



Review of primary schools in North Birkenhead Consultation

This leaflet

- describes the Council's options
- outlines the timetable for consultation and possible implementation
- tells you how to respond to consultation

Dear Consultee

The Council is rightly proud of education in Wirral. Teachers, governors, parents and pupils all play a part in this success. To provide the best education for children the Local Authority must make sure money spent on education is used in the best possible way. This means spending money on real children, not on empty places.

The Council has to review its school places to make sure that across Wirral, empty or surplus places stay below 10%. It also has to consider taking action when a school has 25% or more surplus places.

It is right that there should be some surplus places for parental choice. However, in Wirral the number of primary age children has been falling for some time. This means that some schools are getting smaller, producing a significant surplus of empty places.

Also, each school needs enough pupils to pay its costs in full. When pupil numbers become too low, the school risks having financial problems, and may have to cut back spending on staff and other resources. It also puts more pressure on teachers because they have to take on additional responsibilities.

The number of empty places in some local primary schools in your area is too high. I have to take action to reduce this number of empty places.

This consultation is for you to help decide what changes should be made at schools in this area.

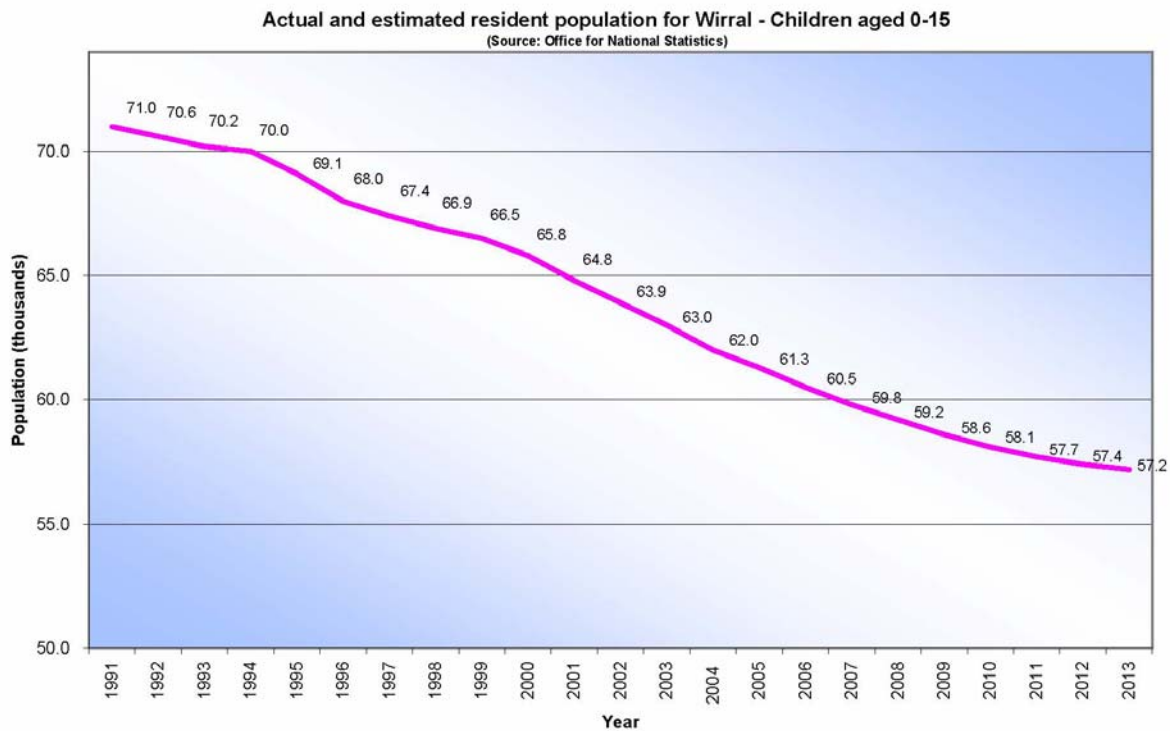
Yours sincerely

Director of Children's Services

Introduction

There are fewer primary age children in Wirral because fewer children are being born. Fewer children are being born in most parts of the country, not just in Wirral. It is clear that new families coming to live in Wirral and new housing developments, including Housing Market Renewal Initiatives, will not make a significant difference.

Right now there are 13% surplus places in primary schools across Wirral. There are more empty places in some areas and schools than in others. The number of primary age children in Wirral has been falling for quite a few years. In the last few years, the birth rate has increased, although the numbers involved are not large – there were 23,899 pupils in 2009 and there are expected to be 24,177 pupils by 2014 – that's just 278 more primary age children across the whole of Wirral. Wirral will still have 11% surplus places by 2014 if nothing is done.



The Local Authority (LA) divides Wirral into Small Planning Areas. Each area contains schools that serve related communities and geographical areas. Small Planning Areas are not the same as electoral wards or constituencies.

This is the fifth phase of a Primary Places Review which has looked at the whole of Wirral over the last few years. This consultation concerns schools in the small planning area of North Birkenhead.

Here is a list of the schools included in this area:

Bidston Avenue Primary School

Cathcart Street Primary School

Cole Street Primary School

Portland Primary School

The Priory CE (Aided) Primary School

Holy Cross Catholic (Aided) Primary School

Our Lady and St Edward's Catholic (Aided) Primary School

St Laurence's Catholic (Aided) Primary School

Some of these schools have more surplus places than others. In January 2009 three schools had more than 25% surplus places. Cathcart Street Primary School had 52% surplus places, Cole Street Primary had 41% surplus places, and St Laurence's Catholic Primary School had 64% surplus places.

Note: From September 2009, Birkenhead High School for Girls will become a free to attend Academy for girls aged 3 to 19. This school has been included in the Authority's overall actual numbers on roll, surplus place calculations and future projections for primary pupil numbers.

Surplus places in North Birkenhead

There are currently 2,250 pupil places in the nine primary schools in this area (including Birkenhead High School Academy). At the last census, the number of children in those nine schools was 1,796. There are 454 surplus places, so:

Now

454 surplus places = about 15 empty 30 place classes

= more than two standard one form entry primary schools

= **20% surplus places**

Our target is to manage surplus places at below 10%.

Predictions have been made about how this situation might change over the next five years. These predictions are based on the number of children in schools now, and how many children have been born.

Over the next five years the number of pupils in North Birkenhead schools will remain about the same as now. The birth rate has risen slightly in recent years, although it is too soon to say whether this trend will continue. It is predicted that the total primary age population for this area will remain almost the same at 1,804 pupils in 2014.

In five years time

If nothing was changed, there would be 446 surplus places, so that in five years time there would be **20% surplus places**.

This is double our 10% or less target. The Council must act to reduce this number of surplus places.

Small schools

Reducing surplus places is the main reason for carrying out this review. However, the Council has considered many other factors before choosing which options would work best in this area. The **number of pupils on roll** was one of these factors.

The Local Authority and school representatives spent a year talking about the way the number of pupils on roll affects the quality of education. It was agreed that a single form of entry primary school (one class in each year) should have at least 120 pupils. The DCSF guidance says that "Schools with fewer than 150 pupils may be educationally and financially sustainable only through substantial subsidies via their local authorities funding formula". Sometimes there can be a reason to keep a very small school, for example in a remote rural area. Councils with many small rural schools, like Cheshire or Cumbria, receive extra money from the Government to support these schools. Wirral does not receive this extra money, which means that if the Council chooses to have small schools, the small school is funded at the expense of all Wirral's children.

The Authority's policy, "In Pursuit of Excellence" says that **schools begin to have budget and organisational problems when they go below 180 pupils**.

- The amount of money schools are given to spend is based mostly on the number of pupils. Because fixed costs like cleaning and heating don't change, with fewer pupils, the school has less spare money to spend on equipment, books and additional support assistants.

- Because the LA wants all children to have the best possible education, they will give the small school extra money for a while to protect it while rolls fall. This extra money does not last forever. If the numbers on roll keep falling, the school could go into debt. Small schools continue to receive some additional money, however, giving extra money to a smaller school also means that all the other schools have less money to spend on their own pupils.
- Because the school has less money, eventually the school has to start making teachers redundant. With fewer teachers, each teacher has to work harder to cover additional responsibilities.
- With fewer teachers, organising the classes can be awkward. As the pupil numbers fall, class sizes stay about the same, but different age groups have to be taught together.
- Small schools can sometimes be successful, but this success relies on a small number of teachers. A single teacher leaving can sometimes have a major effect on the quality of the school.

Larger schools:

- Have more flexibility in their budget and more money to spend on resources like equipment, books, and additional support staff to meet children's needs. This is because their fixed costs, like cleaning and heating, take up less of their budget.
- There are additional responsibilities in a larger school just as in a small school, but they can be shared between a larger group of teachers. One of the benefits of this is that teachers then have more time to plan lessons, and to develop their skills.
- A larger pool of staff means the school can offer a broad range of resources and skills across subjects and key stages, including well-resourced pastoral care to create a caring environment.
- A larger school provides more opportunities for staff to develop their skills, enabling the school to develop and 'grow'.

There are **many other factors** that the Council has considered before choosing to consult on these options in this area. Here are some of them.

- Pattern of parental choice
- Pupil mobility
- Catchment zones
- Educational standards
- Value for money
- Traffic and travel

- Housing Market Renewal Initiative
- Distance between schools
- Class sizes
- Special Educational Needs
- Early Years education
- Denominational issues
- Implications for staff
- Other users of school premises
- Building work
- Expenditure requirements

There is much more detail in the full consultation document. The full consultation document will be available from the website

www.wirral-abc.gov.uk/primaryplaces

You can also read it at your school, local library, or community centre.

There are further details about finding out more information on page 9 of this leaflet.

The Options

Currently, there are 20% surplus places in North Birkenhead. **By 2014 this is projected to stay high at 20% surplus places if the Council does not act.** The Council proposes reducing surplus capacity in these areas. There are several ways this could be done, and we are consulting you about the following options.

Option A1: Closure of Cathcart Street Primary School

Option A2: Closure of Cole Street Primary School

Option A3: Amalgamation of Cathcart Street and Cole Street Primary Schools onto a single existing site, or onto a new site

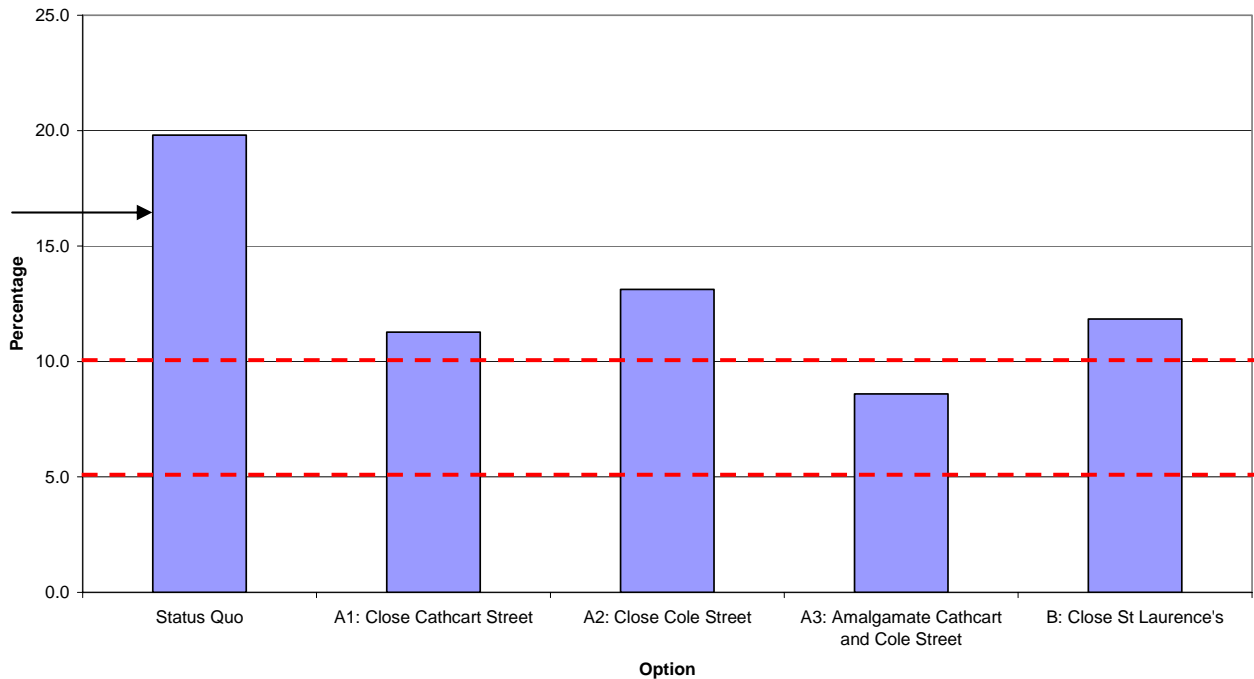
Option B: Closure of St Laurence's Catholic Primary School

The A and B options are not directly linked – this means that if an A option goes ahead, it does not stop the B option going ahead as well, and vice versa.

Effect on Surplus Places

This graph shows how each option is projected to change the percentage of surplus places by 2014. All the options make a better match between pupil numbers and places.

Percentage surplus places in North Birkenhead projected to 2014 by option



We understand that amalgamating or closing a school is a difficult and sensitive issue for the whole community. Detailed community, transport and personnel matters will need to be considered before any option could be put into practice.

It is important for you to understand that a decision has not already been made. The Council's Cabinet will want to see the comments made during consultation before making any decision about what happens next.

What the options would mean for children

The main concern would be to place the children in their new schools with as little disturbance to their education as possible. Parents will be asked to say which local school they would prefer to send their child to. The usual admission criteria will be used to allocate places. If two schools amalgamate, all the children who want to could move together to the same school. This has the advantage that children move with their classmates. In all the options, because children will move at the same time to local schools, they will have friends in their new school.

Children would be entitled to free transport if they live further than statutory walking distance from the nearest appropriate school. This is 2 miles for children aged under 8, and 3 miles for children aged 8 years old and over.

What the options would mean for Early Years provision (Nursery or Foundation 1)

In any option, the Council would make sure that there would not be less Early Years places after the reorganisation.

What the options would mean for staff

If a school closes, all the staff would be made redundant and can be redeployed to other schools.

If two schools amalgamate, both schools close and then a new school opens on one site. This means all the staff at both schools are made redundant and can be redeployed. The new school will of course need staff, and it is up to the new governing body to make appointments.

Wirral LA has an excellent record on redeployment both for teachers and other school staff.

What the options would mean for school sites

If a community school closes, or amalgamates onto a single site, the future of the site that was no longer needed for a school would be determined by the Council. The Council could decide to use the site for another purpose. If a site was sold, the receipt would be invested in the Council's facilities, including schools. The Government usually has to approve the sale of school playing fields.

If an Aided school closes, the site and buildings are usually owned by Trustees of the Diocese. The future of the site would be decided by the Trustees, not by the Council.

There are no plans or planning applications for any of the school sites. No decisions have been made about the future of any site at this stage.

The Consultation

Finding out more

If you want more information about the options, you can find out more on the Internet. Go to www.wirral-mbc.gov.uk/primaryplaces, and click on North Birkenhead under Current Consultations.

You will find:

- The full Consultation document
- A Review pack of background information about all the schools in the area
- The Cabinet report and resolution
- How to send your comments to the Director

If you do not have access to the Internet at home, you can go to your local library where staff will help you log on and print out the information.

The full Consultation document and the Review pack will also be available for you to read at **your school**, and at the following places:

Libraries

St James

Birkenhead Central

Wallasey Central

Community Centres

Gautby Road

Livingstone Street

The Lauries

Children's Centres and Satellites

Bidston and St James (St James Centre)

Birkenhead and Tranmere (St Werburghs and St Laurence's)

You can also look at the documents at Wallasey Town Hall and at the One Stop Shop in the Conway Centre. If you want a printed copy, please contact the Primary Places Review Team, Hamilton Building, Conway Street, Birkenhead, CH41 4FD, 0151 666 4436, or by e-mail at primaryplaces@wirral.gov.uk.

What are the next steps?

Step 1. The first step is to distribute the options and ask for views and comments. There will be a consultation meeting at Cathcart Street, Cole Street and at St Laurence's Catholic Primary School. The meetings will start at 7 o'clock in the evening.

Cathcart Street on Monday, 22nd June 2009

Cole Street on Monday, 29th June 2009

St Laurence's on Thursday, 2nd July 2009

The meeting is an opportunity for parents, staff, governors and other people directly related to the schools to have their views heard and noted by senior representatives of the Children and

Young People's Department, and the Council's Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Lifelong Learning.

People associated with other local schools, and members of the public who want to, can write in with their views. Anyone who wants to can write and say what they think.

When the Consultation ends, all the views and opinions received in writing and at the consultation meetings will form part of a report to the Council's Cabinet. Cabinet members will read the report and decide what to do next. They may decide not to go further with an option at this stage. Members might make changes to the options, consider other options put forward as part of the consultation, or they could decide to do more consultation.

Step 2. If Council's Cabinet decides to go ahead with an option, what happens next depends on the option that is chosen to go forward. Some options can go straight to a formal proposal notice, while some have an extra consultation period before the notices can be published. After this, there are six weeks when formal written objections and comments can be sent to the Director of Children's Services.

Step 3. After the representation period ends, a decision will be made either by the Local Authority or in certain circumstances by the independent School's Adjudicator.

The decision can be to:

- Approve the proposal
- Approve the proposal with changes
- Approve the proposal subject to other factors, such as obtaining planning permission
- Reject the proposal.

Step 4. If the proposal is approved, either by the Authority or by the Adjudicator, it will be put into practice. **The earliest any proposal could take place is September 2010.** Some proposals could take longer – they might need building work, for example. If the proposals require a new school to be established, for example, as a result of an amalgamation, the Authority will, in most circumstances, be required to hold a competition to determine who will establish the new school. The competition process includes further consultation and is likely to add at least six months into the process of establishing a new school.

HAVING YOUR SAY

What do you think? Please make sure your response is received by **Friday 31st July 2009**. You can write on your own, or you can join together with other people to write a joint letter. Your comments can be sent by post, by handing them in at the school, or by e-mail. If you find it helpful you can complete and return the **feedback form** on the next page. There is also an electronic feedback form on the Consultation website : [www.wirral-
mbc.gov.uk/primaryplaces](http://www.wirral-
mbc.gov.uk/primaryplaces).

The postal address for return of feedback forms or written comments is:

**Primary Places Review
Director of Children's Services
Hamilton Building
Conway Street
Birkenhead
CH41 1FD**

Or by e-mail to primaryplaces@wirral.gov.uk

Please note: To make sure the Consultation is fully open and transparent, all the responses to this consultation will be made available for inspection.

North Birkenhead Consultation Feedback Form

Please let us know the main relationships you have with the school(s) by putting a tick in the appropriate box or boxes. You might be a parent and a member of staff, for example.

School	Parent	Member of staff	Governor	Other person
Cathcart Street Primary				
Cole Street Primary				
St Laurence's Catholic Primary				
Other (please say which one)				

Comments

Please use this space for your comments. You can write more on another sheet if you need to.

Here is a reminder of the options that are being consulted on.

Option A1 – Close Cathcart Street Primary School
Option A2 – Close Cole Street Primary School
Option A3 – Amalgamate Cathcart Street and Cole Street Primary on a single site, either an existing site or a new site
Option B – Closure of St Laurence’s Catholic Primary School

Please tell us your name and address, postcode and e-mail address if you have one. We will not use your personal information for anything other than this consultation.

Name _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Telephone _____

e-mail _____

Please note: In order to ensure that this process is fully open and transparent, other people will be able to read all the responses to this consultation.

Address: Primary Places Review
Director of Children’s Services
Hamilton Building
Conway Street
Birkenhead
CH41 4FD

E-mail primaryplaces@wirral.gov.uk

Make sure your response is received by:
FRIDAY 31st JULY 2009