

Cabinet

Report Title:	Peasehall and Yoxford Primary Schools
Meeting Date:	13 September 2016
Lead Councillor(s):	Councillor Gordon Jones, Cabinet Member Children's Services, Education and Skills
Local Councillor(s):	Councillors Stephen Burroughes and Michael Gower
Director:	Sue Cook, Corporate Director for Children and Adults
Assistant Director or Head of Service:	Gavin Bultitude, Assistant Director for children and Young People
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Brief summary of report

1. Until 1 August 2016, Bramfield CEVC, Middleton, Peasehall and Yoxford Primary Schools constituted the BPMY federation. All four schools were inspected by Ofsted in the first half of 2015. Ofsted judged Bramfield, Peasehall and Yoxford as Inadequate and requiring Special Measures; Middleton was judged as Requiring Improvement. Significant, targeted support was provided by the LA including the appointment of a new Interim Executive Headteacher, a Teaching and Learning Consultant and an Interim Executive Board (IEB).
2. Since then, Bramfield has left the Federation and Middleton has begun to move to academy status within the Consortium Multi-Academy Trust (MAT).
3. In April this year, Ofsted found that Peasehall was not making enough progress to take the school out of Special Measures. It advised that urgent action was taken to secure better outcomes for the children at the school. In the light of this advice, a decision was taken to teach Peasehall pupils with their peers on the Yoxford site pending a decision about the longer term future of the school. Neither the DfE nor the Interim Executive Board (IEB) has been able to identify a sponsor for Peasehall which currently has only 23 pupils.
4. Yoxford was monitored by Ofsted in May and deemed to be improving at an appropriate pace. An academy order has been signed for Yoxford.
5. The number on roll at Yoxford is currently 51. If the two schools were amalgamated onto one site, the combined number on roll and capacity to improve would be sufficient to attract a good sponsor. The Consortium Trust has indicated that it would be willing to sponsor a combined school.

6. DMT agreed on 30 March to undertake formal consultation on the closure of Peasehall and the expansion of Yoxford Primary Schools. Consultation on the proposals ran from 6 June to 15 July 2016.
7. Cabinet is asked to consider the outcome of the consultation and approve the publication of statutory notices.

What is Cabinet being asked to decide?

8. To agree to publish statutory notices to close Peasehall Primary School and expand Yoxford Primary School from a pupil admission number (PAN) of 10 to 15.

Reason for recommendation

9. The proposal to close Peasehall and expand Yoxford Primary Schools would address the issue of the longer term viability of Peasehall and Yoxford Primary Schools and would:
 - Improve significantly the education of Peasehall and Yoxford pupils by enabling them to be educated within a larger school community which would also bring cultural, social and sporting benefits;
 - create a strong staff structure on one site and build on the improvements already being made;
 - locate a school centrally in the area where the greatest number of children live;
 - provide a school which could be expanded in the future to take pupils from the wider area.

What are the key issues to consider?

10. The key issues to consider are set out in the Secretary of State's guidance. These include school standards, need for school places, and the views of the community. In addition, the closure of rural schools is governed by DfE guidance on matters listed in Section 15(4) of the Education and Inspection Act 2006 in respect of rural primary schools.
11. Decision-makers considering the closure of a rural school must also carefully consider:
 - The likely effect on the local community of the school's closure (Paragraphs 30 and 31 provide details)
 - Educational standards at the school and the likely impact on standards at neighbouring schools (paragraphs 24/25/31 and 32)
 - The availability and likely cost of transport cost of transport to the LA (Paragraph 33)
 - Any increase in the use of motor vehicles (Paragraphs 30 and 31)
 - Any alternatives to closure (Paragraphs 15,30 and 31)

What are the resource and risk implications?

12. Should Cabinet determine the statutory notices in December, consultation with staff on grounds of redundancy will take place. Should their proposed dismissal on the grounds of redundancy be confirmed they will be entitled to a notice period. During this time, they will undertake the tasks of closing the school's budget, redistributing the school's resources and could be asked to support other schools.
13. The school buildings are owned by Suffolk County Council and the Local Authority will therefore be responsible for the security of the site. Any capital receipt for the site will be used to fund the Suffolk County Council capital programme.

What are the timescales associated with this decision?

14. This decision must be made within 2 months of the representation period ending which is by 28 December 2016. If the decision is not made in that time scale the decision passes to the Schools Adjudicator.

Alternative options

15. The main alternatives to closure are federation with other schools and appointing an academy sponsor. Both options have been pursued unsuccessfully. Federation has not improved standards or reduced the decline in standards or in pupil numbers. Finding an academy sponsor for a school of Peasenhall's size is not considered feasible by the LA or DfE.

Who will be affected by this decision?

16. Remaining staff and pupils on roll at the school and parents/carers who may have been interested in sending their children to the school in the future.

Main Body of Report

17. In 2007, a Federation was formed with Peasenhall and Middleton Primary Schools. This Federation was expanded in March 2015 to include Bramfield CEVC and Yoxford Primary Schools (BMPY) with the aim of providing a more sustainable structure for the schools into the future. Each of the schools is considered small in terms of pupil numbers and all are designated as rural primaries in the Designation of Rural Primary Schools (England) 2015 Order. The rationale was that by joining together, expertise could be shared across the schools which would support improvements in teaching and learning and might bring about a more efficient use of scarce resources.
18. Between January and June 2015 Ofsted inspected all four schools judging Bramfield, Peasenhall and Yoxford as Inadequate and Middleton as Requiring Improvement. These judgements reflected the view that the schools had not continued to improve or kept pace with changes in Ofsted's expectations.
19. In response to these judgements, a number of changes were made including the appointment in July 2015 of an Interim Executive Board (IEB) to take over governing body responsibility for the 4 schools. The immediate priority for the IEB was to improve standards at all of the schools. A new Interim Executive Headteacher was appointed to lead the Federation and a Teaching and

Learning Consultant post was appointed by the Authority to support improvement across all schools.

20. The local authority provided targeted and proportionate support to ensure that the schools addressed the issues identified in the Ofsted inspections and to improve the quality of learning for pupils at the schools. Each school had a bespoke statement of action and detailed action plan which has been revised and adapted based on the progress the schools have made. Ofsted judged the Local Authority statements of action for each of the schools to be fit for purpose.
21. The schools have been supported by Standards and Excellence Officers and Early Years Advisers who have worked closely with the schools' leaders and teachers to address the issues and to strengthen the schools' capacity to continue improving. These officers know and understand the issues at the school the schools well. Visits to the schools have been regular and frequent with a Local Authority officer working with the staff at the schools on average, fortnightly. The total number of visits made was 64 in the last 18 months. This has meant that there has been continuity of support during times of significant changes to the schools' leadership. The impact of the support was recognised by HMI in the most recent inspection letter to Yoxford Primary School stating: ***'The local authority has continued to support the school well during a turbulent period'***.
22. Early this year, Bramfield CEVCP School decided to leave the Federation. It subsequently joined the Church of England Diocesan MAT on 1 August 2016. Middleton decided to begin the process of converting to academy status within the Consortium MAT led by Mr Andrew Aalders-Dunthorne. Mr Aalders-Dunthorne is also acting as Interim Executive Headteacher for Yoxford, Peasehall and Middleton.
23. Peasehall Primary was visited by Ofsted on 19 April this year as part of its monitoring of schools in special measures. It found that although there were some signs of improvement these were not sufficient to indicate that the school was taking effective action to come out of special measures.
24. Yoxford was visited by Ofsted on 11 May. The inspector reported that standards of teaching and learning were improving at the school and the school was taking effective action towards the removal of special measures. An academy order has now been issued by the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) and the school is moving towards full academisation under the sponsorship of the Consortium MAT from 1 January 2017.
25. In the light of issues affecting the quality of teaching and learning at Peasehall and the comparative strength of Yoxford, the IEB agreed that it was in the best interests of Peasehall pupils if they were educated at Yoxford for the second half of the summer term 2016. This was to ensure that pupils did not slip further behind while the consultation process on the longer term further of the school was being undertaken by the Local Authority. This arrangement was deemed by the LA and IEB to be the most effective way of embedding improvements made to date and to ensure that all pupils receive the standard of teaching required for them to make appropriate progress. The

Authority's officers have ensured that the sharp focus on school improvement has continued while pupils have been integrating on a single site. This arrangement is being continued in the Autumn term. At present, unless parents have decided otherwise, Peasehall pupils are being transported to Yoxford in the school's mini-bus.

26. Current pupil numbers at Peasehall and Yoxford are 16 and 51 respectively. The numbers on roll at Peasehall are expected to reduce in September leaving the school in an unsustainable position if it remains open.
27. CYP's DMT agreed on 30 March 2016 to undertake formal consultation on the closure of Peasehall and the expansion of Yoxford Primary Schools. Consultation on the proposals ran from 6 June to 15 July 2016. The consultation paper is attached as Appendix A.
28. The consultation document was sent to governors, staff, and parents/carers of children at Federation schools. A copy of the consultation document was also sent to local county councillors, neighbouring schools and early years' settings, trade unions, the local MP and MEPs, and the district and parish councils. Consultees were invited to respond in writing via letter or email. In total, 35 responses were received during the consultation period of which 23 respondents agreed with the proposal, 9 disagreed and 3 were neutral. An analysis of the responses can be found in Appendices B and C.
29. Meetings were held for staff at each of the two schools and, separately, for members of the public. 26 members of the public attended the Peasehall public meeting and 7 members of staff attending the staff meeting. At Yoxford, 10 members of the public attended the public meeting and 7 members of staff attended the staff meeting.
30. The main concerns raised at the meetings and by the consultation respondents were as follows:
 - a. The LA and IEB should have supported Peasehall more than it appears to have done. Peasehall has been a good school and could be attractive to parents again with the right support. The Parish Council expressed concern that the school was not considered viable given the school's academic success in the past;
 - b. If Peasehall Primary School closes this could have a negative impact on the local community as new families who may have considered moving to the village might not do so in the future. Parents of Peasehall pupils did not want to lose their local school. The Parish Council was especially concerned about the impact of the closure on the community and the 'erosion of the already much diminished provision or services available in the village'. The Parish Council also referred to the potential psychological impact on children and their parents/carers.
 - c. Parents/carers valued the opportunity for their children to walk to a local school rather than travelling by bus or car.

- d. There were concerns that parking would not be sufficient at Yoxford Primary School if its pupil and staff numbers were increased.
 - e. Some respondents asked for reassurance that Yoxford would have sufficient space to expand its accommodation.
31. Responses to the points raised above are as follows:
- a. The LA appointed the IEB which has provided strategic support for leadership and management. It secured interim headship and a teaching and learning consultant and has taken prompt and urgent action in response to Ofsted's concerns. The issues at the school relate to its size and performance neither of which is likely to be remedied easily. The DfE and IEB have not been able to identify a suitable sponsor. Alternatives to closure such as Federation have proved unsuccessful as has the identification of an academy sponsor by the DfE or LA.
 - b. It is not the LA's policy to close schools and we understand the value local communities place on the village school. Closure would only be considered if there is no prospect of a viable solution to issues relating to the quality of education and the size and sustainability of the school. Yoxford village is very close to Peasenhall (3 miles approximately) and we believe would be an attractive option for new families in the area -whether they live in Peasenhall or Yoxford or the surrounding area. The Council recognises the potential psychological impact of losing a local school but must weigh this against the potential improvement in the quality of education and, in the longer term, life choices, offered by a bigger, more successful viable school.
 - c. Bus transport will be provided for pupils living in Peasenhall to Yoxford Primary School. We expect this to reduce the likelihood of pupils travelling in multiple cars. Appendix D shows the distribution of pupils on roll at the two schools in April this year. The map confirms that nearly all Peasenhall pupils are in catchment and would qualify for travel on the bus. It is our view that any increase in motor vehicle use would be minimal and justified by the circumstances.
 - d. We appreciate that bus travel is not the same as walking to school with local friends and that social as well as physical benefits accrue. Bus travel will continue to offer social opportunities however and there will be new opportunities for pupils to engage in physical activity at Yoxford as the school has a swimming pool and access to the village tennis courts in addition to the usual range of outdoor play equipment.
 - e. Staff and some parents currently use the Yoxford village hall car park. This arrangement will continue. Improvements are programmed for the car park itself. That said, if closure is agreed, most of the children from Peasenhall would be provided with free transport because there is no safe walking route between the two villages. We anticipate that most children from Peasenhall will travel by bus.

- f. Peasehall Primary pupils are already being taught at Yoxford. There is sufficient space at the school for the time being. If the decision is taken to close Peasehall, the LA will expand the accommodation at Yoxford by providing 2 more classbases and ancillary rooms when it is needed. Pupil forecasts indicate that there is limited population growth in the area and therefore the need for places is not expected to cause a problem for the other schools in the local area should Peasehall Primary close. There is space on the school site to expand the existing accommodation when it is needed.
32. Educational standards at Yoxford Primary are higher than at Peasehall. Pupils from the two schools are already being educated together and both staff and parents are seeing improvements in the pace of learning and in terms of social, cultural and sporting opportunities. Staff are benefitting from working together and of having opportunities for release for professional development.
33. The LA has transport available for pupils from Peasehall. The cost will be in the region of £34,000 pa.
34. If agreed, the proposal to close Peasehall Primary and merge as a single school on the Yoxford Primary site would mean that Yoxford Primary would be enlarged from a pupil admission number (PAN) of 10 to 15.
35. Should Cabinet agree to the publication of statutory notices these would be published on 30 September 2016. A four-week representation period would follow. Cabinet would be asked to consider whether to determine the notices on 6 December 2016. If the proposal is approved, Peasehall CP would close on 31 December 2016.

Sources of further information

- a. Section 15(4) of the Education and Inspection Act 2006
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/section/15>
- b. Opening and closing maintained schools: Statutory guidance for proposers and decision-makers
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/514556/16-04-06_FINAL_SO_Guidance_ED_Regs.pdf
- c. Equality Impact Assessment: [EIA](#)

