

ANGUS COUNCIL

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

30 APRIL 2002

PROPOSED AMALGAMATION – TOWNHEAD NURSERY SCHOOL AND MAISONDIEU  
PRIMARY SCHOOL

REPORT BY THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

**ABSTRACT**

This report provides a progress report on discussions with parents and staff about the proposed amalgamation of Townhead Nursery School and Maisondieu Primary School and seeks Committee approval for the formal merger to go ahead as previously proposed.

**1 RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is recommended that the Education Committee:

- a confirms that the amalgamation of Townhead Nursery School and Maisondieu Primary School should take effect on 19 August 2002
- b notes the anxieties and concerns of some key stakeholders (addressed within the body of this Report and its Appendix), and instructs me to ensure that these anxieties and concerns are fully taken into account, along with the needs of children, in planning for the merger and in ensuring that it is implemented sympathetically and effectively

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Reference is made to the meeting of the Education Committee on 5 March 2002 when I was instructed to take forward the proposed amalgamation of Townhead Nursery School and Maisondieu Primary School on the basis of consultation and discussion with key stakeholders.
- 2.2 Meetings have since been held with the Townhead Parents' Group and my responses to the various issues raised by them are summarised in the Appendix. Meetings have also been held with Townhead staff who raised similar issues to those addressed within the Appendix.
- 2.3 I have met also with the Maisondieu School Board, and at the conclusion of that meeting the Board indicated support for the proposed merger.

**3 NEXT STEPS**

- 3.1 There is no statutory provision governing situations such as this.
- 3.2 As has been stressed to parents and staff, what is being proposed should have very little, if any, impact on them and certainly should have absolutely no impact on pupils other than an expectation that gradual further improvements should take place in arrangements for the transition of pupils from nursery to primary.

- 3.3 In these circumstances, it is recommended that the proposed amalgamation should go ahead with a view to it taking effect at the start of the new school session – on 19 August 2002.
- 3.4 An additional post of “Depute Head Teacher” in the merged school should now be established and the recruitment procedures to fill that post should now be initiated.
- 3.5 In the coming months (and – equally importantly – in the coming years) every effort should be made to ensure that the concerns expressed by current parents and staff are borne in mind and addressed systematically and sensitively.

#### **4 HUMAN RIGHTS**

- 4.1 There are no Human Rights issues arising directly as a result of approving the recommendations contained within this Report.

#### **5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 As previously indicated, the principal thrust behind the proposal to amalgamate the two existing schools is not a financial one.
- 5.2 In the medium to long term it is likely that the effects of the proposed amalgamation will be broadly cost neutral with the principal variable being promoted post salaries which have yet to be “job-sized” in accordance with the national “McCrone Agreement”.
- 5.3 In the short-term, a small annual saving (approximately £3,000) is likely.

#### **6 CONCLUSIONS**

- 6.1 The logic of amalgamating Townhead Nursery School with Maisondieu Primary School seems irrefutable, given that 50 of the 60 primary schools managed by Angus Council currently has a nursery class attached and that – other than Townhead Nursery – no other separate free-standing nursery schools are managed by the Council.
- 6.2 The anxieties and concerns which have been raised are clearly genuinely held. It will be important to ensure that – both prior to the merger, and in the months and years subsequent to it having been given effect – these concerns and anxieties continue to be borne in mind and addressed systematically and sensitively.

#### **7 CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 In accordance with the Standing Orders of the Council, this report has been the subject of consultation with the Chief Executive, the Director of Finance and the Director of Law & Administration.

Jim Anderson  
Director of Education

No background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (other than any containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to any material extent in preparing the above report.

#### **APPENDIX**

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## ANGUS COUNCIL – EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

### RESPONSES TO TOWNHEAD NURSERY PARENTS' GROUP

#### 1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 On 5 March 2002, Angus Council's Education Committee approved recommendations from its Director of Education that the amalgamation of Townhead Nursery School and Maisondieu Primary School should be taken forward on the basis of consultation and discussion with key stakeholders.
- 1.2 In response to a request from the Townhead Parents' Group, Jim Anderson (Director of Education) agreed to meet with representatives of that group in Townhead Nursery School on 22 March 2002. That meeting was also attended by Councillor Brian Milne (Convener of the Council's Education Committee), Councillor Joy Mowatt, Councillor Bob Myles and Mr Jan Nowak (Head of Educational Services).
- 1.3 Upon arrival at the 22 March meeting with parents, a 4-page document containing a number of assertions and no less than 59 separate questions – some of which covered overlapping issues – was presented to Mr Anderson.
- 1.4 At the meeting on 22 March 2002, a member of the Parents' Group read out each of the 59 questions, seriatim, and Council representatives offered responses where possible.
- 1.5 This paper represents an attempt to summarise the responses given to these questions. It has been structured as far as possible to avoid repetition.

#### 2 RATIONALE FOR MERGER AND CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 2.1 The principal rationale for merger relates to the desirability of securing fair and consistent treatment for all children across Angus. Since Townhead is the only nursery school in Angus, and since 50 primary schools (other than Maisondieu) currently have primary classes attached to them, there would appear to be a strong logical case to treat children in this area in similar ways to their counterparts elsewhere in Angus.
- 2.2 The excellent work which has been undertaken by Townhead Nursery School in recent years is fully acknowledged and – in effecting a merger – it is also acknowledged that it will be important to build on that work and not to undo it in any way.
- 2.3 The impact of the merger on children should be undiscernible, although there is a hope that a merger of this type will in time lead to ever more effective continuity at the key transition point between nursery and primary.
- 2.4 Similarly, from the point of view of parents and other agencies who may work with nursery staff, the impact of the proposed merger should be imperceptible.
- 2.5 That parents feel anxious because they first read about these proposals in the press is understandable, and regrettable. Given that the proposal was and is thought to be likely to have minimum impact on pupils and parents, no specific steps were taken to alert parents lest such a step in itself led to the raising of unnecessary fears and concerns.

- 2.6 Many of the 59 questions raised by parents can be answered in precisely the same way, namely that the proposed amalgamation should have absolutely no effect whatsoever on some of the specific ways in which Townhead Nursery School currently functions.

### **3 STAFFING ISSUES**

- 3.1 Several of the 59 questions raised relate to parental perceptions of individual members of staff and as such cannot and should not be addressed in a public forum.
- 3.2 The impact of the change on current members of staff should be minimal; if there are any changes these are much more likely to arise as a direct result of roll fluctuations than of the proposed amalgamation.
- 3.3 Without exception, all 50 nursery classes attached to 50 primary schools across Angus have functioned with the enthusiastic and wholehearted backing of all staff in the school, and there is every reason to believe that a similar level of support would exist in a merged Maisondieu/Townhead.
- 3.4 To effect the amalgamation, a new post-holder will have to be appointed to replace the current Head Teacher of Townhead Nursery School. That post-holder will become a "Depute Head Teacher" of the merged school (Note – the McCrone package envisages no "Assistant Head Teacher" in future for primary or secondary schools).

### **4 USE OF PREMISES AND USE OF CURRENT SCHOOL TITLE**

- 4.1 The current Townhead Nursery School premises will continue to be used to house nursery children and there is no likelihood of any amendments to this arrangement.
- 4.2 A number of parents would prefer that the name "Townhead" should continue to be used after the proposed amalgamation, and in these circumstances there would be absolutely no objections to referring – formally and informally – to Maisondieu's "Townhead Nursery Class."

### **5 NURSERY ETHOS**

- 5.1 Several parents seem to fear that the merger will lead to changes to what they see as the current school's very successful ethos. There is absolutely no reason why this should happen and all nursery classes across Angus do currently have a quite distinctive ethos which the Council is keen to maintain and promote.
- 5.2 In particular, the way in which children are treated in the nursery will not change, nor will the way in which parents are encouraged to participate in the work of the nursery.
- 5.3 After amalgamation, the formal remit of the Maisondieu School Board would extend to cover the nursery class and, for example, nursery parents would be entitled to stand as full parental members of the School Board.
- 5.4 One very specific question relates to SCRO checks : the current situation will not change which is that all volunteers working with children in schools must be appropriately vetted (including SCRO checking) prior to their involvement.
- 5.5 Finally, in considering parental concerns about ethos, it was agreed that there would be merit in offering assistance to enable a small number of representatives of the Townhead Parents' Nursery Support Group to visit the Seaview Nursery (in Monifieth) and to discuss its operation with Seaview parents, Seaview also being a large nursery in a building separate from its associated primary school, and one which has operated very successfully for a large number of years.

## **6 DELINEATED AREAS**

- 6.1 The proposed amalgamation makes absolutely no difference to the current nursery delineated area.

## **7 FUNDING**

- 7.1 Although the devolved budget for the merged school will be a single entity, it will be perfectly straightforward to identify those parts of that budget which are earmarked specifically for Nursery.
- 7.2 Although the merger is not being proposed with this in mind, on balance it seems likely that – if anything – the Nursery is more likely to benefit from being part of a large primary school than from the current arrangements (eg when additional monies from Central Government have been allocated in the recent past, many of these monies are ring-fenced specifically for primary schools and so free-standing nursery schools have been potentially disadvantaged).

## **8 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

- 8.1 The excellent work which Townhead Nursery School has undertaken in supporting children with Special Educational Needs is recognised and commended.
- 8.2 Given the way in which the Council is attempting to discharge its responsibility for pupils with Special Educational Needs, it is quite inconceivable that the proposed merger would in any way diminish the Council's commitment to meeting the needs of these pupils in future in Townhead.

## **9 CONCLUSIONS**

- 9.1 The opportunity for parents to voice legitimate concerns is most welcome – for all parties.
- 9.2 Angus Council has a responsibility to listen carefully to these concerns and see that they are taken on board.
- 9.3 Officers of the Council believe that parental fears will prove groundless, but are committed to working with parents to offer continuing reassurance and support.
- 9.4 The Council's decision to merge Maisondieu and Townhead needs to take all parental concerns into account – both in the months leading up to the merger, and in the months and years following its implementation.