

Extract from ‘Report to Director of Education’

Title: Public response to informal consultations on proposals to make prescribed alterations to six community primary schools.

Date: 28 October 2016

What is the purpose of the report?

The report collates, considers and makes recommendations as to how to progress the proposals to increase the capacity through enlargement of the premises of: Tattenhall Park, Farndon Community, Winnington Park, Tarporley CE, Winsford High Street and Cuddington Primary Schools.

Background

The informal consultations were authorised by an Officer Decision Notice published by the Director of Education on 12 September 2016 and were carried out in accordance with the consultation plan set out in that document. They are consistent with the recommendations for an informal period of consultation prior to the initiation of the statutory process as set out by the Department for Education in April 2016.

All schools have been requested to consult with their pupils. Where this has taken place the feedback is reported on. Where it has yet to be received schools have been requested to submit a report as part of the Governing Body’s response to the formal consultation.

The consultation process allowed consultees and respondents to make their thoughts known through attendance at a public, in writing or through email to the or through completion of a survey which could be completed in hard copy or online and invited additional comment. It is recognised that there may be duplication in responses from individual consultees.

What decision is required?

It is for the Director to now determine whether the original proposals should be progressed through the formal processes of Notice, Representation and Decision-making, and if so whether it is proposed that they be taken forward in their original or in a modified form.

In considering feedback it should be recognised that this is an ‘educational’ consultation and that issues solely relating to development control, planning and highways should be properly addressed through the planning process and its associated public consultation unless they have a direct impact upon the following considerations specified by the DfE in its statutory guidance to decision-makers. The decision-maker should take account of:

- Whether, given the quality and diversity of schools in the relevant area, the proposal will meet or affect the needs of parents; raise local standards and narrow attainment gaps.
- Whether there is a need for a new school in which case the academy presumption applies.
- Whether there are any sex, race or disability discrimination issues that arise from the changes being proposed, and whether the proposals provide access to a range of opportunities that reflect the ethnic and cultural mix of the area, whilst ensuring such opportunities are open to all.
- Whether the proposal supports community cohesion by encouraging through teaching an understanding of, and respect for, other cultures, faiths and communities. Account should be taken of the views of different sections of the community.
- Whether account has been taken of travel and accessibility and whether the proposal adversely impacts on disadvantaged groups. It should be considered on the basis of how it will support and contribute to the LA's duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to school and should not result in too many children being prevented from travelling sustainably due to unsuitable walking or cycling routes. Proposals should not unreasonably extend journey times or increase transport costs.
- Whether land, premises and necessary funding are available to implement the proposal.
- Whether the proposal will enable the school to meet the requirements of the School Premises Regulations, in particular the ability of the school to provide suitable outdoor space in order to enable physical education to be provided to pupils in accordance with the school curriculum and for pupils to play outside safely.

The Statutory Guidance also states that:

- 'Reducing surplus places is not a priority (unless running at very high levels). For parental choice to work effectively there may be surplus capacity in the system as a whole. Competition from additional schools and places in the system will lead to pressures on existing schools to improve standards'.
- 'Decision-makers should not make blanket assumptions that schools should be of a certain size to be good schools, although the viability and cost-effectiveness of a proposal is an important factor for consideration. The decision-maker should also consider the impact on the LA's budget of the need to provide additional funding to a small school to compensate for its size'.

Proposal:

- **Farndon Community Primary School.** The proposal is to increase the capacity of the current school from 210 pupils to 315 pupils enabling an intake of 45 pupils into each year group.

The consultation event was attended by 10 individuals.

7 On-line responses were made, 1 email and 3 hard copy responses were received.

Of completed survey forms 6 were in favour of the proposal 2 opposed to the proposal and 3 were unsure. 21 visits were made to the web-page without a response being made.

Responses to the issues raised through the consultation may be summarised as:

In general respondents accepted and welcomed the proposal to expand although a number questioned whether it would be necessary if children from outside catchment/the LA could be denied access. It is likely that without this expansion, for the foreseeable future, a number of out-of-catchment/LA children would have priority criteria during the normal admissions round over those without siblings living in more remote parts of the catchment and that spaces may not be available for children moving into new housing during the academic year.

Highways impact is a significant concern for most respondents. This is a planning matter and is most appropriately addressed through the planning process which is likely to make permission conditional upon a review of the school travel plan. There is little concern that this is not a sustainable solution with supportive comment highlighting that without expansion children will need to travel to access education.

There are concerns that site constraints will lead to inadequate outdoor play space, the DFE will need to be satisfied that proposals ensure a sufficiency of playing-field space - meeting this requirement will be an essential component of the design brief.

Concern is expressed at the move to mixed age group teaching that would arise from the proposed size and that the proposal will lead to large class sizes. The Head is confident that the increase in school size and the move to mixed age group teaching will enable the appointment of additional teachers with specialist skills and greater personalisation of learning for individual pupils. Increased capacity is likely to lead to a decreased risk of class size exceeding an optimal 30 on account of reduced likelihood of over-PAN admissions needing to be made. Some respondents were concerned about how growth will be managed, again the Head is confident that this can be managed to enable greater flexibility and personalisation and without financial detriment to the school.

Several respondents felt that it was important that the opportunity be taken to remove all temporary accommodation from the site as part of the capital project. This is the Council's wish but will be dependent upon costings received at feasibility stage and the allocation of further funding from Central Government. In the interim, whilst the school grows to its full future capacity it will be possible to relocate pupils from mobiles to the new classrooms.

Concerns were expressed that there might be a plan to increase the size of the maintained nursery as this would be detrimental to the ability to sustain a diversity of provision in Farndon. It is not proposed to increase the size of the nursery accommodation and it would be the LA's view that such a move could be detrimental to sustaining a full day-care offer in the local area.

The school has consulted with pupils on the School Council. Pupils identified the need to ensure local children could attend their local school, and that this needed more classrooms rather than larger classes. The issue of mixed-age group teaching did not appear problematic to them. Children were concerned that there might not be enough outdoor play-space and suggest construction of an astro-turf pitch, more seating and a track around the field. A suggestion of staggered playtimes seemed not to be popular as children liked to play with friends in other year groups. Children identified the need for more toilets and it was suggested that these should have more cubicles to improve behaviour.

Recommendation: That the proposal be progressed unchanged to the formal process of notice and representation.

Recommendation Approved 23 November 2016