

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 20th November 2012

Lead Member: Councillor Eryl Williams, Lead Member for Education

Report Author: Head of Customers and Education Support

Title: Faith Based Secondary Provision

1. What is the report about?

The report seeks Cabinet's approval to commence informal consultation on the case for change for faith based secondary provision.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

The report seeks to provide a clearer understanding of the case for change in respect of faith based secondary education and the need to discuss the implications for change with stakeholders.

3. What are the Recommendations?

To approve the commencement of informal consultation in December 2012 on the case for change for Faith Based Secondary Provision.

4. Report details.

Over the last 3 years discussions have taken place between the respective Bishop's and Officials of the Roman Catholic and Church in Wales diocesan bodies and representatives of the Governing Bodies of Blessed Edward Jones and St Brigid's, together with officials from Denbighshire County Council. These initial discussions have considered what the long term vision could be for faith based provision within the secondary sector and the potential sources of funding from the Welsh Government to enable this to happen.

These discussions have focussed on concerns over the sustainability of the existing status quo for faith education in North Denbighshire. Both schools are considered as small schools in the context of the overall Modernising Education Policy Framework and this presents challenges for the leadership of both schools in terms of maintaining existing standards and unlocking potential standards for future pupils. The involvement of the Bishop of St Asaph and the Church in Wales Diocesan Education Officer has raised the option of widening the faith ethos of provision to potentially broaden the appeal. Presently whilst there are a number of Primary Church in Wales schools within Denbighshire there is no Secondary provision for such pupils to progress to should they wish to continue to receive a faith education.

To move forward it is suggested that the Council in partnership with the Roman Catholic and Church in Wales diocesan bodies and the St Brigid's Trust should commence informal discussions with the parents, governors, staff and pupils of Blessed Edward Jones and St Brigid's to discuss the case for change and to explore possible options for moving forward and potentially joint working between the two schools. This case for change (see Appendix 1) has been developed by representatives of all parties involved in these discussions.

From an educational perspective it is suggested that joint working between the two schools could deliver the following educational benefits:-

- The development of a leadership and management structure across both schools providing increased opportunities for staff development;
- Wider opportunities for enhancing the education of the pupils, e.g. joint school projects, shared teaching and learning resources;
- Enhanced staff expertise in specialist areas, raising standards e.g. Teachers working together to plan, prepare and assess;
- Enhanced opportunities for monitoring teaching across the two sites and for teachers to moderate and level pupil work.

There is also a need to examine the potential implications of maintaining the status quo for the medium to long term. Both schools buildings in terms of conditions are considered poor and their learning environments provide clear limitations in delivering beyond the basic curriculum. The Council's 21st Century Schools Programme, to be delivered in partnership with the Welsh Government, includes potential funding for faith secondary provision. Any funding award would be dependent on progressing school organisation proposals. It is also noted that the Council is in discussions with the Welsh Government for confirmation regarding the level of contribution that will be required for any capital project that may arise.

It is anticipated that this informal consultation will enable all potential sponsors of the project to understand whether parents, both existing and potential, would support a joint faith school and what are the main drivers for parents choosing a faith based education at present.

The findings of the informal consultation exercise may result in formal proposals arising. Any changes to school provision will involve lengthy public consultation and may result in the publication of statutory proposals. School organisation proposals will generally be implemented following a 12-24 month period depending on the nature of each proposal.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The proposals support the existing Corporate Priority of Modernising Education.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

The initial costs involved will be associated with the consultation exercise, namely the printing and posting of documents to stakeholders and any hire costs for venues etc.

7. What consultations have been carried out?

A number of meetings between Denbighshire officers, the Bishop's for the Wrexham Catholic Diocese and the St Asaph Church in Wales Diocese, Education officers for the Diocesan authorities and the Chairs of Governors and Headteachers of Blessed Edward Jones and St Brigid's have taken place since 2009 to develop initially the Capital submission as part of the 21st Century Schools submission and then to develop the options for change.

8. Chief Finance Officer Statement

There are only minor costs associated with the consultation process and these will be met from within existing budgets. The outcome from the consultation may have significant financial implications and these are contained within the proposals for 21st Century Schools. Cabinet will need to consider how these proposals will be funded.

9. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

There is a strong possibility that the proposal could result in adverse publicity for the Council and in adverse public comments.

To minimise this risk the Council will seek to ensure clear communication with all stakeholders.

10. Power to make the Decision

s29 School Standard and Framework Act 1998.

Modernising Education Policy Framework (approved by Cabinet January 2009)