

Phase 1 Pupil Place Planning

Findings Report

March 2022

Introduction

In March 2021, the Children Young People and Education Committee endorsed the Pupil Place Planning Strategy 2021 - 2026. This Strategy set out a planned framework for the review of school places in both primary and secondary mainstream schools over the next 5 years.

The purpose of the Strategy was to set out a framework for the review of school planning areas which will enable the council to meet its statutory duty and ensure the provision of suitable and sufficiency places for school aged pupils. The Strategy also out how we would work with key partners to shape education provision through a transparent and equitable approach which will lead to supported decision making.

Phase 1 of the primary phase of the review commenced in March 2021 looking at small planning areas in and around Birkenhead, specifically: Beechwood; Central Birkenhead; North Birkenhead; South Birkenhead; Noctorum; Prenton. A detailed review framework and process has been undertaken and has included information gathering, stakeholder discussion and parent/carer engagement. This has culminated in the recommendations presented within the report.

Vision and Principles

The Strategy set out a vision *“to ensure that Wirral’s children attend local schools that provide high quality education, are efficient, viable and provide the best possible educational standards to meet their needs”*. Fundamental to the delivery of the Strategy has been the principles. These have guided the work undertaken

1. We will be fair, thorough, and respectful in our approach to Pupil Place planning reviews
2. We will follow and adhere to all legal requirements, seeking relevant advice and guidance where this is applicable
3. We will work with partners, and involve key stakeholders in pupil place planning where this is relevant and necessary
4. We will consult with schools, parents, and local communities as part of the pupil place planning process
5. We will utilise robust insight, intelligence, and data to underpin a robust methodology and analysis
6. We will always consider how our efforts will improve educational outcomes for children and young people
7. We will consider the efficiency and effectiveness of education provisions as part of pupil place planning
8. We will prioritise and focus on inclusion, ensuring that children with special educational needs and disabilities are at the forefront of considerations throughout

The Pupil Place Planning Strategy seeks to support the vision and pledges of the council and partners, particularly ensuring that we can provide brighter futures for our young people and families. Equally this strategy supports the creation of safe and vibrant communities in which education provision creates environments for parents to want to live and bring up their children.

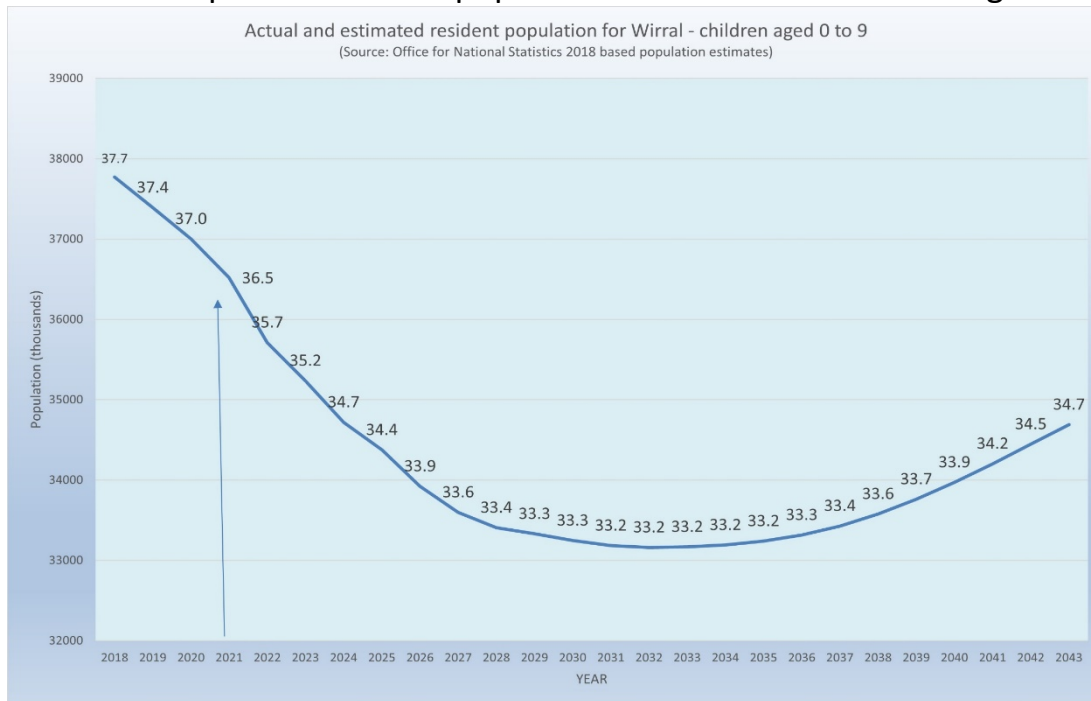
Key Findings

Overview of legal duty

By law, the Local authority has a duty to secure sufficiency of school places for children and young people – this includes addressing any excess or insufficiency. The Council submits annual school capacity survey to DfE which provide pupil forecasts, and these inform capital programmes and funding.

Population change

The population of children aged 0-9 is expected to decline over the next five years. The graph below demonstrates the actual and expected resident population for Wirral for children aged 0-9.



It shows that between 2021 and 2026 (the time frame of the Strategy) there will be a decline in the number of children living on Wirral from approximately 36.5 thousand children aged 0-9 in 2021 to 33.6 thousand.

Understanding population change has been an important factor in carrying out the review phase 1, given its influence in the pupil forecasts over the next five years.

Key Findings by Small Planning area

Small planning area: Prenton

Prenton small planning area consists of one maintained primary school: Prenton Primary.

School Name	Type	PAN (Sept 20)	Net Capacity
Prenton Primary	Community	60	420
Prenton Total			420

The review captured type of school for each area, Pupil Admission Number and overall capacity. The pupil forecasts for the planning area are the same as for the school.

	May 2021			Projections 2022 - 2026					Projections 2026		Projections based on high yield	
	May 2021 actual	May 2021 unfilled places	Percentage occupancy	Jan 2022	Jan 2023	Jan 2024	Jan 2025	Jan 2026	Jan 2026 unfilled places	Percentage occupancy 2026	0-5-year Local Plan yield	0-15-year Local Plan yield
Total	397	23	94.5%	400	398	404	394	388	32	92.4%	94.3%	94.3%
Primary aged pupils Prenton Planning area. 2022 to 2026 are estimates based on current numbers on roll, birth rates and average parental preference.												

As Table 1 indicates the number of surplus places in this planning area (and in Prenton School) will not be significant and remain at 92%.

There are no recommendations for this area arising out of the review.

Small planning area: South Birkenhead

There are five schools within the South Birkenhead Planning area.

School Name		PAN (Sept 20)	Net Capacity
Bedford Drive Primary	Community	60	420
Mersey Park Primary	Community	60	420
Rock Ferry Primary	Community	47	351
St Anne's Catholic Primary	Voluntary Aided	30	243
Well Lane Primary	Community	30	205
South Birkenhead Total			1639

Overall, the small planning area currently (May 21) has an occupancy of 91% and 9% surplus places. It is projected that the surplus will increase to 13% over the next few years. There is one school, St. Anne's Catholic Primary which is projected to have over 25% surplus places in five years. Local plan developments are not expected to have a significant impact on school place planning.

	May 2021	Projections 2022 - 2026	Projections 2026	Projections based on high yield
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	May 2021 actual	May 2021 unfilled places	%Occupancy	Jan 2022	Jan 2023	Jan 2024	Jan 2025	Jan 2026	Jan 2026 unfilled places	%Occupancy	0-5 Years Local Plan yield	0-15 years Local Plan yield
Total	1509	155	90.7%	1496	1495	1468	1466	1450	214	87.2%	89.0%	89.3%
Primary aged pupils in South Birkenhead Planning area. 2022 to 2026 are estimates based on current numbers on roll, birth rates and average parental preference.												

St Anne’s Catholic Primary: St Anne’s currently has capacity of 243 with a Pupil Admission Number (PAN) of 30 (Sept 20). In May 21 it had a percentage occupancy of 84% with 204 pupils on roll and 39 unfilled places. Pupil projections estimate that in 2026, there will be 167 children on roll and the school have a percentage occupancy of 69% with 31% surplus.

Recommendations for South Birkenhead Small Planning area

Recommendation 1: It is recommended that the Diocese of Shrewsbury decommission existing teaching space in St Anne’s and repurpose for alternative use to reduce the overall capacity of the school.

This recommendation has been supported by the Diocese.

Small planning area: North Birkenhead

North Birkenhead small planning area consists of 7 primary schools.

School	Type	PAN (Sept 20)	Net Capacity
Bidston Avenue	Community	60	420
Birkenhead High School Academy	Academy	56	392
Cathcart Street	Community	30	210
Co-op Academy Portland	Academy	30	241
Holy Cross Catholic	Voluntary Aided	30	210
Our Lady & St. Edwards Catholic	Voluntary Aided	60	420
The Priory Parish CE	Voluntary Aided	30	203
North Birkenhead Total			2096

In May 21, the percentage occupancy for the area was 89%. It is anticipated that there will be significant housing developments within North Birkenhead over the next 5 to 15 years, as identified within the Local Plan.

Projections over five years indicate that occupancy will stay the same at 89% with a surplus of 11%. Projections over the next 15 years, aligned to expected housing tenure, indicate that there will be a significant increase in demand for school places and a percentage occupancy of -118%. This means that, currently, there will not be enough provision to meet the need.

	May 2021	Projections 2022 - 2026	Projections 2026	Projections based
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											on high yield	
	May 2021 actual	May 2021 unfilled places	%Occupancy	Jan 2022	Jan 2023	Jan 2024	Jan 2025	Jan 2026	Jan 2026 unfilled places	%Occupancy	0-5 years Local Plan yield	0-15 years Local Plan yield
Total	1875	221	89.5%	1904	1906	1881	1876	1878	218	89.6%	92.5	-118.4
Primary aged pupils in North Birkenhead Planning area. 2022 to 2026 are estimates based on current numbers on roll, birth rates and average parental preference.												

Recommendations for North Birkenhead

Recommendation 2: It is recommended that, in principle, agreement is given for the establishment of a new school in the small planning area of North Birkenhead to meet the demand for new school places over the next 15 years.

Agreement for this recommendation is requested as in principle given that it is intended to meet demand over 15 years and outside of the scope of the review timeframe. However, given the timescales required to establish a new school, between 5 and 7 years, it is pertinent for authority to be granted through the pupil place planning process to allow for enough time for implementation to meet the expected demand.

It should be noted that in line with the legal stipulations, any new school established within an area will be through a ‘free school presumption’ and therefore an academy or voluntary aided school.

Small planning area: Central Birkenhead

There are six schools in the central Birkenhead small planning area.

		PAN (Sept 20)	Net Capacity
Christchurch CE Birkenhead	Voluntary Aided	37	266
Devonshire Park	Community	60	481
St Joseph's Catholic	Academy	60	420
St Werburgh's Catholic	Voluntary Aided	30	210
Woodchurch Road	Community	71	524
Woodlands	Community	44	315
Central Birkenhead Total			2216

The occupancy for the area (May 21) is 80%. Projections indicate that occupancy will be 66% in five years with 34% surplus. Local Plan developments are not expected to impact on pupil place planning projections in this area. There are currently two schools with over 25% surplus places. It is expected that there will be 3 schools with over 25% surplus in the next five years.

	May 2021	Projections 2022 - 2026	Projections 2026	Projections based on high yield
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	May 2021 actual	May 2021 unfilled places	%Occupancy	Jan 2022	Jan 2023	Jan 2024	Jan 2025	Jan 2026	Jan 2026 unfilled places	%Occupancy	0-5 years Local Plan yield %	0-15 years Local Plan yield
Total	1759	431 unfilled	80.3%	1697	1643	1544	1493	1441	749	65.8%	66.1%	70.2%
Primary aged pupils in Central Birkenhead Planning area. 2022 to 2026 are estimates based on current numbers on roll, birth rates and average parental preference.												

St Joseph’s Catholic Primary: St Joseph’s Catholic Primary is an academy school. St Joseph’ currently has a capacity of 420 and a PAN of 60 (Sept 2). In May 21, it had 333 children on roll and 87 unfilled places with an overall percentage occupancy of 79%. Pupil projections estimate that in 2026, there will be 237 pupils on roll and the school will have a percentage occupancy of 57%. A detailed profile of the school is included within appendix B.

Christchurch CE Birkenhead: Christchurch is a voluntary aided Church of England school. Currently it has capacity of 266 with a Pupil Admission number of 37. In May 21, it had a percentage occupancy of 67.9%. Pupil projections estimate that in 2026, there will be 139 children on roll and the school have a percentage occupancy of approximately 58%. A detailed profile of the school is included within appendix B.

Woodchurch Road Primary: Woodchurch Road is a community-maintained school. It has a capacity of 524 with a Pupil Admission Number (PAN) of 71 (Sept 20). In May 21 it had a percentage occupancy of 59.2%. Pupil projections estimate that in 2026, there will be 224 children on roll and the school have a percentage occupancy of approximately 43%.

Catchment analysis shows that of the children living in the catchment area (excluding those attending Catholic schools), 24% attend Woodchurch Road. A detailed profile of the school is included within appendix B.

Recommendations for Central Birkenhead

Recommendation 3: It is recommended that Diocese of Shrewsbury and the Holy Family Multi-Academy Trust reduce the PAN of St Joseph's Catholic Primary school to 30 and decommission teaching space to reduce overall capacity.

This recommendation has been agreed by the Diocese and Holy Family MAT.

Recommendation 4: It is recommended that the Diocese of Chester agree to reduce the PAN of Christchurch CE Birkenhead to 30 and decommission teaching space to reduce overall capacity.

This recommendation has been agreed by the Diocese of Chester.

Recommendation 5: It is recommended that Woodchurch Road primary reduce their PAN to 30 and decommission teaching space to reduce overall capacity.

This recommendation has been acted upon by the school. Consultation has been undertaken and the proposal was agreed by the Children, Young People and Education Committee on 31st January 2022.

Small Planning area: Noctorum

Noctorum has four schools within the small planning area.

School Name		PAN (Sept 20)	Net Capacity
Hillside Primary	Community	30	210
Oxton St Saviours CE Primary	Voluntary Aided	30	210
St Peter's Catholic Primary	Voluntary Aided	30	210
Townfield Primary	Academy	60*	420
Noctorum Total			1050

Overall projections for the area indicate a change in occupancy over the next five years from 84% to 77%, meaning there will be a 23% surplus overall. Local plan developments are not expected to have any significant impact on the projected demand for pupil places in five years. There are two schools within the area with over 25% surplus places who are expected to remain with high levels of surplus over five years.

	May 2021			Projections 2022 - 2026					Projections 2026		Projections based on high yield	
	May 2021 actual	May 2021 unfilled places	% Occupancy	Jan 2022	Jan 2023	Jan 2024	Jan 2025	Jan 2026	Jan 2026 unfilled places	% Occupancy 2026	0-5 years Local Plan yield	0-15 years Local Plan yield

Total	974	184	84.1%	978	965	933	907	894	264	77.2%	77.5	77.5
Primary aged pupils in Noctorum Planning area. 2022 to 2026 are estimates based on current numbers on roll, birth rates and average parental preference.												

St Peter's Catholic Primary School: St Peter's Catholic Primary is a voluntary aided Catholic school. The school has a current capacity of 210 and Pupil Admission Number of 30 (Sept 20). In May 21 it had a percentage occupancy of 57% with 91 unfilled places and surplus of 43%.

Five-year projections indicate that the school's surplus will increase to 52% meaning with a percentage occupancy of 48%. This means that there will be more unfilled places in the whole school than actual filled places.

The projected occupancy of St Peter's Catholic Primary requires significant consideration and review and has been classed, for the review purposes, as a priority. Whilst the school has been able to balance its budget over the past five years, the viability of small schools remains an area of risk given the projections, and close financial monitoring would be required to ensure long-term viability. Compared to other schools within the small planning area, St Peter's spends higher than average per pupil, £1,200 (approx.) more per pupil.

The last inspection of the school was 2015 and it was rated as good. Standards results from 2019 show that the school has performed significantly lower than the national average (65%) in Key Stage 2 (Reading, Writing and Mathematics combined) with 33% of pupils reaching the expected level. Phonics and Key Stage 1 results are also lower than national averages.

The school has appointed a new headteacher and new teaching and learning strategies implemented. The school has 51% of children in receipt of free school meals and 25% of children with SEND.

The school is situated in the St Peter's Noctorum parish. For the parish, 128 children choose a Catholic school. Of the children living in this parish, 23% attend a Catholic school. Out of the 23% living in the parish with a Catholic preference, 59% attend St Peter's school. The remaining 41% attend other Catholic schools, including St Joseph's Upton (10%); Our Lady & St Edwards (8%); St Joseph's Birkenhead (7%); St Michael and All Angels (6%) and Our Lady of Pity (6%).

Hillside Primary School: Hillside is a community-maintained school. It has a current capacity of 210. It has capacity of 210 with a Pupil Admission Number (PAN) of 30 (Sept 20). In May 21 it had a percentage occupancy of 78%. Pupil projections estimate that in 2026, there will be 129 children on roll and the school have a percentage occupancy of 61%. Catchment analysis shows that of the children living in the catchment area (excluding Catholic choice pupils), 28% attended Hillside school.

It has 32% children on Free School Meals and 15% children with SEND. It has early years provision. The school, previously an Infant and Junior School, was built in 1968 with an extension added in 2006. The school's last full inspection was in 2017 with an outcome of Good.

The most recent standard results (2019) evidence that the school performs lower than the national average for Key Stage 2 Reading, Writing and Mathematics combined with 26% of pupils meeting the standard compared with 65% nationally. Performance in Early Years Foundation Stage and Phonics are also below the national average. The school's budget has been in deficit for the past three years but credit prior to that. Average expenditure per pupil £6,495 (2019/20) compared with £5,119 average for the Noctorum area.

The school has a new headteacher who started in September 2021 and implemented new approaches and standards in the school. Further information relating to the profile of the school is attached at appendix A.

Recommendation: The recommendations for schools in this small planning area are outlined as combined recommendations for the small planning area of Beechwood.

Small planning area: Beechwood

There are three schools in the small planning area.

School Name		PAN (Sept 20)	Net Capacity
Bidston Village CE Primary	Voluntary Controlled	50	367
Manor Primary	Community	30	210
St Paul's Catholic Primary	Voluntary Aided	23	150
Beechwood Total			727

As of May 21, the area had an overall occupancy of 82%. This is expected to decrease to 70% over the next five years, in line with population change. Local Plan developments are not expected to impact on the area. Two schools currently have a surplus of over 25% and this is expected to remain for the next five (and 15 years) unless action is taken.

	May 2021	Projections 2022 - 2026	Projections 2026	Projections based on high yield
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	May 2021 actual	May 2021 unfilled places	% Occupancy	Jan 2022	Jan 2023	Jan 2024	Jan 2025	Jan 2026	Jan 2026 unfilled places	%Occupancy	0-5 years Local Plan yield	0-15 years Local Plan yield
Total	595	102	85.4%	591	583	555	522	491	206	70.4%	71.6%	71.6%
Primary aged pupils in Noctorum Planning area. 2022 to 2026 are estimates based on current numbers on roll, birth rates and average parental preference.												

St Paul’s Catholic Primary: St Paul’s had a capacity of 150 with a Pupil Admission Number (PAN) of 23 (Sept 20). In May 21 it had a percentage occupancy of 52%. Pupil projections estimate that in 2026, there will be 100 children on roll and the school will have a percentage occupancy of approximately 48% with a surplus of 52%.

As part of the information sharing phase of the Review, the governing body of St Paul’s have advised that two classrooms have been given over to 2-year-old provision, leaving four classrooms for school age children. This reduces the Net Capacity from 150 to 120 from 2022 onwards, with an indicated admission number of 17, subject to consultation (bottom of range capacity 105 with indicated admission number 15). This has reduced surplus capacity in the planning area from 132 places (81.8% occupancy) to 102 places (85.4% occupancy)– however in five years’ time the overall occupancy is expected to remain low at 70.4%.

In relation to St Paul’s, surplus capacity remains high – occupancy in May 2021 using the revised capacity figure is 65% and projected to fall to 46% in five years.

St Paul's has 46% children on Free School Meals and 29% children with SEND. It has an early year's provision. The school's last full inspection was in 2013 with an outcome of Good. Standards results from 2019 indicate that the school performed below the national average for Key 2 Reading, Writing Mathematics (RWM) combined and that progress at Key Stage 2 declined in all areas. Results in Key Stage 1 (RWM), Phonics and Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) were also lower than national averages. Whilst the school's budget has been in credit at year end for the past five years, it has an average expenditure per pupil £8,242 (2019/20) compared with £6,858 as the average for the Beechwood area.

There are issues associated with maintaining small and very small schools within an urban area. Maintaining small schools when it is not essential to do so comes at the expense of all Wirral's children and it is right to consider whether it is appropriate to do so. In Wirral terms, a small school is one with fewer than 180 pupils – once schools have fewer than 120 pupils this would be considered a very small school.

The school is situated within the combined parish of Holy Cross and St Paul's. 24% of all children who live in the St Paul's part of the parish area attend a Catholic school. **This equates to a total of 135 children.** Of these, 52% attend St Paul's Catholic Primary. The remaining 48% attend other Catholic schools in and around the area including St Joseph's (Upton) (13%); St Peter's (8%), Our Lady and St Edwards (8%), Our Lady of Pity (4%), and St Michael's and All Angels (4%).

Manor Primary: Manor Primary is a community-maintained school. It has capacity of 210 with a Pupil Admission Number (PAN) of 30 (Sept 20). In May 21 it had a percentage occupancy of 70%. Pupil projections estimate that in 2026, there will be 119 children on roll and the school have a percentage occupancy of around 57%. Catchment analysis shows that of the children living in the catchment area (excluding Catholic choice pupils), 41% attend Manor primary.

It had 51% children on Free School Meals and 26% children with SEND. It does not have early years provision or a SEND Unit/Base. The school has one large main building that was built in 1967. An extension was added to the school in 2007. The school last full inspection was in 2017 with an outcome of Requires Improvement.

The most recent standards information evidences that Manor has performed below the national average for standards in Key Stage 2 Reading, Writing and Mathematics with 28.6% of children meeting the expected standard compared to 65% nationally. The school performs lower than the national standards in Key Stage 1 Reading Writing Mathematic combined, Phonics and Early Years Foundation Stage.

Recommendations (for small planning areas Beechwood and Noctorum):

Recommendation 6: It is recommended that the Diocese of Shrewsbury amalgamate St Peter's Catholic Primary School and St Paul's Catholic Primary School. This would involve closure of both schools and opening of a new combined school on one site. Pupils from both schools would be guaranteed a place at the single school.

This recommendation has been agreed by the Diocese of Shrewsbury who will commence formal consultation in line with the statutory guidance on the amalgamation/closure of schools.

Reasons for recommendation 6

- The current surplus at both schools remains critical with projections to 2026 indicating ~50% surplus for both schools.
- The Local Authority and Department for Education would not recommend a further reduction in capacity or PAN, particularly for these schools in urban areas where there are alternative local options available.
- Whilst both schools have put new measures in place to address declining standards and both have high numbers of disadvantaged pupils, results have indicated that pupils' education progress remains significantly lower than national averages.

- Both schools can manage their budgets for year-end but their viability considering declining pupil numbers remains a significant risk. It is considered that the potential limited provision of resources within schools this small, would not support a rich and diverse curriculum offer.
- The distance for pupils travelling to school would not be significantly hampered and would remain within the walking distance guidelines identified in DfE guidance (2 miles aged under 8, 3 miles aged 8 and over). Average travel distances for those attending either school would be 1.4 miles. A breakdown of this is provided below.
- In relation to both schools there are some pupils already travelling more than 2 miles to attend either school who could be expected to continue to use their existing travel method to attend alternative schools.
- In either option, all pupils from the site which ceased to operate as a school, would be guaranteed a place at the other site so that pupils can move together, if they want to take this up. 90% of pupils on roll at St Peter's also live less than 2 miles from the St Paul's site; 59% of pupils on roll at St Paul's live less than 2 miles from the St Peter's site.
- There would also continue to be other options for of alternative Catholic schools nearby. For pupils currently on roll at St Paul's, for example, 64% live less than 2 miles from Holy Cross; 53% live less than 2 miles from St Josephs (Upton) and 47% live less than 2 miles from Sacred Heart Catholic Primary Schools For pupils currently on roll at St Peters, 86% live less than 2 miles from St Josephs (Upton); and 66% from St Michael and All Angels; 38% from Holy Cross Catholic Primary Schools.
- The implementation of any of these options would be aligned to improved configuration of access routes between the two schools (crossing/bridge etc.) to ensure safe travel of families and children.
- The amalgamation or closure of St Paul's would retain a Catholic primary school in every parish due to the existing combined parish of Holy Cross and St Paul's.
- Decisions about the future of any site no longer required for educational purposes would be made by the Diocese.

Recommendation 7: It is recommended to amalgamate Hillside Primary and Manor Primary schools. This would involve closure of both schools and opening of a new combined school on one site. Pupils from both schools would be guaranteed a place at the single school.

Reasons for recommendation 7

- The current surplus at both schools remains critical with projections to 2026 indicating ~50% surplus for both schools.
- The Local Authority and Department for Education would not recommend a further reduction in capacity or PAN, particularly for these schools in urban areas where there are alternative local options available.
- Whilst both schools have put new measures in place to address declining standards and both have high numbers of disadvantaged pupils, results have indicated that pupils' education progress remains significantly lower than national averages.
- Both schools can manage their budgets for year-end but their viability considering declining pupil numbers remains a significant risk. It is considered that the potential limited provision of resources within schools this small, would not support a rich and diverse curriculum offer.
- The distance for pupils travelling to school would not be significantly hampered and would remain within the walking distance guidelines identified in DfE guidance (2 miles aged under 8, 3 miles aged 8 and over). Average travel distances for those attending either school is less than 1.5 miles. A breakdown of this is provided below.
- In relation to both schools there are some pupils already travelling more than 2 miles to attend either school who could be expected to continue to use their existing travel method to attend alternative schools.

- In either option, all pupils from the site which ceased to operate as a school, would be guaranteed a place at the other site so that pupils can move together, if they want to take this up. 91% of pupils on roll at Hillside Primary School also live less than 2 miles from the Manor site; 88% of pupils on roll at Manor Primary School live less than 2 miles from the Hillside site.
- There would also continue to be other options for of alternative schools nearby. In each case there are more than 10 alternative schools with an average travel distance below 3 miles. For pupils currently on roll at Manor Primary School, for example, 92% live less than 2 miles from Bidston Village CE Primary School. For pupils currently on roll at Hillside Primary School, 89% live less than 2 miles from Townfield Primary School.
- The implementation of any of these options would include redrawing catchment zones to better align the pupil populations with the local schools and ensure children have a local school within a reasonable travel distance.
- The implementation of any of these options would be aligned to improved configuration of access routes between the two schools (crossing/bridge etc.) to ensure safe travel of families and children.

Formal consultation on the decision

In line with statutory guidance, this recommendation requires a formal consultation. At its meeting of 10th March, members of the Children, Young People and Education Committee are requested to agree to undertake a consultation on this proposal commencing 9th May 2022.