


Cabinet 27 November 2024	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Steve Reddy, Corporate Director of Children's Services	Classification: Unrestricted
Stepney Greencoat CE School – Expansion to Include Permanent Nursery Provision	

Lead Member	Councillor Maium Talukdar Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning
Originating Officer(s)	Catherine Grace, Head of School Admissions
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	Yes
Reason for Key Decision	Significant impact on wards
Forward Plan Notice Published	30/08/2024
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	Accelerating education

Executive Summary

This report presents recommendations for Cabinet to agree to the proposal from the Governing Body of Stepney Greencoat CE Primary to a permanent change of age range by adding a nursery provision.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the proposal from the Governing Body of Stepney Greencoat CE Primary to a permanent change of age range by adding a nursery provision as detailed in the report.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 Where a proposed expansion is permanent and/or will increase the capacity of a school by more than 30 pupils, and/or the age range, the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations (2013) process must be followed.

- 1.2 The Local Authority is the decision maker in this process; as the governing body of Stepney Greencoat CE Primary has proposed a permanent age range change to the school to include a 30-place nursery.
- 1.3 In making in decision the Local Authority should ensure that good quality nursery places will be provided where they are needed, that the change can be implemented effectively, and there is a strong case for doing so at a school that has an overall Ofsted rating of 'good' or 'outstanding'.
- 1.4 The recommendations in this report have been prepared with regard to the statutory process. This has included informal consultation with the Local Authority, Diocese and neighbouring primary schools, wide publication of the proposal and a statutory consultation with full consideration of all the responses.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 When changes are proposed to the age range of a voluntary school, the Local Authority has a statutory duty to make a decision following the end of the consultation. If Cabinet is not able to take such action the proposal should be referred to the Schools Adjudicator.
- 2.2 Consideration has been given to alternative decisions:
 - The Mayor could approve the proposal with modifications, having consulted with the governing body, or
 - The Mayor could approve the proposal, with or without modification subject to specific conditions being met ie the school's admission arrangements are also changed¹. The school admission arrangements will be determined in January 2025.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 The plan to add a new nursery was first proposed in March 2023. An initial informal consultation with neighbouring primary schools took place in July 2023, and the Stepney Schools Partnership was formally consulted on 8 May 2024. The proposals were met positively. Consultation also took place with the London Diocesan Board for Schools, which has given its support to this proposal.
- 3.2 The school's plans were first discussed with the Local Authority in June 2023. It was agreed for the school to start its nursery as a pilot with a view to the provision being established on permanent basis, if the pilot proved successful. This temporary provision could be sustained for up to two years.
- 3.3 Since September 2023, with only internal advertising and through word of mouth, the school has admitted 11 nursery aged pupils to the pilot class.

¹ The condition must be the occurrence of a prescribed event as listed in paragraph 8 of Schedule 3 to the Prescribed Alterations Regulations. In the case of mainstream schools, the agreement to any change of the admission arrangements relating to the school or any other school or schools, as specified in the approval.

School Year 2023-24 terms	Numbers on roll*
Autumn 1 (Sept-Oct)	5
Autumn 2 (Nov-Dec)	6
Spring 1 (Jan-Feb)	8
Spring 2 (March-April)	9
Summer 1 (April-May)	10
Summer 2 (June- July)	10
(Autumn 1 2024-25)	10

*Numbers as in May 2024, in advance of the Consultation

- 3.4 A public consultation commenced on 8 July and concluded on 19 August 2024 (Appendix A). This was delayed because of the General Election and so longer than the minimum four weeks due to the summer break. An analysis of the responses is included as Appendix B to this Cabinet report. In summary, the consultation was promoted with a wide range of stakeholders and other interested groups including the school and local communities, neighbouring primary schools and their governing bodies, Members and local PVI's. Promotions were delivered through the 'Let's Talk Tower Hamlets' and Local Authority websites, direct emails/messaging, social media, bulletins and newsletters, a statutory newspaper notice on 25 July and at an in-person event at the school on 17 July 2024.
- 3.5 Respondents included parents, Headteachers, Governors, a PVI and other community members. The consultation website was visited **159** times, **70** viewed the survey, with **29** responses received. **11** individuals attended the in-person event on 17 July 2024. The overwhelming majority of respondents agree with the proposal, with parents particularly supportive for a range of reasons, including quality of the pilot provision, need in local area and importance of the provision for working families and families of school staff.

The Proposal

- 3.6 **Accommodation**
The proposal will allow for up to 30 places to be available to 3–4-year-olds. As of June, the Ben Hanbury room (previously used as a computing room / break-out space) has been reassigned as a classroom to accommodate Year 1. This enables the Reception and Nursery cohorts to split between two separate rooms. The introduction of a permanent Nursery class will have no negative impact on space for the remainder of the school and the school floor plan will remain the same besides the repurposing of one room.
- 3.7 The early years playground has been refurbished (Autumn 2023) to accommodate more pupils with a more varied outdoor provision including opportunities to develop gross motor skills.

3.8 A floor plan is available in Appendix C, and photographs of the classroom and playground space are available in Appendix D.

3.9 Early Years Curriculum & Quality of Teaching

Stepney Greencoat CE Primary School is an Ofsted rated 'Good' school working in partnership with St Peter's London Docks CE Primary School (Ofsted rated 'Outstanding'). Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum expertise and resource across both schools is well supported and shared. The quality of teaching is ensured through careful planning and high-quality early years trained staff. There is at least a 1:8 teaching ratio at all times including a Scale 5 practitioner.

3.10 Pupils access early years provision from several different places before attending the nursery at 3years of age. Crucially, this proposal provides children with the opportunity to access the school's EYFS curriculum prior to entering reception. By providing local families with a permanent, two-year, EYFS curriculum, the differing starting points of pupils can be addressed before the transition to Reception.

3.11 The current pilot nursery cohort (2023-2024) indicates that children are making very good progress in all areas of the EYFS. This will have a significant, positive, impact on their attainment and transition to reception.

3.12 Good quality wraparound provision is now available to all EYFS children (including Nursery pupils). This includes a breakfast club from 7:45 – 8:45am and afterschool care until 5:30pm.

3.13 Aims & Objectives

A permanent nursery provision will enable the following:

- The school to develop children's EYFS curriculum knowledge and skills over two years of carefully planned teaching with support from expertise at partner school, St Peter's London Docks;
- The opportunity for early intervention from the school re: SEND, safeguarding, behaviour and speech and language;
- The opportunity to build strong relationships with parents / carers from the start of their child's school journey;
- One 'settling-in' period, rather than two, for families who seek nursery places elsewhere before starting in Reception class;
- A positive and consistent, through-school experience for pupils;
- Support to local families financially (by providing free childcare hours);
- Support to existing Stepney families by removing the need for a 'double drop-off' where younger siblings are forced to attend other local nursery settings.

3.14 The pilot nursery provision has had an extremely positive impact on the school's reception numbers for 2024-2025, with 30 offers made. Reception is currently oversubscribed for September 2024. This compares to 13 offers at this point in 2023-2024, with 14 on roll in Reception in the summer term 2023-24. This supports with the future sustainability of the whole school going forwards.

- 3.15 Sustainability and potential impact on provision within the area**
The permanent nursery will not be in competition with other local primary schools but will rather enable the school to provide equal nursery provision to all local families.
- 3.16 All other schools in the Stepney Planning Area have full-time nursery provision which feeds into their Reception class. It is important that the school is able to meet parent demand and to offer the same provision as other local schools.
- 3.17 Projections indicate that the total number of children aged 2-4years accessing an Early Years entitlements in 2025 will increase by 12% on the previous year. Furthermore, the expansion of entitlements to a younger age range is anticipated to predominantly impact on capacity in the PVI sector, as most maintained settings are not designed to accommodate children younger than 2 years old (Appendix G).
- 3.18 The ward assessment (Appendix H) suggests a need for more full time childcare to support working parents and the ongoing expansion of the childcare entitlements to include a broader range of children whose parents are working. This may result in a greater need for term-time only early education provision, as PVI providers gear their provision towards working parents.
- 3.19 Furthermore, the new increases to entitlement demand are expected to have a consequential impact on the ability of PVI providers to accommodate 3- and 4-year-olds. Whilst the total number of children accessing 3- and 4-year-old entitlements is expected to reduce by 8% over the next five years, more children will need to access their entitlements at a maintained setting.
- 3.20 Financial Sustainability**
There are no capital funding implications. The pilot nursery is cost neutral. Further financial modelling will ensure that this continues as numbers grow (Appendix E).
- 3.21 The benefits for the school long term include;
- Higher pupil-roll in Reception class as nursery families apply;
 - Opportunity for earlier intervention for SEND allowing for funding requests to be made sooner and support implemented more quickly;
 - Workforce and professional development and stability in the form its EYFS curriculum.
- 3.22 Implementation timetable**
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|-----------------------|---|
| September 2024 | Local Authority administrative support for nursery admissions |
| January 2025 | Determination of Admission Arrangements 2026-27 |
| September 2025 | Coordination of nursery admission arrangements |

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Local Authority aims to establish provisions that seek to eradicate inequality and maximise the accessibility of nursery places. These policies are circumscribed by law and statutory guidance. They comply with equalities legislation and, as far as possible, are inclusive of the community. The nursery provision will not adversely impact any particular group, including those with protected characteristics or who are disadvantaged (Appendix F).
- 4.2 Schools have a key part to play in providing opportunities for children from different backgrounds to learn with, from and about each other; by encouraging through their teaching, an understanding of, and respect for, other cultures, faiths and communities.
- 4.3 The Local Authority is also very mindful of its duty to ensure that school organisation and place planning decisions meet parental preference, where possible. It monitors outcomes to ensure that any proposed changes have consideration to the background, identify any issues of concern, and highlight the potential benefits.
- 4.4 The proposal will support the local authorities' duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to school, by reducing multiple journeys, journey times and car use and travel costs for local families, particularly those with more than one child.

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

Best Value

- 5.1 Best Value is a core objective of the proposals outlined as they seek to secure the best outcomes for the population in the context of fair access to high quality local nursery provision.

Environmental Implications

- 5.2 The underpinning principle of any expansion is to ensure sustainable local places for local children. This reduces the need for pupils to travel long distances to school as well as the impact of school transportation on the environment. The proposal will support the local authorities' duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to school ie walking, cycling and public transport, it will shorten journey times, reduce costs for families, and reduce the use of vehicles

Risk Management Implications

- 5.3 The decision to expand a provision permanently must be made in accordance with the [Making significant changes \('prescribed alterations'\) to maintained schools \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67112/making-significant-changes-to-maintained-schools.pdf) Failure to do so could lead to legal challenge and a loss of confidence in the local authority as the decision maker.

Sustainability Implications

- 5.4 Although, the circumstances in which all nursery provisions and primary schools are now operating have been impacted by falling rolls, the Local Authority maintains there is a need for plans that continue to maintain different types of nursery provision and families' access to choice and preference. The risk of not implementing the proposed expansion could remove this right, threatening the future sustainability of a 1FE school.
- 5.5 The Local Authority is assured that the permanent expansion does not threaten the long-term sustainability of other nursery classes and primary schools. Rather, it places Stepney Greencoat CE School on a more level playing field.

Safeguarding Implications

- 5.6 This proposal, enables the local authority to work collaboratively with schools and other agencies to safeguard and promote the well-being of all children in the borough, particularly our most vulnerable in our nurseries and during the transition to primary school.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 The initiative is cost-neutral, with all expenses fully covered by early years funding, including any additional teacher salaries and associated costs. The total projected income for this initiative is £122,000, as detailed in Appendix E. While there is no financial risk to this initiative due to its cost-neutral nature, it's important to consider that as pupil numbers increase—particularly if students are drawn from neighbouring nurseries—those schools could experience reduced enrolment, leading to decreased funding.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations (2013) statutory process must be followed where the proposed enlargement is permanent and would increase the capacity by more than 30 pupils and where a change of age range is being proposed.
- 7.2 Local authorities must have regard to the 'Making significant changes (prescribed alterations) to maintained schools; Statutory Guidance for proposers and decision makers' when exercising functions under the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations (2013).
- 7.3 The statutory process for proposed alternations has been complied with in relation to this proposal.

- 7.4 Local Authorities must also adhere to the usual principles of public law when making changes to schools by (i) acting rationally and within their powers (ii) taking into account all relevant and no irrelevant considerations and (iii) following a fair procedure.
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Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- NONE

Appendices

- Appendix A Stepney Greencoat Statutory Proposal Document
- Appendix B Public Consultation Responses
- Appendix C Floor Plan
- Appendix D Classroom Accommodation and Playground Space
- Appendix E Financial Modelling
- Appendix E1 Stepney Greencoat Nursery Costings 2024-25
- Appendix F Equality Impact Screening
- Appendix G Early Years Sufficiency: 3 and 4 Year Olds
- Appendix H Mile End Ward Score Card

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information)(England) Regulations 2012

- NONE

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A