at Pilgrim's Way and a longer term issue regarding sufficiency of school places in the area. In return for investment at South Farnham Academy the Head teacher will undertake to bring about much needed improvements at Pilgrim's Way replicating a national strategy of getting stronger schools to take over the leadership of weaker schools, something we have organised with success to date in Surrey. Such improvements will include
- Recognised excellence in leadership overseeing the improvements
 - The implementation of specialist primary teachers
 - Staffing economies of scale
 - Increased community confidence in Pilgrim's Way due to the association with a popular and successful school and anticipated improved Ofsted results
15. The cost of the proposed adaptation at the South Farnham, Bourne site is £750,000. This can be funded by redirecting an allocation from a scheme in the existing programme. This potential saving has arisen following further viability work demonstrating that the initial scheme can be delivered for less due to the opportunity to manage the existing infrastructure effectively. This creates the opportunity to redirect funds to the scheme at South Farnham without an overall increase to the programme
16. In the context of additional places an investment of £750,000 which provides an increased capacity of approx 150 places (1 form of entry at South Farnham's Bourne site) and the potential to fill up the existing capacity of 1FE plus bulge class at Pilgrims Way represents value for money. A typical form of entry at a primary school would be expected to cost approximately £1.9m

Section 151 Officer Commentary

17. The s151 Officer confirms that this proposal, including agreed performance measures, would not be an unreasonable use of resources.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer

18. The local authority has a duty to exercise its education functions with a view to promoting high standards and the fulfilment of learning potential. It also has a duty to secure sufficient school places for the area and must exercise this

function with a view to ensuring diversity in the provision of schools and increasing opportunities for parental choice. The proposal outlined in this report to adapt the site at South Farnham Academy to increase the provision by an additional form of entry, combined with the proposal for the Academy to take over the management of Pilgrim’s Way school addresses the issues of both capacity and performance which have arisen in the area.

Equalities and Diversity

- 19. The county council is committed to improving standards at all under-performing maintained schools and has invested in a comprehensive programme of improvement with Babcock 4S, However given the readily available local solution that the LA is proposing between The South Farnham Academy and Pilgrim’s Way specific action targeted here is deemed appropriate.

Corporate Parenting/Looked After Children implications

- 20. Pilgrims Way contains significant proportions of at risk and looked after children and changes that improve its educational performance will benefit these.

Safeguarding responsibilities for vulnerable children and adults implications

- 21. Pilgrims Way contains significant proportions of at risk and looked after children and changes that improve its educational performance will benefit these.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

- 22. Subject to Cabinet approval the administrative process to amalgamate Pilgrims Way with the South Farnham Academy Trust will commence.

Contact Officer:

Peter–John Wilkinson, Assistant Director, Schools and Learning 020 8541 9907

Consulted:

Nick Wilson, Strategic Director for Children Schools and Families
Councillor Pat Frost, Local Member, Farnham Central
Paula Chowdhury, Strategic Finance Manager, Children Schools and Families
Schools – Head teachers and Governors

Sources/background papers:

- The Academies Act 2010
- The Education Act 1996
- The School Standards Framework Act 1998
- The Education Act 2002
- The Education and Inspections Act 2006

