

Oaklands Park and Ratcliffe Schools, Dawlish: Joint Changes to Provision

Report of the Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

Please note that the following recommendation is subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

Recommendation: that approval is given to implement the proposal to merge Oaklands Park and Ratcliffe Schools to provide a single provision across both sites for pupils aged 3-19 years. The school will continue to provide 156 registered day places. Residential places will be merged and reduced to 35 weekly residential places from April 2018. The two schools will merge in August 2018, reopening as one Residential Special School in September 2018.

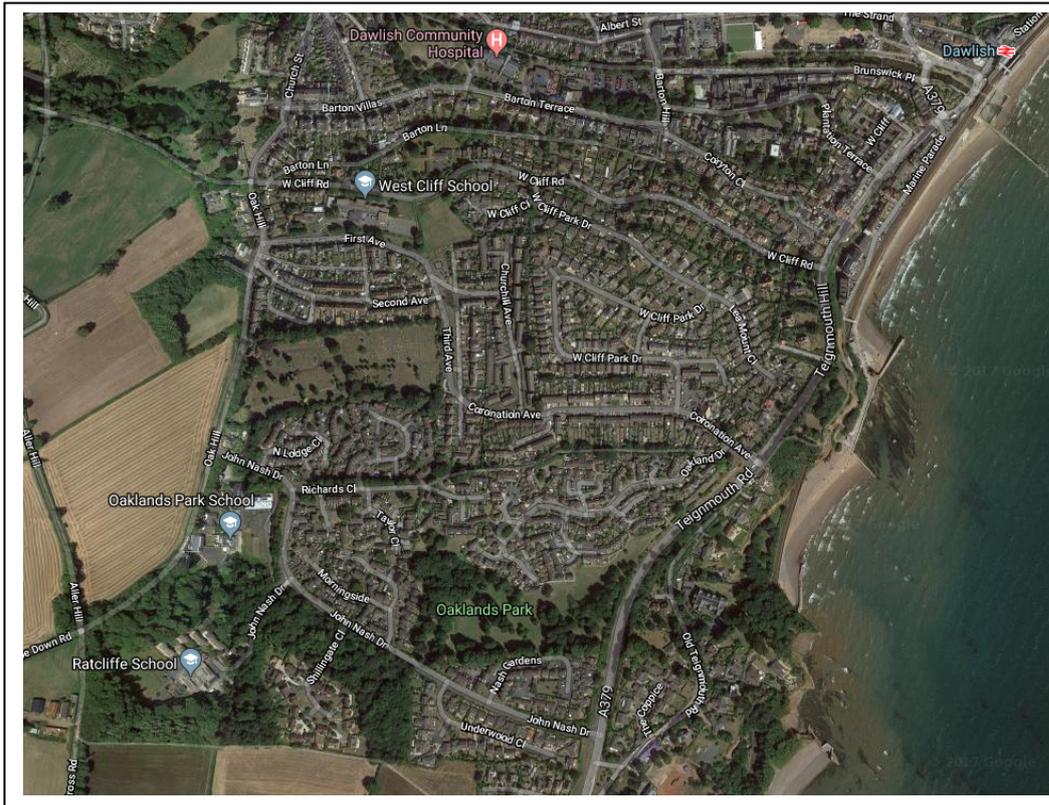
1. Summary

The Governing Body of Oaklands Park and Ratcliffe Schools (Foundation Special Schools within the Sentient Co-operative Trust) propose merging the two schools to ensure the ongoing high quality educational standards against changing patterns of provision and demand for children with additional needs and within a sustainable financial climate. The Governing Body has undertaken the necessary consultation and is seeking final approval to implement this change.

2. Background/Introduction

Oaklands Park and Ratcliffe Schools are situated on adjacent sites. The Dawlish Federation of Special Schools consisting of Oaklands Park and Ratcliffe Schools was formed in January 2016 and both Schools are part of the Sentient Co-operative Trust. The federated governing body contains foundation governors appointed by the Trust and a new Chair of Governors. New members have also recently been appointed to manage the proposed merger. The formation of the federation enabled the Schools to work more closely together and share resources and expertise. The Schools have gone through a number of changes over the past few years together with changes in governance and leadership. The current changes proposed reflect the changing patterns of provision being commissioned.

Oaklands Park School was inspected by Ofsted (education) in February 2016 and requires improvement. The residential provision of Oaklands Park School was inspected by Ofsted in June 2016 and required improvement. At the time of the inspection, the residential provision was in a period of a change following the closure of the Children's Home and the establishment of the residential special school provision. A follow up monitoring inspection visit (education) confirmed that senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified.



Ratcliffe School was inspected by Ofsted (education) in March 2015 and was Good. Good teaching features across the school and there are examples of outstanding practice in all key stages. Pupils make good progress from their starting points and achieve well. The residential provision of Ratcliffe School was inspected by Ofsted (Social Care) in November 2017 and required improvement. The report states that the school is not yet delivering good help and care but there are no serious or widespread failures that result in pupils' welfare not being safeguarded or promoted. The Schools are receiving considerable support from our Learning Development Partners (Babcock) through the process of this proposed merger and to raise the standards and further improve the quality of education and care.

3. Proposal

The current provision at the Schools is:

Oaklands Park School: 60 places including 17 residential places for boys and girls aged 3-19 with Severe Learning Difficulties, Complex Communication and Interaction Difficulties and Autistic Spectrum Conditions.

Ratcliffe School: 96 places including 40 residential places for boys and girls aged 5-16 with Communication and Interaction Difficulties and Social Development Needs.

At present, across both provisions, only 29 pupils are placed residentially of the 57 that are available.

The Governing Body of Oaklands Park and Ratcliffe Schools are proposing to merge the Schools to provide a single provision across both sites for pupils aged 3-19. The school will continue to provide 156 registered places but it is planned to increase the number to 190 in the future subject to further consultation.

The proposal is to reduce residential places to 35 weekly residential places for pupils aged 3-19 to reflect current and future demand for places. It is proposed to merge the residential

provision from April 2018 and the two schools will merge in August 2018 and reopen as one residential special school in September 2018. The Governing Body consider that working as one school and combining resources in terms of staffing, buildings, facilities, skills, experience and expertise will enable the merged School to deliver services more effectively and improve standards.

The proposal meets current need as the Schools have seen a gradual but continued reduction in the number of pupils being placed residentially at both schools and there is no expectation that there will be any significant increase in demand for residential placements at either school in the future. There has also been a significant change in the needs of pupils placed residentially, most requiring weekly placement rather than termly. Generally, there is a national shift away from the termly residential provision model with more emphasis being placed on the importance of a balance between a weekly residential model and access to family and local community at weekends. The Schools are also considering options for developing and accommodating independence training for day students and development of self-help skills.

The merged Schools will allow for an increase in day places over a period, a reduction in residential places to meet a reduction in demand and secure sustainability and financial viability for the future. The formation of the Dawlish Federation of Special Schools has provided an insight into what can be achieved through working together. The merger is a natural progression from this arrangement to meet the changes in commissioned income remaining static and increases in employment costs. The proposed merger will ensure consistency and common processes are in place to raise standards of education and care and good practice for the benefit of all pupils, parents, staff and stakeholders.

There is a high demand for special need places and this change in provision is in line with the emerging Strategic Review of Special Needs places being undertaken in the County, Devon's Local Offer and the Education Infrastructure Plan to ensure the most effective use of resources and future pattern of service delivery.

4. Consultations/Representations/Technical Data

The Governing Body consulted on the proposal from 1 November to 13 December 2017. There were 24 responses to the consultation to the Governing Body, which mainly concerned the rationale for informing all those concerned and how the change would affect pupils, parents and staff. The Governing Body responded to the concerns raised. In addition, a freedom of information request was received for documentation pertaining to meetings between the Dawlish Federation of Special Schools and DCC relating to the move away from termly to weekly boarding provision. A response identified that the Local Authority aim to support children in their local communities and their family homes and that the need for a residential placement for any children would not be done through strategy or policy meetings but on an individual case by case discussion about each young person.

Following consultation, in accordance with statutory requirements, a Brief Notice and Full Proposal were published on 3 January 2018 with a formal four-week representation period. Cabinet will be updated on any responses received at the meeting.

5. Financial Considerations

A strategic review of special needs places in the County is at present being undertaken and this proposal forms part of that review. Following completion of the review, which will be put before Cabinet in March 2018 a development plan for the schools will be commissioned. The changes proposed will not require any immediate capital commitment but will be part of a phased plan for the schools.

Increasing national pressure on funding means that resources need to continue to be targeted at the educational outcomes of pupils which is sustainable. Staffing costs total 80% of the Schools' costs and it has been necessary to redesign and restructure the Schools to ensure the best outcomes for pupils in a financially sustainable way. The redesigning of the Schools was a culmination of a long process of evaluation of the Schools financial position and their ability to provide effective outcomes for pupils with SEN in a weekly care setting. The structure was designed to meet the brief and vision for the Schools, importantly, strategically aligned to Devon's needs. A separate concurrent consultation with staff was undertaken on the proposed changes and staff feedback via trade unions was then considered and addressed throughout the process.

There will be a reduction in total of 15 posts (12.93 FTE) from 93.8 to 78.9 FTE and the areas of the Schools that are directly affected are support staff and the Care Teams which provide residential support, administration, catering, caretaking and cleaning. The redesign required the addition of three new instructor posts delivering field and outdoor activities for pupils. Teaching provision at the Schools is not affected. The estimated redundancy costs are in the region of £300,000 with pension strain costs in the region of £70,000. These costs will be met by an allocation from FIPS (Finance Intervention Panel Schools) and a loan to the merged Schools.

The transport implications for the merger may see an increase in cost where weekly residential pupils become daily pupils but, logistically, it is not anticipated that too much will change. At present it will not be possible to combine students on routes to serve the merged school as the drop off/pick up times will be the same for both sites. This is due to safety precautions at entry and exit at both sites requiring an approximate time of 30 minutes.

6. Environmental Impact Considerations

See impact on transport above.

7. Equality Considerations

Where relevant to the decision, the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Equality Duty requires decision makers to give due regard to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other prohibited conduct;
- advance equality by encouraging participation, removing disadvantage, taking account of disabilities and meeting people's needs; and
- foster good relations between people by tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

taking account of age, disability, race/ethnicity (includes Gypsies and Travellers), gender and gender identity, religion and belief, sexual orientation, pregnant women/ new and breastfeeding mothers, marriage/civil partnership status in coming to a decision, a decision maker may also consider other relevant factors such as caring responsibilities, rural isolation or socio-economic disadvantage.

An impact assessment has been prepared, a copy of which has been circulated to Cabinet Members and is available at <https://new.devon.gov.uk/impact/oaklands-and-ratcliffe-schools-merger/>

8. Legal Considerations

In accordance with Section 34 of the School Governance Federation Regulations 2012, the Governing Body is required to give notice of dissolution of the federation and this will be undertaken.

9. Risk Management Considerations

This proposal has been assessed and all necessary safeguards or action have been taken/included to safeguard the Council's position.

A whole system approach in assessing the proposal including the impact on Social Care has been undertaken. No further risks have been identified.

10. Public Health Impact

The proposals will take into account the requirements and health and wellbeing of its local community.

11. Discussion

The Governors of Oaklands and Ratcliffe Schools consider that the priority must be maintained on provision of high quality teaching, learning and pathways developing and accommodating independence training for day students and development of self-help skills. Resources need to continue to be targeted at the educational outcomes of the students alongside the wider enrichment programmes of the schools but this needs to be on a realistically sustainable basis. The changes are in accordance with current Devon County Council commissioning priorities, will provide more opportunities for day pupils, will reflect future requirements for residential provision and financial sustainability.

The merger is a progression from the federation arrangement due to change in demand for residential places, commissioned income remaining static and major increases in employment costs. The proposed merger will ensure consistency and common processes are in place for the benefit of all pupils, parents, staff and stakeholders. The changes proposed will allow the merged school to continue to sustain and further improve the quality across both the teaching and pastoral residential side without one negatively impacting on the other as well as the benefits of regular weekly access to family and community at weekends.

12. Options/Alternatives

The Schools have experienced significant changes in recent years with an increase in day places over a period, a change to residential places to meet changing needs and new admission students and parent/carers who express preference for a weekly placement rather than the current termly default offer. It is also the aim to support children in their local communities and their family homes. The Schools have been working together for some time under the federation arrangements to ensure consistency and common processes but the primary aim for all student referrals is educational. Children's needs are becoming more complex and as development continues throughout Devon the pressure for these places will increase and the change in provision will ensure that demand is met within this merged School.

13. Reason for Recommendation/Conclusion

The Governing Body consider that the merged Schools and changes to provision will provide future sustainability, meet demand for this specialist provision and meet their's and the LA's statutory duties to provide places and for pupils to be able to attend their local school.

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Head of Planning, Transportation and Environment

Electoral Divisions: Dawlish

Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools: Councillor James McInnes

Chief Officer for Communities, Public Health, Environment and Prosperity: Dr Virginia Pearson

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
1. Impact Assessment Joint Changes to Provision at Oaklands Park and Ratcliffe Schools, Dawlish, Devon	01.01.2018	https://new.devon.gov.uk/impact/oaklands-and-ratcliffe-schools-merger/

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