



Mrs S Bitcon and Mr B Stanton
Cherry Orchard First School
Cherry Orchard
Pershore
WR10 1ET

Our Ref: CHFS Age range 12/2017
15 December 2017

Dear Sarah & Bob

Re: Cherry Orchard First School proposal to extend the age range of the school to accommodate children at Year 5 and Year 6 (change of age range).

I refer to the Avonreach Academy Trust Consultation letter of 1st November 2017, relating to your Governing Body proposal to change the age range of Cherry Orchard First School (COFS) to include Year 5 and Year 6 (change of age range by two years). As you are aware the Department for Education (DfE) publish guidance for Academy Trusts proposing to make significant changes to academy schools. As part of this guidance Academy Trusts **must** consult with the Local Authority on such proposals, therefore thank you for writing to us.

Cabinet approved a policy position in October 2016 that outlines the framework for assessing change of age range proposals. We have used the criteria from this policy to form our response to your consultation:

- a) An open and fair consultation has taken place with parents and other relevant stakeholders and the school can clearly demonstrate how any objections or issues raised will be managed

The LA acknowledge that the school has opened a consultation period of 6 weeks during term time and held a consultation meeting at each school which is in-line with DfE best practice guidance. The consultation document held useful, appropriate information and there was clarity on how and when responses should be made. The LA is aware that parents / carers and other local schools have been included in the consultees. The LA is also aware that Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) have been produced and published on The Avonreach Academy Trust website.

Presently the LA believe that there are gaps in the information provided as part of the consultation documents (as indicated in points below) and is also unclear how the responses received from stakeholders during the consultation period will be managed. All objections or issues raised should be considered and answered fully at the end of the consultation period, prior to the final proposal

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decision being submitted to the Regional Schools Commissioner. The LA request to receive a copy of the responses and answers from the Avonreach Academy Trust.

- b) the school has a 'good' or 'outstanding' Ofsted judgement, or can demonstrate how the change would support improvement at the school;

It is noted that the school has been judged as being 'good' by Ofsted in March 2016.

- c) the school can demonstrate the capacity to manage any curriculum changes or has secured appropriate support to do so;

We acknowledge that as part of your FAQ's the school has recognised the implications of this change and its impact on the curriculum, and has identified that there is currently appropriately trained and experienced teachers in post to support this change. Governors should assure themselves that the school can manage this change without any impact on standards and that the appropriate resources are put in place prior to the start of this process.

- d) the school can demonstrate that appropriate facilities, staff and systems will be in place, including how they will manage additional revenue costs;

The Local Authority confirms that there will be no capital or revenue funding to support this process and Governors will need to ensure that any changes can be met from within existing budgets.

The school has confirmed that the additional accommodation is already available for a Year 5 intake from September 2019.

- e) there should be no detrimental impact on other schools i.e. the proposal should not undermine the quality of education provided by other good or outstanding schools in the area, for example, by creating additional places where there is already surplus capacity;

The DfE in its school organisation guidance and the LA in policy position recognises that change of age range proposals can impact negatively on other schools in the area.

We do not believe your consultation document and FAQ's demonstrate that there will be no detrimental impact on other schools. Abbey Park Middle School (rated Good) may potentially lose up to 30 pupils transferring from Cherry Orchard into the Middle School Year 5 and Year 6. In 2016, 23 pupils transferred from Cherry Orchard to Abbey Park Middle and in 2017, 22 pupils transferred. The proposed change is likely to undermine the quality of provision Abbey Park Middle School is able to provide to the remaining pupils and force the Middle School to reduce their PAN.

In addition, the linked Avonreach MAT proposals (change of age ranges at Norton Juxta First and Inkberrow First) are likely to cause a detrimental impact on the other Middle Schools in the pyramid, and the change of age range at Pershore High School may also cause detrimental impact upon the Middle Schools in the pyramid. If the High School lowers the age range to include Year

7, some of the Middle Schools are likely to lose Year 7 pupils (dependent upon the admissions criteria being agreed).

This proposal is not aligned with local pupil place planning and could have a significant impact on other local provision, as well as creating surplus places. Cherry Orchard's proposal will create an extra 30 places in both Year 5 and Year 6 which will create an oversupply of places in the area. Alongside the other Avonreach proposals in 2021 we estimate 123 surplus places at Year 5, 132 surplus places at Year 6, and 125 surplus places at Year 7.

Because the local provision is organised in three tiers, the DfE expects schools to work together to ensure appropriate co-ordinated implementation. The LA does not agree that this proposal achieves that.

The Local Authority requests copies of any objections / issues received by Avonreach MAT from other local schools, with responses to how the issues raised will be (or have been) managed.

- f) there is an agreed, clear and practical pathway for children to move on from each school affected by the change;

The Middle Schools at this stage are not proposing any admission changes therefore children could continue to leave Cherry Orchard at the end of Year 4 and transition to a Middle School into Year 5.

The LA does not believe that the school has demonstrated that an agreed and clear pathway for students leaving Cherry Orchard at the end of Year 6 is in place. At this stage, there is no guarantee that Pershore High School will have approval to lower the age range to admit students into a Year 7, nor is there an approved admissions policy for the proposed Year 7. Changes to admission arrangements must be consulted upon and agreed before 31st January 2018 for implementation in September 2019. Although the proposed change of age range at Pershore High would not be implemented until 2021, there is no agreed pathway for children to move from Year 6 to Year 7 until these admission arrangements are agreed and published.

- g) funding for any necessary accommodation changes has already been secured;

The school has confirmed that additional accommodation has been secured but that further improvements to accommodation and facilities may be required, such as improvements to the entrance, office and additional resources. It is not clear in the consultation document or FAQ's how these additional requirements will be funded.

- h) any reduction in Published Admission Number or change in admission criteria required has been consulted upon and agreed;

The proposal does not indicate a reduction in PAN. The LA expect a PAN of 30 pupils to be implemented for Year 5 & 6 if this proposal proceeds.

- i) appropriate planning permission and any other consent required have been secured;
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The Local Authority is not aware that planning permission is needed at Cherry Orchard.

j) individual factors for specified school.

School Admissions have advised that Cherry Orchard do not have an existing published admissions policy on the school website for 2018. The school needs to rectify this aspect.

It is noted that if approved, the school wish this change in age range to be effective from September 2019. Taking into account all the factors noted above and in particular, items a, e ,f and j; Worcestershire County Council does not support the proposal to change the age range of Cherry Orchard First School.

The school needs to consider our response and put in place mitigation. In particular, we would seek:

- Evidence of responses / mitigation to all objections or issues raised during the consultation, prior to the final proposal decision being submitted to the Regional Schools Commissioner;
- Evidence of funding resources required to support any recruitment requirements;
- Evidence of how the school believes this proposal will not impact on other schools, particularly Abbey Park Middle;
- Clear evidence of agreed, clear and practical pathways for your pupils beyond Year 6; and
- Published admission arrangements for Cherry Orchard.

The LA believe that the proposal to change the age range of Cherry Orchard First School by two years linked to the other Avonreach MAT change of age range proposals, is a contentious proposal and therefore, if to be considered by the Regional Schools Commissioner, should be subject to a full business case.

To ensure transparency in this process the LA will copy this response to the consultation to all other schools in the pyramid and to the Regional Schools Commissioner.

Yours sincerely



Marcus J Hart
Cabinet Member for Education & Skills

Copied to:

Andrew Longdon – Avonreach Academy Trust Chair of Trustees
Clive Corbett – Avonreach Academy Trust Executive Officer
