

REVIEW OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACES PHASE 1: AREA REVIEWS OF BIRKENHEAD AND BEBINGTON

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report advises the Cabinet of progress on the Phase 1 Area Review of secondary school places in the Birkenhead and Bebington areas. Following meetings with key stakeholders in each of these areas, this report contains a summary of provision in each area and comments briefly on some of the issues involved.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Council is required to monitor surplus places, both by the DCSF and by the Audit Commission. The Audit Commission recommends that surplus places overall should be no higher than 10%. Below 4%, there may be little scope for parents to exercise their right to express a preference, while above 10% the Council is considered to be wasting resources supporting empty space, rather than directly funding education. In the most recent Supply of School Places return to the DCSF in summer 2007, the overall surplus percentage for secondary schools was calculated at 11%.
- 1.2 The DCSF also uses the number of schools with more than 25% and more than 30 surplus places as a measure of how effectively the LA is managing places. In January 2007, two of Wirral's 22 secondary schools were in this category. This has risen to three schools in January 2008, and it is estimated that this will continue to rise to seven secondary schools by 2013. The Authority is obliged to make a statement about schools in this category, stating how and when the surplus place issue is to be addressed, or if no action is to be taken, the reasons for this decision.
- 1.3 Wirral is already above the Audit Commission's recommended 10% maximum for surplus places, and has at least three schools in the 25% and 30 places category. If no action is taken to address these issues, the overall Wirral surplus place percentage in secondary schools is projected to increase to 21% by 2013, more than double the Audit Commission's maximum acceptable level.
- 1.4 At its meeting of 29th November 2007, Cabinet instructed that Phase 1 of the Secondary Places Review should comprise schools in Birkenhead and Bebington. The minutes of that Cabinet meeting are attached for Members' information as Appendix A to this report. As in the review of primary school places, the first stage of the Review has been to conduct a process where, on a confidential basis, meetings have taken place with key stakeholders in each of the areas under review. These stakeholders included Ward Councillors as well as officers of the Diocese of Chester and Shrewsbury, headteachers and chairs of governors of schools potentially affected by the Reviews.
- 1.5 There is considerable analytic and background material available for Members on request. A brief description of this material is included at Appendix B. Numbers on roll provided in this report are from the annual School Census of January 2008.

2.0 Bebington

- 2.1 This area is served by five 11 to 18 secondary schools – two are single sex selective grammar schools, one is a Voluntary Aided Catholic school, and two are community secondary schools. The Governing body of South Wirral High School has recently informed the Council of their decision to change to Foundation status from July 2008. This date allows

little time for implementation, and is now the subject of discussion between LA officers and the governing body of the school.

2.2 The following table shows the current position in terms of capacity, number on roll and surplus places, as well as the pupil projections to 2013.

	Bebington	St John Plessington	South Wirral	Wirral Boys	Wirral Girls
2007 Net Capacity	1251	1404	1180	1013	1129
2008 NOR	993	1287	1153	1012	1048
2008 Surplus place %	20.6	8.3	2.3	0.1	7.2
2013 NOR (projected)	751	1248	1108	985	1044
2013 Surplus place % (projected)	40.0	11.1	6.1	2.8	7.5

2.3 Bebington High School is already demonstrating high levels of surplus places, and is projected to exceed 25% and more than 30 surplus places in the next few years. The sixth form at Bebington High is relatively small.

2.4 As shown in Appendix C, South Wirral High School also has a relatively small sixth form department, with the post-16 pupils comprising 12% of the total school population at South Wirral, compared with the Wirral non-grammar school average of 15% (19% with grammar schools).

2.5 As reported in Section 4 of the November 2007 report, the Wirral working group agreed that a definite size beyond which a school was no longer viable was impossible to determine in Wirral. However, the discussion group did agree that compromises became increasingly difficult for cohorts approaching 100 pupils. National research on secondary school size has been scarce, but a study carried out in 2002 suggests that the optimum cohort size for a comprehensive school is between 175 and 200 pupils. For an 11 to 16 secondary school, this would result in between 875 and 1000 total pupils. The current and projected average cohort size at each school is shown in the table below.

Average Cohort size	Bebington	St John Plessington	South Wirral	Wirral Boys	Wirral Girls
2008 11 to 16	171	216	204	150	152
2013 11 to 16 (projected)	134	211	196	147	155
Difference	-37	-5	-8	-3	+3

2.6 In terms of size, Bebington High School is projected to experience the greatest fall in average cohort size over the next five years of schools in the secondary area.

2.7 Analysis of where pupils live and attend school shows that there is an overlap between the pupil populations of Bebington High School, and nearby Rock Ferry High School, and options for change across the Phase 1 area should consider addressing falling rolls at Bebington High School.

3.0 Birkenhead

3.1 This area is served by two 11 to 18 single sex selective Catholic grammar schools, and five 11 to 16 schools. Four of these are community schools, one of which is single sex, and the fifth, Ridgeway High School, has recently changed status to become a Foundation school.

3.2 The following table shows the January 2008 census numbers on roll (NOR), the projected NOR in 2013, the capacity of the schools and the actual and projected surplus place percentages.

	Park	Prenton	Ridgeway	Rock Ferry	St Anselm's	Upton Hall	Woodchurch
2007 Net Capacity	1250	750	801	1250	1066	1043	1379
2008 NOR	868	640	759	689	844	891	1294
2008 Surplus place %	30.6	14.7	5.2	44.9	20.8	14.6	6.2
2013 NOR (projected)	510	686	679	410	822	824	1360
2013 Surplus place % (projected)	59.2	8.5	15.2	67.2	16.2 *	13.6 *	1.4

3.3 The level of surplus places in several of these schools is projected to increase. Two schools are already above the 25% and 30 surplus places DCSF indicator – Park High School and Rock Ferry High School.

3.4 By agreement with the headteachers of the two schools and the Diocese of Shrewsbury, a revision of the Net Capacity of St Anselm's Catholic College and Upton Hall School will reduce the projected surplus place percentage for these two schools (marked with an asterisk in the table above) with effect from the next Supply of School Places return to the Government in Summer 2008. Surplus places at the two schools are still projected to be above the 10% level by 2013.

3.5 Several of these schools are also relatively small. As reported in Section 4 of the November 2007 report, the Wirral working group agreed that a definite size beyond which a school was no longer viable was impossible to determine in Wirral. However, the discussion group did agree that compromises became increasingly difficult for cohorts approaching 100 pupils. National research on secondary school size has been scarce, but a study carried out in 2002 suggests that the optimum cohort size for a comprehensive school is between 175 and 200 pupils. For an 11 to 16 secondary school, this would result in between 875 and 1000 total pupils. The current and projected average cohort size at each school is shown in the table below.

Average Cohort size	Park	Prenton	Ridgeway	Rock Ferry	St Anselm's	Upton Hall	Woodchurch
2008 11 to 16	174	128	152	138	128	136	259
2013 11 to 16 (projected)	106	137	136	82	128	121	272
Difference	-68	+9	-16	-56	0	-15	+13

3.6 Over the next five years, average cohorts at Prenton High, St Anselm's College and Woodchurch High are projected to remain stable or grow in size, while average cohorts at Rock Ferry High and Park High are likely to experience a significant fall to close to or below the 100 pupil viable size for an 11 to 16 school.

4.0 Next steps

Academy

4.1 There are a number of possible options for changes to secondary schools in the Phase 1 area. The present situation is however further complicated by the potential introduction of an Academy at Birkenhead High School for Girls, which is discussed in greater detail in a report to Cabinet on the same agenda.

- 4.3 The Office of the Schools Commissioner have suggested that they be allowed to appoint an independent assessor to work alongside the Authority in order to fully examine the wider implications of the establishment of the proposed Birkenhead High Academy. At this stage, an informal meeting will be arranged with the independent assessor to discuss this suggestion.

National Challenge

- 4.4 On 10th June 2008, the DCSF announced the National Challenge, a three year £400 million programme targeting 638 schools in England where fewer than 30% of pupils achieve at least five GCSEs at A* to C, including English and maths. Details are not yet available, however, the programme is likely to offer extra funding, specialist advice, assistance from experienced headteachers and the involvement of neighbouring schools, with the intention of having no schools in the below 30% category by 2011. The National Challenge follows on from the London and City Challenge programmes. The DCSF document "City Challenge: For World Class Education" is attached as Appendix D.
- 4.5 Six Wirral secondary schools have been identified as part of the National Challenge, three of whom are included in the Phase 1 review area. They are: Ridgeway High School (27%), Park High School (23%) and Rock Ferry High School (18%).
- 4.6 The remaining three schools fall within the Phase 2 review area. They are Wallasey School (29%), Oldershaw School (28%) and Pensby High School for Boys (26%).
- 4.7 A distinction should be drawn between schools on a rising performance trajectory, and those with more static attainment, often in challenging areas, set against the backdrop of the selective system in Wirral. When comparing the performance of schools it is important to recognise the progress they have helped students make. In terms of Contextual Value Added between the end of primary school (Key Stage 2) and Year 11 (Key Stage 4), pupils in all six schools made average or above average progress compared with mainstream schools nationally – none were in the bottom 25% of schools for this performance measure. These six schools may not yet have met the DCSF floor target but with continued school development and support will progress. A plan of action for each school must be drawn up by the LA by the end of July 2008, ahead of results from the 2008 GCSE and equivalent examinations, which will be released in August 2008.

Further steps

- 4.8 Given the potential implications of the proposed new Academy at Birkenhead High School, and the recently announced National Challenge, it seems prudent to await the outcome of the Feasibility stage of the Academy process, and more detailed information on the National Challenge programme, before making recommendations to Cabinet for options to proceed to consultation in the Phase 1 area. On this basis it is intended to return to Cabinet with a further report on the Phase 1 review area in Autumn 2008.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are none arising as a result of this report.

6.0 Staffing Implications

- 6.1 There are none arising as a result of this report.

7.0 Equal Opportunities Implications

- 7.1 It is essential to plan school provision across the Authority so that it is both efficient and effective in the interests of all pupils.

8.0 Community Safety Implications

- 8.1 Rationalisation and refurbishment of schools allow the most vulnerable accommodation to be removed and other security improvements carried out.

9.0 Local Agenda 21 Statement

9.1 The provision of efficient and effective education is a vital part of serving local communities; inefficient use of resources is wasteful both in educational and physical resource terms.

10.0 Planning Implications

10.1 The relationship between housing development policy and school place provision is a factor in considering surplus place removal.

10.2 Any proposals that may arise out of options after the consultation and decision making process for school re-organisation would be subject to the usual planning processes.

11.0 Anti-Poverty Implications

11.1 The redistribution of funding released by school reorganisation, in combination with the Authority's intention to realign the schools budget to give higher levels of funding to schools with high levels of deprivation, as well as improved accommodation, goes towards raising aspirations and narrowing the attainment gap for vulnerable groups.

12.0 Social Inclusion Implications

12.1 School re-organisation and transforming accommodation through the forthcoming Building Schools for the Future programme and other schemes, provides opportunities to promote joint agency work to promote co-ordinated solutions for pupils and their families. There is scope for community participation in the design process of any new school buildings, raising the school's profile within the community.

13.0 Local Member Support Implications

13.1 The schools specifically mentioned in the report and appendices, and the Wards in which they are situated, which are Bebington, Claughton, Eastham, Rock Ferry and Upton.

14.0 Background Papers

DCSF Supply of School places return

DCSF guidance on Surplus Place Removal

Pupil and Capacity data held by the LEA

DCSF Press Release 10th June 2008 "National Challenge Strategy launched to ensure more children get better GCSEs" - http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/pns/DisplayPN.cgi?pn_id=2008_0109

Recommendations

- (1) That Cabinet note the new demographic information in relation to schools in the Phase 1 area, including future projections of pupil numbers.
- (2) That a further report on the Phase 1 review be brought to Cabinet later this year, following the outcome of the Feasibility stage for the proposed Birkenhead High Academy and taking into account the implications of the National Challenge programme.

Howard Cooper

Director of Children's Services

Minutes - Cabinet - 26 June 2008

Present

Chair S Foulkes

Councillors

George Davies, PL Davies, G Gardiner, SA Holbrook, SE Kelly, RK Moon,
Jean Quinn, JV Stapleton

In attendance:

JE Green

Apologies

M McLaughlin

Minute 81 - CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND LIFELONG LEARNING: REVIEW OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PLACES PHASE 1: AREA REVIEWS OF BIRKENHEAD AND BEBINGTON

The Director of Children's Services advised the Cabinet of progress on the Phase 1 Area Review of secondary school places in the Birkenhead and Bebington areas. Following meetings with key stakeholders in each of these areas, a report was presented which contained a summary of provision in each area and commented briefly on some of the issues involved.

Minute Decision :

Resolved - That

(1) the new demographic information in relation to schools in the Phase 1 area, including future projections of pupil numbers be noted; and

(2) a further report on the Phase 1 review be brought to Cabinet later this year, following the outcome of the Feasibility stage for the proposed Birkenhead High Academy and taking into account the implications of the National Challenge programme.