

Committee/Meeting: Cabinet	Date: 8 September 2010	Classification: Unrestricted	Report No:
Report of: Acting Corporate Director, Children, Schools & Families Originating officer(s) Pat Watson, Head of Building Development		Title: Thomas Buxton Infant and Junior Schools – Proposed Amalgamation Wards Affected: Weavers	

Lead Member	Lead Member for Children, Schools & Families
Community Plan Theme	A Prosperous Community
Strategic Priority	Priority 3.1: Support lifelong learning opportunities for all

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report explains the background to the proposals and informs Cabinet of the consultation that has taken place to date. The report recommends that statutory proposals are now published for the amalgamation of the schools.

2. DECISIONS REQUIRED

Cabinet is recommended to:-

- 2.1 Agree that statutory proposals should be published both for the closure of Thomas Buxton Junior School from 31 March 2011 and the change of age range of Thomas Buxton Infant School from 1 April 2011 in order to implement the amalgamation of the existing Thomas Buxton Infant and Junior Schools.

3. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 3.1 The LA has held consultation with the governing bodies, parents and staff of both schools. The proposal has been put forward to benefit the leadership and management of the schools and the effect this will have on teaching and learning for the children. Cabinet is asked to consider the proposed amalgamation, the response to the initial consultation and the recommendation that statutory proposals should be published. The publication of statutory proposals is required in order to implement this change to the school.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1 This proposal relates to this school only. The benefits of amalgamation are set out below and proposals of this kind have previously been implemented successfully for other schools. Taking no action would put at risk the success of the school and the educational outcomes for the children.

5. BACKGROUND

- 5.1 Thomas Buxton Infant and Junior Schools occupy the same site in Buxton Street, E1. There are 60 places in each year group across the two schools, and two nursery classes. The Headship of the Junior School had been vacant for some time when the Headship of the Infant School also became vacant. By agreement with the governing bodies, a substantive appointment was made of one Head of both schools from January 2010. This has already brought benefits in the two schools working together.
- 5.2 Preliminary consultation has taken place on the proposal to amalgamate the two schools into a single all-through primary school. The feedback from this consultation supported the proposals. This report gives details of the consultation and the action that is now required to publish proposals formally.

6. BODY OF REPORT

Decision-making on school expansion proposals

- 6.1 There is a statutory framework for implementing certain alterations to schools. The requirements are included in the Education & Inspections Act 2006 and regulations made under that Act. For community schools, the Local Authority (LA) can propose discontinuance and prescribed alterations. Prescribed alterations include a change in the upper age limit of a school.
- 6.2 Prescribed alterations require a two stage consultation process. The initial, pre-statutory consultation should provide information on the proposals and include a wide range of consultees. The outcome of this stage is then considered and, if the LA agrees, statutory proposals are published for a specified period, in this case 6 weeks. After this period, the LA must consider any responses to the second consultation and decide whether or not to implement the proposals, or modify them in the light of the consultation.
- 6.3 There is a right of appeal to the Schools Adjudicator for certain parties against the LA's decision.
- 6.4 The timetable for the process is shown in paragraph 6.23 taking into account the legal requirements of the consultation and decision-making process

6.5 In order to achieve the amalgamation, the formal process for the statutory proposals will require simultaneous proposals to discontinue the Junior School and extend the age range of the Infant School. The published proposals will state that the two proposals are dependent, i.e. one will not be implemented without the other.

Benefits of amalgamating Thomas Buxton Infant & Junior Schools

6.6 The LA has put forward proposals for the amalgamation because it recognises there are clear education benefits. The need for primary places in the Borough continues to rise and therefore the LA has no justification for considering closure of the schools. The amalgamation proposal will not reduce existing places or create additional places.

6.7 The benefits include:

- better opportunities for recruiting good staff, including Headteachers and other senior leaders. The LA has experience of the difficulties of recruiting good Headteachers to smaller schools. Research shows that the quality of the Headteacher and staff is critical to a school's success;
- a larger school allows better opportunities to retain staff as there are more opportunities for career progression and additional responsibilities within the school;
- better continuity of curriculum between the Key Stages 1 and 2. There will be one set of plans and linked schemes of work which will smooth children's progression through the school and help raise standards;
- a larger school is able to use its financial resources more flexibly and can more easily afford to pay for teachers to have additional responsibilities;
- no need for arrangements for children to transfer schools at age 7.

6.8 If the proposals go ahead, there will be no changes to the current admission criteria for the schools and all children now on roll will remain on roll.

Financial Implications

6.9 If the schools are amalgamated, there will be minimal impact on the revenue budget. The school will continue to be funded from the DSG (Dedicated Schools Grant) according to its size.

6.10 There may be a need for minor capital funding in order to carry out some accommodation alterations to support the amalgamation (eg. alterations to create a single main entrance). This will be considered further with the Headteacher and programmed at a later date as required.

Implementation of the Amalgamation

- 6.11 It is proposed that the amalgamation should take effect from 1 April 2011. The amalgamation will have no impact on children now on roll of the school.

CONSULTATION

- 6.12 The initial consultation period was held in May 2010. Parents, staff and children were consulted. A copy of the consultation paper issued is included as Appendix A. The consultation paper was sent to:
- all parents and carers of children now at Thomas Buxton Infant and Junior Schools
 - all staff at Thomas Buxton Infant and Junior Schools
 - all governors of Thomas Buxton Infant and Junior Schools
- 6.13 Consultation meetings were held at the school to discuss the proposals with parents and staff.
- 6.14 The overall response to the proposed amalgamation of the schools was positive. The consultation paper included a form to return and the analysis of those returned is as follows:

Thomas Buxton Infant School			
Received from	For	Against	Not sure
Parents	60	10	4
Staff	7	1	
Thomas Buxton Junior School			
Received from	For	Against	Not sure
Parents	30	6	2
Staff	12		

- 6.15 Two parents' meetings were held at the school. The response from parents who attended these meetings was positive and they welcomed the proposal. At the parents' meetings there were questions and discussion on a number of issues which were responded to by the LA officers and the headteacher in the meetings. These principally related to matters about the management of the school and any impact on the process on the education of children now on roll. Where concerns about amalgamation were expressed by parents, these principally related to the possibility of any adverse impact on children now on the roll of the school. The Headteacher and LA responded to these matters by setting out the benefits of amalgamation (addressed in paragraph 6.6 and following of this report) and the positive experience elsewhere.
- 6.16 The consultation that has been conducted is in accordance with the requirements of the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2007 and the Secretary of

State's guidance on consultation. There is some continuing consultation required to complete compliance with the Regulations. This will be concluded prior to the Cabinet meeting and, if necessary, an addendum provided on the results of that consultation.

Impact on staff

- 6.17 It is not envisaged that there will be any significant impact on staff now employed at each school. There are existing vacancies in the senior management and a decision on amalgamating the schools will allow a revised structure to be developed.

Arrangements for the governing bodies

- 6.18 If statutory proposals are agreed to be implemented, arrangements will be made with the governing bodies for an interim governing body to work with the headteacher from the end of the Autumn term 2010. The new governing body will be in place for the date of implementation, subject to the outcome of the statutory proposals process.

FURTHER ACTION NOW PROPOSED

- 6.19 The outcome of the consultation has been reviewed and it is clear that there is support for the proposal. Officers are continuing to work with the Headteacher and governing bodies to plan for the transition to the amalgamated school.
- 6.20 The Cabinet is recommended to agree to publication of statutory proposals for the closure of Thomas Buxton Junior School and the simultaneous change of the age range of Thomas Buxton Infant School to include children up to the age of 11 years. The statutory proposals will be published in East End Life and made available at the schools. Any comments or representations on the proposals should be submitted to the Council by the end of the six week period.
- 6.21 As referred to above, after the statutory representation period, there will be a further report to Cabinet. This will include details of any comments made during the representation period. Cabinet will be asked to take account of these and the detail of the report in reaching a decision on whether to proceed to implement the proposals. An appeal against the decision can be made to the Schools Adjudicator by the Roman Catholic or Church of England Diocese, or the governing body of the school concerned. If the Council is unable to reach a decision on the proposals within two months of the end of the representation period, they have to be referred to the Schools Adjudicator.
- 6.22 The timetable for the process is set out below:

Initial consultation	May 2010
Cabinet receives a report on the consultation and decides on publishing formal statutory proposals	8 September 2010
Statutory proposals published with 6 weeks allowed for comments	1 November to 10 December 2010
Cabinet meets to consider any comments from the 4 week period and, in the light of these, to decide on implementing the proposals as published or with any modification	February 2011
Amalgamation takes effect	1 April 2011

7. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

- 7.1 The school's revenue budgets will be increased to reflect the increased size of the building and the rise in pupil numbers. This funding is within the Dedicated Schools Grant which reflects increases in the total roll in the Borough.
- 7.2 The report does not identify any specific capital works that arise from this amalgamation, but it does indicate that some minor works may need to be prioritised within the CSF programme and will be funded from available capital resources.

8. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL SERVICES)

- 8.1. The report proposes discontinuance of Thomas Buxton Junior School and consequent change in upper age limit of Thomas Buxton Infant School.
- 8.2. The report correctly identifies that the Council may bring forward such proposals as the local education authority, but must comply with the requirements specified in Part 2 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, Schedule 2 to the Act and regulations made under the Act. The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) (England) Regulations 2007 ("the Discontinuance Regulations") govern the proposed discontinuance. The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2007 ("the Prescribed Alterations Regulations"), govern the proposed change in upper age limit
- 8.3. In respect of both the discontinuance and the change in age limit, the Council is required to publish its proposals. In respect of the change in age limit, the Prescribed Alterations Regulations require the Council to follow a two stage proposal. This is set out in the report. The Council

must be able to demonstrate how it has taken into account the views expressed during the initial consultation before taking a decision to publish a formal proposal. The report states that consultation complies with the requirements of the Regulations and guidance and so the Council is in a position to determine whether to publish a proposal.

- 8.4. The Discontinuance Regulations and the Prescribed Alterations Regulations prescribe what information must be specified in, respectively, the discontinuance proposal and the change in age limit proposal. They also specify how the proposals should be publicised. Statutory notices containing specified information and stating how complete copies of the proposals can be obtained must be published in a local newspaper, and also posted at the main entrance to the school (and all the entrances if there are more than one) and at some other conspicuous place in the area served by the school (eg. local library, community centre). It is essential that the published notices comply with the statutory requirements as set out in the Regulations otherwise they may be judged invalid.
- 8.5. The statutory scheme prescribes how proposals may be determined by the Council after consultation and officers will need to take advice to ensure that these are correctly followed.

9. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1. The Local Authority has a key role in securing effective and successful schools. This proposal is put forward to ensure the success of Thomas Buxton School and sustain educational achievement.
- 9.2. Strategies to raise educational attainment, including ensuring sufficient school places, support students in a successful period of statutory education and then moving into employment

10. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT

- 10.1. There are no specific proposals arising from this report.

11. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. The timetable for implementation of the amalgamation will be managed with the Headteacher and governing bodies to ensure that it is effectively dealt with.

12. CRIME AND DISORDER REDUCTION IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. There are no specific implications arising.

13. EFFICIENCY STATEMENT

13.1. The LA is seeking to ensure efficient organisation of local services by proposing the amalgamation.

14. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Consultation document

**Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)
List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report**

Brief description of “background papers”

Name and telephone number of holder and address where open to inspection.

Results of consultation

Pat Watson 020 7364 4328

THOMAS BUXTON INFANT AND JUNIOR SCHOOLS

**CONSULTATION WITH PARENTS ABOUT PROPOSALS TO
AMALGAMATE THE SCHOOLS
Summer Term 2010**

What is being proposed?

1. Tower Hamlets Local Authority (LA) and the Governors of the Infant and Junior schools are considering amalgamating them. That would mean that in the future the schools would become one school, with Lorraine Flanagan as Headteacher and one governing body rather than the current two.
2. Before the LA and Governors go ahead they want to know what you think.
3. Details about the proposals and how you can make your voice heard are set out below.

When might all this happen?

4. Amalgamating schools takes quite a long time. The earliest it could happen is January 2011 so there is plenty of time to discuss the proposal with you thoroughly before decisions are taken.
5. The consultation process has two stages. This first stage asks for views, mainly from parents, staff and governors of the two schools. Depending on the outcome of that consultation the LA will decide whether or not to go ahead with the second, formal stage. If at this stage the governing bodies of both schools decided that they did not want to amalgamate, it is very unlikely that the LA would go ahead with the proposal.
6. If it is decided to go ahead, the second, formal stage will probably take place during the autumn term next year. During that time anyone can object to the proposal and details about how they can do that will be available at the schools and in the local press. After that, the Council's Cabinet receives a report on the consultation and makes the final decision on the amalgamation going ahead.

Why is amalgamation being proposed?

7. The LA and Governors want the best education possible for your children. We want both schools to be outstanding - it is what your children deserve. But as education changes it becomes more difficult to keep those standards high in smaller schools.
8. The key to making both schools outstanding is the quality of the teachers and the Headteacher.
9. Recruiting good quality teachers is harder when the range of experience in the school is limited to one key stage. It limits their experience and makes it harder for them to develop their career.

10. Now that Lorraine Flanagan has been appointed as head of both schools, the schools will be run in the same way, with the same policies, teaching and expectations.
11. Larger schools have more flexibility in how they organise the school, use their money and staff to the greater benefit of all children. They also do not have to spend time and energy on organising the transfer from one school to the other.
12. Since the appointment of Lorraine Flanagan as head all staff have started to work together and collaborate to improve things for all children. As parents you will already have seen the benefits of working with one head, although the two schools remain separate.
13. Parents on the other hand in general like small schools particularly for very young children. They like the intimacy. Tower Hamlets believes that the size of school proposed strikes the right balance between keeping that personal contact whilst creating an institution that is large enough to attract good staff, benefits from economies of scale and avoids the distraction of transfer at age seven.

How big would the new school be?

14. The new school would be for 420 pupils plus nursery. On paper that is twice as big as either of the current schools and might sound really big to some of you. In practice of course it is exactly the same size as the two schools are now in total. Those of you with children in both schools will already be familiar with a school of this size. The new school will occupy the same buildings as now. The only difference will be that as well as one Headteacher there will be one governing body. These arrangements are much simpler and clearer to parents.
15. The schools are not full. The planned admission number (i.e. the maximum number of places offered each year for both schools is 60 with 2 nursery classes. The January rolls of the school for the last four years have been:

	Places	2007	2008	2009	2010
Infant incl. nursery	232	211	210	214	236
Infant Yr R to Yr 2	180	159	158	208	193
Junior	240	202	194	196	196

16. There are no proposals to alter the size of the school. The planned admission number for the amalgamated school would also be 60 with 2 nursery classes. The LA believes that there is and will be sufficient demand for places in the area to justify maintaining the size of the school. It believes that as a stronger, well led all through primary school it will attract more pupils and in the medium term will fill to or much nearer to its capacity.

Will my child still have a place at the school?

17. Absolutely yes. Every child at the schools when amalgamation happens is guaranteed a place in the amalgamated school. There are no exceptions.

Will it be harder for me to get my child into the school?

18. The answer is no.
19. The maximum number of children to be admitted each year, 60, will be exactly the same as it is now. The rules about who gets priority if more than 60 applications are made remain exactly the same. The special rules about admission to a nursery class place stay exactly the same as will the special arrangements for moving from the nursery class to year Reception.
20. However transfer from year 2 to year 3 will become simpler and more certain if the schools amalgamate. At the moment transferring from the infant school to the junior school is actually not automatic. To date all year 2 pupils who have wanted a place in the junior school have got one. That is because the schools are not quite full. If redevelopments in the local area boost numbers as is predicted that may not always be the case and a few parents of children in the infant school may find that they cannot get their child into the junior school. If this proposal is agreed that problem disappears and moving from year 2 to year 3 will become automatic and no different from moving from say year 1 to year 2.

Will my child see the same people at school?

21. The simple answer is yes.
22. Your child will go to school with the same children as they go to school with now.
23. Of course some pupils, teachers and other staff leave each year and new people join the school but amalgamation of it will not change that. This is because the number of staff needed depends mainly on the number of children and amalgamation makes no difference to that total number.
24. The number of office staff is not directly related to pupil numbers. But the two schools are already sharing some of these staff. So the numbers are already related to the total volume of administrative work. It is unlikely that amalgamation will change the need for administrative staff. The existing arrangements for cleaners and the premises manager will remain in place.
25. Although the detailed staffing arrangements will be for the governors of the amalgamated school the expectation is that amalgamation will make no difference to who the adults are that your child will see. Those relationships will continue just as they do now from one year to the next.

How much money will the Council save?

26. This proposal is not about saving money or closing buildings or anything like that. It is about securing the highest educational standards for your children into the future.
27. If anything amalgamation is likely to cost the LA something in the short term because some alterations to the buildings are likely to be necessary. For example, it is likely that the school office will need some work as the office organisation and reception arrangements change to reflect one school. The staffroom too may need relocating to allow all the teachers and classroom support staff to come together. But the LA believes that this would be a good investment for the future.
28. How schools are funded is complicated. In the short to medium term there will be no financial loss to the schools by amalgamating. In the long term however there may well be a change because the schools will no longer get extra funding because they are "small". However as an amalgamated school they will make savings due to their size.

How would the change be made?

29. Unfortunately the law makes the process quite complicated. Technically the LA has to close the junior school on one particular day and extend the age range of the infant school the next day. There is no risk to the education of the pupils or the employment of the staff. The current schools cannot be closed or changed unless the amalgamated one opens and your child is guaranteed a place in that amalgamated school. In practice your child will not be without a school or a school place at Thomas Buxton at any time during this process.
30. There are two ways of arriving at amalgamation:
 - to close both schools and open a new one; or
 - close the Junior school and expand the age range of the Infant school.If this change is to go ahead, the LA would follow the second route.
31. As parents and for your children it will make absolutely no difference which way it is done. It will not make any difference to the LA either. It will however affect the makeup of the new Governing Body and the LA intends to facilitate the process so that the Governing Body includes a range of Governors from both existing schools.

What disadvantages might there be?

32. Proposals to make changes to schools sometimes cause concern to the school community. Parents are concerned about disruption to their children's education or getting into the new school; staff are concerned about their jobs and the effect on their careers; and everyone wonders what will happen to the money, school buildings and grounds. We hope that the answers given to the questions about reassure you on all these points.

Conclusion

33. There is no denying that change always causes some anxiety. However the Governors and LA are persuaded at this stage that the short, medium and long term educational advantages set out above for amalgamation far outweigh any transitional difficulties. It currently seems to them that the benefits of having a single school with one Headteacher and one governing body are:
- 33.1 parents are just as likely to get a place at Thomas Buxton as now
and every child currently at either school is guaranteed a place in the amalgamated school;
- 33.2 amalgamation guarantees your child a place in years 3 to 6 which is not the case at the moment when they finish year 2 in the infant school;
- 33.3 amalgamation makes no difference to admission arrangements to
the nursery and reception;
- 33.4 a single school can provide better continuity of curriculum for both Key Stages one and two. It will have one set of plans and linked schemes of work all of which will help smooth children's progression through the school and help raise standards;
- 33.5 it is easier to recruit good headteachers and other staff to all-through
Headteacher primary schools. Research shows that the quality of the
and staff is critical to a school's success;
- 33.6 amalgamation will not change the number of teachers, classroom support staff and dinner supervisors so your child will come into contact with the same staff as before amalgamation;
- 33.7 children's education will suffer minimal disruption when the change is made amounting to no more than they experience from the usual turnover of staff. For those children moving from year 2 to year 3 the disruption will in fact be much less;

- 33.8 the effect of the change on most staff will be positive or these will be no change at all;
- 33.9 the financial and other assets of the school remain secure and a larger school can use its bigger budgets more flexibly and can afford to pay for teachers with additional curriculum responsibilities and specialist skills. In practice the school will seem no bigger than now. It will use the same buildings etc as now.
34. This change is not about saving money. There is no saving to the Council and any changes to the school's funding will not happen for several years.
35. If the schools are amalgamated, the LA will arrange works after consulting the Governors to help unify the school such as creating one staff room and one school office.
36. The LA and Governors believe that this is the right time to discuss the change following the successful appointment of one, strong head for both schools.

What you can do now

37. Please take time to read this consultation paper and let us know your views by filling in the reply slip on the last page.

What happens next?

38. Come to a parents meeting to hear more about the proposal and let us hear your views. There will be two meetings at the school on

**Wednesday, 28th April
from 9am – 10am and again from 5pm – 6pm**

39. At the meetings parents and governors will be able to discuss the proposals with the chairs of governors and LA officers.
40. The views we hear during the consultation process will be considered by the governing bodies and reported to the Cabinet when it considers whether to proceed with the formal consultation to amalgamate.

Appendix 1

Possible Timetable

A possible timetable for the consultation and implementation, if agreed is set out below.

w/b19 th April 2010	Informal Consultation starts
1. 28 th April 2010 9am – 10am 2. 28 th April 2010 5pm – 6pm	Parents of the two schools meet and consider the proposal (2 meetings, one am the other pm – Monica to cover pm)
4 th May 2010 4pm – 5pm	Joint staff meeting to consider proposal
End of May	Informal consultation ends
July	Report to Cabinet on outcomes of informal consultation. Cabinet to agree whether to move to formal consultation
1 st Sept	Formal consultation starts. Consultation lasts for 6 weeks
Mid October	Formal consultation ends
Nov	Take outcomes of consultation to Cabinet. Decision made by Cabinet whether to amalgamate or not.
December	If amalgamation agreed, new interim Governing body established to lead the process to completion
January 2011	Amalgamation complete and one school established.

THOMAS BUXTON INFANT AND JUNIOR SCHOOLS

CONSULTATION ON THE PROPOSED AMALGAMATION OF THOMAS BUXTON INFANT AND JUNIOR SCHOOLS

Please tick as appropriate

I agree with the proposal to amalgamate the two schools.

I do not agree with the proposal to amalgamate the two schools.

I am not sure

Other comments

Name: _____

—

Parent, Governors,
Other (please
state) _____

Date: _____

—

Please return this slip by 28th May 2010 to:

The school office