

PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES REVIEW - UPDATE AND STRATEGY FOR PHASE 2

Executive Summary

- 1.0 This report provides an updated summary of the position in respect of primary school places: recent developments, the current position and issues for the future. It proposes the next Phase of the area reviews, involving schools and stakeholders, to identify any further opportunities for the removal of surplus places. It is based on the approved School Organisation Plan and data from the January 2005 pupil census.

Background

- 2.0 This report is based upon the five key documents in relation to primary school place provision. These are:-

The LEA School Organisation Plan (Cabinet 4th October 2004)

The LEA Asset Management Plan and Statement of Priorities (Cabinet 20th April 2004)

The Audit Commission report of Primary Place Planning in Wirral (Education & Cultural Services Select Committee 16th September 2004)

The LEA Primary Entitlement Document "In Pursuit of Excellence"

Education & Cultural Services Select Committee, 18th October 2004

The annual return to the DfES, Supply of School Places, July 2005.

- 2.1 There are three elements in looking to plan future primary school requirements across the Borough. These are

- the numbers of children expected to enter school over the next five years
- the capacity of the current stock of primary schools, individually and in areas
- factors with implications for place provision.

These other factors include developments within the Education System: for example, those arising from the Children Act (including Children's Centres and Extended Schools), as well as external factors which impact on primary school numbers; for example, Housing Market Renewal and new housing developments and the need for a balance between Aided and community school provision.

- 2.2 **Pupil Numbers**

The number of primary age pupils has been falling steadily in recent years and will continue to fall in the future, based upon live birth figures which will translate into intakes up to 2010. Total primary numbers on roll, actual and projected, to 2010 are as set out below:

	YEAR	PUPILS	ANNUAL CHANGE
ACTUAL	1983	29,940	
	1988	27,547	
	1993	29,387	
	1998	29,498	
	2000	28,396	- 651
	2001	27,842	- 554
	2002	27,333	- 509
	2003	26,556	- 777
	2004	26,044	- 512
	2005	25,416	- 628
PROJECTED	2006	24,777	- 639
	2007	24,355	- 422
	2008	23,928	- 427
	2009	23,746	- 182
	(2010)	(23,184)	(-562)

- 2.3 The numbers set out above are for primary age pupils (4 – 11) in mainstream schools, including any part-time four-year-olds in nursery classes.
- 2.4 Projection for 2010 (in brackets) is an estimate based on previous years, due to the fact that the children due to enter Reception in 2010 are not yet born.
- 2.5 The above figures illustrate a significantly falling primary school roll across the Borough. The levels of reduction are not even; in general terms the sharpest falls are in the east of the Borough, particularly in Birkenhead, and the lowest levels of fall to date have been on Deeside. However, there are “pockets” of fall in various locations, which are set out later in this report, including some in areas where the overall position is more stable. (There is also some variation in the numbers in Aided as opposed to Community Schools.)
- 2.6 The projected numbers reflect an assumption of the percentage of the relevant live birth figure entering Reception – most recently 98%. Figures for live births are obtained from the Health Authority, modified to take account of Ellesmere Port and Neston. This percentage figure is reviewed annually and a three-year average is applied to the live birth figure to reach the LEA projection. The most recent Audit Commission report confirms that over the last five years (the period covered in the report) the LEA has achieved or been very near to the 1% level of variation – projected to actual – recommended by the Audit Commission.
- 2.7 From this overall figure for the LEA, an estimate is generated for each future year for each school. This is done by calculating the average intake figure for the school over the last three years and multiplying this by the LEA percentage of live birth to Reception figures, most recently 98%. This produces a figure for discussion and planning purposes but of course individual school intakes can fluctuate due to other

factors e.g. changing patterns of parental preference or changing age profiles in the community served by the school.

2.8 From the above it seems reasonable to conclude that over the next five years a total of over two thousand fewer pupils will require primary school provision, continuing a trend which has resulted in three thousand fewer pupils in the system in 2005 than there were in 2000. Further details and the breakdowns by the smaller planning areas used in the School Organisation Plan are attached as Appendix A to this report.

3.0 **Primary School Capacity**

3.1 Establishing the projected number of pupils is the first step in planning ahead, the second step is the calculation of the capacity of both individual schools and overall LEA capacity, in order to try to achieve the best match between need and provision, whilst at the same time retaining some flexibility to allow parental preferences to be considered.

3.2 On a national level there are two measures which are applied to all LEAs. Firstly an overall surplus place total, calculated annually, with a recommended maximum of 10% surplus. In the most recent return (Summer 2005) the overall surplus as calculated by DfES for Wirral is 13%, an increase from 9.5% in Summer 2004. Without further action this figure could reach 20% by 2009/10, based on forecast numbers discussed above. If all the proposals which resulted from Phase 1 of the Review were approved, this figure could still reach 18% by 2009/2010.

3.3 The second national measure, which is preferred by DfES as a measure of the effectiveness of the LEA in managing places, is the number of primary schools with more than 25% and more than 30 surplus places. In Summer 2004 the total for Wirral was 12 out of 101 primary schools. In Summer 2005, this number had increased to 17. Two major rationalisation schemes are currently at the planning stage. It is estimated that if no further action is taken the number of schools exceeding this national benchmark would rise to around 40% of Wirral schools by 2009/10. If all the proposals which resulted from Phase 1 of the Review are approved, this figure would still reach a third by 2009/2010.

3.4 Supporting these national benchmarks is the DfES method of calculating capacity, Net Capacity, used by all LEAs. This is a relatively new method, introduced as part of the Asset Management Planning Framework and was first calculated for each school in 2002/03. This single calculation replaced two measures of school capacity, the Standard Number capacity (SN) and the More open Enrolment (MoE) method, which produced anomalies and variations year on year. The first calculation using Net Capacity produced a total number of places which was several hundred places lower across the LEA when compared with the calculations applied previously.

3.5 In seeking the first update to Net Capacity figures in July 2004, the DfES requested that LEAs check each calculation school by school to ensure that "net capacities are at an appropriate level for each school", including taking account of the Infant Class size limit and carefully checking the number of class bases on which the calculation is based (a class base being where a register is taken). Reductions resulting from this recalculation reduced surplus places overall by 1,050 at this time.

3.6 It seems likely that the Net Capacity method will continue to be used by the DfES and LEAs in future years, following its introduction in 2002/03 and the major review

described above across the country described above in July 2004. From now onwards the DfES will accept major changes only when a school's accommodation changes.

3.7 In summary the position as at January 2005 is:-

- (i) Number of primary pupils on roll: 25,416
- (ii) Total Net Capacity: 28,931 = 3,515 surplus places
= 11% approximately
- (iii) Number of schools where the Net Capacity is greater than the number of pupils on roll: 87 schools out of 101.
- (iv) Number of pupils on roll in these 87 schools: 20,585
- (v) Total Net Capacity of these 87 schools: 24,343
- (vi) Total surplus in these 87 schools: 3,758 = 13% of total capacity and 15% of capacity in the 87 schools with surplus places.

3.8 The total figure at (vi) is greater than the difference between (i) and (ii) due to 12 schools having a number on roll above their revised Net Capacity – in all but 5 schools by less than 6%. This situation is only an issue in a very small number of schools, where options are being considered and schemes have already been brought forward for two with over capacity figures.

3.9 The overall surplus figure has increased from the 2004 figure, due to the continued falling roll. The number of schools with 25% and 30 surplus places has increased from 12 to 17. Almost 9 out of 10 Wirral primary schools have surplus places. In 50 of these schools the total surplus is greater than 30 places. Relating this to the pupil projections a decrease of around two thousand further pupils over the next five years will bring more schools into the position of having surplus in excess of 30 places, as well as the 10% or more figure used by OFSTED (currently 53 schools).

4.0 School size and viability

4.1 The Authority funds its schools through the operation of its local funding formula. The formula is designed so as to ensure that sufficient resources are made available to schools for the pupils they have to teach, however small the school. What happens is that small schools draw in a greater share of the resource per pupil from the total available for distributing among all schools.

4.2 Since the total sum available for spending on all our children does not increase if we choose as an Authority to organise our children in more schools than is necessary for the efficient and effective delivery of education, it follows that the maintenance of small schools where this is not necessary comes at the expense of all other children.

4.3 Small schools also face greater challenges in organisational viability. This does not mean that at any one time a particular small school cannot produce excellence through having outstanding teachers. Furthermore it is often the case when small schools are considered nationally that many small schools enjoy a number of advantages as a result of their location and are attractive to staff. In many parts of the

country small schools are maintained because the alternative would be to transport children, perhaps for a number of miles, to the nearest school. Authorities who have such schools receive additional funding from the government which enables these small schools to be maintained without it being at the expense of others.

- 4.4 While overall Wirral has had few primary schools who have fallen into one of the Ofsted categories of concern, those that have done so have been among our smaller schools. We do not believe that this is coincidence: it arises because of the inevitable requirement on individual staff in small schools to take on wider burdens of responsibility and from the disproportionate impact which one weaker member of staff will have on the school as a whole.
- 4.5 With regard to Wirral's policy on small schools, the School Organisation Plan (agreed in 2003) contained the proposal that the LEA "should consider the implications of an increasing number of primary schools with less than one form of entry – 30 pupils and therefore primary schools with fewer than 210 pupils i.e. 7 x 30".
- 4.6 The Policy document "Pursuit of Excellence: Primary Education in Wirral", developed with headteachers, sets out what every Wirral child shall expect from their primary education. Our pattern of school provision should enable schools to deliver this entitlement. This policy (adopted in 2004) now suggests that a school should have at least 180 pupils in order to be viable. The broad agreement of Wirral's professional community is that it becomes increasingly difficult to provide an excellent and enriched primary curriculum when pupil numbers fall, with an optimum range between 180 and 210 pupils. (Please see Appendix B for the appropriate extract from the policy).
- 4.7 Guidance from the DfES says that "Schools with fewer than 150 pupils may be educationally and financially sustainable only through substantial subsidies via their local authority's funding formula";

[www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/fallingschoolrolls/schools/educational decisions](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/fallingschoolrolls/schools/educational%20decisions)

5.0 **Strategy**

- 5.1 In order to ensure that the review of surplus places in Wirral's primary schools was both seen and experienced as transparent, open and consultative, the following ways of working have been adopted:
- a) Each small planning area will be considered in turn, in an order to be decided by Cabinet.
 - b) The key factors to be weighed up include the number of children, their actual distribution across the area, in relation to schools available, including denominational schools and parental preferences.
 - c) Officers, headteachers and chairs of governors will agree how many schools are now needed, compared to the number currently available, and the geography of where schools are in relation to the communities they serve.
 - d) Feasible options will be developed, informed by current and future land use plans, for example, information about new housing developments. Feedback from the community is an integral part of the consultation process.

5.2 Several ways of dealing with spare capacity are outlined in the School Organisation Plan, as set out below:

- (i) Application of the new Net Capacity calculation to establish a new base-line figure capacity – this process is now complete, with very limited future potential to contribute to place removal.
- (ii) Re-allocation of space within schools for educational purposes outside core use, particularly pre-school provision, childcare and other community provision. Given the number of schemes established in schools and the current allocations within the Net Capacity calculations for community use space, it is felt that future contributions to surplus place from this use will be more limited in the future, although the development of Children’s Centres and extended schools will provide some opportunities.
- (iii) Adaptation of spaces from general teaching to specialist provision such as Library, ICT resource, and parents’ rooms. The ICT programme is now complete and it is felt that nearly all potential place credits for library and parents’ spaces are already taken account of in the 2004 calculation.
- (iv) Removal of “temporary” accommodation. Just under a quarter of primary schools still have some form of limited life accommodation on site, although not all these schools are in a falling roll situation and not all the “temporary” spaces are used for teaching. A modest removal programme of 90 – 120 places a year is feasible over the short term.
- (v) The LEA, in partnership with the Diocesan Authorities, will continue to bring forward proposals for specific areas where none of the above measures is sufficient in itself to reduce surplus capacity to an acceptable level.

5.3 In recent years place removal has utilised all of the five actions above. The intention is that these will continue to be undertaken but increasingly it is the final one – area proposals regarding future provision - which will have most relevance.

6.0 **Other factors impacting on school capacity**

6.1 By setting out the position in respect of pupil numbers and the existing capacity in primary schools in Wirral, this report attempts to create the most secure starting point for consideration of possible future actions regarding primary school places. It is then important that other factors which could have local influence on both pupil numbers and the nature of primary school provision are considered. In addition to the debate about the nature and form of primary education provision and the subsequent implications for school size, structures, inter-school relationships and locations, there are factors related to changes to communities in the Wirral which impact on pupil numbers.

6.2 Looking firstly at changes to communities in Wirral, the biggest changes impacting on school provision over the next ten years are likely to come from the Housing Market Renewal Strategy, in the Birkenhead, Tranmere and Seacombe areas. Work is currently under way sharing information on schools with the Council’s Re-generation Team in order to contribute to the consultation process. Once future options are brought forward to the Council and the community, then more detailed work will be undertaken to assess the implications for primary school places and provision and

consider options for the future to complement, integrate with and support the Housing Market Renewal Initiative (HMRI).

- 6.3 Outside the HMRI areas the process of re-development is likely to continue, with properties cleared and new developments taking place. Clearly, sufficient “spare” capacity has to remain in the system to deal with local growth fluctuations as a result of new development. The number of pupils generated on average by new housing developments is lower than is often thought to be the case; the Audit Commission recorded a range of three to six pupils per year group for every one hundred new homes built in their 1997 study ‘Trading Places’. Added to this is the situation that family movement within Wirral means that some children moving to new developments will already be on roll at a Wirral primary school. The current planning development rules for parts of Wirral are also a factor to be taken into account. It is also important that denominally based provision is considered in overall school place planning in any area.
- 6.4 There are practical implications which may arise from the implementation of the Children Act, in that the new approach to supporting children may provide opportunities to relocate more services on school sites and thereby make use of available space as it is released by falling rolls. In many ways this would be a progression from the developments in recent years, with for example, pre-school groups and education initiatives – such as Behaviour Improvement Programmes (BIP) being located on school sites in “spare” accommodation. The development process regarding Children’s Services, currently under way, will identify such needs and opportunities in the short and medium term.
- 6.5 There will be a continuing need to work in partnership with the Diocesan Bodies in looking at future capacity needs in the primary sector. It has already been noted that the generally falling roll may impact unevenly, to some extent, on Aided, controlled and community schools. There is a requirement to consider the balance between Aided and community provision, as stated in the Policies and Principles section of the 2003 School Organisation Plan.

7.0 **Proposals for Primary Place Review and Planning**

- 7.1 There will continue to be opportunities to remove temporary accommodation, rationalise premises and possibly convert some existing school spaces to house other complementary services. There will also continue to be a need for “one-off” school reviews for a range of reasons, including those required by OFSTED for schools judged inadequate, i.e those deemed to require special measures, or those requiring notice to improve; those required by the DfES for schools with more than 25% and 30 places surplus, and for local reasons, such as a serious decline in pupil numbers.
- 7.2 However, the data set out in this report leads to the conclusion that these measures alone cannot continue to reduce the current surplus figure against a reducing primary roll. This conclusion is supported by the Audit Commission Report, “Planning Primary School Places in Wirral, September 2004”. The post OFSTED Action Plan, following the last LEA Inspection also required the LEA to “ensure that the growth of surplus places (identified at the time of the inspection) is controlled”.
- 7.3 It is therefore proposed that in addition to the existing measures set out in 5.2 above (and in the School Organisation Plan) that a series of area reviews is carried out over the coming years, to study provision in an area, match current provision against future

predicted need and draw up proposals for discussion and further consultation, leading to formal proposals, where appropriate.

- 7.4 It is proposed that the small planning areas in the School Organisation Plan, as set out in Appendix A of this report, are used as the basis for area reviews including additional schools where there is “overlap” in catchment areas, where another school sits close to the boundary of a neighbouring small planning area or to take account of Aided School provision. It is proposed that a maximum of three reviews could be undertaken at any one time.
- 7.5 In the most recent Asset Management Plan and the 2003 School Organisation Plan (updated with 2005 data), the following areas were identified as those predicted to have the greatest overall surplus in the future, in alphabetical order:
- Beechwood (Phase 1)
 - Bromborough
 - Leasowe
 - Moreton
 - Noctorum
 - North Birkenhead (Phase 1)
 - South Birkenhead (Phase 1)
 - South Wallasey
 - Woodchurch
- 7.6 At the Cabinet meeting on 20th October 2004, Cabinet agreed to the principle of carrying out area reviews to study provision in an area, match current provision against future predicted need and draw up proposals for discussion and consultation with all relevant stakeholders, leading to formal proposals, where appropriate.
- 7.7 Phase 1 of this process encompassed the Small Planning Areas of North Birkenhead, Beechwood, Central Birkenhead and South Birkenhead. Following extensive consultation, in July 2005 Cabinet determined that formal proposals should be published with regard to the following actions:
- Closure of The Dell Primary
 - Closure of St Paul’s Catholic Primary
 - Amalgamation of Vyner Primary and St Oswald’s CE (Controlled) Primary, to form a new CE school at the St Oswald’s site.
- 7.8 The minute of this meeting is attached as Appendix C.
- 7.9 The statutory notices were published on 12th October 2005, and the formal six week representation period for these proposals is now under way. The proposals are due to be determined by the multi-representative School Organisation Committee in December 2005 or January 2006. If the Committee is unable to reach a unanimous decision on any individual proposal, that proposal will go to the independent Schools’ Adjudicator, who will make a determination.
- 7.10 If all these proposals are approved, they will make a significant impact on surplus places in Beechwood, North Birkenhead and South Birkenhead. However, it cannot be assumed that all or any of these proposals will be approved, either by the School Organisation Committee, or by the Schools’ Adjudicator, and these areas remain subject to future review.

- 7.11 The Authority has recently approved a statutory proposal to amalgamate Prenton Infant and Prenton Junior Schools to form Prenton Primary School. A scheme is being implemented to reduce the size of Arroe Hill Primary to a single form of entry primary school.
- 7.12 The following small planning areas are predicted to have overall occupancy levels of 75% or less in 2010 if circumstances remain as they are, in alphabetical order:
- Beechwood (Phase 1)
 - Leasowe
 - Moreton
 - North Birkenhead (Phase 1)
 - South Birkenhead (Phase 1)
 - South Wallasey
 - Woodchurch
- 7.13 Cabinet's views are being sought on the areas to be included in the second phase of the Primary Places Review. Small planning areas are grouped below into possible review Phases.
- South Wallasey, Leasowe and North Wallasey
 - Moreton, Greasby and Upton
 - Noctorum, Prenton and Woodchurch
 - Pensby/Thingwall, Hoylake/Meols, Heswall and West Kirby
 - Bromborough, Bebington, Thornton Hough and Spital.
- 7.14 It is recommended that Cabinet should formally adopt a policy to review each of these groupings at the rate of one group per year. At the completion of this cycle, the Council should revisit the areas considered in Phase 1 (North Birkenhead, Beechwood, Central Birkenhead and South Birkenhead) and continue the cycle for the foreseeable future. This will introduce a greater degree of predictability for schools and parents and will ensure that the Council is always in a position to react to demographic and other trends.
- 7.15 Cabinet is further asked to identify the group to be reviewed in 2005/6 and invited to set the pattern for the future.
- 7.16 Cabinet may also wish to include additional schools in reviews earlier than their expected place where particular pressures on numbers have emerged. There are currently eight schools with fewer than 120 pupils on roll. Using the latest September Census data, these are;
- Bromborough Pool Primary (49)
 - Pensby Infants (79) (Pensby Junior has 131)
 - Pensby Park Primary (98)
 - Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary (84)
 - St Paul's Catholic Primary (87)
 - St Mary's CE Primary (105)
 - The Dell (110)
 - St Laurence's Catholic Primary (114)

- 7.17 St Paul's Catholic Primary and The Dell Primary are already the subject of statutory proposals for closure from the review carried in Phase 1. Cabinet may wish to consider a review of one or more of the remaining small schools as part of Phase 2.
- 7.18 As in the first phase of the Primary Places Review, a review document will be produced for each area, containing the following information:
- (a) Background / Introduction
 - (b) Map of the area
 - (c) School data, including Aided provision
 - (d) Current school populations plotted by address
 - (e) Asset Management Data
 - (f) Other services / provision currently located on school sites
 - (g) School performance data / OFSTED reports
 - (h) Diocesan Body statement
 - (i) Transport / travel route issues
 - (j) Application of Primary Curriculum entitlement template
 - (k) Other factors including
 - age profiles in community
 - Housing Market Renewal
 - other housing development issues
 - Children's Bill context
 - (l) Summary
Proposed Options
Details of proposed consultation process.
- 7.19 This document would be used as the basis for discussions with school governors, Diocesan Bodies, other Council departments and relevant external bodies, with a view to producing options for more formal consultation on proposals as appropriate. Timescales would be the subject of a further report, subject to approval of the review process in principle and determination of the number of area reviews to be carried out at one time and the degree of complexity of the first area(s) identified.

8.0 **School Organisation Plan and School Organisation Committee**

- 8.1 The LEA is required to produce a School Organisation Plan for approval by the School Organisation Committee. The current plan was approved by Cabinet on 5th November 2003. It was approved, with some relatively minor amendments by the School Organisation Committee on 13th November 2003. Prior to 2003, it was a requirement to produce a new School Organisation Plan each year but from 2003 the requirement was changed to a new plan "being produced every three years as a minimum". There are likely to be further changes from 2006/07 with the national introduction of a single service plan. As there has been no change of policy, strategy or local circumstances relating to Wirral schools from the situation set out in 2003 plan there is no requirement to produce a new plan this year.
- 8.2 LEAs are "strongly advised" by the DfES to review, revise and publish the data section of the plan each year when a full plan is not published. The revised data section based upon January 2005 numbers on roll (DfES return) and the Net Capacity figures as at August 2005 form Appendix A of this report. It is proposed that these data pages are included in an updated version of the 2003 School Organisation Plan and submitted later this term to the School Organisation Committee, along with a copy of this report, the recent Audit Commission report on Primary Places and the LEA

document Pursuit of Excellence: Primary Education in Wirral for consideration and discussion.

Financial and Staffing Implications

- 9.0 Current staffing levels will need to be taken into account in determining the number and timescale of proposed area reviews.

Equal Opportunities Implications

- 10.0 There are none arising out of this report.

Human Rights Implications

- 11.0 There are none arising directly from this report.

Local Agenda 21 Statement

- 12.0 The removal of old, inefficient accommodation contributes to Council principles and targets in respect of Agenda 21.

Community Safety Implications

- 13.0 Rationalisation and refurbishment of schools allow the most vulnerable accommodation to be removed and other security improvements carried out.

Planning Implications

- 14.0 The relationship between housing development policy and school place provision is a factor in considering surplus place removal.

Local Member Support Implications

- 15.0 Primary place planning and potential surplus place removal have relevance to all Wards.

Background Papers

- 16.0 Audit Commission Report: Planning School Places in Wirral September 2004
School Organisation Plan
School Asset Management Plan
LEA document "Pursuit of Excellence: Primary Education in Wirral"
School pupil number returns, January 2005 (PLASC return to DfES)
Supply of School Places return, July 2005, to DfES requirements
Other data held in Department including that provided by Wirral Health Authority.

Recommendations

- 17.0 (i) That this report be noted and that the report, the data in Appendix A be forwarded to the School Organisation Committee for their consideration;

- (ii) The principle be adopted of carrying out a review annually focussing on different parts of the Borough in rotation;
- (iii) That Cabinet's views be sought on the reviews to be carried out in the second phase and identify the chosen area(s);
- (iv) That Cabinet's views be sought on any schools outside the chosen area(s) additionally to form part of Phase 2;
- (v) That Cabinet views be sought on the inclusion of areas in the third and subsequent phases of the review.

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