

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:

- **Winsford High Street Community Primary School.** The proposal is to increase the capacity of the current school from 315 pupils to 525 pupils enabling an intake of 75 pupils into each year group.

The consultation event was attended by 2 individuals.

41 On-line responses were made and 9 emails and 2 hard copy responses were received

Of completed survey forms 27 were in favour of the proposal 11 opposed to the proposal and 3 were unsure. 35 visits were made to the web-page without a response being made.

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

It is apparent from much of the feedback that many respondents have failed to appreciate that this proposal seeks to formalise the growth that has already occurred at the school rather than make a proposal for significant further growth. There are currently 452 pupils on role, with there being only 3 vacant places in the three infant year groups that have had a planned admission of 75 pupils for the past three years. Consequently the concern expressed by parties associated with other Winsford schools that this proposal will be highly detrimental to those schools is open to question given that the town is anticipating significant new housing development in future years and full child yield from recent housing developments has yet to enter primary education.

Many of the supporters of the proposal cite the fact that the school offers a quality experience to its pupils, choice to parents and is conveniently located in the town centre.

The physical expansion has already received planning permission and work has commenced on those aspects of the scheme that seek to make the existing accommodation more fit for primary education in the 21st century. Planning conditions requires improvements to the school's internal parking arrangements and a review of the school travel plan. This would imply that there are no unresolved highways planning issues as a consequence of the school's cumulative growth over recent years.

Many objections relate to the size of the school but no evidence is presented that this is detrimental to pupils learning and development, whilst two respondents assert that the size has positive benefits for teaching and learning. Concerns are expressed that the proposal will lead to increased class size and a stretching of resources, it is not anticipated that the proposal will have a detrimental impact upon class size, resourcing or pupil to teacher ratios.

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

Recommendation Approved 23 November 2016