

# WIRRAL COUNCIL

## CABINET

12<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2015

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	REPORT ON OUTCOME OF CONSULTATION ON PROPOSAL TO AMALGAMATE PENSBY HIGH SCHOOL FOR BOYS AND PENSBY HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS
<b>WARD/S AFFECTED:</b>	All
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Director of Childrens Services
<b>RESPONSIBLE PORTFOLIO HOLDER:</b>	Councillor Tony Smith
<b>KEY DECISION?</b>	Yes

### 1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 This report advises the Cabinet of the outcomes of the consultation process which has taken place in regard to the amalgamation of Pensby High School for Boys and Pensby High School for Girls, as agreed at Cabinet on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014. This report describes the responses, and makes recommendations with regard to statutory proposals in this area.

### 2.0 BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

2.1 In May 2010, the two Pensby secondary schools entered into a hard Federation, enabling the two schools to work together more closely under a single governing body led by a single headteacher, building on the existing joint sixth form arrangements, helping to safeguard viable secondary education for both girls and boys in Pensby as rolls fall in forthcoming years.

2.2 In Autumn 2014, the governing body of the Pensby High Schools federation approached the Council to begin a formal consultation on the amalgamation of the two schools to form a single establishment.

2.3 On 6<sup>th</sup> November 2014, Cabinet approved a six week public consultation be held on the proposed amalgamation of Pensby High School for Boys and Pensby High School for Girls, through closure of Pensby High School for Boys, and changing the gender intake of Pensby High School for Girls to form a mixed sex secondary school in Pensby. This report gives the outcome of the consultation and makes a recommendation for the next stage of the statutory process.

### 3.0 The Consultation

3.1 In order for all stakeholders to have access to relevant background information and have the opportunity to comment and respond, the following methods of consultation have been employed :

- a) A range of documentation has been produced and distributed (See Appendix 1) This comprised:
- (i) The consultation leaflet was sent to parents of pupils at Pensby High School for Boys and Pensby High School for Girls; to staff and governors at both schools; to the Central libraries, local libraries, and relevant community centres, one stop shops and children's centres.
  - (ii) Local primary schools from which children would be likely to attend either school were provided with consultation leaflets and a poster, and asked to advertise the consultation in their internal newsletters.
  - (iii) all other statutory consultees, including the Diocesan bodies, trade union representatives, and neighbouring authorities, were notified by e-mail
- b) The consultation was advertised on the Council's consultation website, and via in an advert in the Wirral Globe. The website provided access to all the information produced in paper form and allowed e-mail responses to a dedicated e-mail address.
- c) A meeting was arranged for all interested stakeholders, which was hosted at Pensby High School for Girls on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2015. The meeting began with a short presentation on the overall position and the reasons for the consultation, followed by around ninety minutes of time for audience comments, feedback and questions. The meetings were attended by parents, carers, staff and governors. The meeting was chaired by the Director of Children's Services. The date for the meeting was in the parents' leaflets and on the specific web-site, in the posters provided to other schools and community centres etc., and in the general notice which was published in the local press.
- d) Opportunities have been provided for other means of response. Submissions have been received in paper and e-mail formats – all of which will be made available before and at the Cabinet meeting, in addition to the summaries contained in this report.

3.2 The consultation process and the presentation of Council and school data to this wider audience does appear to have persuaded most people of the need to reduce the number of school places in Pensby, although understandably some respondents have expressed concerns about the impact of the change to a mixed sex school.

3.3 In addition to the detail set out below, a summary of views put forward during the consultation period are attached as Appendix 2, bringing the responses from the meeting together with any points raised in written or e-mail submissions to the Council.

#### 4.0 **Outcome of the Consultation**

4.1 There were several key themes in the combined responses from consultees:

- Falling rolls
- Educational standards and quality of provision
- Concern for the building and site
- Disruption to education
- Financial

- Choice of single sex education
- The consultation

## 4.2 Responses to the consultation

The next section of the report contains a summary of comments on the proposal in relation to each school. Numbers on roll are from the January 2015 School Census unless specified otherwise.

47 written responses to the consultation were received. The consultation meeting was attended by 26 people (23 parents, 3 others), 7 of whom also responded in writing to the consultation.

Responses	Total	Parent	Staff	Governor	Others
Pensby Boys	17	15			
Pensby Girls	13	13			
Both schools	12	4	6	2	0
Other	5	1	0	0	4

40 of the 47 respondents were in favour of the amalgamation, although some minor concerns were expressed (see below). The seven respondents who were against the amalgamation identified themselves as parents of children attending the current Girls school, comprising 54% of the respondents with a sole connection to this school.

Respondents with a direct connection either to Pensby High School for Boys, or to both schools, were universally in favour of the amalgamation, albeit with some minor concerns in some cases.

Generally, respondents indicated that they understood the falling rolls situation, and articulated their respect for school staff in their skills and relationships with pupils and parents.

Respondents supporting the amalgamation expressed views in relation to improving and enhancing existing good practice and quality of provision, sharing excellence with all pupils across both schools, broadening the curriculum and providing choice for pupils, a greater degree of academic challenge and also work appropriate to pupils needs available within a larger year group, as well as highlighting the importance of maintaining a secondary school in the Pensby area.

### 4.1 Commentary on these responses

#### 4.2 Falling rolls

At the recent peak in 1999, there were 836 boys and 844 girls attending, 1680 in total (including sixth form). In January 2015, following a long term falling roll, there are now 380 boys and 510 girls, totalling 890 pupils. The combined capacity of the two schools is 1,750 places. The school is currently 51% occupied.

Over the same time period, the number of pupils attending Hilbre High School and Woodchurch High School (mixed sex schools) in West Wirral has increased, going against the Wirral-wide trend for falling secondary pupil numbers. Projections indicate that the total roll at Pensby should rise from 2016 onwards, in line with an increasing number of pupils moving through from primary schools, to approximately 923 total pupils in 8 years time, however this is still far below the capacity of the two schools in the current state.

Some respondents asked if the rising roll moving through from primary schools had been considered. The Wirral roll will not rise to the extent projected in some other parts of the country.

	2005	2015	2023 (projected)
Total pupils (boys and girls)	1610	890	923
Total places	1750	1750	1750
% occupancy	92%	51%	53%

Table shows number of boys and girls at the Pensby secondary schools ten years ago, now and in 8 years time. Total places includes Sixth Form (250 places). Projections to 2019 are based on current pupils moving through the school, the staying on rate for Sixth Form, and a three year average of parental preference for Year 7, adjusted for the rising roll.

One respondent asked if the Council could reduce the number of places offered at grammar schools so that more pupils would go to non-selective schools. The admission number of a secondary school is set according to the Net Capacity of the building, within a band with a minimum and maximum range. All grammar schools on Wirral are now Academy schools, and whilst the governing body may choose to set their admission number at a lower or higher point within the Net Capacity band, it is not within the remit Council to do so. There is a presumption that popular and successful schools can expand, and it is unlikely that reducing the admission number (except for accommodation related reasons) would be supported by the Schools Adjudicator.

The impact of parental choice for Neston High School in Cheshire was also raised as a reason why the roll may have fallen. The impact of non-Wirral schools such as Neston High School, is a factor in parental choice, mainly in the Heswall area, however this remains relatively constant from year to year.

No pupils should be displaced by the proposal, although a small number of parents may wish to consider places at other schools should the proposal be approved.

#### 4.3 Educational standards and quality of provision

Respondents from both schools valued and praised the excellent work carried out by staff. The following paragraphs set out the position at the two schools.

##### 4.3.1 Ofsted

Ofsted last inspected Pensby High School for Girls in October 2013, where it was found to be a good school overall, with various areas identified for improvement, including the sixth form provision and certain elements of lesson planning.

Ofsted last inspected Pensby High School for Boys in October 2014, where it was found to require improvement. The Ofsted report also recognised that the school was improving in terms of its vision for standards and attendance.

The Ofsted inspection reports for both schools and the most recent monitoring letter for the Boys school is available online at [reports.ofsted.gov.uk](http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk)

##### 4.3.2 The future and continuity of school staff was raised. The Federation governing body is already planning to reduce staffing across the two schools in line with the budget, for example by allowing fixed term contracts to lapse, and this will take place whether or not the amalgamation is approved.

- 4.3.3 There is a presumption in the decision maker's guidance that proposals involving the closure of schools causing concern should be approved, provided there are suitable accessible places for the displaced children. There is also a presumption that proposals which expand provision in popular and successful schools should be approved.
- 4.3.4 The intention of the amalgamation is to take the best practice from the two predecessor schools and to build on it to improve standards and raise ambition and aspiration. This is supported by the views of the majority of respondents to the consultation. The amalgamation of the two schools also provides that both boys and girls living in the local area will have a local school for the future.
- 4.3.5 Some parents were concerned that about the impact of larger classes following the amalgamation.

The average size of a class in both the Boys and Girls schools (excluding sixth form pupils) in 2013, without any merging of boys and girls within classes, was 22 pupils. However, some classes now have as few as 12 pupils.

In order to be viable, classes generally require 25 to 30 pupils. The school has continued with the existing single sex classes in Key Stage 3 to date, but it is not sustainable in the long term. Improved task planning for more able students was identified by Ofsted in their reports on both Pensby High School for Girls and Pensby High School for Boys as an area for improvement. As a combined school, although class sizes in some subjects are likely to increase, there is also greater scope for differentiating by ability in core subjects such as English and Maths, which is not currently possible in the existing small single sex classes, where pupils of all abilities must, by necessity, be educated in the same class.

The Principal indicates that classes that are currently around 12 pupils might increase to 18 pupils, whilst those of around 22 pupils might increase to 28 or 30 pupils.

#### 4.4 **Concern for the building and site**

The governing body indicate that they intend to relocate all classes currently situated in the Boys building, into the Girls building, from September 2015, with the exception of the music and drama facilities which will remain in the Boys building. The school will also retain the joint Sports Hall and the entire playing field. There are no plans to release any part of the site.

One respondent was concerned that the mixed school would lose specialist Sports College status, however the additional funding attached to the Specialist Schools programme came to an end in 2010. Another was concerned that the science laboratories in the Girls building were smaller than in the Boys school and this would impact on learning. The average size of the laboratories in the Girls building is 83m<sup>2</sup>, slightly above the average size of Boys laboratories at 80m<sup>2</sup>, which is unlikely to make a significant educational difference.

#### 4.5 **Disruption to education**

Some parents were concerned about the impact of mixed sex teaching on children and young people, in particular for those who would be entering Y11 in September 2015.

The school has already merged most curriculum option groups in Years 10 and 11. In those subjects that are not already merged, amalgamation will allow more differentiation (setting or streaming) by ability, and will allow the school to offer a wider range of curriculum options.

The move to mixed sex teaching for Y11 would be managed by careful transition planning, for example pupils could begin the new timetable for the last few weeks of Y10, with team building exercises and keeping friendship groups together so that pupils are already familiar with each other at the start of Y11.

A few parents were concerned that teaching boys and girls together would be disruptive, specifically to girls education, due to concerns about poor behaviour by boys. All schools have a behaviour policy setting out the principles of expected pupil behaviour, inside and out the classroom. The majority of pupils in Wirral attend a mixed sex school, and Wirral teaching staff are used to managing pupil behaviour, including encouraging positive behaviour and dealing with incidents in an appropriate manner.

#### **4.6 Financial**

Some respondents requested clarification on the financial position of the schools, and asked why this had become an issue. It was asked if the amalgamation would save money for the Council.

The principle way in which schools are funded is on the number of pupils on roll. Salaries and associated staff costs make up the largest proportion of the overall budget of any school. As the number of pupils on roll falls, the budget falls accordingly and the governing body of the schools need to make difficult decisions in order to balance the budget and it becomes increasingly difficult to provide a broad and balanced curriculum with appropriate staffing. The Federation was established in 2010 in order to assist with the financial issue by allowing staff to be employed across the two federated schools under a single structure, and Pensby High Schools Federation has set a balanced budget for 2014/15, however this has only been possible by the use of reserves totalling £350,000.

By the end of 2016-2017 there may be a deficit in excess of £1.5 million in total. This is the result of a number of factors – falling rolls, a small sixth form with reduced funding levels from previous years, flat budgets with no inflationary increases, and high staff costs.

The proposed amalgamation would not by itself directly resolve the Federation's financial issues, however as a single school with a single budget, there is far more opportunity for the governing body to reduce duplication and create efficiencies in many areas, and to put into place the appropriate number of staff to operate the new merged teaching timetable.

The school also intends to occupy the Girls building and a small part only of the Boys building, which will reduce the overall costs to the school budget for cleaning, caretaking, heating and lighting etc.

Closing or amalgamating schools does not result in any saving to the Council (see 10.5 below).

#### **Cost of uniforms**

Some parents were concerned that with a new name, the mixed sex school would require new uniforms to be purchased.

The governing body indicate that they would expect the Student Council to be involved in choosing the new uniform, which will be kept as simple as possible. In the short term following amalgamation, it may be possible for the school to provide all parents with a new badge to apply to existing uniform garments.

#### **4.7 Choice of single sex education**

Some parent responders had specifically chosen single sex education, whilst others had chosen the Pensby schools because they were local to home, or for various other personal reasons.

It should be borne in mind that if there were sufficient local parents requesting single sex education, the two schools would be viable. Some respondents thought the school should advertise to recruit more pupils. The Principal's view is that the expense of advertising reduces funding to spend directly on pupil's education.

One respondent said that children achieve better in single sex schools, however there is little evidence that single-sex education is a significant advantage to either girls' or boys' academic achievement compared with co-educational schools. Other factors, including quality of teaching and learning, prior attainment, student engagement, social background and family support, are probably more important in how young people achieve at secondary school.

Should the proposal be approved, whilst there would no longer be a single sex non-selective school in the West Wirral area, there remain single sex non-selective schools in the Wallasey (boys and girls) and Birkenhead (girls only) areas which parents may wish to consider.

#### **4.8 The Consultation**

Some respondents thought that the consultation could have been more widely advertised, and that the decision had already been made.

The Council's consultation process meets the requirements set out by guidance and is given in more detail in section 3. The statutory process requires that if the decision is to proceed to the next stage, there is then a further four week representation period for further comments to be made on the proposals (see 7.1 below)

#### **4.9 Other factors to be considered by decision makers**

The Department for Education provides guidance for decision makers on changes to school organisation. Guidance points not already covered elsewhere in this report include:

- Admission arrangements

The admission policy of the mixed sex school will follow the Wirral policy for community secondary schools, and will comply with the Admissions Code, the Wirral Co-ordinated Scheme and all associated guidance. The admission number of the school would be reduced from 300 (both schools together), to 150 initially.

- National Curriculum

As a community school, the mixed sex school will follow the National Curriculum

- Equal opportunity

Amalgamating the two schools provides equal opportunity of access for boys in the local area to a local school, which would not be the case if the Boys school were to close without an associated change of intake for the Girls school, or vice versa.

- Community cohesion and services

All community use, for example of the sports facilities, will be maintained in the amalgamated school. The school will also investigate whether enhanced

community access can be offered to the portion of the Boys building that is no longer in use by the school.

- Travel and accessibility

All pupils currently on roll at both schools will transfer automatically to the mixed school as at 1<sup>st</sup> September. Whilst some parents may wish to transfer to an alternative school, the impact on home to school travel is expected to be minimal.

- Capital – see 10.0 below.
- Rural schools – The Pensby schools are not defined as rural schools. This guidance point does not apply.
- Early Years and Nursery schools – There is no Early Years provision that would be affected. These guidance points do not apply.
- Balance of denominational provision – The mixed school will remain a community school if the proposal is approved.

## **5.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 5.1 Should the two schools remain separate within the Federation, both will be subject to a budget in line with the number of pupils on roll, which is significantly below the budget for previous years. This is likely to have an impact on teaching and standards, and may result in the closure of one or both schools.

## **6.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 6.1 None.

## **7.0 CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 Consultation has taken place in accordance with statutory guidance (see section 3.1).
- 7.2 If the decision is to proceed to the next stage where statutory notices are published, the statutory notice would be followed by a four week representation period in which there is a further opportunity for consultees to respond prior to any final decision being made. The outcome of the representation period would be reported to Cabinet, who are the decision maker.

## **8.0 OUTSTANDING PREVIOUSLY APPROVED ACTIONS**

- 8.1 None.

## **9.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR VOLUNTARY, COMMUNITY AND FAITH GROUPS**

- 9.1 None.

## **10.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: FINANCIAL; IT; STAFFING; AND ASSETS**

- 10.1 The Council's bid to the Education Funding Agency for capital funding to refurbish the Pensby High School site was recently rejected. If this proposal is approved following the statutory processes, there is likely to be a requirement for the allocation of local capital in order to facilitate the transition to a single school,



including renewed signage and other small capital projects. However, the proposal to amalgamate the two schools does not rely on the availability of capital in order to proceed.

- 10.2 The redistribution of funding released by school reorganisation goes towards raising aspirations and narrowing the attainment gap for vulnerable groups.
- 10.3 Any capital works will be subject to the appropriate relevant national and local planning legislation.
- 10.4 An amalgamated school is likely to require a new staffing structure for the existing staff. There is therefore potential for future school redundancy costs.
- 10.5 There are no savings for the Council from the change proposed for consultation. Amalgamation would eventually return the closed school Lump Sum of £100,000 into the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for re-distribution to all schools through the budget formula (2014-2015 figures). Under the new School Funding Guidance for 2015-16, an amalgamating school is entitled to receive 85% of the two Lump Sums in the first year (£170,000 total lump sum). The document now makes provision for this to be extended to 2 years if the LA applies for this exceptional factor.

## **11.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 The consultation complies with all statutory guidance.

## **12.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 Has the potential impact of your proposal(s) been reviewed with regard to equality?

(a) Yes and impact review can be found via the following link:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/community-and-living/equality-diversity-cohesion/equality-impact-assessments/eias-april-2014/eias-families-wellbeing>

## **13.0 CARBON REDUCTION AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 13.1 None.

## **14.0 PLANNING AND COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

- 14.1 None.

## **15.0 RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 15.1 That statutory proposals be published in respect of the following linked proposals:
  - 1) The closure of Pensby High School for Boys from 31<sup>st</sup> August 2015
  - 2) A prescribed alteration to the gender intake of Pensby High School for Girls from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015.
  - 3) That the Director of Children's Services be authorised to take all necessary steps to publish these proposals and ensure the prescribed procedures are followed in furtherance of the proposals.

## 16.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

16.1 No one closes schools lightly. Officers are required to offer clear advice as to appropriate action in order to spend public money wisely and ensure all Wirral's children benefit equitably from the funding available. The recommendations will ensure best value for the future generations of children in this area of Wirral, and more equitable spending for the benefit of all Wirral's pupils, from the savings made.

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## APPENDICES

*Appendix 1 – Consultation leaflet*

*Appendix 2 – Summary of responses to consultation*

## BACKGROUND PAPERS/REFERENCE MATERIAL

*School Organisation – Maintained Schools – Guidance for Decision Makers*  
*Ofsted inspection reports on Pensby High School for Boys and Pensby High School for Girls*

## BRIEFING NOTES HISTORY

Briefing Note	Date

## SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Cabinet	6 <sup>th</sup> November 2014