

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:

- **Tattenhall Park 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 39 individuals.

32 On-line responses were made, 3 emails and 2 hard copy responses were received

Of completed survey forms 11 were in favour of the proposal 14 opposed to the proposal and 10 were unsure. 50 visits were made to the web-page without a response being made.

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

A significant number of adverse comments relate to 'over-development' of the village, these are a planning matter and fall outside the scope of matters for the decision-maker in this consultation.

Highways impact is also a significant concern; again 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 several supportive comments highlighting that without expansion children will need to travel significant distance to access education.

There are concerns about the potential impact upon green space; again this will be a planning issue providing that the DFE are satisfied that proposals ensure a sufficiency of playing-field space. Meeting this requirement will be an essential component of the design brief. Several respondents suggest upward physical expansion, and designers should be encouraged to explore this option if it is cost effective and acceptable to the planning authority.

A significant number of objections are to the proposed size of the school and the consequent need for mixed age group teaching that will arise from the proposed size. No evidence has been produced that suggests that mixed age group teaching or a school of this particular size will be detrimental to pupil's learning. Forecasts of future pupil numbers do not suggest that a school of 420 pupils could be sustained.

A number of respondents express concern at the impact of building work upon children's safety and upon the management of teaching and learning. It is the Council's practice to only appoint contractors with a positive record of working on school sites, whilst acknowledging the challenges that a construction project poses to school management it is the Council's experience that school's indicate that the process has been a positive and stimulating process for pupils.

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

Recommendation Approved 23 November 2016