

Review of primary schools in South Wallasey 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.

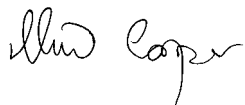
It is right that there should be some surplus places for parental choice. However, in Wirral the number of primary age children has been falling for some time. This means that some schools are getting smaller, producing a significant surplus of empty places.

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. No change is not an option.

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

Yours sincerely



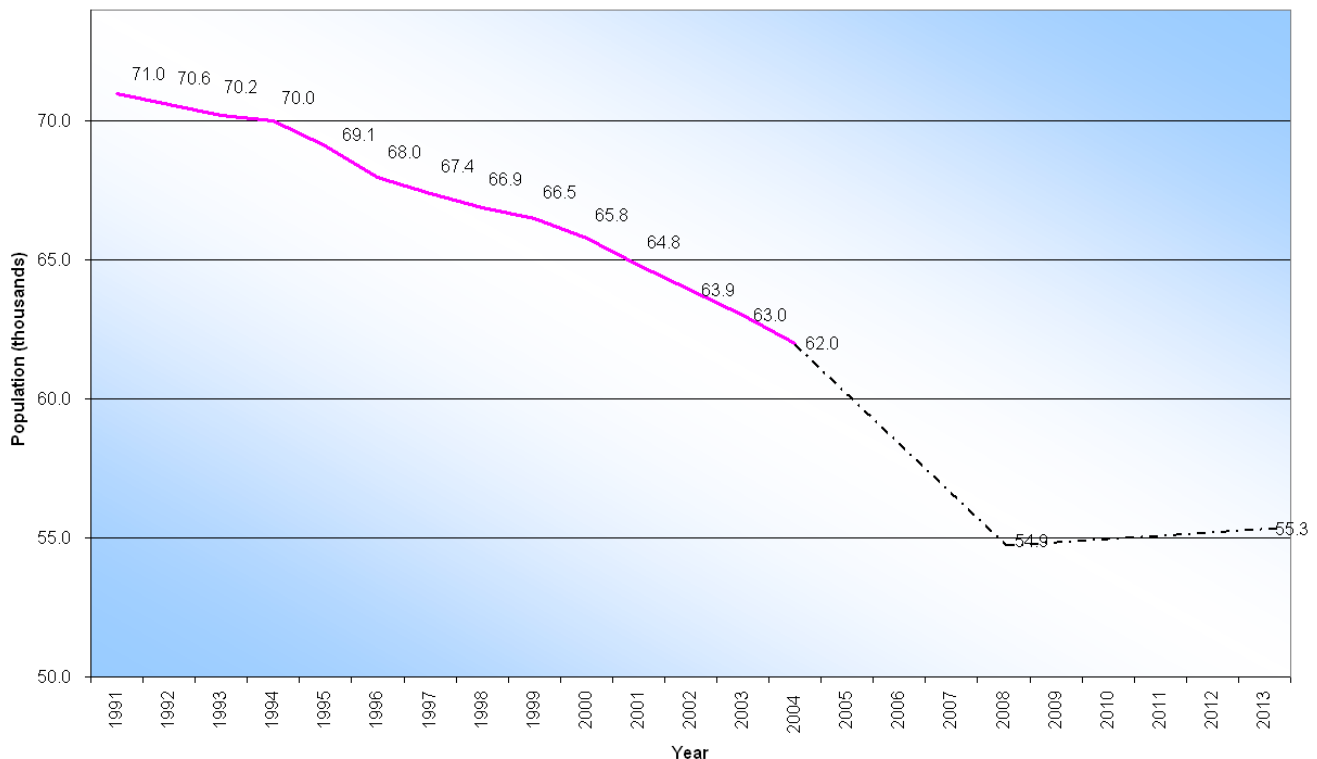
Director of Children's Services

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 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. 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 or constituencies.

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 South Wallasey.

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

Egremont Primary

Kingsway Primary

Park Primary

Poulton Primary

Riverside Primary

Somerville Primary

St Joseph's Catholic Primary

Some of these schools have more surplus places than others. In January 2006 none of the primary schools in South Wallasey had less than 10% surplus places. Four schools, Egremont, Kingsway, Poulton and St Joseph's Catholic Primary, had more than 25% surplus places.

There is also a Nursery school in this area, **Brentwood Early Years Centre**.

Surplus places in South Wallasey

There are currently 2,344 pupil places in these seven primary schools. At the last census, the number of children in those schools was 1,797. There are 547 surplus places, so:

Now

547 surplus places = about 18 empty 30 place classes

= about 2 empty primary schools

= **23% 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 Wallasey 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 1,797 pupils in 2006 to 1,669 pupils in 2011.

If nothing was changed, there would be 675 surplus places, so:

In five years

675 surplus places = about 22 empty 30 place classes

= about 3 empty primary schools

= **29% surplus places.**

This is almost three times 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 LA 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 DfES 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 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 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
- 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-mbc.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 9 of this leaflet.

The Options

Currently, there are 23% surplus places in South Wallasey. **By 2011 this is projected to rise to 29% 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 A: Closure of Poulton Primary School

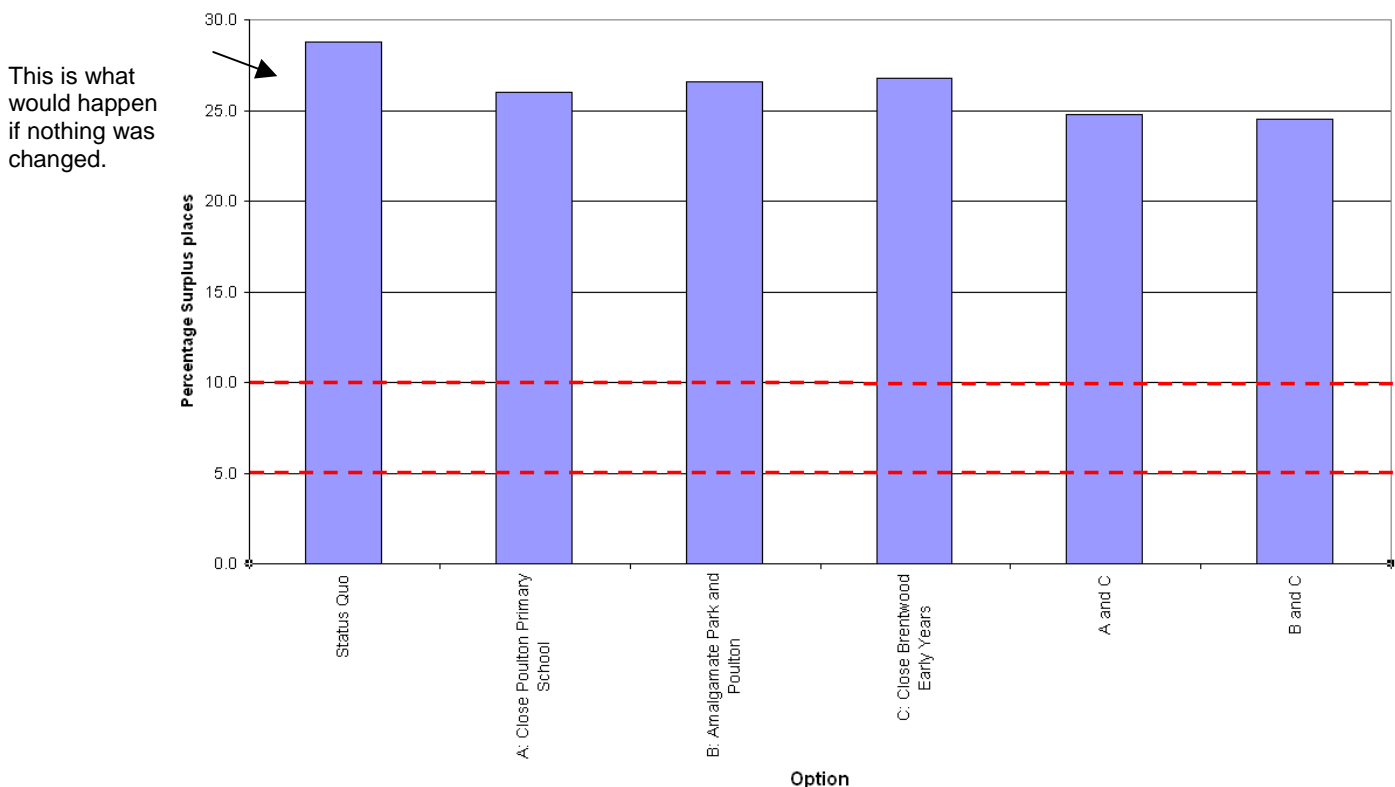
Option B: Amalgamate Park Primary and Poulton Primary on either site

Option C: Closure of Brentwood Early Years Centre AND open Foundation 1 classes at local schools

Effect on Surplus Places

This graph shows how each option is projected to change the percentage of surplus places by 2011. Notice that none of the individual options remove enough surplus places to reach our 5 to 10% target, between the dotted lines. However, several options can happen at the same time to remove more surplus places.

Percentage Surplus places in South Wallasey 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 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 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.

For example, if the Council decided to propose the closure of Brentwood Early Years Centre, it would be "linked" with proposals to create Foundation 1 (Nursery) classes at local primary schools. For example, two schools in this area, Park Primary and Somerville Primary, do not have Authority designated F1 classes. Another school, Kingsway Primary School has a "half" nursery which could be expanded.

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.

All staff on the redeployment register would be given preference when appointments are made. Teachers would not be “lost”. Wirral LA 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 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.

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 South Wallasey.

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

Seacombe

Birkenhead Central

Wallasey Central

Community Centres

Manor Trust

Seacombe

One Stop Shops

Seacombe (the Town Hall)

If you want a printed copy, please contact the Primary Places Review Team, Hamilton Building, Conway Street, Birkenhead, CH41 4FD, 0151 666 4351, 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 for each school which is named in the options. The meetings will start at 7 o'clock in the evening.

Brentwood Early Years on Thursday, 25th January 2007

Poulton Primary on Monday, 29th January 2007

Park Primary on Wednesday, 31st January 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 Children and Young People's Department, and the Council's Cabinet Member for Education.

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. The timescale is shorter if the proposal involves a school in Special Measures.

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 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 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 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 a feedback form on the Consultation website : 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

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

South Wallasey 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
Egremont Primary				
Kingsway Primary				
Park Primary				
Poulton Primary				
Riverside Primary				
Somerville Primary				
St Joseph's Catholic Primary				
Brentwood Early Years				
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
A: Closure of Poulton Primary School
B: Amalgamate Park Primary and Poulton Primary at: the Park site (B1) OR the Poulton site (B2)
C: Closure of Brentwood Early Years AND open Foundation 1 (nursery) classes at local primary schools

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

Make sure your response is
received by:

FRIDAY 30th MARCH 2007

E-mail primaryplaces@wirral.gov.uk