

By: Director - Operations

To: School Organisation Advisory Board – 7 September 2006

Subject MOREHALL (COMMUNITY) PRIMARY SCHOOL AND HARCOURT (FOUNDATION) PRIMARY SCHOOL, FOLKESTONE: PROPOSED AMALGAMATION - OUTCOME OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION.

Classification: Unrestricted

File Ref:

Summary: This report sets out the results of the public consultation. It seeks the views of the School Organisation Advisory Board on the issuing of a public notice for the proposed amalgamation of Morehall (Community) Primary School and Harcourt (Foundation) Primary School by the closure of both schools and for the establishment of a new Community Primary School on the Morehall School site.

Introduction

1. (1) The School Organisation Advisory Board at its meeting on 18 May 2006 supported the undertaking of a public consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Morehall (Community) Primary School and Harcourt (Foundation) Primary School into a new Community Primary school on the Morehall School site.

(2) Morehall Primary School has 336 children on roll (January 2006) against a net capacity of 406. The significant majority of the children live within one-mile radius of the school. The school serves a mixed community in socio-economic terms.

(3) Harcourt Primary School has 170 children on roll against a net capacity of 210. Harcourt School is located in an area which is ranked in the most deprived 41-50% nationally. This area needs access to a Children's Centre by 2008. Part or all of the Harcourt school site could be retained for this. The District Consortium has proposed a possible alternative location for this Children's Centre (The Gurkha Community Centre). Feasibility studies are being carried out on both locations.

(4) The two schools are located about half a mile apart, and between them offer 616 places. They have 506 pupils on roll. The natural catchment areas of the two schools overlap considerably, with Morehall School in particular attracting pupils from the immediate vicinity of Harcourt School. A map is attached in Appendix 1 which shows the location of the schools and the pupil distribution. The combined roll of the schools in 2008/09 is expected to be about 400 and could be accommodated in Morehall School's buildings.

Background

2. (1) In Shepway District there are 35 Primary schools with a combined capacity of 8,990 places. The District's only remaining pair of infant and junior schools (in Hythe) amalgamated with effect from 1 September 2006. There are 8082 pupils on roll (January 2006) attending Shepway schools giving a surplus capacity of 10.1%. By 2010 it is estimated that the surplus will have risen to 12.4%.

(2) Folkestone is home to Shorncliffe Barracks which is currently the UK base for two Gurkha Regiments. This has produced some uncertainty regarding pupil rolls. One Regiment was posted in Brunei until this summer, the other in Shorncliffe. These Regiments were swapping postings, a process which was due to occur through the summer. Information provided by the Regiment regarding troop movements show that the return of 2RGR will bring 229 children aged 0-16 years into Kent. Of these 151 have been allocated housing in Folkestone or Dover. The remainder have not been housed yet, as barrack accommodation is full. These children and their families will be housed within 20 miles of Folkestone and Dover. Of the 89 children being housed in Shorncliffe Barracks 41 are of primary school age. It was expected that 95 pupils would leave Folkestone but for operational reasons there has been a delay in families leaving for Brunei. In addition, as of 1 April 2006 Gurkha servicemen's rights changed. Servicemen are now able to be accompanied by their families throughout their overseas tours. The Regiment suggests there will be about 500 pupils in total moving to Kent as a consequence of the Regiment swapping postings and this change to legislation. Barracks in Shorncliffe will fill first, then Dover, then Canterbury. We are working with the Regiment to manage this pupil movement, but the process of housing and relocating families is, understandably, subject to constant change. The proposals in this paper have been developed in the knowledge that it may be necessary to cease implementation.

(3) As part of the Kent Primary Strategy, Recommendation 27 states that "wherever surplus primary capacity is projected to rise above 7% in any cluster area, proposals should be brought forward to reduce it to 5%. The retention of a 5% surplus in any area (rather than zero) is considered to be 'good practice' to assist parental preferences being met, and to build in a contingency to deal with any unforeseen short-term increase in pupil numbers (for example a regiment moving). The DfES require all authorities to report annually on all schools with an excess of 25% surplus capacity (and more than 30 pupils), giving justifications why such schools are not being closed or having their net capacity reduced.

The Proposal

3. (1) To amalgamate Morehall (Community) Primary School and Harcourt (Foundation) Primary School to form a new Community Primary School. The amalgamation, if approved, would be effected by the closure of both schools and the establishment of a Community Primary School on the Morehall School site.

(2) The new school would admit two forms of entry, giving it an admission number of 60 and a capacity of 420. The proposal would take effect from either September 2007 or September 2008.

Public Consultation Process

4. (1) A consultation document, a copy of which is attached as Appendix 2, was circulated according to the County Procedures for Review. This included Local Members, District Council, Parish Councils, local libraries, schools within the two Shepway Clusters, Member of Parliament and other interested parties.

(2) Approximately 1,500 copies of the document were circulated.

(3) The document included a separate form on which respondents could express their views.

(4) A public meeting was held at Morehall Primary School on 12 June 2006. The meeting was chaired by Mrs Valerie Dagger, Chairman of School Organisation Advisory Board. Mr John Simmonds (Cabinet Member for Education & School Improvement), Mr Roland Tolputt (KCC Member for Folkestone South), Dr Ian Craig (Director of Operations), Mr David Adams (Area Education Officer), Mrs Val Walton (Local Education Officer) and Mrs Kendra Stanley-Berridge (Education Support Officer) were in attendance.

(5) There were 148 members of the public in attendance.

Responses to the Public Consultation

Written Responses

5. (1) In total 957 responses were received. This included a Petition from the Harcourt 'Save Our School' Action Group which contained 668 signatures. 3 were in favour of the proposal and 954 were against.

(2) A summary of written responses is attached as Appendix 3. Responses to the main points are included in the Area Education Officer's Comments in Section 12.

Public Meeting Responses

(2) A summary of comments, views and responses is attached as Appendix 4.

Views of the Local Member

6. (1) Mr R Bliss, Local Member for Folkestone West, is recovering from major surgery. He has delegated his ward responsibility for this proposal to Mr R Tolputt.

(2) Mr R Tolputt, Local Member for Folkestone South is opposed to the proposal and made the following comments (taken from letter dated 4 July 2006):

"I remain opposed to the closure of Harcourt Primary School. KCC is supposed to be taking into account the local community standing of any school under threat. Harcourt is the only community facility in that area of Cheriton, and was built to serve the Biggins Wood estate and other new housing nearby in the late 1950's.

The condition of school buildings must be considered, and any requirement for any considerable capital expenditure taken into account. Harcourt has a lovely site, whereas Morehall is about 100 years old, and was and looks like a former Boys Secondary School. Considerable expenditure will be needed, and surely the allocation of £92k must be a pipe dream! Many teachers who have helped out at Morehall during recent problems over standards cannot understand why Morehall is not to be offered for sale, or scheduled for major rebuilding.

There still do not appear to be any specific proposals for a Children's Centre in West Folkestone. Certainly the Harcourt site could not be sustained on a budget of £200k. KCC's proposals on this issue need to be firmed up swiftly – surplus accommodation at Morehall if a one form entry was accepted, would be the obvious solution.

If Harcourt is closed, and Morehall has a two form entry for about 408 pupils, then considerable capital expenditure will be required including the siting of Mobiles – surely a retrograde step after all the finance and time spent getting mobiles replaced over Kent. Surely this factor contravenes the Primary Strategy.

Whilst I agree that good schools should be preserved, the parents of Cheriton cannot accept that All Souls is allowed to retain a PAN of 36 (not 30), and is at present 18 over capacity on probably the worst site in Folkestone with no playing fields whatever. KCC's proposals will cause resentment against Church schools seen to be given preference. Surely All Souls' PAN should be cut back to 28/30 in accordance with the agreed strategy?

Standards are rapidly rising at Harcourt under the new Headteacher, and doubtless numbers for September would be higher if the school were not under threat. In Harcourt year 6 pupils, 25% passed the PESE test this year. Whilst I accept that the children of Gurkhas due to arrive at Shorncliff may not all live locally, surely it is reasonable to assume that some will naturally wish to live near their compatriots.

If it is decided that Harcourt should stay open, and Morehall should run on a one form entry, then if in addition after the siting of a Children's Centre at Morehall, there proves to be surplus space, then provided pupil security is satisfied, surely the space could be let out on a commercial basis, in view of the proximity of the proposed Folkestone Parkway station.

My own view is that these proposals are designed to realise capital receipts from an attractive school site, without the reversions which would be the consequence of the sale of a Church School (All Souls).

The quality of teaching in appropriate surroundings is far more important for our children. I propose that each school should have a one form entry, with the Children's Centre at Morehall.”

Views of the Local Member of Parliament

7. Mr Michael Howard, MP for Folkestone, is opposed to the proposal and gave the following reasons (taken from letter dated 5 July 2006);

“... Harcourt Primary School is the focal point of the community it serves. It occupies purpose built accommodation considerably superior to the accommodation which would be available to the children if they were to attend Morehall School. This is a particularly surprising feature of this proposal given the emphasis placed by the Education Authority on the need for high quality buildings.

Harcourt Primary School has been through a difficult time, academically, but it has greatly improved under the leadership of its current headteacher. Indeed the number of children applying to go to the school in September 2006 has been most encouraging, notwithstanding the threat of closure.

Here, too, there is an abundance of evidence that the school is highly valued, by pupils, parents and prospective parents.

There are a number of uncertainties about the future school age population of Folkestone. Apparently, these uncertainties are to be recognised by the Authority, in the event that it pursues its proposals, by staging their implementation so that Harcourt Primary School would not close until the summer of 2008. To subject the school to this prolonged period of uncertainty would be very unfair to all concerned. The solution is not to close the school earlier, but to keep it open indefinitely.

If it turns out that there is a surplus of primary school places in the area of Folkestone under discussion there are other options available. It is a matter of great regret that these options were not made available for consultation. One possibility might be to introduce one-form entry to Morehall Primary School using the accommodation thus freed for a children's centre which is much needed. This is in line with the Audit Commission's guidance on the management of school places, and ensures that school accommodation remains available for any future expansion in demand.

In summary, I believe that this proposal is misconceived and should not be implemented. I shall certainly do all in my power to challenge it at every opportunity...”

Views of the Governing Bodies

Morehall Primary School

8. (1) The governing body of Morehall Primary School is not in favour of the proposal and made the following comments (taken from email dated 30 July 2006):

- (a) Traffic – Concerned that the proposal will increase traffic and make surrounding roads even more congested.

- (b) Education Standards – Concerned that progress to date (recognised by Ofsted to the extent that no further monitoring visits are required) will be disrupted. We have demonstrated the capacity to improve and expect to be out of category in February 2007.
- (c) Staff – Our new headteacher enjoys the 100% support of the school community. We risk losing him before the new school is able to appoint. Equally the uncertainty for all staff will slow progress.
- (d) Projected Figures – Morehall expanded due to a shortage in pupil places and this has caused pain as we have adapted and re-organised. The school was a successful 1FE school. Are you sure forecast figures are right? The Gurkha Regiment creates uncertainty in pupil numbers.
- (e) Conclusion – If Morehall was left for 3 years, the school would naturally become one form of entry. The governing body would not be happy about having a children's centre on the Morehall site because this could present a security risk to pupils, unless proper controls were in place.

The governing body would have no objection to having some of Morehall's classes "decommissioned", or the SEAC block demolished. This would get rid of a number of spare places. We may be prepared to reduce the PAN further.

Since the "merger" was announced Morehall has taken a battering from all sides. People who should be representing both schools seem to have been promoting Harcourt at the expense of Morehall. The Morehall site has a lovely playing field. The huts on-site belong to Pent Valley Technology College and they are not part of our grounds. Our children do not have to go to the local recreation ground for PE. Our buildings are lovely and they have all been adapted to suit primary age children – we have been a primary school for the last 30 years. A school has been on site since 1908.

Morehall is in category, but so is Harcourt. We do not want to merge with Harcourt any more than they want to merge with us. Although the two schools are geographically quite close together it seems that we don't have a lot in common except for the fact that we all want the best for our pupils. Whilst we agree that this is a good common base to start from, we are concerned that it is going to take a while for the bad feeling that has been created by this process, between our two sets of parents, to be forgotten and this atmosphere will not be conducive to providing a settled environment for the children to learn in".

Harcourt Primary School

(2) The governing body of Harcourt Primary School is not in favour of the proposal and made the following comments (taken from letter dated 12 July 2006);

“...The Governing Body of Harcourt Primary School is emphatically opposed to the proposal to amalgamate Harcourt Primary School with Morehall Primary School as there is a perfectly viable alternative which would provide the required reduction in surplus places. There are also a number of significant disadvantages associated with the proposal.

The alternative is:

- Morehall to be reduced to a 1FE school and the space created used for the proposed Children's Centre and an on-site nursery.
- All Souls Primary School to confirm to the Primary Strategy regarding admission numbers.

The disadvantages of the proposal are:

- Both schools are at the heart of two very different communities, both economically and socially as demonstrated by the level of Free School Meal provision.
- Removal of the only 1FE non-denominational school within the area reduces parental choice and affects the education of children who require a small school environment to provide support and confidence.
- Traffic, transport and child safety around the Morehall site.
- Closure of a purpose built, rapidly improving and well respected community school.
- Standards at Harcourt are improving significantly.
- The school roll at Harcourt has been rising steadily since January, only slowed by this proposal.
- Harcourt is an "ideal school site" – purpose built, well maintained with superb grounds.
- Nepalese children form almost 25% of the pupils. Within the Nepali community, Harcourt is well respected as a provider of multicultural opportunities.
- Harcourt has a healthy budget forecast.

We therefore feel that this proposal is not in the best interest of the children or the local community."

Views of the Cluster Board

9. (1) Proposals to reduce surplus capacity in the Cluster have been developed in discussion with the headteachers of the schools involved, and all headteachers in the Cluster. The Cluster accepted the logic of closing Selsted CEP School, and considered a variety of options to remove 200 places in Folkestone. The Cluster did not feel able to determine which of these should be pursued.

(2) The Cluster felt that the Harcourt site was very valuable to education as it offers space which many schools do not enjoy. They would prefer the site to be retained for cluster use, (such as an alternative curriculum centre), a Children's Centre or for relocation of another school in due course. Also, with the neighbouring barracks the cluster felt the site offered a safety value for future needs.

(3) The Cluster is committed to ensuring the pupils and staff of schools affected receive high quality support through the transition to minimise the negative impact of the proposals.

Views of Shepway District Council

10. Shepway District Council has been consulted on the proposal and rejects the idea, giving the following reasons (taken from letter dated 12 July 2006);

“...That this Council rejects the idea of Harcourt (Foundation) Primary School merging with Morehall (Community) Primary School and recognises the valuable contribution both schools make to local communities and the education of children within those communities and asks Kent County Council to look at the alternative of Morehall (Community) Primary School becoming a one-form entry school.

In support of this decision, the Council submits that the schools, whilst only half a mile apart as the crow flies, are situated within two separate communities and, in this respect, both schools make a very valuable contribution to their local communities. Merger of the schools therefore would significantly affect not only the lives of schoolchildren but also the wider communities in these areas.

A walk to school for many of the children who would currently attend Harcourt School would be difficult if they were faced with a walk to Morehall School. There are many individual children with conditions such as asthma, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, partially sighted, etc for whom the longer walk to school could be a burden.

The Council wishes to draw the County Council’s attention to the siting of the two schools. Harcourt School is considered to be a very safe school with an entrance set back from the road away from traffic. Morehall School, on the other hand, suffers from many road safety issues. Parking, in particular, causes many hazards, which have recently been exacerbated by the expansion of nearby Pent Valley Technology College.

There is current uncertainty surrounding the numbers of Nepalese children who will be seeking places in schools in the local area in the future. Whilst it is acknowledged that the County Council has attempted to predict where the Royal Gurkha Riflemen Regiment families are likely to be accommodated, there is no clarity as to where these families will be and what demands there will be on school places. The decision to amalgamate the two schools concerned is seen therefore to be premature.

It is questionable whether the site of Morehall School can accommodate additional pupils without resorting to the use of temporary (“mobile”) accommodation, the use of which is against the policy in the Kent Primary Strategy.

The Council does, however, support the idea of Morehall School becoming a one-form entry school, as this will enable all schools to keep their own unique identity. The children’s centre proposed for west Folkestone should therefore use any spare capacity at Morehall School, the school being well situated with easy access for all residents within the west Folkestone area. It is submitted that children’s centres are much more successful when directly attached to a school and this would seem to be a better solution than the one proposed.

The Council urges the Kent County Council to examine other options for reducing surplus spaces at schools within the area and to not pursue the proposed merger.”

Views of Folkestone Town Council

11. Folkestone Town Council are not in favour of the proposal and gave the following comments (taken from email dated 14 July);

“...This Council rejects the closure of Harcourt Primary School, dressed as the merger of Harcourt Primary School in Cheriton and Morehall Primary School, onto the Morehall site. This Council believes both schools should be retained, with Morehall Primary School becoming a one form entry school, which would result in all schools in Folkestone maintaining their own identity. This Council further believes the children’s centre, proposed for Folkestone West, could be based at Morehall Primary School, to provide the services to Cheriton, Morehall and Sandgate...”

Views of the Area Education Officer

12. (1) The issue of surplus capacity in Shepway is forecast to worsen rather than improve in the foreseeable future. Within Shepway One Cluster there are six schools with above 15% surplus accommodation. Two are in Hawkinge which is a growth area, one is in East Folkestone (George Spurgen School), one in Selsted (subject to a closure proposal) and two are in West Folkestone (Harcourt and Morehall). Of these six schools George Spurgen, Harcourt and Morehall are in OfSTED categories. It is legitimate, therefore, to explore whether in the context of falling rolls the two under performing, under subscribed schools in West Folkestone should continue in their current form.

(2) The Authority has recognised that there was uncertainty about pupil numbers in West Folkestone as a consequence of Shorncliffe Barracks. The background Section 2(2) sets out the position at the time of going to print. An oral update will be given at the meeting.

(3) There is little housing development in West Folkestone. The majority of new housing is concentrated to the East of the Town and in Hawkinge.

(4) The Authority has also recognised that both Harcourt and Morehall schools are improving schools. It is to be welcomed that both schools continue to enjoy significant parental support for the work they are doing.

(5) Issues regarding travel and community are covered in Section 15 of the report.

(6) Amalgamation will inevitably cause some disruption to the smooth provision of education for the schools' pupils, however carefully managed. To help mitigate this the Authority would provide re-organisation funding available to the new school for governors to use as felt appropriate. This could be for refurbishment of buildings, for additional short-term staff, or for extra curriculum activities to support pupil learning. The new school is likely to be staffed by people currently employed in Morehall and Harcourt schools, all of whom are committed to providing the best opportunities for the pupils. Similarly the Governing Body will be made up predominately of Governors from the current schools. Also Shepway One School Cluster has committed to supporting schools subject to re-organisation proposals to ensure pupils receive the best education possible.

(7) Class sizes and the number of youngsters in them with special educational needs will change frequently. In the main, schools will base their organisational decision on budget circumstances. For example, Morehall School has reduced the number of classes it operates due to the falling school roll and corresponding reduced budget. This has increased class sizes. If amalgamation occurs decisions about class organisation will be made by the Governing Body according to pupil numbers and the year group sizes at the time.

(8) Morehall school site is 1.81 hectares in size (the DfES required size of a 2FE school is 1.76 hectares). This complies with guidance regarding the playing field and site requirements of a school, and the school is already a 2FE school. It is not true to say that the site is overcrowded already.

(9) Respondents have put forward two alternative proposals; first, reduce the Published Admissions Number of All Souls' CEP (Voluntary Aided) School; and second reduce Morehall to 1FE.

(10) All Souls' is a Voluntary Aided School, therefore the Governing Body is the Admissions Authority, not the Local Authority. The Published Admissions Number is 36. The school is typically oversubscribed, is full and was regarded as a good school in its last Ofsted (2005). The Governing Body considers that it is difficult to reduce the school's published admissions number and refuse children places when it has space to accommodate them, and when the alternative schools are under-performing. The Local Authority could challenge the school's admission arrangements for 2009 when consulted on in the last Autumn/Spring, but it is difficult to see this challenge being supported by the Schools Adjudicator.

(11) It has been suggested that the Children's Centre which is required to serve the area running North/South from Harcourt to Seabrook could utilise some of the space at Morehall, if the school reduced to a 1FE provision. Ideally this Centre would be located in the area it is intended to serve so that it is as accessible as possible. A Children's Centre will not require all the space made available by reducing Morehall to 1FE. If the objective of removing surplus places to release revenue funding is to be achieved surplus capacity in schools has to be removed (i.e. demolished to remove ongoing maintenance costs), or rented to external users. It is hard to see that sufficient paying users exist to rent in effect a 1FE school (who we would welcome on an operating school site) even with the extended school agenda. However, the Governing Body of Morehall has suggested the SEAC building could be demolished (4 classrooms). If this is the case, there would be a capital cost and no funding has been identified for this. It is also important to note that the Authority's preferred option is for 2FE schools, but reducing Morehall to 1FE and creating two schools of this size in West Folkestone remains an option available to Members.

Equality Issues

13. Morehall Primary School has a low percentage of pupils from minority ethnic groups. The percentage in Harcourt has risen and was 21% (as at January 2006). The proposal does not disadvantage any ethnic group disproportionately.

Resource Implications

Accommodation Issues and Capital Requirements

14. (1) Morehall School is currently a 2FE School. Therefore, no additional permanent accommodation is needed. Some accommodation at Morehall would benefit from refurbishment, particularly the Key Stage One Block (SEAC building). The main school building comprises a victorian 2 storey block with a recent three classroom extension (which replaced mobile accommodation). Re-organisation funding (currently approximately £81.5k) could support refurbishment.

(2) The use of temporary accommodation has been raised. The forecasts indicated that by September 2008 the combined roll of the two schools would be about 400. Theoretically the Morehall buildings can accommodate these pupils in existing accommodation. However, it is recognised that the pupils will not be in neat year groups and this might require mixed age classes or temporary classes to manage the transition. This would be determined in association with the Interim Governing Body. The cost of locating mobiles on site is approximately £20k per mobile (assuming refurbishment and relocation of an existing KCC mobile).

(3) Harcourt School has no significant accommodation issues. Modest expenditure is required on electrical infrastructure. If this proposal was implemented, the Harcourt site would be declared surplus to requirements and could be used for community facilities or to yield a capital receipt.

Revenue

(4) The amalgamated school would be eligible for re-organisation funding currently approximately £81.5k (based on 2006/07 budget. The figure of £99k reported on 18 May was based on 2005/06 budget). Annual savings of £18k would be made on small school factors and £75k on premises factors.

Human

(5) In order to appoint the best possible applicants to school leadership posts, the Interim Governing Body would be advised to advertise the new headteacher and deputy headteacher posts nationally, and this may result in redundancy of one or all of the current incumbents. The Interim Governing Body will also be advised to ring fence posts in the new school for staff from the predecessor school, and to make the selection process as simple as can be. Wherever possible slotting of staff would be advocated.

(6) It is unlikely that all existing staff will be required. However, it is anticipated some staff will move on to new opportunities before the schools amalgamate. This would reduce the risk of needing to make redundancies. If it is necessary to involve a redundancy situation volunteers would be sought first, and then decisions would be

made via selection for appointment. The LEA is responsible for any redundancy costs, which will be met from the existing Children, Families and Education budget provision.

Transport and Environmental Impact including Community Implications

15. (1) The amalgamation of Morehall Primary and Harcourt Primary schools should have no significant associated transport costs as the schools are less than 1 mile apart from each other.

(2) Much comment has been made about the impact of the amalgamation on traffic in the area of Morehall. The amalgamated school would, in its final form, be a 2FE school, which is the same size as the current school at Morehall (when full). The peak roll of Morehall was 378 in 2003. Whilst not wishing to seem to be dismissive of the public concerns and the difficulties the existence of a school causes, especially a 2FE school, this means there are no planning or highways implications associated with the proposal. Sufficient staff parking to meet planning requirements was provided at the time the three classroom extension was built. The School Travel Planning Team can work with the new school to develop a sustainable travel plan to reduce traffic, for example it would be logical to operate a walking bus from the Harcourt area, to promote car sharing or to operate a 'Park and Stride' from the local business park.

(3) It is self evident that closing a school site will have a negative impact on the community simply by virtue of the fact that education provision, whilst still available, is more distant. Both schools are currently working to provide a range of extended school services to their families. These would continue in the new school. A private nursery operates from Harcourt School, and this may need to relocate. Decisions regarding Children's Centres are awaited. If located on the Harcourt site a wider range of community services would be available locally.

School Improvement Implications

16. (1) The Authority believes that two form entry schools are the optimum size for primary schools. These provide good value for money, ensure that the maximum resource is focused towards pupil's education, rather than infrastructure. The structure enables joint planning which reduces teacher workload and raises standards, but remains small enough to ensure pupils are known and valued.

(2) Morehall Primary School was found to have serious weaknesses in February 2005. Since this time a new headteacher has been appointed, who has a proven track record of bringing a school out of an Ofsted category. The school is making progress. HMI have visited and were satisfied with progress. No further HMI monitoring visits will be made.

(3) Harcourt Primary School received a notice to improve in November 2005. Since this time a new headteacher has been appointed by the Governors. She has been bringing about the necessary improvement. HMI recently conducted a monitoring visit which found good progress.

Links to Primary Strategy

17. This proposal is consistent with recommendations 17,18,19,27,28 and 30 of the Primary Strategy 2006.

Proposed Timetable

18. If it is decided that a public notice should be issued in respect of the proposal, the following timetable could apply:

Cabinet Member decision	September/October 2006
Public Notice issued	4 October 2006
End of Public Notice period	15 November 2006
Report to Kent School	
Organisation Committee (if required)	5 December 2006
Implementation	September 2007 or September 2008

- 19 The views of the Schools Organisation Advisory Board are sought on:
- (a) the issuing of a public notice for the proposed amalgamation of Morehall (Community) Primary School and Harcourt (Foundation) Primary School by the closure of both schools and the establishment of a new Community Primary School with 420 places on the Morehall School site;
 - (b) whether a September 2007 or September 2008 implementation date should be adopted if the proposal proceeds;
 - (c) subject to approval of the proposal following the end of the objection period, the resources necessary to implement the scheme being provided on the basis identified in this report.

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The Local Member is Mr R Bliss/Mr R Tolputt

Background Documents:
None

Previous Committee Reports:
Report to School Organisation Advisory Board on 18 May 2006

Other Sources of Information:
LEA School Organisation Plan

Kent Primary Strategy 2006

Appendix 3

Proposed Amalgamation of Morehall (Community) Primary School and Harcourt (Foundation) Primary School

Summary of Written Responses

Consultation documents distributed 1,500
Responses received 957

Numbers in favour of a September 2007 implementation 3
Numbers in favour of a September 2008 implementation 0

	Support	Against	Undecided	Total
Parents of children at the schools:				
Morehall Primary School	3	33		36
Harcourt Primary School		84		84
Members of staff at the schools:				
Morehall Primary School		6		6
Harcourt Primary School		9		9
Governor of the schools:				
Morehall Primary School		1		1
Harcourt Primary School		5		5
▪ Parent of child at another school		13		13
• Member of staff at another school		4		4
• Governors from other schools		8		8
• Other interested party		123		123
PETITION (received from Harcourt 'Save our School' Action Group, which consisted of 668 signatures)		668		668
TOTALS	3	954		957

Comments in Favour of Proposal

Education and Standards

- Well over due, it will improve standards of both schools and should go ahead as soon as possible (1)

Impact on the Children/Community

- It is the parents who would not be able to cope with the change – not the children they would adapt easily (1)

Viability

- The amalgamation would save costs related to administration, buildings maintenance, lighting etc. These costs would be maximised if the two schools merged in 2007 (1)

Comments not in Favour of the Proposal

Education and standards

- The education of the children will suffer, during the transition period, (3)
- Would have a detrimental affect on childrens' education and welfare, especially those wishing to go through the Kent Test (17)
- Larger schools do not provide better education/the increase in class sizes, and number of SEN per class, will have a detrimental affect on the pupils (9)
- Children do not cope well with change (5)
- The merger would be very detrimental to the success of Morehall (2)
- Harcourt is an excellent school and has made very good progress since the new headteacher was appointed (9)
- Harcourt has a steady increase of numbers for September 2006 – 17 already confirmed.
- My child needs a smaller school.
- Has consideration been given to the language and cultural needs of the Gurkha families?
- What will happen to the Unit for Visually Impaired Pupils?
- The Gifted and Talented children at Harcourt are doing well.
- The Governing Body at Harcourt is very conscientious and capable. Some of the Governors were approached to assist on an Interim Governing Body (2)
- Merging two under-performing schools is not the solution to solving the problems (3)
- Newly appointed headteacher at Morehall is already making significant improvements/merger would have a negative effect (2)
- Removing parental choice (4)

Impact on the Children/Community

- Keep both schools open – local children for local schools (2)
- Both schools are the heart of their communities. Harcourt is at the centre of a very deprived, but caring community (10)
- Harcourt is a very safe and secure schools with fantastic grounds (4)
- Harcourt has a nursery which parents rely on (2)
- The schools serve different communities, not as stated, similar catchments (1)

Traffic and Road Safety Issues

- Increase in traffic, congestion and parking for residents in Chart Road/need to consider the safety of the children at the school as well as those at the Norrington Centre (27)
- Consider having a one-way system between Coombe Road and Surrenden Road with traffic calming measures (2)
- Parents who do not drive will have a 20 minute walk to school (5)
- Walking bus should continue to reduce traffic (1)

Ethos/Values

- Both schools have different morals, standards and parents/pupils from different social backgrounds/they will not mix well (11)

- A new school could create an atmosphere of rivalry and hostility (6)

Staffing Issues

- Concern that teachers and support staff will lose their jobs (2)

Buildings/Size and Site of School

- The dinner hall at Morehall will not be large enough for all the children (4)
- Morehall is already overcrowded/not sufficient space at Morehall for safe play/playgrounds are overcrowded (10)
- Reduce Morehall's intake to 1 form of entry gradually from September 2006 (8)
- Harcourt would make a better site for new school – a more secure site (2)

Housing Development

- Planning permission has been granted to build an office block for the Home Office on the Shearway Industrial Estate, which will bring jobs to the area. No allowance seems to have been made for economic growth – a lack of school places may deter a company from relocating to Folkestone
- The new rail link and housing developments at Hawkinge will certainly put a demand on local schools (3)

Viability

- If the birth rate rises in the near future will Morehall be issued with mobiles on its playing field to accommodate the extra children?
- All Soul's currently oversubscribed/reduce All Soul's pupil admission number to 30 per year (2)
- Perception that the proposal is driven by commercial gain rather than improving education standards (6)
- This is a closure of Harcourt – not a merger of two schools (1)
- Vacancy figures include Hawkinge. Why?
- Don't merge – just close Harcourt School(1)

PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

**Proposed Amalgamation of Morehall (Community) Primary School
and Harcourt (Foundation) Primary School**

Summary of the public meeting on 12 June 2006
held at Morehall Primary School

Issue or Comment	Response
Viability	
<p>Surely it is unthinkable to close any school! If the roll numbers are falling then surely this is a prime opportunity for smaller classes</p>	<p>It is unthinkable <u>not</u> to close schools. There are currently 14,000 surplus places in Kent and within the finite budget for education by not closing schools it is denying children a better education.</p> <p>Smaller class sizes would be wonderful but much of a school's budget is based on headcount and by keeping surplus places it is tying budgets up where the funding could be used much more efficiently.</p>
<p>Where have all the children gone? One set of figures seemed to vary so much from the next.</p>	<p>The data obtained in 2005 is reliable to 1% in terms of Kent, which becomes less reliable when it is broken down into districts.</p> <p>Catchment areas have now been superseded by parental choice which can make the popularity of a school fluctuate for no apparent reason. Previous data patterns can only be supposed for the forthcoming school years. The postcode modelling is used to look at past patterns, but cannot predict which schools parents will choose to send their children to.</p>
<p>The forecasted timescales appear to be too short term.</p>	<p>The health authority data used gives information for the previous 4 to 5 years and this suggests the decline in roll numbers for the forthcoming 4 to 5 years. The projections used are a reliable source and suggest that rolls are not only falling in Kent but nationally and will continue to fall until at least 2010.</p>
<p>All Souls has recently expanded, but the school has very little outside area?</p>	<p>All Soul's is a Church Aided school. The admissions arrangements can be challenged.</p>

Staff	
How can you ensure that the transition would not have a substantial impact on children's education and behaviour?	The staff in the new school will broadly be staff from the existing schools. These people would ensure that the transition would be managed smoothly to avoid any unnecessary impact on the children.
Why were new headteachers appointed at both Morehall and Harcourt?	There had been a number of meetings with Headteachers and Chairs of Governors in this area prior to implementation of this proposal. In West Folkestone three Heads have recently left their posts and during the meeting it was discussed as to whether they should be replaced or if an alternative is implemented. The Chairs of Governors at this meeting agreed that permanent Headteachers were required, as it does not portray a positive image for the school to have an acting headteacher at a time of public debate about falling school rolls. Therefore, decisions were taken by the relevant governing bodies to appoint.
George Spurgen	
Why is George Spurgen School due to continue as a two-form entry school?	<p>Currently there is a roll of 327 at George Spurgen which is a surplus of approximately 80 places. This is not sufficient to reduce by a one-form entry (210 places). This school is in East Folkestone. Morehall and Harcourt are in West Folkestone. The majority of the Town's surplus accommodation is in these three schools. For September 2006 Reception, all schools in East Folkestone, except George Spurgen, will be broadly full. Therefore George Spurgen provides the only spare capacity to accommodate new children arriving into that area of Folkestone.</p> <p>This is not the case in West Folkestone where several schools have surplus places for September's Year R. In these terms Morehall and Harcourt are only 25 and 33% full respectively.</p>
All teaching assistants at George Spurgen School have had to reapply for their jobs. Would this happen under the proposal concerning Morehall and Harcourt?	The situation at George Spurgen is an exceptional one. The Interim Governing Body would be advised to make the process as simple as possible for staff by ring fencing posts to those from the predecessor school and slotting staff if possible. We cannot guarantee everyone will have a post as the size of the school is smaller.

Traffic/road safety	
There will be further impact on traffic in the local area. Parents and local residents cannot believe that there are not already provisions in place in for a one-way system, speed bumps or passing places?	Traffic is always a difficult issue. The travel planning team will be actively involved in this proposal and the school has the physical capacity to accommodate the number of forecasted children.
Will there be spaces at other schools within a two mile radius?	There will be sufficient school places within two miles. Within the transport guidelines children under 8 years can walk up to 2 miles and children above 8 years walk up to 3 miles.
Community	
Will there be a Children's Centre at the Gurkha community centre?	A Children's Centre will be identified where there is spare accommodation/capacity, at the moment a feasibility study is being conducted.
Why was Morehall enlarged six years ago?	Six years ago, The Churchill School had not been built, at that time the school needed to expand to meet demand.
How can you justify "ripping the heart out of the community" for the sake of 24 children?	This is a wider, County issue which currently consists of 32 proposals involving 50 schools across the county.
Was the Highspeed Rail Link and the Folkestone regeneration project taken into account when this proposal was being drawn-up?	This proposal does take into account the current planning applications. The Local Authority works closely with MORI and the strategic planning department to compile the pupil forecast figures. Migration is built into such proposals as these and are reviewed annually.