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ST IVES FIRST SCHOOL

RECORD OF THE REASONS FOR DECISION ON THE 16 APRIL 2015

On the Thursday 16 April 2015 the Governors of St Ives First School met to consider whether the school should change its age range to enable it to become a primary school with effect from September 2015.

The proposal had been the subject of both initial and then formal consultation. At both its meetings of 30 March 2015 and 16 April 2015, the Governors gave lengthy and careful consideration to relevant matters including those which had been raised in the consultation responses. It has considered, in particular:

1. The information contained in and accompanying the formal proposal document provided to all relevant stakeholders on 24 February 2015, including
 - a. the views expressed by parents and prospective parents in relation to the proposal
 - b. the considered impact on the schools financial position
 - c. the information concerning the school's ability to accommodate the proposal safely
 - d. the data and other information concerning pupil numbers at the school and other schools, including the school's continuing loss of children to Hampshire schools
 - e. the considered impact of the proposal, if implemented, on other schools including local middle schools
2. The data and other information provided to the school by Dorset County Council
3. The objection to the proposal made by Dorset County Council, as particularly made in its letter of 24 March 2015
4. Responses to the consultation provided by Emmanuel Middle School, St Michaels Middle School, West Moors Middle School and the Dorset Association of Middle Schools.
5. Guidance from the Department for Education relating to schools organisation, which made clear that the proposal could be adopted without following the formal statutory process which would apply in the case of a "prescribed alteration", but advised that Governors must act in accordance with general public law principles, undertake an effective consultation with all relevant stakeholders, and liaise with the local authority in terms of place planning and relevant issues.
6. Legal advice which it has received in relation to the proposal.

At its meeting on the 16 April 2015 the Governing body determined unanimously that St Ives should become a primary school with effect from September 2015 for the following reasons:-

1. The proposal had been the subject of an effective consultation with stakeholders and all reasonable efforts had been made to liaise as appropriate with the local authority. The Dorset Association of Middle Schools had thanked the Governors for ensuring an effective consultation had taken place within an appropriate time span and providing all stakeholders with the opportunity to express their views. The Governors considered that, having carefully considered the points made during consultation including by the local authority, they were well placed to make a decision.
2. The rationale for the proposal, as expressed in the formal proposed document, remained sound. In short: the school had been experiencing an unacceptable level of turbulence for a small one entry first school to manage. The school was located on the border of Dorset and Hampshire, and many parents considered Ringwood, in Hampshire, as their local town. The school had been

experiencing a consistent loss of pupils who lived within its catchment area to Hampshire schools. The extent of the loss was demonstrated by data and information provided in and with the formal proposal document, which was not effectively disputed by stakeholders during consultation. The loss was detrimental to the school, both financially and in terms of the disruption of pupils' education. By becoming a primary school, the school would be able to seek to retain many of those children being lost to the Hampshire system, and serve more effectively the particular community with which it had the closest connection, namely Ringwood in Hampshire.

3. The Governors remained of the view expressed in the formal proposal document that the proposal would increase parental choice in a way which was desirable. If the school became a primary school, parents would have a choice to either remove their child at the end of year 4, so as to send them to a middle school, or to keep them at the school until the completion of their primary education. The Governors attached significant weight to the fact that some 98% of parents of pupils at the school had been in favour of the proposal.
4. Contrary to the view of the local authority, the Governors considered that the proposal would be to the educational benefit of pupils. The school was rated as "Outstanding" by Ofsted and there was no reason to suppose it would not remain so as a primary school. The school was more highly rated than local middle schools. Accordingly the Governors considered that, in general, a pupil in year 5 or 6 at the school would be more likely to receive a better education than in a local middle school.
5. The Governors carefully considered the financial sustainability of the proposal, including in light of representations received by the local authority. They concluded that the proposal was financially acceptable in the short term, and would be to the school's overall financial benefit.
6. The Governors recognised that the school had previously been a primary school and accepted the advice of the Head Teacher that re-organisation of the premises would enable two additional classes to be accommodated safely and in accordance with local authority recommended guidelines. The Governors considered that no significant concern had been raised during consultation of the school's ability physically to accommodate the proposal.
7. Having carefully considered all the information available to or provided to them from a variety of sources (including parents, the local authority, and local middle schools), the Governors considered that, on balance, the significant merits of the proposal outweighed such adverse impact which it might have on local middle schools, and any other potential demerit. The Governors acknowledged that some adverse impact on middle schools was likely, at least in the short term, but did not consider the extent of such impact to be as great as suggested in certain consultation responses. In particular, having regard to the school's historic data provided with the formal consultation document and information provided to it by parents, the Governors did not consider that the extent of impact suggested by the local authority and certain middle schools was accurate or likely. The Governors recognised that a decision as to whether to adopt the proposal involved making a judgement on competing considerations. Their judgement was to adopt the proposal.
8. The Governors considered that the proposal should be implemented with effect from September 2015. In light of certain consultation responses, they considered at length whether implementation of the proposal should be deferred until September 2016. They recognised that implementation in September 2015 might result in parents who have already applied for places in local middle schools not now taking up such places at a potential loss to the middle schools in question, but considered the potential loss not to be as great as had been suggested. They considered, furthermore, that implementation in September 2015 was appropriate given that, because of the timing of admissions processes, there was a historical trend of parents applying for middle school places in Dorset and then subsequently applying for places in Hampshire. For parents not to take up places at local middle schools was not therefore unusual.

