

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Member for Education
Date:	1 July 2016
Title:	The Connaught School - Aldershot
Reference:	7540
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

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1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this paper is to seek authority to carry out a consultation on the future of The Connaught School because a step change in attainment and performance is required. Currently too few students secure 5 good GCSEs including English and mathematics. The report sets out a number of options for structural change, several of which would appear to be viable. During the consultation the County Council would welcome the proposal of any additional viable proposals.
- 1.2. The County Council would like to hear the community's views on each of these options. The framework for undertaking such a consultation requires that the County Council start from a premise of having a preferred option.
- 1.3. The preferred option set out in this report would be to merge The Connaught Secondary School, Newport Junior School and Belle Vue Infant School as set out in section 5.4 of this Report. This would be achieved through the closure of The Connaught School and Newport Junior School and a change of age range for Belle Vue Infant School from 4 – 7 to 4 – 16, creating an all-through school, with an anticipated implementation between January and September 2017.
- 1.4. This paper sets out the background to the proposal, and explains the required statutory consultation process to be followed.

2. Contextual information

- 2.1. The Connaught has a track record of weak educational performance over a number of years and there are insufficient indications that rapid and sustainable improvement is likely. It also has a long-standing poor reputation in the community relative to neighbouring schools. The issues facing the school are complex and inter-related. The number on roll has been low for

several years in comparison to capacity and this is having a significant negative impact on the budget. The school serves a community with a high number of disadvantaged students, primarily those eligible for free school meals. A change of approach is now deemed necessary, in order to raise standards of educational provision and outcomes for secondary age students locally and to secure the school's long term viability.

- 2.2 There are four mainstream secondary schools within the Borough of Rushmoor; The Connaught, The Wavell, Cove and Fernhill. Cove and Fernhill serve students primarily from Farnborough. The Wavell is in the heart of Rushmoor and serves students from both Aldershot and Farnborough. The Connaught is sited on the edge of Aldershot town and tends to serve students from Aldershot.
- 2.3 The Connaught is in very close proximity to the Hampshire/Surrey border. There are several more popular and generally higher performing Surrey secondary schools nearby: Ash Manor is within half a mile (Ofsted – good in 2012); All Hallows RC is within one and a half miles (Ofsted – outstanding in 2014), Farnham Heath End Academy is within two miles (Ofsted – requires improvement in March 2016) and Weydon Academy is within 4 miles (Ofsted – outstanding 2009).
- 2.4 The Connaught was judged satisfactory in 2011, then requiring improvement in 2013 and again in March 2015. The current Ofsted framework requires that any school receiving two consecutive requiring improvement judgements must, on a third inspection, either be deemed good or be placed in special measures. The Connaught must therefore be judged good at the next inspection (due in April 2017) or it will be placed in special measures.
- 2.5 The Department for Education provides Guidance on School Alterations, including change of age range and closures when proposed by the Local Authority. This Guidance recommends the following stages for this type of statutory proposal, as set out below:
 - Consultation – Minimum 6 weeks
 - Public Notice – Statutory Proposal published
 - Representation (Formal Consultation) - Public Notice to run for 4 weeks, during which representations can be made. Notice is posted online, in media and at the affected schools.
 - Decision – the Local Authority (decision-maker) must decide the proposals within two months of the expiry of the public notice.
 - Implementation – Must be as specified in the published statutory notice, subject to any modifications agreed by the decision-maker).

3. Finance

Revenue

- 3.1 The school finished 2015-2016 with a budget deficit of £94k. A new 3 year financial plan is being prepared for approval by governors. The current indication is that the deficit will rise to around £200k in 2016/17. The school is projecting an increase in NOR from 537 currently to 567 in September 2016 and 626 in September 2017. This forms the basis of its current proposal to recover the deficit and returning to surplus at the end of 2018/2019.
- 3.2 No capital investment is required as part of the preferred solution.

4. Performance

- 4.1 The Connaught has a history of relatively weak performance coupled with a poor reputation in the community when compared to neighbouring schools. The current headteacher took up post in April 2009 and has secured many positive changes; however GCSE outcomes remain stubbornly low (see below). The school was removed from an Ofsted inadequate category in September 2007 and deemed satisfactory. Since then the school has struggled to secure continued, significant and sustainable improvement.
- 4.2 In 2015 29% of students attained 5 good GCSEs including English and mathematics compared to a national average of 57%. This places the school well below the minimum Government Floor Standard of 40%. The school's performance in relation to 5 good GCSEs including English and mathematics has been consistently below that nationally: 48% (57%) in 2014, 36% (61%) in 2013, 44% (59%) in 2012 and 42% (58%) in 2011 (figures in brackets show the national comparison).
- 4.3 The LA school improvement team has provided high levels of additional support to The Connaught over recent years (English, mathematics, science, some non-core subjects, SEND, EAL students, generic teaching learning and assessment, middle and senior leadership); however the impact of this support has either been limited or has not been sustained.
- 4.4 The school experiences particular difficulties in recruiting staff and attributes this to a number of factors including: the historic reputation; the challenges presented by the contextual factors of the school, primarily high numbers of students from relatively impoverished backgrounds; the high level of scrutiny from LA and Ofsted due to the school's performance; the vulnerability of the school due to its performance, declining numbers and budgetary constraints; being in competition with schools able to pay the outer London weighting within two miles of The Connaught; and having insufficient flexibility in the budget to offer recruitment or retention incentives.
- 4.5 The overall effectiveness and performance of feeder primary schools has improved significantly since 2011. Of the ten primary schools in Aldershot three are currently judged by Ofsted to be outstanding and the remaining seven are judged to be good; no primary schools are requiring improvement or in an Ofsted category. These schools work in strong collaboration.

Attainment has been improving strongly over time: In 2011, 61% of pupils in Aldershot primary schools attained the national standard in reading, writing and mathematics; in 2012 and 2013 the Aldershot schools attained in line with the national figure; they attained above the national figure by 3% in 2014 and 2% in 2015. The performance of Rushmoor primary schools is an educational strength with 86% of pupils attaining the national standard in reading, writing and mathematics in 2015 compared to 80% nationally.

- 4.6 Rushmoor county councillors are supportive of the local schools and recognise the challenges facing The Connaught; however there is rightly a strong desire to improve provision and outcomes at the school and broad support for structural change to be considered.

5. Options Considered

5.1 Maintain the current position; make no change.

- This is no longer considered a viable option because the community could and should be better served by its local secondary school. There is insufficient evidence or confidence that the school has the capacity to secure the rapid and sustained performance required, nor to turn around its long-standing relatively weak reputation which is having a negative impact on student numbers, the budget and consequently the quality and breadth of educational provision.

5.2 Find a strong academy sponsor to improve outcomes at the school

- A viable option would be to find a strong academy sponsor to take over the running of the school. Academy sponsorship has been successful in some parts of the country with schools securing higher attainment because of the drive and expertise good sponsors can offer. In Hampshire, we currently have 6 sponsored academies. Their combined attainment fell in 2015 to 40% which is the Government's minimum National Floor Standard. They have not delivered a step change in performance in Hampshire to date.
- This option would offer a 're-branding' of the school which may be beneficial and lead to the school becoming the first choice for some catchment students who would otherwise go to either Surrey schools or other Hampshire schools. It would also potentially offer the school greater flexibility to recruit and retain staff of high calibre; however this would be dependent on decisions of the sponsor regarding budget, pay and conditions.

5.3 Merge The Connaught with The Wavell; this would be achieved by closing The Connaught and retaining The Wavell as an expanded secondary school but retaining The Connaught site, thus offering split site provision.

- This option would also be viable. The Wavell has a strong reputation in the community and has higher standards than the national average. The Wavell benefits from strong leadership and good quality provision. The higher standards of The Wavell would influence positively those of students who

traditionally would have attended The Connaught. It would increase internal capacity through a larger staff, a wider and more experienced leadership team and the potential for staff to work within a 'critical mass' of good practitioners. Students would be exposed to the better teaching, learning and assessment offered to those at The Wavell currently. It may reap the benefits of a wider curriculum offer. There would be the potential for economies of scale. It would assist the integration of the AUE community across Aldershot, through the split site arrangement.

- The option does mean that there would only be one secondary school serving Aldershot thus limiting parental choice.

5.4 Merge The Connaught School with the Federation of Newport Junior School and Belle Vue Infant School, to create a single all-through (age 4 to 16) school. This would be achieved by closing The Connaught School and Newport Junior School whilst retaining Belle Vue Infant School and expanding its age range to 4-16. The merger would operate across the three existing sites.

- This is also a viable option and would maximise the potential for continuity of culture and educational experience across the key stages, bringing with it a number of inherent advantages linked to high expectations and aspirations, already well-established within the two primary schools. Belle Vue Infant School and Newport Junior School have both secured significant improvement since the federation was formed and the appointment of the current headteacher in 2006. Both have been judged by Ofsted as good or better for over five years. The overall effectiveness of Belle Vue Infant School was judged by Ofsted to be outstanding in March 2016. Outcomes show an overall trend of performance which has been significantly above the national average over a sustained period of time. Consequently they are popular schools with a strong reputation in the locality.
- There is strong capacity across the current federation and there would be the potential for economies of scale. It would retain the possibility of wider collaboration within the family of all Aldershot schools moving forward. Leaders and governors of Belle Vue Infant School and Newport Junior School recognise the benefits of structural change, having experienced these through the federation, and acknowledge the need to strengthen secondary provision in Aldershot, in order to build on good outcomes in the primary phase. This increases the likelihood of the Belle Vue Infant and Newport Junior communities being open to consideration of a merger, recognising the potential benefits it would offer local children.

- All though schools are a relatively new addition to the national educational landscape. Hampshire County Council expanded Westgate School to create an all through school in Winchester in 2014 and this arrangement is working well. At Westgate the leadership team has been deliberately designed to secure both high quality primary and secondary expertise and it is envisaged the same approach would need to be taken with this option. Where all through schools have been created elsewhere in the country transition arrangements between primary and secondary years have been improved, with students benefiting from common approaches to teaching and learning, curriculum design and behaviour policies.
- This option does not offer routine sharing/dissemination of good practice with another strong secondary provider internally; this would need to be sourced externally through brokering further school to school support.

5.5 Having considered all the above options, the County Council believes that creating an all-through 4-16 school offers the best potential for success. The preferred option for consultation is therefore set out in paragraph 5.4 above and will form the focus of the consultation.

5.6 Alternate options or other proposals as to how the required improvement of The Connaught could be achieved are welcome and will be fully considered as part of the consultation process.

6. Consultation

6.1 Subject to approval to consult being obtained a draft timetable for consultation, decision making and implementation is set out in Appendix 1.

7. Personnel implications

7.1 Any structural solution to address underperformance and future viability of a school being taken forward inevitably leads to HR processes to support achievement of that solution.

7.2 The preferred model as well as the wider options would lead to a review of the staffing structure. This has the potential for staff reductions as the structure is matched to both budget and pupil need to ensure maximisation of both pupil outcomes and efficiency. The input of LA support services will be required to enable the new school to develop and implement a structure that is fit for purpose.

7.3 Whilst a standard HR process is in place to support the recommended structural solutions, it does require localisation and therefore sufficient time will be needed to ensure the nuances of this restructure are considered to

allow the exact processes to be followed. The exact procedure and the proposed restructure will require consultation with recognised trade unions.

- 7.4 Initial stages of this process up to and including development of a potential structure, may run concurrently with public consultation and Member decision where timescales require.

8. Admissions

- 8.1 Of the four options considered, the first two have no requirement for the County Council to reconsider its published admission arrangements. Option 3 (merger of The Wavell and The Connaught), if pursued, will need to follow the process outlined below in relation to option 4. There are a number of children from Surrey attending both The Wavell and The Connaught (8% at The Wavell and 3.1% at The Connaught). For options 3 and 4, consultation would need to take account of these families to ensure the intended variations to the admission arrangements are possible.
- 8.2 The admission arrangements for 2017/18 are already determined and published. The closing date for secondary applications for September 2017 is 31 October 2016 and 15 January 2017 for primary applications. Parents will have already made their applications to Belle Vue Infant, Newport Junior and The Connaught before any decision is made about the future of the schools. Places will therefore have to be administered for these schools according to the existing 2017/18 published arrangements and will continue to be until any agreed scenario is implemented. HCC can propose variations to the admission arrangements for 2017/18 (post implementation) where such changes are deemed necessary in view of a major change in circumstances. Such proposals must be notified to the appropriate bodies and then referred to the OSA for approval. The public consultation will need to include information about how the admission arrangements will look for 2017/18 (post implementation) and 2018/19.
- 8.3 The statutory timescale for consulting on changes to the 2018/19 admission arrangements is between 1 October 2016 and 31 January 2017. Consultation must run for a minimum of 6 weeks. Following consultation, the arrangements must then be determined by 28 February, although in Hampshire, this usually takes place in January (on EME decision day). Based on the proposed timeline, it would not be possible to consult on the new arrangements within the prescribed timescales. HCC would need to follow the same process of seeking approval from the OSA for a variation to the determined arrangements after the final decision. The difference in this case being that no children will have started making their applications for entry in September 2018.
- 8.4 It is proposed the school would have two main entry points for admission – Year R and Year 7. A PAN of 90 would apply at the primary phase of the school and a PAN of 80 (for new pupils) at the secondary phase. Year 6 pupils attending the lower school are expected to transfer to the upper school without the need to apply. Should they wish to attend a different school the admissions application process would need to be completed. The number of

places available at the upper school could increase above 80 if fewer children transfer from the lower school, so that a total of 170 places are allocated (The Connaught's current PAN).

9. Governance

- 9.1 Any proposed structural changes would require changes to the governance arrangements currently in place. The establishment of a single governing body to govern an all through 4 to 16 offer would require sufficient capacity, including appropriate skills and knowledge, to ensure robust and effective governance across multiple sites. The governing body of Belle Vue Infant and Newport Junior already has some experience of governing more than one school across a split site, but there would need to be sufficient capacity within the governance structure to ensure that statutory functions were met and to ensure robust accountability across multiple sites and phases through a single board.
- 9.2 Should proposals to discontinue either Belle Vue Infant or Newport Junior be adopted the requirements of The School Governance (Federations) (England) Regulations Part 8 take effect and the Local Authority would need to form a Temporary Governing Body to establish governance arrangements for changed provision in the area. This would present an opportunity to work with governors across the impacted schools to put in place a skill- based, robust governance board across the new provision.
- 9.3 Governors would need support and advice throughout the consultation and change process.

10. Recommendation(s)

- 10.1. That the Executive Member for Education approve statutory consultations being undertaken on the options set out in the report, with the proposal being the merger of The Connaught Secondary School, Newport Junior School and Belle Vue Infant School to form an all through age 4-16 school; this would be achieved by closing The Connaught and Newport Junior School and extending the age range of Belle Vue Infant School to 4-16, with the anticipated implementation being between January and September 2017.
- 10.2. That a report on the outcome of the consultation be prepared for a future decision day.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

Hampshire safer and more secure for all:	yes
Maximising well-being:	yes
Enhancing our quality of place:	yes
OR	

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equality Duty

1.1. Equalities have been considered and no adverse impacts identified.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

2.1. The recommendations will have no impact on crime and disorder.

3. Climate Change:

a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

No impacts have been identified.

b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?

No specific measures have been identified.