

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL

REPORT FOR RESOLUTION

COMMITTEE: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny
Executive

DATE: 7 February 2006
15 February 2006

SUBJECT: Greenbrow Infant School

REPORT OF: Director of Children's Services

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

To advise the Executive of the need to take action in relation to the future of Greenbrow Infant School.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Executive is asked to:

- (a) note the serious concerns which exist about Greenbrow Infant School and its future viability;
- (b) request the Director of Children's Services to undertake statutory consultation on a proposal to close Greenbrow from 31 December 2006 and that its provision be transferred to Newall Green Primary School from 1 January 2007.
- (c) agree that the Newall Green building be extended and remodeled to facilitate transfer of the Greenbrow pupils, that the site be rationalised to allow the school to function as a primary and that both elements of the project be funded from existing education capital sources.

FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE REVENUE BUDGET:

Closure of Greenbrow Infants would result in a reduced call on the Individual Schools Budget as school budget share for Greenbrow would not be allocated. There would be, however, still a need to fund the pupils currently at Greenbrow at their successor schools. Based on the 2005/6 formula the financial implications are given below:

	(£000)
Saving relating to Greenbrow	(369)
Cost of funding pupils currently in Greenbrow at successor schools	134
Cost of increasing occupied area in Newall Green	1
Initial saving	(234)

In line with ring fencing arrangements around the Dedicated Schools Grant any savings would be reinvested within permitted spend from this grant.

FINANCIAL CONSEQUENCES FOR THE CAPITAL BUDGET:

The recommended option will require capital investment to remodel and extend the Newall Green building, to the extent of three extra infant classrooms and additional nursery accommodation. The estimated cost of this basic remodeling is £1 million.

Newall Green Primary was created in 2002, following amalgamation of the infant and junior departments which, although located on the same site operated out of separate buildings. Since that time some relatively modest adaptations to the building have been made, jointly funded by the City Council and the governing body from its devolved capital allocations.

More recently governors have been working with the City Council to joint fund provision of a new staff room, large enough for both infant and junior staff. The reason for this proposed investment is that the process of amalgamation is being hindered by having separate staff rooms.

In spite of the adaptations already made and those planned, the school continues to operate from a configuration of buildings which perpetuates separate infant and junior working arrangements. It is therefore proposed that the opportunity be taken to rationalise the premises and site to facilitate a genuine primary school operation. This further remodeling would largely involve creating physical links between separate buildings, at an estimated cost of £250,000.

Delivering both elements of the proposed remodeling would cost an estimated £1.25 million. This would in the first instance be funded from existing education capital sources. However, closure of Greenbrow would present an opportunity to dispose of the premises and site to generate a capital receipt. This could be used wholly or in part, to offset the cost of remodeling the Newall Green building. At this stage the likely size of capital receipt has not been established.

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BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

All working documents are available on the report file for inspection, including those relating to discontinuation of the SEN assessment facility at Greenbrow.

The evidence base for the comments on educational issues at Greenbrow includes records of:

- i) scrutiny of pupil work, teacher planning and timetables;
- ii) discussions with the acting headteacher and staff;
- iii) direct observations by LA advisers, including in depth monitoring of the Foundation Stage;
- iv) visits to school, including those made by external consultants providing in-school support.

WARDS AFFECTED:

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IMPLICATIONS FOR:

ANTI POVERTY	EQUAL OPPS	ENVIRONMENTAL	EMPLOYMENT
No	No	Yes	Yes

BACKGROUND:

1. Greenbrow is a long established community infant school, located on Greenbrow Road, Wythenshawe. It provides 90 infant places plus 30 full time equivalent nursery places. Its 30 place SEN assessment facility was discontinued from August 2005.
2. Greenbrow is the only infant school in the City without a junior partner. Historically it has been a popular school and has regularly recruited to capacity in both the nursery and infant departments. However, without any income for junior age pupils the budget delegated annually to the governing body has always been small. With fixed costs comparable to larger schools, setting a balanced budget has, as a result, presented a significant challenge.
3. In the mid-1990s the governing body found it impossible to deliver an appropriate quality of education and keep within the school's limited finances. A significant budget deficit resulted. At the time the City Council was engaged in a review of SEN provision. One of the outcomes was that Mill House SEN Assessment School was closed and its 30 full time assessment places transferred to Greenbrow Infant school.
4. Significant additional revenue funding was delegated to the Greenbrow governing body to support transfer of the SEN assessment provision. As a result governors had a much larger budget to manage. The increased flexibility which this created enabled governors to ensure

that an overall balanced budget was produced. The outturn figures from 1999/ 2000 to 2004/2005 are set out below, alongside figures showing what the outturn figure would have been without the SEN assessment provision funding:

Year	Balance (£000) surplus	Revised Balance (£000) (deficit)
1999/ 2000	27	(212)
2000/ 2001	48	(412)
2001/ 2002	80	(586)
2002/ 2003	65	(784)
2003/ 2004	77	(981)
2004/ 2005	112	(1,085)

DISCONTINUATION OF THE SEN ASSESSMENT FACILITY:

5. From past experience it was known that closure of the SEN assessment facility and the resulting loss of additional revenue funding, would make it extremely difficult for Greenbrow to set a balanced budget. The Executive therefore gave an undertaking that sufficient revenue funding would be provided to ensure the school's viability until the end of the summer term 2007. In the light of the Executive's undertaking, the Primary School Review Steering Group (which is part way through a review of school places and capital investment priorities) was and asked to ensure that particular consideration was given to the future development of the school.
6. The Steering Group had intended to make recommendations about Greenbrow in the summer term 2006, at the same time as the other review recommendations are scheduled to be announced. However, in addition to a deteriorating financial position the school has serious educational deficiencies which need to be addressed urgently. It is therefore necessary to take action in advance of the primary school review. The reasons for this are set out below.

STANDARDS AND QUALITY:

7. The overall effectiveness of the school is how inadequate in both the Foundation stage and Key Stage 1. In spite of the high levels of support currently provided by the City Council significant concerns remain about:
 - Pupil achievement and standards
 - Personal development and well-being
 - Quality of teaching and learning
 - Curriculum and other activities
 - Care guidance and support
 - Leadership and management.
8. Attainment and standards across the school are well below nationally expected levels in all core subjects. They are poor at the end of the reception class in writing, and although by the end of the Key Stage 1 pupils make some progress from a very low baseline, they do not come close to expected levels.

CAPACITY TO IMPROVE:

9. The previous OFSTED inspection of Greenbrow was in March 2000 so another one is due soon. It is the view of the Director of Children's Services that, when the school is inspected it will be classified as requiring special measures. Manchester Education Partnership (MEP) currently provides high levels of support to the school. There is an acting headteacher. An external consultant has enabled the school self - evaluation form to be completed. This level of support is not having a fast enough impact on standards or quality due to the long- term and deep seated nature of the problems in the school. This high level of support is not best value given the low number of pupils on roll.

PUPIL NUMBERS AND FINANCIAL VIABILITY:

10. Addition of the SEN assessment facility to Greenbrow Infants in the mid 1990s brought about a period of financial stability. However, since discontinuation of the SEN assessment facility from September 2005 a significant number of pupils have moved to other local schools. There were 32 children in the combined nursery and reception classes (Foundation Stage) and 28 pupils in two classes at Key Stage 1, at the time of the annual pupil census (PLASC) in January 2006. The table below shows the position since 1999:

Year	Nursery/ Infant Places	Pupils on Roll
1999	120	126
2000	120	125
2001	120	124
2002	120	127
2003	120	120
2004	120	111
2005	120	105

2006	120	60

11. In addition to low and falling pupil numbers the school is significantly overstaffed with teachers and teaching assistants, having the following staff complement:

Post	Number
Headteacher	1
Deputy Headteacher	1
Teachers	7
Teaching Assistants	10
Clerical Officer	1
Caretaker	1
Cleaner	1
Senior Lunchtime Org	1
Lunchtime Organisers	5
TOTAL	28

12. The projections set out below illustrate the size of budget deficit which can be expected over the next three years. These projections take account of the large surplus carried

forward from 04/ 05; incorporate the loss of SEN assessment funding from 1 September 2005; assume that current staffing levels remain intact; and assume that the number of pupils on roll will remain constant at 60:

Year	Outturn (£000) surplus (deficit)
04/05	112
05/06	20
06/07	(212)
07/08	(451)

CURRENT SITUATION:

13. The current situation at Greenbrow can be summarised as follows:

- i) educational standards are poor, the forthcoming OFSTED inspection is highly likely to place the school in special measures and the capacity to improve is low;
- ii) the resulting uncertainty about the future viability of Greenbrow has become common knowledge in the locality and has resulted in a loss of almost a third of the school's pupils since September 2005. As long as this uncertainty continues the loss of pupils is likely to continue;
- iii) governors feel that the loss of so many pupils in such a short period of time means that the school cannot survive in the long term, in spite of the Council's willingness to fund the school until July 2007;
- iv) the loss of pupils is having a demoralising effect on staff, which is damaging the school's ability to address its educational deficiencies. As a result the remaining pupils are not receiving the quality of education to which they are entitled;
- v) as pupil numbers continue to fall the amount of revenue funding available will further reduce. This will make it even more unlikely that governors will ever be able to set a balanced budget. It will certainly prevent any investment to address the educational deficiencies which exist;
- vi) as pupil numbers continue to fall and the more apparent it becomes that governors are not able to take action to stabilise the situation, existing staff will be increasingly likely to leave. Quite apart from a loss of proven expertise, it would be difficult to recruit quality replacements.

OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE:

14. The options identified to address long term, the situation summarised above are as follows:

- (a) improve Greenbrow's chances of achieving educational and financial viability by establishing a junior department and making it a primary school;
- (b) retain Greenbrow as an infant school and create a hard federation with Newall Green Primary School;

(c) close Greenbrow and increase the number of infant places at its nearest local primary school, Newall Green.

15. The paragraphs which follow provide comments on each of the options.

REDESIGNATE GREENBROW AS A PRIMARY SCHOOL:

- 16. Redesignating Greenbrow as a one form entry primary school would add 120 junior places. This may attract enough extra pupils to generate sufficient delegated funding to enable governors to produce a balanced budget. Such a redesignation would be classed as a “prescribed alteration” and would require the relevant statutory processes to be followed. The School Organisation Committee would make the final decision.
- 17. Although superficially attractive this option carries significant risks. For example, the known educational deficiencies need to be addressed before expansion could be contemplated. Given the school’s current position it is highly unlikely that this is achievable. In addition, the number of surplus primary school places in Wythenshawe generally remains too high. The primary review is likely to conclude that fewer places are needed in the area for the foreseeable future, making it extremely difficult to justify an increase at Greenbrow without a corresponding reduction elsewhere.
- 18. The nearest school to Greenbrow is Newall Green Primary. This has a settled pupil intake, only 12% surplus places and a budget surplus of £62,048 at 04/05 outturn. The danger in creating extra junior places at Greenbrow is that some existing and potential Newall Green pupils may decide to transfer. This could seriously disrupt what is currently a very settled and effective school.
- 19. The current Greenbrow building is sufficient for 90 infant and 30 nursery pupils. To be able to take an extra 120 junior pupils would require significant remodeling and expansion of the current building, including the hall and other common areas. This would be a major cost to the education capital budget. In any event, the current Greenbrow site falls well short of the size required by Regulations for a one form entry primary school ie

Size of Greenbrow site

5,655 m²

Land required for 1fe primary school

11,710m²

20. In these circumstances it is not proposed to consider this option any further.

CREATE A FEDERATION INVOLVING GREENBROW AND OTHER LOCAL SCHOOLS:

- 21. Soft federation is an informal arrangement, where the governing bodies of two or more schools agree to work in collaboration on a range of issues.
- 22. Schools in a soft federation retain their unique identity, in that they have their own headteacher and staff complement. They have their own governing body, which receives an annual delegated budget in the usual way. Soft federation is a useful way of encouraging co-operation between schools and the sharing of good practice. It is, however, not sufficient to address the deep rooted deficiencies which exist at Greenbrow. This option is not appropriate for further development.

23. A hard federation is a more formal arrangement than a soft federation. It exists where up to five schools decide to have a single governing body. Membership of the single governing body is prescribed by Regulation and consists of parents, staff governors, LA representatives, community representatives, the headteachers (if they so wish) and optional sponsor governors. Individual governors could come from any of the predecessor governing bodies or could be entirely new appointments.
24. Schools in a hard federation retain their unique identity. They have their own staff complement. Schools also receive an annual delegated budget, although each delegated budget is managed by the single governing body. The single governing body can decide to have a single headteacher responsible for all schools in the federation or it can decide that each school should have its own headteacher.
25. The benefits of a hard federation are said to include:
- i) development of a common approach to governance across a local area, rather than on a school by school basis;
 - ii) a reduction in competition between local schools in favour of greater collaboration;
 - iii) generation of greater impetus to share good practice and resources between all schools in the federation and the ability to address areas of deficiency in a common way;
 - iv) creation of a system to promote greater inclusion, by sharing out disruptive pupils between schools in the federation rather than resorting to exclusion.
26. If Greenbrow Infant was to enter into a hard federation with its nearest neighbour (Newall Green Primary) each would continue as a separate school, with their own staff complement and unique identity. Both schools would receive their own delegated budgets. The main difference would be that the existing governing bodies would be disbanded and replaced by a new, single governing body, which would then decide on headteacher arrangements.
27. Again, the opportunity to collaborate would be a positive development for Greenbrow in addressing its educational deficiencies but would not be enough given the extent of improvement required in a short period of time. In any event Regulations would prevent the single governing body from using the two delegated budgets flexibly to enable Greenbrow to achieve financial viability.
28. There appears to be far less incentive for the governing body at Newall Green to want to federate with Greenbrow. Newall Green currently provides a satisfactory education for its pupils. The governing body functions well and the headteacher provides good leadership. The school has a good reputation locally and has 476 pupils on roll. There is a healthy revenue budget surplus of £62,000. The building is in relatively good condition.
29. A hard federation involving Greenbrow and Newall Green Schools would not provide the kind of framework and flexibilities which would ensure Greenbrow's future educational and financial viability. Crucially, without the agreement of the Newall Green Primary governing body there could be no federation, even if the governing body of Greenbrow is in favour. The same would apply if federation with other local schools was explored. In the

circumstances it is clear that the risks associated with this option are considerable and it is not proposed to pursue it any further.

CLOSURE OF GREENBROW AND EXPANSION OF NEWALL GREEN PRIMARY:

30. Newall Green Primary is 0.577 miles from Greenbrow Infant and at the time of the annual pupil census in 2005 had 476 pupils on roll throughout the school. The nursery provides 60 places. The Newall Green Infant department has an admission number of 60 and provides 180 places. The junior department has an admission number of 90 and provides 360 places. The remaining 30 nursery places and 90 infant places are at Greenbrow. This is an anomalous situation which is unique in the City.
31. Transfer of the Greenbrow nursery and infant places to Newall Green would bring the nursery and infant admission numbers into line with the junior admission number, without disrupting total place availability in the locality. This would be a sensible move, particularly as most of the Greenbrow pupils transfer to the Junior Department at Newall Green Primary. The relevant statutory process would need to be followed to bring about the expansion of Newall Green. The Executive would make the final decision about the nursery and the final decision about the infant department would be taken by the School Organisation Committee.
32. This option would require capital investment to extend the Newall Green building by three classrooms in respect of the infant places and an appropriate extension of the nursery accommodation. The estimated cost of this remodelling is £1 million.
33. Newall Green Primary was created in 2002, following amalgamation of the infant and junior departments. Although located on the same site the two departments operated out of separate buildings. Since amalgamation some relatively modest adaptations to the building have been made, jointly funded by the City Council and by the governing body from its devolved capital allocations.
34. More recently governors have been working with the City Council to joint fund provision of a new staff room, large enough for both infant and junior staffs. The reason for this proposed investment is that the process of amalgamation is being hindered by having separate staff rooms.
35. In spite of the adaptations made and those which are planned, the school continues to operate from a configuration of buildings which is more conducive to separate infant/junior working arrangements than a single primary. It is therefore proposed that the opportunity be considered to rationalise the premises and site to facilitate a genuine primary school operation. This further remodeling would largely involve creating physical links between the separate buildings.
36. The estimated cost of this additional work is £250,000, making a total estimated scheme cost of £1.25 million.
37. Closure of Greenbrow would need to be managed through the relevant statutory processes and harmonized with the exercise to expand Newall Green. If both process begin in June 2006 full implementation could be achieved from 1 January 2007, including remodeling of the Newall Green building and site.

PROPOSED ACTION:

37. The Executive is asked to:

- a. note the serious concerns which exist about Greenbrow Infant School and its future viability;
- b. request the Director of Children's Services to undertake statutory consultation on a proposal that Greenbrow should close from 31 December 2006 and that its provision be transferred to Newall Green Primary School from 1 January 2007.

EMPLOYMENT IMPLICATIONS:

38. Closure of Greenbrow would raise questions about the future employment of its staff. Newall Green will need some extra staff to manage the extra pupils transferring from Greenbrow, but will not need them all. The City Council will therefore need to use its best endeavours to secure alternative employment for the displaced Greenbrow staff.
39. The City Council has an excellent record of managing staff reductions in schools which close. There are well developed channels of communication with the trade unions and teacher associations to facilitate the processes.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS:

40. Remodeling and extension of the accommodation at Newall Green Primary will be done so as to ensure maximum security and energy efficiency. Scheme delivery will be through the appropriate City Council Framework.