

**CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES - CLLR LAURA MAYES**

**OPERATIONAL CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

**OFFICER CONTACT:** Susan Tanner susan.tanner@wiltshire.gov.uk

**REFERENCE: CS-05-16:**

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**DECISION TO CHANGE DOWNLAND SPECIAL SCHOOL FROM  
SINGLE SEX (BOYS ONLY) TO CO-EDUCATIONAL FROM OCTOBER  
THE 31ST 2016**

**Purpose of Report**

To facilitate the decision to change Downland Special school from Single sex (boys only) to co-educational.

**Consultation**

As per the guidance laid out in line with Department of Education's publication "School Organisation – Maintained schools" (April 2016) a four week consultation period was undertaken between the 13<sup>th</sup> of June 2016 and the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2016 (see attached documents). Information was made available to key stakeholders regarding the proposals and the background behind these proposals. Stakeholders were encouraged to respond by filling in a consultation reply form which was made available, by post and email and via the Wiltshire Council and Local Offer Websites<sup>1</sup>.

In addition, three meetings were held with parents, governors, staff, pupils and interested parties. The Head of Commissioning and Joint Planning, Susan Tanner, led the meetings with staff and Governors and parent/carers. A Voice and Influence officer led the consultation with the pupils supported by staff from Downland School.

25 staff and governors, 6 parents/carers, and 9 pupils (2 groups; 4 from key stage 3 and 5 from key stage 4) attended the meetings.

There were 5 written replies to the consultation, of these 0 were from parents and 4 were from members of staff and there was a collective response from the Downland School Governors.

**CONSULTATION MEETINGS**

Key areas of questioning and debate were around how having girls in the school would change the dynamic of the school. All of the three consultation sessions noted both positive and more challenging aspects of coeducational education. All three groups raised concerns around introducing only 1 or 2 girls such that they felt isolated or vulnerable. However the boys themselves and both staff and parents also noted that a coeducational school would offer the boys a broader socio-emotional education. The Governors noted that in principle they were in support of the proposal, provided the implementation plan met the need to ensure that girls did not experience an isolated start. Notes have been kept from all three consultations. Key areas of discussion:

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<sup>1</sup> See consultation process at appendix

<b>Carers and Parents</b>	<b>Response</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Could Springfield's have SEMH girls?</li> <li>2) How do you prioritise places for the school?</li> <li>3) Will there be some special support for girls when they arrive?</li> <li>4) Won't it make the boys more challenging?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Springfield's primary designation is not SEMH and Downland has greater capacity to meet the academic needs of many girls with SEMH</li> <li>2) This is an on-going process led by an SEN Panel in accordance with the Children and Families Act 2014 Code of Practice</li> <li>3) The Implementation plan will ensure plans are in place to provide good support to the girls</li> <li>4) Bringing girls in will certainly change the dynamic and it will be down to the good training and awareness of the staff team to support positive behaviour and tackle problems.</li> </ol>

<b>Pupils</b>	<b>Response</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) How can we ensure the girls don't feel isolated</li> <li>2) We are not sure if it will make the boys behave badly and maybe the girls will too</li> <li>3) We want to ensure they feel welcome</li> <li>4) It will be a good thing for us - make us more sociable with girls</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The staff will think through how girls are introduced and we will try and avoid just one or two girls starting on their own</li> <li>2) Bringing girls in will certainly change the dynamic and it will be down to everyone with the support of the staff to support positive behaviour and tackle problems</li> <li>3) The staff will be working with the Local Authority to ensure they have a good welcome, but your role will also be very important</li> <li>4) We really hope that this is positive for the boys and that it can give you lots of support and experience in all aspects of your life.</li> </ol>

<b>Staff and Governors</b>	<b>Response</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The end of term is coming soon so have we really got time to get everything arranged?</li> <li>2) Is this in the best interests of the boys?</li> <li>3) How can we prepare for this?</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) We can make the decision and then agree a good time table which could give some time to make changes</li> <li>2) Very much so, this is about giving them a full whole life education.</li> <li>3) By developing an implementation plan to ensure the girls get a good introduction and the boys are able to continue their development.</li> </ol>

## **WRITTEN FEEDBACK**

The written replies were on the whole less positive, although no replies were received from parents. Of the 4 staff who replied to the 3 choices (in favour, not sure and no) 3 noted they were “not sure” and 1 chose “no”. Key concerns were around:

- Being able to manage the physical redevelopment of the build during term time
- Concerns about the vulnerability of a small numbers of girls attending
- Concerns about the upheaval and change particularly for a vulnerable group of boys.

Respondents were also asked to identify other options. One respondent suggested using an alternative Special School in Wiltshire. While this is an option, this has been put aside as the other Special Schools in Wiltshire do not have SEMH as their primary designation and have limited opportunities to offer girls the significant range of academic options that are available at Downland.

The Governors concerns were about the process. They felt that an implementation plan should have been written prior to the end of the consultation and the lack of one meant that, while they supported the proposal in principle, they were unable to fully support the proposal at this time without the implementation plan in place.

## **THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES RESPONSE**

None of the issues raised by the parents, pupils or staff are unexpected. The consultation document supporting the delegated decision does identify these same concerns. Therefore the decision to become coeducational should be made with a firm commitment to:

- The development of a comprehensive implementation plan co-produced by Downland School and the Local Authority covering the time prior to the first girls arriving and the initial years when girls are in a significant minority. This will particularly include issues around safeguarding.
- If at all possible, ensuring that rather than introducing individual girls, that a small cohort of girls started together

Local Authority Officers have responded to the Governors’ issues directly in writing to reassure them of our commitment to the implementation process, noting that it would have been inappropriate to complete an implementation plan prior to the completion of the consultation as this would have undermined the consultation and pre-empted the decision.

Subsequent correspondence from the Governors noted that they felt that the lack of an implementation plan undermined their ability to support the proposal and that at the end of the consultation period they felt that they had to note that they were not in favour of progressing the proposal until such time as the implementation plan reassured them that the process of becoming coeducational was not detrimental to the school.

In response the Local Authority is proposing to move the introduction of the coeducational designation from the 1st of September 2016 to the 31st of October 2016 to give the school additional time to develop the implementation plan.

**Options Considered**

- a. To implement the decision as per the original proposal from the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2016.
- b. To implement the decision with effect from the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2016 with the school being ready to admit girls in September 2017 at the latest.

**Reason for Decision**

The feedback has been reviewed and it has been concluded that it is the right move for children and young people in Wiltshire with SEN, in and particular social emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs, that boys and girls be given equal access to Downland Special School. Wiltshire Council is therefore making the decision for Downland Special School to change designation from single sex to coeducational.

This will come into effect from the 31<sup>st</sup> of October 2016 when a process of adaption, development and planning will take place to enable both girls and boys to attend Downland School by September 2017 at the latest.

<p><b><u>DECISION MADE</u></b></p> <p>Following consultation I give notice that I have made the decision set out in the attached report for Downland Special School to become coeducational,</p> <p>This decision was published on 14 September 2016 and will come into force on 22 September 2016.</p> <p>The decision therefore becomes effective from 31 October 2016 with the school being able to admit girls by September 2017 at the latest.</p>
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**The following supporting documents are attached:**

CS-06-16 Report

Date: .....14 September 2016..... signed.....

Cllr Laura Mayes  
Cabinet Member for Children’s Services