

## **CABINET**

**8 FEBRUARY 2018**

### **REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES**

#### **PROPOSED CLOSURE OF ST MARY'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND MIDDLE SCHOOL, BELFORD AND PROPOSED EXTENSION OF THE AGE RANGE OF BELFORD FIRST SCHOOL**

#### **REASONS FOR DECISION**

1. The Governing Bodies of St Mary's Church of England Middle School and Belford First School requested the Council to consult on proposals to close St Mary's Church of England Middle School with effect from 31 August 2018 and to extend the age range of Belford First School to become an age 2 to 11 primary school from 1 September 2018.
2. The Council's consultation followed on from a consultation undertaken by the Governing Body of St Mary's CE Middle School from 25 January to 15 March 2017 on a stand-alone proposal to close the school with effect from 31 August 2017 on the basis that the continuing fall in pupil numbers at the school, and consequential impact on the school's budget, would make it difficult to provide a broad and balanced curriculum to pupils on a par with their peers in other schools.
3. During the Council's informal consultation, both Governing Bodies wrote to the Council to formally support the proposals. Furthermore, 52 of the 76 respondees to the informal consultation agreed with the proposal to close St Mary's CE Middle School and extend the age range of Belford First School, including the Newcastle Diocesan Education Board. This was in line with the conclusions drawn at the end of the consultation carried out by the Governing Body of St Mary's in February-March 2017, which were that the community were generally in favour of Belford First School becoming a primary school.
4. There are currently only 39 pupils on roll at St Mary's (including only 2 pupils in Year 7 and 3 pupils in Year 8) and only 6 applications have been made for a place in Year 5 in September 2018. The school has a capacity of 120 places.
5. While St Mary's was judged to be 'Good' by Ofsted in November, the ability of the school to continue to provide a good standard of provision for pupils in the medium to longer term in the light of the continuing projected fall in pupil numbers remains an issue. The Governing Body has not reduced staffing numbers pending the decision of the Cabinet on the proposals and 4.6 teaching staff, it is unlikely that this ratio would be able to be maintained should the budget continue to reduce as predicted.
6. Although Belford First School was judge by Ofsted to Require Improvement in March 2016, at its monitoring visit from in January 2017 it was judged to be making effective progress towards becoming a good school. The site and buildings of Belford First School have the capacity for an additional 2 year groups at Years 5 and 6 without the need for capital works.
7. Therefore, the Council believes it is in the best educational interests of the current and future pupils in St Mary's Church of England Middle School and Belford First School to close St Mary's with effect from 31 August 2018 and to extend the age range of Belford First to become an age 2 to 11 primary school with effect from 1 September 2018.
8. The consultation on this proposal has been appropriate, reasonable and robust.