

Report to Director of Education

Title: Public response to informal consultation on proposals to make prescribed alterations to expand the physical capacity of Blacon High School.

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Date: 10 April 2019

What is the purpose of the report?

The report collates and considers public responses to the informal consultation on a proposal to expand the physical capacity of Blacon High School by one form of entry. Its purpose is to inform the decision whether to enter a period of statutory consultation leading to a Cabinet Member decision whether to proceed with the proposal.

Background

Blacon High School was recently rebuilt by the DFE to a capacity of 600 pupils. The former building had a capacity of 810 pupils, the DFE rejected representations by the Council that the decreased capacity would be inadequate to meet future needs. The new building opened in 2016. Demand for places in Year 7 first exceeded the available places for entry in September 2018; the demand for Year 7 places in September 2019 exceeds current capacity by 37 places and is forecast to remain at a similar level for the foreseeable future.

The informal consultations were authorised by an Officer Decision Notice published by the Director of Education on 18 December 2018 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 October 2018.

The school has been requested to consult with their pupils. This has not yet been received. The school will consequently be requested to submit such a report as part of the Governing Body's response to any formal consultation.

The consultation process allowed consultees and respondents to make their thoughts known through attendance at a public meeting, in writing, via email, or through completion of an online survey. 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 they be taken forward in their original or in a modified form.

In considering feedback it should be recognised 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.
- The requirement to pay due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty to: eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act 2010; advance equality of opportunity between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it; and foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it.
- 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 School Premises (England) Regulations 2012 requirement 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:

'Decision makers should not simply take account of the number of people expressing a particular view. Instead they should give greatest weight to responses from those stakeholders likely to be affected by a proposal-especially parents of children at the affected school'.

Responses to the Proposal:

The proposal is to increase the capacity of the current school from 600 pupils to 750 pupils. This enables the intake of pupils across all year groups to be increased from 120 to 150.

- The consultation event was attended by 10 individuals.
- 23 on-line survey responses were made, and 51 hard copy surveys were received.
- Of the consultees 54 were in favour of the proposal and 16 were opposed to the proposal, 14 were unsure/unclear.

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

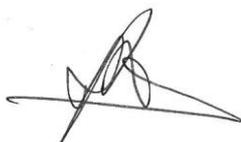
- A large body of responses came from parents of pupils attending local primary schools; these were overwhelmingly in favour of the proposal, not all giving reasons for their support. A common theme of those who did comment, explained it would be good for the community and give local children a greater opportunity to access secondary education within the locality instead of being displaced elsewhere.
- A number of respondents suggested that rather than expanding Blacon High School the LA should be making investment in the physical infrastructure of Upton High School. The need for such investment is recognised and the Council has supported Upton in making application to the DFE for capital funding to address these issues, however to date the DFE have not considered the condition of the school to be of such a priority to make funds available to address these issues. Such works are funded through the DFE's Capital Maintenance ('Condition') budgets rather than the Basic Needs ('Sufficiency') budget which will fund the expansion of Blacon HS. Whilst there has been an historic pattern of a proportion of Blacon parents exercising a preference for children to be educated at Upton High School this appears to be a diminishing preference as confidence in the educational offer available in Blacon has risen. A decision to increase the capacity of Upton rather than Blacon would not meet current patterns of preference, would be environmentally unsustainable and would not provide funding to address the current shortcomings of the existing Upton buildings.
- The majority of attendees at the public event were local residents who all expressed a concern about the highways impact of the proposal during both the construction and operational phases of the proposal. The fear of increased car-parking on neighbouring streets, already perceived as a nuisance, was a particular concern. These matters (also reflected in online representations) are more properly addressed through the public consultation associated with the determination of the planning application that will be necessary to implement the proposal. Despite these concerns the residents were generally in favour of the principle of Blacon children being able to access their secondary education in Blacon. Residents also expressed concerns about the possible on-site location of a potential extension. The emergent option favoured by the school appears likely to be the option residents and planners find most acceptable.

- A number of respondents expressed concerns about the quality of education and life in the school if it were to expand. These included concerns:
 - About the existing capacity of the canteen-it is recognised that an additional facility will need to be planned into the proposed new build.
 - That the existing capacity of corridors will lead to added congestion within the school as a consequence of increased numbers-the schedule of accommodation within the proposed expansion is being scoped with the assistance of the DFE's design team to ensure existing accommodation is not compromised.
 - There will be a reduction in the ratio of staff to pupils-it is the school's aspiration and intention the new accommodation will lead to improved personalisation of learning without detriment to the level of staffing available to support class-based learning.
- A number of respondents suggested that rather than/as well as expanding the school, consideration should be given to the creation of a sixth-form. Such a development is not currently under consideration

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

Recommendation: Approved

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Parkinson', written over a horizontal line.

Mark Parkinson

31/05/2019