

Report to: Cabinet

Date: 14 May 2009

Subject: Proposed Closure of Montrose School

Report of: Nick Hudson – Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services

Jill Clarke – Head of Service – Learning i.clarke@wigan.gov.uk

Contact officer: Elaine Baulcombe – Service Manager – SEN Commissioning
e.baulcombe@wigan.gov.uk 01942 486127

Purpose / summary: The purpose of this report is to:

- outline the borough's specialist provision for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN);
- request permission to consult on the proposed closure of Montrose School.

Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended: The alternative option considered was that Montrose and Hope Schools would federate and that Montrose School would continue to be maintained.

The reasons for selecting the recommended option are contained within the body of the report.

Recommendation / decision: Members are recommended to note the content of this report and agree the request of the Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services to proceed to statutory consultation on the proposal to close Montrose School wef 31st August 2010.

Key Decision: This report involves a key decision within ground(s) 1,2.

The decision made as a result of this report will be published within **48 hours** and cannot be actioned until **seven working days** have elapsed, i.e. before 27 May 2009

This item is included in the Forward Plan.

Risks / Implications:

Financial:	Individual pupil funding will be transferred and used to support pupils in the receiving schools. Revenue savings will be reinvested to further develop SEN provision.
Staffing:	Permanent staff that may be at risk of redundancy will be supported in finding alternative employment.
Policy:	Wigan Strategy for School Places and Buildings. LA Inclusion Strategy.
Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted?	Yes
Wards affected:	All

Property Implications – Does the proposal involve a reduction, addition or change to the Council’s asset base or its occupation?

In the event that the decision is made to implement the proposal for closure, the building/site will revert back to CYPS to decide its future use or declare it as surplus to requirements.

If yes, have the property implications been agreed with the Corporate Property Officer?

Yes

Does this proposal have significant implications for the Council and the local population?

A full diversity impact assessment has been undertaken and is attached as an appendix to this report.

Does this proposal involve a new policy or procedure or significant changes to an existing policy or procedure?

A full diversity impact assessment has been undertaken and is attached as an appendix to this report.

Has the Service Director - Borough Solicitor confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council’s Constitution?	Yes
Has the Service Director - Corporate Services confirmed that any expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council’s budget?	Yes
Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council?	No

* delete which applicable

For Cabinet reports only :

Categorisation of the report:	x
Discussion leading to a decision	
Monitoring	
Sharing for corporate understanding	

	x
Discussion	
Decision	x
Information	

Tracking/Process:

	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council
		14 May 2009	

List of Background Papers in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:

The School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2007
Planning and Developing Special Educational Provision: DCSF Guide for Local Authorities and Other Proposers Publication date: 25/05/07

Proper Officer



Date

28th April 09

1 Background

Following the Local Education Authority's Ofsted inspection in February 2001, an Inclusion Strategy was drawn up with the aim of improving inclusive education for children and young people with SEN. The strategy specifically aimed to address the issues raised within the inspection report, which stated that Wigan had:

- a higher than average number of pupils with statements
- below average performance in the timescale for issuing statements
- higher than average numbers of pupils placed in special schools
- higher than average numbers of pupils placed in independent schools
- higher than average numbers of maintained special schools
- surplus capacity within special schools resulting in poor value for money

The Inclusion Strategy contained a number of actions to address these issues, which included a review of maintained special schools.

1.1 Review of Specialist Provision

In 2001, there were ten special schools maintained by Wigan, and 964 of the 2,522 pupils with statements were placed there; but there was surplus capacity in the majority of the schools, particularly those catering for children and young people with moderate learning difficulties.

The review resulted in the disestablishment of six special schools. These schools catered for children and young people with moderate and severe learning difficulties and physical/medical needs. Three new generic special schools were established, as was a range of resourced mainstream provision on an area basis.

Hope School was maintained, to provide for children and young people, aged 2-19, with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), and also complex needs arising from learning, physical and medical difficulties.

Landgate School was established to provide for children with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD), reducing the need to use costly independent schools outside of the borough.

2 Current Situation

The number of pupils with SEN, and the types of difficulties they experience, are regularly monitored and reviewed. As a result, improvements and developments in the SEN sector are ongoing. Since 2006, Landgate School has been expanded to cater for pupils aged 16-19. Platt Bridge and Westfield Community Primary Schools, and Hawkley Hall High School, all offer resourced mainstream provision for a number of children and young people with SEN.

Two secondary EBSD schools, both in the east of the borough, have been disestablished, and a new school, Newbridge Learning Community, has opened in the centre of the borough, for the 11-16 age range.

Specialist Provision wef September 2009	
Special School	Designation
New Greenhall	Complex Needs 2-14
Montrose	Complex Needs 4-14
Oakfield	Complex Needs 11-19
Hope	Complex Needs (inc PMLD) 2-19
Willow Grove	EBS D 4-11
Newbridge Learning Community	EBS D 11-16
Landgate	Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) 4-19 yrs
Mainstream School	Designation – Resourced to provide for:
Hindley Sure Start Nursery	Physical/Medical Difficulties N
Platt Bridge Community	Observation & Assessment / Speech Lang & Comm / ASD 3-11
Westfield Community	Observation & Assessment / Speech Lang & Comm / ASD 3-11
Hindley J & I	Physical/Medical Difficulties 4-11
Hindley Community High	Physical/Medical Difficulties 11-16
Hawkley Hall High	ASD 11-16

3 Issues at Montrose School

- 3.1 As part of the three-year budget-setting process for 2008-2011, forecasts of the number of pupils who would access specialist provision during that period were produced. These were based on trends from the previous 18 months, and identified a continued reduction in numbers. Ongoing review has confirmed the decrease in numbers.

At Montrose School, this is particularly significant. Pupil numbers are low and will reduce over the next two years. The school is approved to cater for 70 pupils but by September 2009, only 30 pupils will remain on roll. By September 2010, there will be only 21, making the school unviable.

- 3.2 Montrose School has been placed in Special Measures since its Ofsted inspection in January 2008. Subsequently, the substantive Headteacher began a period of long-term absence.

A Statement of Action was drawn up and approved by Ofsted in March 2008. This included the collaboration of a partner school to support Montrose in addressing the key areas for improvement as identified by the inspection report.

Since April 2008, the Headteacher of Hope School has been acting as Consultant Headteacher at Montrose and, with support from CYPs, much progress has been made towards meeting set targets.

HMI monitoring visits report satisfactory progress in all key areas. However, the long term absence of the substantive Headteacher, and his recent resignation, has led to uncertainties surrounding the longer term leadership and direction of the school. This has placed some limitations on the rate with which the school can come out of Special Measures.

Discussions with Governing Bodies at Montrose and Hope Schools have been ongoing to explore the possibility of a formal, non-statutory, soft federation between the two schools, whereby each school would have its own Governing Body and joint governance/strategic committee without delegated powers.

In order to do this, both Governing Bodies would have to formally agree and consult over the intention to federate. The decline in pupil numbers, which calls into question the long-term viability of the school, has made federation a less favourable option.

4 Proposal

In view of the above, it is now proposed that Montrose School should close with effect from 31st August 2010. CYPS and Hope School will continue to work with Montrose to bring the school out of Special Measures, and provide support with the management of the proposed closure.

5 Implications of Closure

5.1 Implications for Pupils

Montrose School caters for children and young people from Reception until the end of Year 9. If the proposal is agreed, a proportion of the pupils on roll at the school at the end of the Summer Term 2010 will need to transfer prematurely, ie, before they reach Year 9.

Wigan Council will commit to ensuring continuity of quality education for all pupils transferring from Montrose, and the advantages and disadvantages of a range of options have been considered.

Whilst some parents may choose a mainstream place for their child, all parents will be assured that a special school place will be available in an appropriate setting. Discussions around possible pupil destinations have been held with the prospective receiving schools, and preparation and liaison will take place with staff, parents and pupils to minimise disruption and ensure a smooth transition.

5.1.1 Options for Pupils transferring from Montrose School

Primary-aged pupils on roll at the end of the Summer Term 2010 will transfer to the alternative special school in the west of the borough. Secondary-aged pupils, who will be moving up into Years 7, 8 and 9, will transfer to the school they would have transferred to naturally at the end of Year 9. However, parental preference will be considered, and the commitment is that all pupils will continue to receive high quality education and care in an appropriate setting.

5.2 Implications for Staff

Established systems are in place, which have been agreed with Trade Unions and other professional associations, to support staff facing displacement to find suitable alternative employment.

5.3 Financial Implications

As pupil numbers continue to fall the school will not provide value for money.

Individual pupil funding will be transferred and used to support pupils in the receiving schools.

Revenue savings will be reinvested to further develop SEN provision. The building/site will revert back to CYPS to decide its future use or declare it as surplus to requirements.

6 Conclusion

Montrose School is in Special Measures, loosely collaborated with Hope. It has falling numbers, uncertainty of leadership, and to maintain the school would be unviable.

Federation with Hope School has been considered, but the fall in numbers and the fact that there is sufficient capacity within other special schools to accommodate the number and needs of pupils at Montrose have made this a less favourable option. To continue to maintain Montrose School would not provide value for money.

7 Recommendation

Members are recommended to consider the content of this report and agree to the request of the Executive Director of Children and Young People's Services to proceed to statutory consultation on the proposed closure of Montrose School with effect from 31st August 2010.

Diversity Impact Assessment form

Section: CYPS

Policy/Service Area: Strategy and Commissioning

Person Completing Form: Elaine Baulcombe

Date: 09.04.09

Do any of the below groups suffer specific disadvantage (please indicate)

	Yes	No		Yes	No
Race		x	Disability		x
Ethnicity		x	Gender		x
Age		x	Religion		x
Class		x	Sexual Orientation		x

Is there evidence of disadvantage or associated problems?

There is sufficient capacity within existing provision to meet the current level of need.

Parental preference will be considered and continuity of quality education and care will be maintained.

Surplus funding will be re-directed to provide support in other areas of SEN.

How was the information collected and/or who have you consulted with?

- The proposals have been discussed with the Governing Bodies of Hope and Montrose Schools.
- Parents and staff at Montrose have been made aware of the proposals.
- Discussions have been held with the Chair of Governors and Headteacher at Oakfield School.
- Cabinet agreement to progress the proposal will lead to wider consultation.

Action Plan – *What specific actions are planned to tackle any disadvantage identified?*

Is the policy in line with current equality legislation and relevant codes of practice?

Equality legislation has been taken into consideration and an Equality Impact Assessment has been completed.

The proposal supports SEN policies and is in line with the SEN Code of Practice

Timescale

Responsibility

Comments

Are the actions specified included in any other documents/plans?

Departmental Service Plan

Section/Team Plan

Other (Specify)

Date for further review