

The Report on The Hills Academy's consultation on changing the school age range from 2017 onwards

December 2015



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Section 1

The Directors and Trustees of The Hills Academy are now in a position to report on the outcome of the consultation and make a representation to the Secretary of State regarding:

The Hills Academy's consultation on changing the school age range for 2017 onwards.

The Hills is situated in Bedford, MK41 9AT. Please see attached map.

The Academy Ofsted URN is 139522

The DfE number for The Hills Academy is 822/2178

Brief history

The Hills Academy is located in a residential area in east Bedford town. The original building dates from 1966 when it was opened as Hazeldene Infants School. When Bedfordshire introduced the three-tier education system in the 1970s, it was re-named and designated as The Hills Lower School.

We are a friendly, caring, fun academy with a strong commitment to pupil achievement, serving the surrounding community and pupils from further away.

The academy is designed to accommodate up to 352 pupils, aged 3 to 9 years. The pupils start in our Nursery, which takes children from 3 years old within a flexible provision, and remain until the end of Year 4 when they transfer to a choice of local middle school.

In April 2013 we converted to become an academy after considering all the options open to us. We wanted to ensure that we were well placed going forward to support our children in their learning journey.

We are committed to providing a safe, exciting and high achieving environment for your children to thrive in and we use strong traditional values, coupled with a creative and innovative approach to education to achieve this.

Alteration proposal to the age range

It is proposed that The Hills Academy will extend its age range from a 3 to 9 years Lower School to a 3 to 11 years Primary School.

Implementation and stages of implementation

The proposal will be implemented on 1st September 2017.

- In September 2017 – Year 4 children will have the option to remain at the Academy and become a new Year 5

- In September 2018 – Year 5 children will remain at the Academy and become a new Year 6

Capacity

The current capacity of the school is 352 pupil places including the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).

Following implementation, the proposed capacity will increase to 420 places including EYFS.

We do not wish to alter the admission number. This is 60 places annually, each September into the EYFS.

However, in September 2017 a new Year 5 will be created and in September 2018 a new Year 6 will be created to enable pupils, who would have had to leave the school at the end of Year 4, the opportunity to remain at The Hills Academy.

Objectives of our proposal to change the age range are:

- To provide for continuation of the curriculum, whereby we can ensure continuity within Key Stage 2 fully without having to consider the interruption of transition at Year 4
- Within the national curriculum (that we chose to follow) we can ensure that there are no gaps in what the children are taught
- Whole school planning can map the progress of curriculum subjects all the way to Year 6 ensuring the foundations built lower down the school are carried through, allowing all children to continue working in an environment that completes their entire Primary education in one setting.
- To sustain high standards of education and maintain the nurturing and well-being of children by:
- Providing a values based, Primary focused, learning environment until the end of Year 6
- Nurturing our children and helping them to work together towards their aspirations in an environment they are used to.
- To offer children in Years R - 6 an exciting and innovative curriculum provision that meets their needs and supports them to achieve their full potential.

- To increase parental choice with regard to the variety of options and opportunities that are being offered.
- To avoid two transitions at the end of years 4 and 8; ensuring that the provision at The Hills Academy links seamlessly with other local providers.
- To drive up standards in Bedford Borough and meet the local area vision for development including the progress of vulnerable groups.
- To aide teacher recruitment and retention as fewer and fewer local authorities have three tier and teachers are trained for the two tier system.

Consultation

An informal consultation process was carried out between 1st October 2015 and 19th November 2015; the outcome of this is outlined elsewhere in this report. Attached is a copy of the consultation document.

Who did we inform?

We informed and invited comments from a wide range of stakeholders and the wider community through a number of approaches (detailed in the consultation document). It should be noted that the consultation process was run in conjunction with Goldington Academy and Goldington Green Academy which are also consulting on changes to their age ranges. Since the schools serve a common geographical area, it was felt appropriate to work together on informing and consulting with stakeholders.

Public meetings were held for parents and stakeholders:

7th October 2015 2pm and 7pm (with 25 attending in the afternoon and 34 attending in the evening)

A staff meeting was held at The Hills Academy:

12th June 2015 and 3rd September 2015

with teachers, teaching assistants, office staff, site agent and domestic staff invited.

We used various means of communication to reach our stakeholders including texts, newsletters, parent council meetings, blog and school website as well as formal letters. The family support worker helped parents who needed support to access information.

An electronic version of the consultation was placed for all stakeholders and interested parties on the school website.

We emailed copies of the consultation to:

All neighbouring local authorities and schools and the two Dioceses.

We spoke to pupils about the process in Assembly and the School Council held a discussion.

Implementation

The context of the implementation is part of the wider plan by Bedford Borough Council, the Local Authority, that is currently consulting on facilitating a two-tier system of education in the Borough, commencing in September 2017. The Borough already has a number of primary and secondary schools currently operating. Indeed, our traditional Upper School, Mark Rutherford, where most of our children eventually attend, receives a limited number of children into Year 7 from another Primary school in our area, Putnoe Primary.



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The purpose of this section of the proposal is to:

- Provide detailed information about the responses to the consultation process;
- Respond, in particular, to the areas of concern that have been raised as part of that process;
- Identify how the Academy Trust will meet the objectives for changing the age-range, as set out in the consultation process.

The consultation with stakeholders covered a single proposal:

'Do you agree that, from September 2017, Year 5 pupils should remain at The Hills Academy and move into Year 6 from 2018'

The Academy Trust invited through the consultation, responses to the following specific proposals:

- From September 2017 – Year 4 pupils should remain at The Hills Academy and move into a year 5 class and then into year 6 in 2018. The Hills Academy's age range changes from 3 to 9 years to 3 to 11 years.
- The Academy made it clear that there were no proposals to amend or consult on any changes to the current admissions criteria.

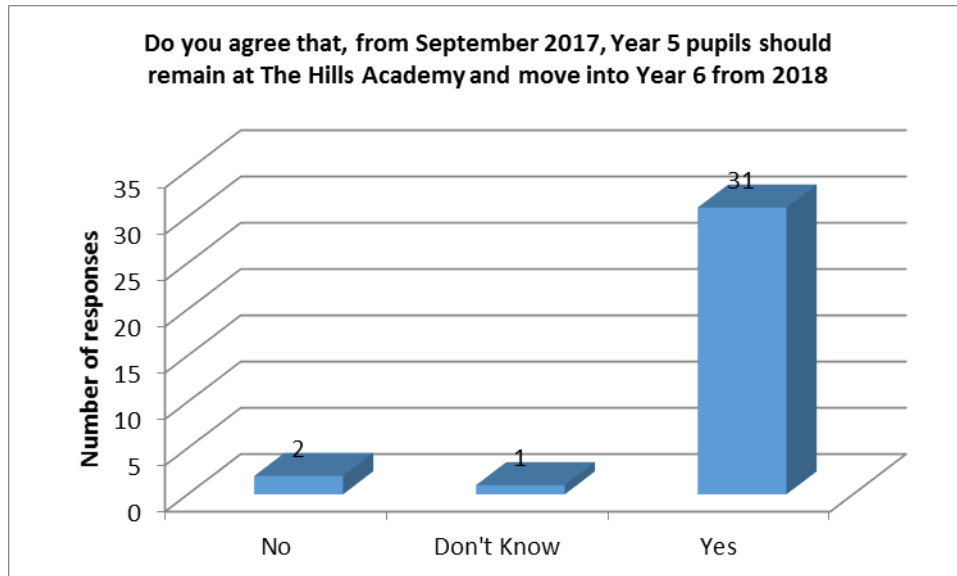
Summary of responses

A total of 34 written responses were received for the proposal plus some verbal questions and responses that arose from the 59 people who attended the consultation events. In terms of this report, there will be an indication of the responses received in graphical form and a commentary derived from the specific feelings that respondents made.

The report will then detail:

- Areas of concern
- The Academy Trust's responses to comments raised through the consultation process

Proposal



Whilst the vast majority of respondents were in favour of the proposal (31/1/2), some of those people expressed concerns about certain elements. These are detailed below, together with the governors' response to those concerns:

Areas of Concern

Written responses:

- My concern is with the plans at Goldington Middle School ...
- My concerns are with the secondary schools in the area ...
- My main concern is where children will move on to after The Hills Academy. If Castle/Newnham federation occurs and Newnham give priority to children from Castle and Hazeldene over catchment – what will happen to children who live in Newnham's current catchment area? Potentially they will be without a catchment school.
- Numbers on roll do not include any Nursery children, which could total another 30+? Children. Do not feel proposal takes into account these extra children and does not have room to accommodate up to 420 or 450 children and this is rather vague in info provided to date.

- My only concern is in the provision of educational equipment, space and teaching that is required in Years 5 & 6. Also, the current site feels 'full' – so will the extra numbers not impact on all years, unless we have a new sports hall, playgrounds, teachers, equipment, assembly hall, canteen etc. (x3)
- Given the space available & planned new classrooms, the only obvious logistical issues seem to be seating 420 pupils for assembly and lunch.
- Concerned about the loss of the computer suite into another classroom.
- Concerned about loss of outdoor space if more buildings need to be erected on the site.
- My only concern is that there will be adequate provision for Prime Time.
- As long as the necessary funding is put in place to ensure the transition will not affect our children's ongoing education.
- One concern is pedestrian safety during school drop off/collection times.

From the two respondents opposed to the proposal:

- The timescale for the age extension is unrealistic.
- The school grounds and buildings are not big enough to accommodate the extra children.
- The current plan appears to restrict, rather than increase parent choice (in terms of secondary options at Year 7).
- Insufficient funding to implement plans.
- Difficult for those children who were expecting to make the transition to Middle School and avail themselves of opportunities there such as technology rooms, computer suites, cookery rooms, homework timetables etc.
- Reservations concerning the administration in the school and the ability to communicate effectively.

Verbal responses. Queries about:

Academy Response to areas of concern

- We will be using skills from within as well as employing skills from without to enhance areas of specialism throughout the curriculum for years 5 and 6. We are already working closely with local settings and accessing additional facilities (such as AstroTurf sporting facilities and Science laboratories) and the intention is to continue to develop those links. It is important

to remember that we are not trying to be a middle school. We will be providing a **Primary** education.

- We do not currently have changing facilities for children but as in other Primary schools we will organize PE sessions so that boys and girls can change in separate rooms.
- We will be working hard throughout your child's time with us to ensure a smooth transfer to whichever setting you choose. Together we will ensure that your child is ready and happy to move on at that time. There will be a number of options for your child at Year 7 which will offer you good choice.
- Goldington Academy and Newnham Middle School consultation reports will be published on their websites in the near future
- The main hall is big enough for assemblies and also for lunches. We also have extensive grounds in which to provide outdoor PE.
- We will stagger break times to ensure that children have enough space at break times. Having said that, studies show that children mixing across age groups is desirable as it has a positive social impact on the children.
- We are building new classrooms to provide extra space for years 5 and 6 and before and after school care and this build is being funded by the Local Authority (the school is making a small contribution to fixtures and fittings). Prudent financial planning by the school has ensured some contingency is in place to ensure resourcing of new classes; including staffing. Once this build is complete (Spring 2017) there will be good accommodation for all pupils. Due to the plans in place for the building work the footprint of the school will not increase (it will be where the current prefab buildings are situated) and therefore none of the school field will be lost.
- All building works are being planned so that there will be minimal impact and have no negative effect on your children's education.
- Our intention is to improve this single point of transition for your child. This work will begin long before you are even deciding which school to send them to as we will be working very closely with the secondary schools to ensure that your child feels at home in their chosen setting.
- For many years we have been engaged in transition dialogue with a wide range of schools in the area. This has provided some opportunities for the children and parents to gain a little more information to inform their choices. As previously stated we wish to dramatically improve on this as we go forward and ensure that transition and communication between

ourselves and all other schools/academies enables parents to make a fully informed and supported choice for their child.

- In order to ensure that dropping off and picking up arrangements do not increase local traffic congestion, and/or reduce safety, the school is planning to work with Hazeldene Lower School to secure staggered start times; a new travel plan for the school will be in place and Years 5 and 6 pupils will be encouraged to walk to school (as many now do to their Middle School)
- The school makes every effort to communicate with parents in a timely fashion using a variety of means. We have taken feedback about this on board and will continue to provide timely and effective information and communication to parents and families.