
HOBKIRK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Report by Service Director Children & Young People

EDUCATION EXECUTIVE

3 November 2015

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report proposes changes to the status of Hobkirk Primary School in that it is proposed the school be mothballed for a temporary period and that the decision to do so be reviewed within 12 months.**
- 1.2 The report outlines the background to the falling pupil roll at Hobkirk Primary School, which has resulted in placing requests from parents of the last 7 pupils attending the school being granted, leaving no pupils at the school. Arrangements for accommodating the pupils within Denholm Primary School are described and include transport, staffing and the educational and social benefits to be achieved through the process.
- 1.3 The Statutory Guidance issued pursuant to the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 recognises that on occasions a Local Authority might consider it appropriate to mothball a school. This decision does not need to be subject to the formal requirements of that Act. However, the guidance emphasises that mothballing is temporary and any decision to do so must be kept under review.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **I recommend that the Executive Committee agrees:-**
 - (a) To recommend to Council that Hobkirk Primary School be mothballed with immediate effect for a temporary period; and**
 - (b) To review the status of the school within the next 12 months.**
 - (c) In the interim that a decision be taken to provide transport to Denholm Primary School for any new pupils who move into the area.**

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 In January 2010 the roll at Hobkirk Primary was 39 pupils in 2 classes plus a nursery. The number of children in nursery reduced and by August 2012 the nursery was accommodated within the Primary 1-4 class; and in August 2013 the nursery ceased to operate as there were no nursery aged children.

3.2 In June 2014, 7 pupils left the school and none were enrolled. The reduced roll of 21 meant that the children were accommodated in a Primary 1-7 class and the teaching staff was reduced to 1. In June 2015, 5 Primary 7 pupils transferred to High School and additional placing requests to other schools resulted in the school opening with 7 pupils in August 2015.

3.3 Pupil Roll

(a) The roll at Hobkirk Primary School is currently 7 pupils:

Primary 3	1 pupil
Primary 5	2 pupils
Primary 6	3 pupils
Primary 7	1 pupil

(b) One of the Primary 5 pupils is leaving the area by Christmas reducing the roll to 6.

(c) 4 of these pupils are currently transported into Hobkirk Primary School from Southdean and Chesters, the other 3 live within the 2 mile walking radius of the school.

(d) 17 further primary age pupils who live in the Hobkirk catchment currently attend other schools following placing requests. These schools are Denholm (11), Parkside (5), and Drumlanrig (1).

(e) There are two 4 year olds living in the existing catchment area. In the last 3 years no children have started Hobkirk Primary School, but chose to enrol in other schools. Consultation with the pre-school parents intimates that the children will enrol at Denholm and Trinity Primary Schools for school session 16/17.

3.4 Staffing

The staffing complement in Hobkirk School is currently 0.5 Headteacher, 1.07 FTE class teachers, 1FTE cook/cleaner and 42 hours of support staff time comprising playground supervision, Classroom Assistant and Administration shared by 2 part time members of staff.

3.5 Community Use

Hobkirk Primary School building is not used by any other groups or organisations.

3.6 **Consultation**

(a) Following concerns raised by parents about their children's learning experiences at Hobkirk Primary this school session, a meeting took place between Council Officers and all existing parents.

- (b) Parents identified a number of concerns relating to the size of Hobkirk and the effects on their children's education. These include: difficulty for children to find a wide friendship group with similar interests, anticipated difficulties with transition to High School, lack of opportunities for games and team sports and lack of links into wider network of clubs and activities. The Parents also identified a number of educational benefits, should their children be able to attend Denholm Primary School: greater opportunities to experience the skills and abilities of a wider staff group, greater opportunities for socialisation and collaborative learning and greater opportunities for participation in team activities.
 - (c) There was also an acceptance from parents that their children were not able to participate fully in the Curriculum for Excellence due to the requirement for collaboration and peer working among learners and this is difficult to achieve with very small numbers at each stage.
 - (d) During discussions with parents the following options were considered:
 - i. Status quo
 - ii. Responding to individual parental placing requests to any school
- 3.7
- (a) As a result of discussions, all families from Hobkirk Primary School made placing requests to Denholm Primary School and these were granted by the Service Director, Children & Young People Services, under delegated authority. The Service Director recognised the educational benefits for the children. Moreover Section 28A of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 required that a placing request be granted unless specific grounds detailed in S.28A (3) apply. There were no grounds for refusing the placing requests.
 - (b) The majority of parental placing requests (65%) out of Hobkirk Primary School are to Denholm Primary School, therefore parental preference is being responded to in granting places requested for Denholm Primary School.
 - (c) Hobkirk Primary School became partner school to Denholm Primary School under Transforming Children's Services and as such the Headteacher works across the 2 schools. Pupils from Hobkirk already access facilities and activities in Denholm Primary School on a regular basis. The distance between the 2 schools is 9.7 miles on main routes.
 - (d) Both schools are in the same secondary catchment area and work in the same Learning Community. Improvement plans are aligned across the 2 schools, as are curricular programmes and teaching plans. This will support an easy transition for the Hobkirk pupils into classes in Denholm with continuity and progression in learning effectively supported.

Denholm Primary School has a roll of 97 pupils in 5 classes:

(e)

Class	Year groups	Total	With New Placing Request Pupils
P1/2	8+7	15	15
P2/3	10+8	18	19
P3/4	5+13	18	18
P5/6	15+8	23	25
P6/7	6+17	23	27

(f) The pupils from Hobkirk Primary School will transfer into the classes for their individual year groups. Transport has been arranged for the pupils transferring.

(g) A meeting took place with the parents of the P6/7 class of Denholm Primary School. The proposed arrangements were explained, which would have two teachers working with the class for the remainder of the school year. The remaining parents in the school were informed by letter of the addition of 7 new children enrolling in the school. The parents were supportive of the new arrangements. It is normal practice for children to move between schools during the school session as places are granted within Placing Request Legislation.

(h) After the Placing Requests were granted, 1:1 meetings were arranged for all staff with the Headteacher and a Human Resource Business Partner. The meeting with one staff member has still to take place, but will occur in the week commencing 26 October. Alternative roles have been found for the majority of staff and discussions are continuing with the other staff members.

4 PROPOSAL

4.1 As a result of the granting of Placing Requests to all of the children who were on the Hobkirk Primary School roll, the school roll has fallen to zero with no pre-school children expected to enrol for August 2016. Scottish Borders Council being in this position has considered the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 and proposes that Hobkirk Primary School be mothballed with immediate effect. The Statutory Guidance states that "mothballing" is a 'temporary closure which does not lead to a consultation under the 2010 Act'.

4.2 In accordance with the Schools Consultation (Scotland) Act 2010 Statutory Guidance, the decision to mothball the school will be formally reviewed within a 12 month period of this arrangement being implemented.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial

Whilst there may be slight financial implications relating to transport, it is anticipated that this be offset by savings relating to utilities at Hobkirk.

5.2 Risk and Mitigations

(a) Building Deterioration

There is a risk that the empty building falls into a state of disrepair when unoccupied. To mitigate this, there will be a caretaking arrangement undertaken to provide regular checks on the building and maintain it to appropriate standards.

- (b) Transport
The rural location of the journey to Denholm will be mitigated through the use of approved providers and journeys being undertaken on main routes.
- (c) Financial
As an interim measure this does not present any financial pressures. Longer term finances would be considered as part of any future statutory consultation process.
- (d) Staff
The majority of staff have been redeployed to roles in Denholm Primary School. Discussions are ongoing with the other members of staff. Scottish Borders Council policies on redeployment are being followed. However, if mothballing is approved that creates a redundancy situation in terms of the Employment Rights Act, and if staff cannot be successfully redeployed the Council's Redundancy Policy will be followed. There is a risk of increased travel expectations or staff not having access to transport, however Scottish Borders Council policies on Disturbance Allowance will be followed where applicable.
- (e) Stakeholders
Parents and pupils at Denholm Primary School have been fully informed in respect of additional pupils attending the school. Parents were invited to a meeting to discuss proposed changes in the Primary 6/7 classroom, as the teacher allocation for Hobkirk would be going into this class. The parents recognised a number of educational benefits for their children at Denholm in the new arrangements. The children responded positively to the news of 7 new children joining their school. Staff will ensure that regular contact is made with the parents of the transferring children to ensure a smooth transition.
- (f) The existing grandparent helpers who currently support children at Hobkirk Primary School have intimated their continuation of support as part of the Denholm Primary School Community.
- (g) We will advise the Community Councils in both communities of the new arrangements.

5.3 **Equalities**

It is anticipated that there are no adverse impact due to race, disability, gender, age, sexual orientation or religion/belief arising from the proposals in this report.

5.4 **Acting Sustainably**

There are no significant impacts on the economy, community or environment.

5.5 **Carbon Management**

There are no significant effects on carbon emissions arising from the

proposals contained in this report. We expect a carbon neutral position. Although there will be travel to the new school for all children there will be significant reduction of existing travel activities eg Headteacher visits between schools

5.6 Rural Proofing

While this report does not propose any new Policy or Strategy the Service Director Children and Young People has considered the impact of the proposal in light of the Council's rural proofing policy. The school has a roll of nil, so no current pupils are being displaced as a result of the mothballing. Nor are there any children living in the area who intend to enrol in Hobkirk Primary 1 Class in August 2016. No community groups make use of the school facilities. It is therefore considered that the proposal does not create any negative rural impact.

5.7 Changes to Scheme of Administration or Scheme of Delegation

There are no changes to be made to either the Scheme of Administration contained in this report.

6 CONSULTATION

6.1 The Chief Financial Officer, the Monitoring Officer, the Chief Legal Officer, the Service Director Strategy and Policy, the Chief Officer Audit and Risk, the Chief Officer HR, and the Clerk to the Council have been consulted and their comments have been incorporated into the final report.

6.2 A meeting has taken place with the Ward Councillors for Hawick & Denholm.

Approved by

Donna Manson
Service Director Children & Young People

Signature

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Background Papers:

Previous Minute Reference:

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