

Report by the Executive Director of Children's Services for decision on a statutory change to change to age range at St. Michael's Church of England, Voluntary Aided, Nursery and Infant School, Aylsham

The Proposal I have considered, as the statutory decision-maker is;

- To change the age range to admit pupils from 4 up to the age of 11 years, to begin transition from 1st September 2018, to become an all through primary school with a Published Admission Number of 20.

1. Background on school organisation process for a statutory change

The DfE guidance on 'Making prescribed alterations to maintained schools', April 2016, sets out the school organisation process for governing bodies of voluntary schools who wish to change the age range;

- Although there is not a statutory 'pre-publication' consultation period for prescribed alteration changes, there is a strong expectation that schools and local authorities will consult interested parties in developing their proposal, before publicising their statutory proposal/notice.
- Stage 1 – publication of statutory proposal/notice
- Stage 2 – representation (formal consultation) which must be at least 4 weeks
- Stage 3 – decision. The Local Authority is the decision-maker and they must decide a proposal within 2 months of the closing date of the public notice, otherwise it will fall to the Schools Adjudicator. Any appeal to the adjudicator must be made within 4 weeks of the decision.
- Stage 4 – implementation. There is no prescribed timescale however it must be specified in the published statutory notice, subject to any modifications agreed by the decision-maker.

My decision to proceed to Stage 3 - decision, is made after careful consideration of a number of factors, including demographics, use of council resources, Ofsted inspection results and best use of the available space. This is set alongside the County Council's policy preferences, agreed in May 2015 and re-affirmed in September 2017, by the Children's Services Committee, as follows;

- Promoting school groupings with a minimum of two forms of entry for primary schools, to ensure sufficient capacity and funding for sustainable leadership models.
- Where possible, move to all through primary model (including on multiple sites) to reduce the number of transitions for pupils
- Giving preference to models with full forms of entry or, where this cannot be achieved, ensure mixed age classes with no more than two year groups in any one class e.g. year 1 and year 2 or year 5 and year 6.
- Ensuring the management partnerships move to a single governance model within six terms (2 years)
- Local Authority capital deployment is aligned to these principles
- Expand schools judged by Ofsted as Good or Outstanding.

2. Background to this proposal

2.1 St Michael's CE VA Infant and Nursery school

This Church of England school came into existence in 1848 to provide education for the children of Aylsham. The predominately Victorian buildings accommodate 108 children, in four classrooms. There is a separate kitchen and dining hall (housed in HORSIA accommodation), three outdoor playgrounds and a pond area. Attached to the school building is a modern purpose built nursery suite with its own dedicated outdoor play space.

St Michael's Church of England Voluntary Aided Nursery and Infant School, Aylsham is an Infant & Nursery School, taking 96 pupils (as at Sept 2017) from the age of 4 -7 years. The capacity of the school is for 108 infant school children. The school's last Ofsted Inspection was in November 2014 and was rated Good.

The children from St Michael's feed into Bure Valley School (Junior), along with the Infant children from John of Gaunt School, Aylsham.

2.2 Schools in Aylsham

The schools in Aylsham currently offering primary phase education are;

- St Michael's CE VA Nursery & Infant School – Published Admission Number 36
- John of Gaunt Infant and Nursery School – Published Admission Number 36
- Bure Valley School (Junior) – Published Admission Number 60

Aylsham High School and Bure Valley School are federated and formed the Aylsham Learning Federation. John of Gaunt Infant and Nursery School has recently joined in partnership with the two schools and the intention is that they will formally federate in September 2018. The Head of Aylsham High School is currently the Executive Headteacher of all three schools. John of Gaunt Infant and Nursery School and Bure Valley School (Junior) are situated next door to each other.

The locations of the schools are shown on a map in Appendix 1.

2.3 Growth in Aylsham

Norfolk County Council has a duty to ensure a sufficient supply of school places to respond to housing growth and other demographic changes. The proposed growth from the new housing in Aylsham as set out in Broadland Council's Local Plan, of approximately 500 dwellings, identifies a need for an increase of an additional 0.5 Form of Entry (0.5FE), by 2020. Additional places will be on a phased basis and dependent on the housing development's progress.

The options available for increasing the pupil places are limited, as growth will have to be accommodated within the current primary phase schools. The impact of growth is not enough to look at the option of a new school building.

3. The requirements of the decision maker

In coming to a decision on school organisation proposals, I am required to address the following factors:

1. Consideration of consultation and representation period
2. Education standards and diversity of provision
3. Demand v. need
4. School size
5. Proposed admission arrangements
6. National Curriculum
7. Equal opportunity issues
8. Community cohesion
9. Travel and accessibility
10. Capital
11. School premises and playing fields

This report, to be read in conjunction with the prescribed information (Appendix 2) will address each of these factors in turn.

3.1 Consideration of consultation and representation period

All statutory requirements in relation to the statutory consultation, publication and decision-making have been complied with, including adequate time, consultation of interested parties, sufficiency of information, and opportunities to provide feedback.

The Governing Body chose to undertake Informal consultation. This took place from 23rd May 2016 to 15th July 2016. The Governing Body carried out an initial public consultation on two proposals;

- Proposal 1; to extend the age range of the school to create a primary school for pupils aged 4 – 11 years, plus nursery from September 2017
- Proposal 2; to change the category from VC (voluntary controlled) to VA (voluntary aided) from January 2017.

Copies of the informal consultation document (Appendix 3) were sent to all parents of pupils attending the school, staff, governors, schools in the Aylsham cluster, the local county, district and parish councillors, MP, Church of England Diocese, local residents and all other stakeholders as set out in the school organisation guidance.

Two stakeholder events were held on 29th June 2016, which were well attended. The notes from these meetings and the written responses received were considered by the school governing body. Analysis of the responses is set out in Appendix 4.

Following this informal consultation, the school's governing body decided to proceed with the change of category from VC to VA. The Public Notice was published for four weeks between 28th September and 20th October 2016. No comments or objections were received during the Public Notice.

The Local Authority Decision-maker issued a Notice of Determination October 2017 agreeing the decision to proceed with the change of category from VC to VA and the change came into effect on 1st January 2017.

The informal consultation on the proposal to extend the age range was reviewed and the school governing body undertook a 2nd informal consultation setting out a

proposal (Appendix 5) to delay their plans to extend the age range, by 12 months and to change the Pupil Admission Number, from the original proposal of 25 pupils to 20 pupils. This closed on 20th October 2016 and there were no responses to the consultation document.

A Public Notice was issued on 28th September 2017 with the proposal to;

- Change the age range of the school to admit pupils from 4 up to the age of 11, in the main school, from 1st September 2018. The proposed capacity will be 140 children, with a published admission number of 20.

The statutory public notice was issued by the school governing body and was published in the North Norfolk News on 28th September 2017. Copies were displayed at all the main entrances to the school. The four week representation period came to an end on 20th October 2017. The prescribed information to support the Public Notice is set out in Appendix 6.

There were 7 responses to the Public Notice. They were all from local residents, who all made objections to the proposal. The issues raised in objection were;

- Traffic congestion; concerns about the busy junction around the school and the proposed extension to the school day due to breakfast and after school clubs, which will lengthen the times of day when traffic is congested around the school. The issues of parents parking and blocking driveways will be increased with more parents dropping off more children. The dangerous situation with the current parking and traffic to children and parents. However there is recognition that the school have undertaken several measures to improve the traffic issues.
- Concerns that parents will not use the public car parks and walk to school.
- Misunderstanding of Public Highways; School House Lane and Church Terrace and the concern that the perception and use of these private lanes as public pathways is causing issues.
- Traffic calming measures suggested to minimise the risk of accident crossing Blickling Road.
- Concerns about the accessibility of emergency vehicles through the area, at school drop off and pick up times.
- Provision of adequate education in mixed year classes
- The need for a new school to accommodate the additional children from the new homes, rather than compromise a small school at St. Michael's.

I have considered the representations made during the consultation and I am aware of the concerns about the increased traffic as a result of an expansion of the age range. However the school governing body have undertaken a comprehensive review of the issues and identified solutions, through their Travel Strategy.

3.2 Education standards and diversity of provision:

Norfolk County Council's duty is to carry out its functions in such a way as to promote high educational standards. Its commitment is for there to be a 'Good Education for every Norfolk Learner' and this commitment shapes all its decisions.

St Michael's VC Infant and Nursery School was last inspected by Ofsted in November 2014 and was rated Good. However, following a drop in Key Stage 1

standards in the summer term of 2017, the Local Authority’s risk-rating process identified the school as one requiring further investigation to determine whether the education provision remained ‘good’. As part of this process a scoping audit was undertaken at the school in November 2017. This identified that there were strengths in Nursery and Early Years provision, but as predicted by the school’s own monitoring over a number of years, there had been a dip in Key Stage 1 standards. Areas for improvement were identified and an Improvement Board has been established to support and challenge the school in ensuring that these are addressed. The Board will serve the additional purpose of supporting the planning for Key Stage 2, as the school expands to a primary. The response of school leaders and governors to the Improvement Board has been very positive.

The proposal seeks to grow to a maximum of 140 children over four years;

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
YR	34	20	20	20	20
Y1	33	34	20	20	20
Y2	30	33	34	20	20
Y3		20	20	20	20
Y4			20	20	20
Y5				20	20
Y6					20
Total	97	107	114	120	140

The school will continue to offer mixed year classes to accommodate the primary school children in the building accommodation. The school will need in time, a fifth classroom, in addition to a nursery to be able to accommodate the additional children. This will help achieve the additional pupils places arising from the growth planned in Aylsham.

The proposal offers diversity of provision of primary education in Aylsham as it is the only Church of England School and currently there are no VA places available at Key Stage 2.

3.3 Demand v Need

225 houses have been built at the Bure Meadow development and a further 75 houses are planned at this site. The Woodgate, Cawston Road development has started, with approximately 100 of the 250 houses completed.

Norfolk County Council estimate that this will lead to an increase of around 0.5FE for the area which can be accommodated in the existing schools with this proposed expansion. Any further significant housing numbers would put pressure on primary school places in the area.

Analysis of the pupil numbers in the area for Reception 2018 admissions shows 75 children for 80 places currently so there is not a demand for further places above what is already provided at this stage.

3.4 School size:

This proposal sees an increase in capacity of the school from 108 to 140 pupils, over the next four years, from September 2018. The Published Admission Number of 20 allows two classes in Key Stage 1 and three classes in Key Stage 2, and fits with the County Council's proposal to provide a fifth classbase at the school.

The County Council's preference for a Published Admissions Number of 30 pupils, thereby avoiding mixed year classes, would not be achievable on the current site.

The combination of this proposal and growth from housing has generated the need for John of Gaunt Infant School to increase its Published Admission Number to 60 and a modular building has been provided to facilitate this in the first instance. Bure Valley School has already reduced its Published Admission Number from 70 to 60 which is a better and their preferred operational model for the school.

3.5 Proposed admission arrangements:

The published admission number for the school from September 2018 is 20 and admissions will follow the school's published admissions arrangements.

In the transition period, Year 2 pupils will have first priority for the available 20 Year 3 places and parents will be encouraged to consider applying for places at St. Michael's and Bure Valley, in their preferred order.

3.6 National Curriculum

St. Michael's will continue to teach the National Curriculum (in all subject areas) and ensure that all teachers are suitably trained and highly skilled in teaching throughout the primary years.

3.7 Equal opportunity issues

There are no equal opportunity issues raised and there is a commitment to provide access to a range of opportunities to all.

3.8 Community Cohesion

Schools have a key part to play in providing opportunities for young people from different backgrounds, to learn from and about each other. The proposed changes will not have an impact on the good work already carried out the school.

3.9 Travel and accessibility:

Norfolk County Council will continue to provide transport to those eligible under their statutory requirements.

I note the comments made by several local residents who made representations outlining concerns about the increase in car traffic. However I also note the steps taken by the school governing body, in recognition of the road safety issues not only for the families, but also the local community. This includes;

- Road Safety working group, who look at road safety on a regular basis
- A Travel Strategy setting out the nine steps for improvement in the immediate future
- Reduction in congestion around school drop off and pick up times, due to starting extended school through breakfast clubs and after school club.

3.10 Capital

Norfolk County Council has identified a provisional £600,000 from its school capital programme budget (Capital Priorities Group September 2017), to support the addition of an extra classbase. Funding for the additional places will be a combination of Basic Need growth funding and S106 developer contributions. The outline proposal is to provide a stand-alone nursery unit (re-allocating the Nursery to become a fifth classroom). This proposal to extend the age range is not dependent on this funding. A temporary classroom arrangement can be provided for September 2018 to facilitate the change. The scheme has planning permission and the building will be one removed from another site in the County.

Norfolk County Council has provided a double modular classbase at John of Gaunt Infant school, to ease September 2017 area pressures and allowing the school to expand to 2FE. This will also assist with any additional places needed from September 2018.

3.11 School premises and playing fields:

Under the School Premises Regulations, all schools are required to provide suitable outdoor space, in order to enable physical education to be provided to pupils in accordance with the school curriculum and for pupils to play outside safely. In addition St Michael's is a Forest School which believes outdoor learning is vital. When it becomes necessary, St Michael's are confident that they can continue to make excellent provision by using land currently owned by the Church.

4. Conclusion

In considering the proposals, as Decision Maker, I can decide to:

- Reject the proposals
- Approve the proposal
- Approve the proposal with a modification
- Approve the proposal subject to it meeting a specific condition.

This proposal is a complex one, as it does not meet several of NCC's policy preferences. However the proposal does offer a solution to place planning by providing;

- Improvement of education standards by reducing the number of transitions
- Diversity of choice to parents, as the only Church of England school in Aylsham
- Additional primary phase places for pupils.

5. Recommendation:

It is therefore recommended that the Executive Director of Children's Services, in their role as Decision Maker as delegated by the Children's Services Committee, should decide in favour of the proposal to extend the age range of St. Michael's CE VA Infant and Nursery School, 1st from September 2018, to become an all through primary school.