

Expansion of Swindon Academy

CABINET

31st October 2007

Author: Cabinet Member for Children Services and Group Director, Children**Parish / Wards Affected:** *Penhill; Gorse Hill and Pinehurst, Moredon and St Philips***Purpose**

- To seek permission to express an interest to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and the United Learning Trust (ULT) for the expansion of the Swindon Academy to include Penhill Primary School.

Recommendation

Cabinet is requested to

- Authorise the Group Director, Children to submit an expression of interest to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and United Learning Trust for the expansion of the Swindon Academy to include Penhill Primary School.
- Authorise the Group Director and Lead Member Children to actively pursue discussions with the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the United Learning Trust, which attempt to secure the funding necessary to bring the quality of estate at Penhill Primary School in line with the Swindon Academy.

1. Reasons

- a) Penhill Primary school is on the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) list of 266 'hard to shift' primary schools in England and has failed to meet the floor target at Key Stage two in both Maths and English for five years, despite receiving considerable additional resource and support from the Local Authority. The Local Authority considers that a structural solution is required to move this school forward. If the school became part of the Academy it would benefit from the drive to raise standards already evident in the Academy.
- b) An all-through Academy can help pupils with the transition from one school to another and provides continuity of teaching and learning for pupils. Evidence shows that pupil performance dips, and pupil progress is slowed, as a result of moving schools. In an area where raising standards of achievement is a key priority between primary and secondary and where this has not to date been successfully addressed through to age 16, it is vital that these barriers to progress are removed. There are opportunities in the future for feeder schools to the Academy to be more closely associated with the United Learning Trust, for

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example through, Trust status. However, the critical issue of school standards in Penhill School needs to be addressed;

- c) During the consultation phase for the Academy, it became clear that members of the community of Penhill felt that their children might miss out on the Academy development. Although children from the Penhill Primary School area will have the opportunity to apply for a place at the Academy at the secondary school stage, there is a perception that primary age children may be potentially disadvantaged compared to those in the previous Pinehurst Schools, by being excluded from the Academy arrangement.
- d) The developing educational plans for the all-through Academy suggest that it will break out from traditional year group structures and move towards working within vertically organised systems where the needs of the individual learner can be more readily met and personalised. Pupils will be able to progress according to the 'stage' they are at in their development rather than their chronological age. Such a development may make it more difficult for the pupils of Penhill Primary School to integrate into the Academy when they move at 11 years of age.
- e) As well as helping to raise standards, the expansion of the Academy to include Penhill Primary School would also promote inclusion and is likely to be highly popular with parents in the area who will recognise the benefits attached to continuity of care, especially for more vulnerable children.
- f) In the same way, an all-through Academy would help the more effective deployment of multi-agency approaches i.e. easier access, economies of scale for all agencies involved, and closer relationships through more regular formal and informal contacts, all resulting in an improved standard of provision for pupils.

2. Detail

- 2.1 The Swindon Academy, sponsored by Honda UK, and under the governance of United Learning Trust (ULT), opened in September 2007. The 0-19 Academy incorporates Headlands School, together with Pinehurst Infant and Junior Schools.
- 2.2 If the recommendation in this report is accepted, Swindon Borough Council and ULT would have to seek Department for Children, Schools and Families permission to move to a consultation on expanding the Academy to include Penhill Primary School.

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- 2.3 The final date for the expansion of the Academy to include Penhill will be dependent on DCSF approval, the outcomes of the consultation, and ULT agreement, and cannot be defined at this moment.
- 2.4 Penhill Primary School was inspected by Ofsted on 18th/19th September 2007. The report on the inspection is attached as **Appendix 1**.

Alternative Options

The alternative options are:

- To close Penhill School place planning means that option is not viable as there are not sufficient places in neighbouring schools for displaced pupils;
- To continue to support Penhill with substantial additional resource and advice. This strategy has been in place for the last two years, without obvious effect;
- To federate or amalgamate Penhill with a neighbouring community school. There are no suitable schools in the close vicinity.

Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- A feasibility study needs to be carried out in order to identify whether it will be necessary to refurbish Penhill Primary school to bring the quality of the provision in line with that of the Academy, as well as to identify the source of funding if a refurbishment is required. Although a refurbishment scheme has been under consideration for some years, there is currently no capital funding available for the necessary work within the Children's Services Capital Programme. It is proposed therefore that discussions should be held with the DCSF about this, also involving ULT.
- When a school becomes an Academy the funding that Local Authorities receive direct from the Department of Children, Schools & Families (DCSF) for that school is removed from the overall Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Due to the funding of schools and the requirement to provide retained services from the DSG i.e. special educational needs assessments, out of borough placement, there may be financial implications relating to the retained services due to variations between the level of per pupil funding the Council receives from the DCSF compared to the per pupil funding that is allocated directly to the school.
- In the current year Swindon has received £3,597 per pupil from the DCSF, based on existing number of pupils at Penhill. The total amount of grant that would be removed from the DSG (assuming a full year impact) would be

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£1.370m. The current funding formula within Swindon allocates a total budget for Penhill of £1.211m. The difference of funding contributes towards the retained services within the DSG. The table below illustrates that if Penhill becomes an Academy there would be a reduction of grant, totalling £159k that currently supports the retained services.

	Based on 2007/08 budget & pupil numbers for Penhill totalling 381		
	£'s		£'s
DSG per pupil	3,597	Total reduction of DSG	1,370,457
School Budget per pupil	3,178	Total School Budgets	1,210,762
Difference per pupil	419	Total Difference	159,695

Legal / Human Rights Implications

- Educational achievement is clearly linked to the life chances of individuals. The actions taken by the Local Authority should seek to ensure that all groups and individuals are able to achieve their full educational potential and so maximise their choices and access to opportunities.
- If the DCSF give approval following the expression of interest for the proposal to go forward, it will be necessary for a statutory process to be followed by the Council to close Penhill School as required by the Education and Inspection Act 2006. This process will take approximately 5 months and include a two month pre-statutory consultation, the publication of a formal notice, a further 6 weeks statutory consultation and then a final decision by Cabinet.

Links to Corporate Plans and Policies

- Links to Promise 20 and Local Area Agreement Outcome 7.

Consultees

- The Director of Finance (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

Background Papers and Appendices

Appendix 1: Report on Penhill Primary School by the Office for Standards in Education

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Key Decision/Decision in Forward Plan

This is not a key decision and is included in the October 2007 Forward Plan