

## Review of primary schools in Pensby and Thingwall 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 LEA 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.

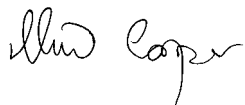
It is right that there should be some surplus places for parental choice. However, in Wirral the number of primary age children is falling. This means that some schools are getting smaller, producing a significant surplus of empty places.

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. No change is not an option.

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

Yours sincerely



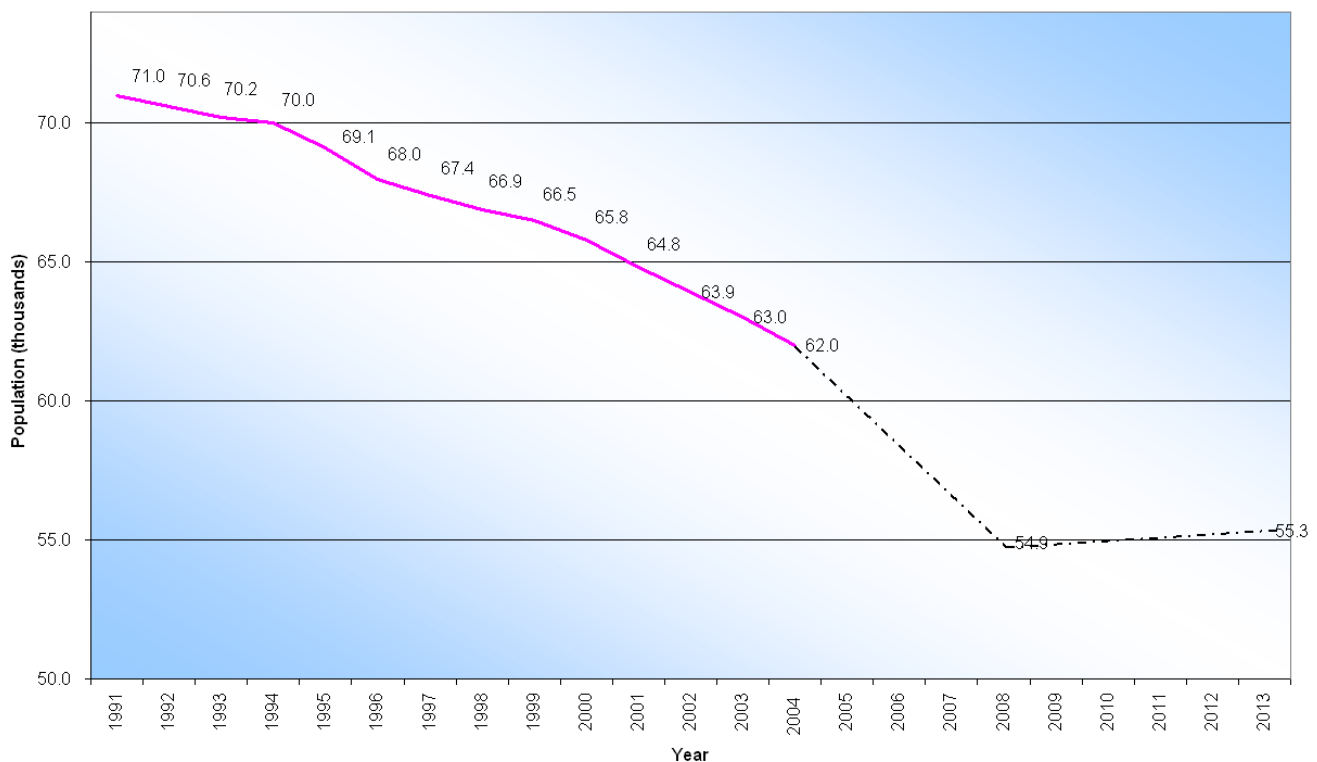
Director of Children's Services

## 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 12% 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 and the birth rate shows that the number of children will keep falling further. The birth rate shows that there will be fewer primary children in five years time – there were 24,844 pupils in 2006 and there are expected to be 23,682 pupils by 2011. Wirral will have 16% surplus places by 2011 if nothing is done.

**Actual and estimated resident population for Wirral - Children aged 0-15**  
(Source: Office for National Statistics)



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.

This is the third phase of a Primary Places Review which will look at the whole of Wirral over the next few years. This consultation concerns schools in the small planning area of Pensby and Thingwall.

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

**Irby Primary School**

**Thingwall Primary School**

**Pensby Park Primary School**

**Dawpool CE Primary School**

**Pensby Infant School**

**Ladymount Catholic Primary School**

**Pensby Junior School**

Some of these schools have more surplus places than others. In January 2006 Irby Primary, Dawpool CE Primary and Ladymount Primary had less than 10% surplus places. Pensby Infant had 34% surplus places, Pensby Junior had 25% surplus places, and Pensby Park Primary had 18% surplus places.

## **Surplus places in Pensby and Thingwall**

There are currently 1,280 pupil places in primary schools in this small planning area. At the last census, the number of children in those schools was 1,191. There are 89 surplus places, so:

### **Now**

89 surplus places = about 3 empty 30 place classes

= **7% 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 Pensby and Thingwall schools will keep falling because larger classes will leave primary schools, and smaller classes will join. This reflects the fall in births and other local trends, including the current choices being made by local families. It is predicted that the total primary age population for this area will fall from 1,191 pupils in 2006 to 1,085 pupils in 2011.

If nothing was changed, there would be 195 surplus places, so:

### **In five years**

195 surplus places = almost 7 empty 30 place classes

= almost one empty primary school

= **15% surplus places.**

The surplus places in this area are not evenly distributed within the area. Surplus places are higher in some parts of the area and in certain schools.

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 (LA) and school representatives spent a year talking about the way the number of pupils on roll affects 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. Sometimes there can be a reason to keep a very small school, for example in a remote rural area.

Where school rolls are falling, small schools face the following problems. **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 Authority 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 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'. This helps explain why large stable schools can cope better with staff changes.

## **Infant and Junior schools**

Options B, C and D involve the amalgamation of Infant and Junior schools to form an all-through primary school. The Council does not have a policy of amalgamating all Infant and Junior schools. However, it is Council policy that the possibility of amalgamation to form an all-through primary school should be considered as opportunities arise, such as through the Primary Places Review.

There are educational, organisational and financial benefits to all-through primary education.

- Parents go through the admissions process just once in primary phase, rather than twice
- Fewer journeys for parents with younger and older children.
- Children would no longer have to change schools at age 7, avoiding the dip in progress which is sometimes seen when pupils transfer from Infant to Junior schools.
- Assessment of children's attainment and tracking of individual progress from age 4 to 11 is uniform and consistent
- Schools can design and plan a whole school curriculum covering the full primary age range.
- An all-through school helps staff to develop an in-depth knowledge of every child's

individual needs and abilities from the start of statutory education.

- Key Stage 1 and 2 staff will be able to plan together, pooling skills and knowledge to build on children's prior learning.
- There would be more opportunities for younger and older children to work together and act as mentors and buddies to each other, which will support their personal and social development.
- Maintaining one institution rather than two saves money for the overall schools budget which means all schools have more money to spend on their pupils.

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
- Value for money
- Traffic and travel
- Housing Market Renewal Initiative
- Distance between schools
- Class sizes
- Special Educational Needs
- Early Years education
- Denominational issues
- Educational standards
- 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](http://www.wirral-abc.gov.uk/primaryplaces).

You can also read it at your school, local library, one-stop shop or community centre.

There are further details about finding out more information on page 10 of this leaflet.

## The Options

Currently, there are 7% surplus places in Pensby and Thingwall. **By 2011 this is projected to rise to 15% surplus places if the Council does not act.** The Council proposes reducing surplus capacity in the Pensby area. There are several ways this could be done, and we are consulting you about the following options.

**Option A:** Closure of Pensby Park Primary School

**Option B:** Amalgamate Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior to form an all-through Primary School

**Option C:** Closure of Pensby Park Primary School AND amalgamate Pensby Infant and Junior to form an all-through Primary School

**Option D:** Amalgamate Pensby Park Primary School, Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior to form an all-through Primary school on one site

**D1:** the current Infant or Junior site

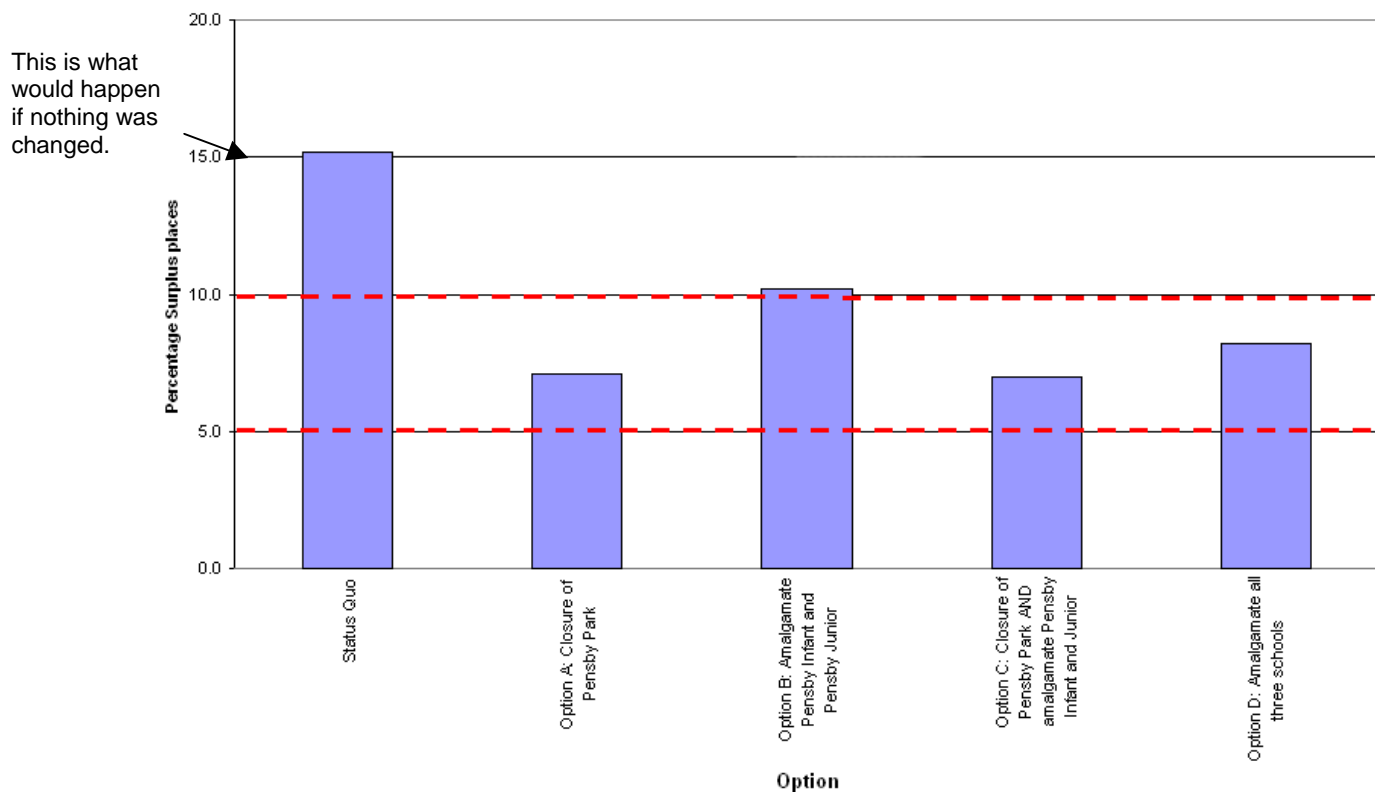
**D2:** the current Pensby Park site

**Option E:** To include in any of the above options the establishment of a Church of England Primary School in Pensby

## Effect on Surplus Places

This graph shows how options A to D are projected to change the percentage of surplus places by 2011. Any of these options would reduce surplus places in the Pensby and Thingwall area. Option E, which could be considered in conjunction with the other options, is not shown separately as it would be unlikely to have any significant impact on surplus places.

Percentage Surplus places in Pensby and Thingwall Projected to 2011 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 or more 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 8 years old and above.

### **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 or more schools amalgamate, all the schools close and then a new school opens. This means the staff at all the 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.

All staff on the redeployment register would be given preference when appointments are made. Teachers would not be “lost”. Wirral Council has an excellent record on redeployment both for teachers and other school staff.

Wirral Council has agreed a Code of Practice on school re-organisation designed to support staff through the process of change.

### **What the options would mean for school sites**

If a community school were closed and declared surplus to requirements, the future of the site 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. Pensby is within the Council's West Wirral planning restraint area for new housing development.

There are no plans or planning applications for any of the school sites, including the possible sites for any new schools. 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-abc.gov.uk/primaryplaces](http://www.wirral-abc.gov.uk/primaryplaces), and click on Pensby and Thingwall.

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

Irby

Pensby

Birkenhead Central

Wallasey Central

### Community Centres

Kylemore Drive

Pensby

You can also look at these documents at Wallasey Town Hall.

If you want a printed copy, please contact the Asset Management Team, Hamilton Building, Conway Street, Birkenhead, CH41 4FD, 0151 666 4351, or by e-mail at

[primaryplaces@wirral.gov.uk](mailto: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 for schools named in the options. The meetings will start at 7 o'clock in the evening.

Pensby Infant School on Thursday, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2007

Pensby Park Primary School on Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> February 2007

Pensby Junior School on Thursday, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2007

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

Children's Services, 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, formal proposal notices will be published. Then 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, the proposals, with the objections and comments, will be sent to the decision maker. This will either be the Local Authority or in certain circumstances, the independent School's Adjudicator.

The proposals would be referred to the Adjudicator if any of the following bodies object:

- The local Church of England Diocese
- The Bishop of the local Catholic Diocese
- The governing body or trustees of a foundation, voluntary or foundation special school that is the subject of the proposals
- The Learning and Skills Council where the school provides education for pupils aged 14 or over

The decision maker can:

- 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 2008. Some proposals could take longer – they might need building work, for example. If the proposals require a new school to be established, under the new Education Act the Authority will, in

most circumstances, be required to hold a competition to determine who will establish the new school.

### **HAVING YOUR SAY**

What do you think? Please make sure your response is received by **Friday 30th March 2007**.

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, through 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-abc.gov.uk/primaryplaces](http://www.wirral-abc.gov.uk/primaryplaces).

*The postal address for return of questionnaires 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](mailto: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.

## Pensby and Thingwall 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.

<b>School</b>	<b>Parent</b>	<b>Member of staff</b>	<b>Governor</b>	<b>Other person</b>
Irby Primary				
Pensby Park Primary				
Pensby Infant School				
Pensby Junior School				
Thingwall Primary School				
Dawpool CE Primary School				
Ladymount Catholic Primary School				
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.

<b>Option A:</b> Closure of Pensby Park Primary School
<b>Option B:</b> Amalgamate Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior to form an all-through Primary School
<b>Option C:</b> Closure of Pensby Park Primary School AND amalgamate Pensby Infant and Junior to form an all-through Primary School
<b>Option D:</b> Amalgamate Pensby Park Primary School, Pensby Infant and Pensby Junior to form an all-through Primary school on one site:
<b>D1:</b> the current Infant <u>or</u> Junior site
<b>D2:</b> the current Pensby Park site
<b>Option E:</b> To include in any of the above options the establishment of a Church of England Primary School in Pensby

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 \_\_\_\_\_

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

Make sure your response is received by:

**FRIDAY 30th MARCH 2007**

E-mail [primaryplaces@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:primaryplaces@wirral.gov.uk)