

**REVIEW OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PLACES – OUTCOME OF FURTHER  
CONSULTATIONS ON A JOINT CHURCH SCHOOL IN LEASOWE**

---

**Executive Summary**

This report advises the Cabinet of the outcome of the further consultation process which has taken place in the Leasowe and Wallasey areas in respect of the option to establish a Joint Church school in Leasowe. This option was previously consulted upon in Spring 2007 during Phase 3 of the Primary Places Review. The report describes the option, the responses to it, and makes recommendations with regard to statutory proposals in relation to the option.

**1.0 Background**

**1.1 Context Of The School Organisation Plan**

Until March 2005, School Organisation Committees (SOC) were required by law to have regard to the School Organisation Plan (SOP) when considering statutory proposals for changes to schools' provision. The plan itself was approved on a regular basis by the SOC. However the SOP was one of seven statutory plans repealed by the Children Act 2004. The SOC itself was abolished by the Education and Inspections Act 2006 with effect from 25<sup>th</sup> May 2007. Nevertheless the policies and principles set out in the SOP remain an important context in which the Wirral Primary Review was set, and continue to be key guidance for the consideration of statutory proposals.

**1.2 DCSF guidance on the School Organisation Plan states that**

“The key purpose of the School Organisation Plan is to set out clearly how the Local Education Authority (LEA) plans to meet its statutory responsibility to secure sufficient education provision within its area in order to promote higher standards of attainment. It should be designed to help the key stakeholders – LEA, schools, promoters, parents and local communities, understand what school places are needed at present and in future, and how they are provided. Importantly it will be the starting point... in considering statutory proposals for changes to schools”.

**1.3 As indicated above, the plan contains the policies and principles proposed by the LA and agreed by the former SOC for the planning of school provision. These policies and principles are set out at Appendix A to the report. It will be seen that the intention (prior to the abolition of the requirement to consider the plan) was that any proposal should be considered within the context of the principles set out in paragraphs 3 to 5 of the Policies and Principles. There is an over-riding requirement that overall provision is effective and efficient, i.e. that there should be an appropriate balance between school places and the following principles/criteria:**

- parental preference
- delivering the curriculum
- meeting statutory and desirable goals on class sizes
- maintaining or promoting diversity
- SEN
- standards
- accessibility

- (secondary schools only) post 16 provision
- contribution to the community.

Paragraph 4 of the Policies and Principles adds the issue of overall school size within the primary sector and paragraph 5 deals specifically with the objectives of the Diocesan authorities.

#### 1.4 View of the Wirral Schools Forum

Members should note that in June 2005 the Schools Forum passed the following resolution:

“Resolved - That Wirral Schools Forum recognises that the local education authority has a duty to maintain and fund schools in an efficient and effective manner. This implies that the number of schools should reflect the pupil population and the needs of Wirral communities, which could mean the amalgamation or closure of schools for the efficiency and effectiveness of the service.”

#### Primary Places Review – Phase 3

- 1.5 Following the presentation of the Primary School Place Provision report on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2006, Cabinet instructed that six Area Reviews be carried out within Phase 3 of the Primary Places Review : Pensby and Thingwall, Heswall, Greasby, Upton, South Wallasey and North Wallasey. These areas equate to the small planning areas in the Authority’s School Organisation Plan. Following the subsequent report on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2006 advising Cabinet of the outcome of Ofsted’s inspection of Castleway Primary School, the small planning area of Leasowe was brought forward for inclusion in this phase of the review. The outcomes of these area reviews were reported to Cabinet on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2006.
- 1.6 Following consideration of that report, Cabinet agreed that no options would be brought forward for the Greasby, Heswall, North Wallasey and Upton small planning areas at this time, although numbers and place provision would be kept under review. A number of options for consultation were proposed in respect of the remaining areas.
- 1.7 In the Leasowe small planning area, these options were:
- A Closure of Castleway Primary School
  - B Amalgamate Castleway Primary School and Leasowe Primary School either at the Castleway site (B1) or the Leasowe site (B2)
  - C Closure of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School
- The following options relate to faith school provision. Option D1 was a joint suggestion by the Anglican Diocese of Chester and the Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury. Options D2 and D3 were suggested by the Catholic Diocese.
- D1 A joint denominational school to be established by the Anglican Diocese of Chester and the Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury
  - D2 Expansion of Our Lady of Lourdes to a one form of entry primary school (210 places) whilst maintaining the current admission policy that welcomes applicants from other or no faiths whose parents want their children to have an education in a Catholic school
  - D3 Maintain Our Lady of Lourdes with its existing planned admission number and its current admission policy that welcomes applicants from other or no faiths whose parents want their children to have an education in a Catholic school

These options were approved for consultation. The outcome of the consultation was reported to Cabinet at its meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> June 2007. The report and minute are

attached as Appendix B. The Consultation was carried out as stated in paragraph 2.10 of the 20<sup>th</sup> June 2007 report to Cabinet.

- 1.8 Further suggestions were made as part of the consultation process in the Leasowe area:
- Amalgamate Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School and Leasowe Primary School
  - Close all three existing schools and establish a new primary school on a central site
  - Close Leasowe Primary School
- 1.9 Following a positive response from parents of pupils attending Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School to Option D1, a joint denominational school, Cabinet decided that the Director should be authorised to give all necessary support to the governing body of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School, the Anglican Diocese of Chester, and the Catholic Diocese of Shrewsbury with regard to publishing proposals to close Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School and to establish a new joint denominational school on the Our Lady of Lourdes site, and that the position of community primary schools in the Leasowe planning area be monitored and reviewed in a future review phase pending the outcome of joint denominational school.
- 1.10 The concern raised by a single respondent at this stage was in regard to the loss of the existing school's ethos. Other respondents overwhelmingly felt that the school's ethos would be enhanced by joint denominational status, contributing to community cohesion.

### **Implications of the abolition of the SOC**

- 1.11 Until the SOC's abolition on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2007, each Diocese was represented by a voting group on the SOC. Under the new guidance on school re-organisation proposals, each Diocese has the ability to object to any statutory proposal decided by the Local Authority Decision Maker, thereby referring the proposal to the School's Adjudicator. This is not a significantly different position to their former roles on the SOC. Full guidance has now issued by the DCSF and is available to read or download on-line at <http://www.dcsf.gsi.gov.uk/schoolorg/index.cfm> Key points of the guidance and a commentary in relation to this option is included within the report at Appendix C.

### **2.0 The New Consultation**

- 2.1 Extensive discussions between the Diocesan authorities and the Local Authority having reached a conclusion, in December 2008 a new consultation on the option was instigated by all three bodies. The consultation document is attached as Appendix D.
- 2.2 On 28<sup>th</sup> November 2008, the consultation document was sent via the schools to parents/carers of pupils attending Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School, Leasowe Primary School, Leasowe Early Years Centre and Castleway Primary School, as well as to the headteachers of primary schools in the North and South Wallasey and Moreton planning areas.
- 2.3 A dedicated website on the Wirral Learning Grid was established and advertised in the parents consultation leaflets. This site provided access to all the information produced in paper form and allowed e-mail responses to a dedicated e-mail address. A consultation meeting for all interested stakeholders was held at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School on 3rd December 2008, which 7 people attended.

### **3.0 Commentary on Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School**

- 3.1 Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School currently has 108 pupils on roll and an LA designated F1 class which in January 2009 had 4 full-time and 25 part-time pupils.

This is a small school, and has been so for some considerable time. The school retains a third of the total Catholic choice pupils in its admission catchment (36%, 89) which includes the Parish of English Martyrs in North Wallasey. If the Our Lady of Lourdes Parish is analysed separately, the school retains 62% (87) of total Catholic choice pupils. Almost a third of Catholic choice parents in the Our Lady of Lourdes Parish send their children to Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School (28%, 39). It may be worth noting that even if all potential Catholic choice pupils in the Our Lady of Lourdes Parish attended the school, it would remain small at 140 pupils.

The school has 27% (39) surplus places at present. This is projected to remain high at 25% (37 places) by 2014. In 2006-2007, expenditure per pupil was £4,113 compared with the Wirral average of £3,249.

3.2 The contextual value added score (99.1) for Key Stage 2 in 2007 shows pupils at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School were making the expected rate of progress.

#### 4.0 Outcome of the Consultation

4.1 The consultation finished on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2009. In total, 94 responses to consultation were received, broken down by respondent category as follows.

Direct School	Total	Parent	Staff	Governor
Castleway	1	1	0	0
Leasowe	42	24	15	3
Leasowe EYC	1	1	0	0
OLOL	49	30	15	5
Sacred Heart	1	0	0	1

Note that in this table, numbers may not exactly add to the total since some respondents fall into more than one category, i.e. parent and governor.

4.2 Respondents using the feedback form provided were asked to say whether they agreed or disagreed with the proposal.

Direct School	Agree	Disagree	Percentage Agree
Castleway	1		100
Leasowe	1	41	2.4
Leasowe EYC		1	0
OLOL	46	3	94
Sacred Heart	1		100
Grand Total	49	45	52

4.3 As in the 2007 consultation, respondents related to Our Lady of Lourdes were largely in favour of the Joint Church option. Of the three who stated they were against the proposal, one respondent was concerned about an increase in school size, and the other two were concerned about the school being moved to a different site, which is not the case in this proposal.

4.4 Respondents allied to Our Lady of Lourdes were also asked for their view on a name for the new Joint Church school. The final choice would be a matter for the shadow governing body to decide, however the breakdown of responses is as follows:

Hope Catholic and Church of England Primary School	76%
Carmel Catholic and Church of England Primary School	9%
Gardenside Catholic and Church of England Primary School	4%
Sandhills Catholic and Church of England Primary School	4%

Other individual suggestions received were – Lourdes, Our Lady of Lourdes, Our Lady of Mount Carmel and The Foundation.

- 4.5 By far the greatest amount of opposition to the proposal came from people related to Leasowe Primary School. Some were under the impression that the new Joint Church school meant that Leasowe Primary School would automatically close, which is not the case.
- 4.6 Other respondents were concerned that the establishment of a Joint Church school in Leasowe would indirectly cause the closure of Leasowe Primary School, which has recently moved into a new PFI school building in an area which already has high surplus places.

There were several key themes in the combined responses from these consultees:

- Size and surplus places
- Impact on other schools, especially Leasowe Primary School
- Concerns about the consultation process
- Concerns about religious issues
- Concerns about traffic and road safety
- Removal of choice

### **Size, surplus places and impact on other schools**

- 4.7 The Joint Church consultation document says that in the first year, the admission number of the school would be 25 pupils, identical to that for Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School. From the second year of implementation, the admission number would be raised to 30 pupils, and the capacity increased through capital works to 210 pupils.
- 4.8 Respondents were concerned about the impact of this increase on the Leasowe community schools, and on overall surplus places. Their view was that the additional pupils required via an increase in the admission number of 5 from 2010 would come entirely or largely from the Leasowe area and questioned the justification for creating additional places in a school, and in an area, which already had high levels of surplus places.
- 4.9 The Diocesan view is that the additional pupils would be drawn from outside the Leasowe area with minimal impact on the remaining Leasowe primary schools. The North Wallasey area, for example, has 4% surplus places overall. Soundings via the Diocese of Shrewsbury with St Mary's Catholic College indicate that numbers to the Joint Church primary school from English Martyrs parish will be enhanced, and the Diocese of Chester has had positive feedback to the same effect from the Anglican parishes designated in 5.3.
- 4.10 As in the 2007 consultation, respondents from community schools stated that they would not choose Catholic primary provision in the event of their school's closure or amalgamation, and that those parents who wanted their child educated at a Catholic school had already made that decision. There is little indication from either consultation that existing community school parents would choose to transfer to the Joint Faith school if the school were expanded.
- 4.11 Leasowe Primary School occupies a PFI building, which the Council has committed to lease for 25 years until 2031. It may be possible to find an alternative non-school use for the Leasowe building, if it were subsequently to be declared surplus to requirements, however since there is no intention to close Leasowe Primary School as part of this proposal, this is a low probability risk. Parents in the Leasowe planning area would retain a choice of non-faith primary school education. There are no direct

implications for disruption of the education of community pupils, unless parents choose to transfer to the Joint Church school.

- 4.12 Expanding the Joint Church school significantly without a concurrent reduction in places at other schools in the area, and with no evidence of parental preference for the school, appears counter-productive when surplus in the area is already high. When a new school is established, the specification for the school is decided by the Authority, including the number of places, age range, gender balance and admission number.
- 4.13 It is recommended that Cabinet request that the two Diocese to make an amendment to their proposal so that the admission number remains at 25 for three years following implementation, followed by an impact assessment of preferences, before any additional capacity is added to the school building or the admission number is raised further. It should be noted that the existing admission number of 25, set by the Governing body of Our Lady of Lourdes, is already above the Net Capacity indicated admission number of 21 pupils.

### **Process and Procedure**

- 4.14 This is now the second consultation on changes to schools in the Leasowe area in the last two years.
- 4.15 Some respondents thought that it was wrong for the Joint Church proposal to take place outside the Review cycle, and that insufficient consultation had taken place. This option was in the original consultation in 2007 and effectively arose from it as the Council's preferred option for the Leasowe area. It has taken from June 2007 to November 2008 to set out exactly how this innovative Joint Church primary school would operate in terms of staffing, governance, ethos and so on. It has been more than 12 months since the original consultation, and guidance says that in this instance, consultation should begin again.
- 4.16 One respondent was concerned that there was not enough space on the feedback form to provide proper comment, and that this implied that comments were not welcomed. The layout of the form was limited by the size of the paper. Other respondents, including the complainant, wrote either in the margins of the form, on the reverse, or on separate sheets of paper.
- 4.17 Some respondents felt that the inclusion of the Leasowe area in Phase 6 of the Primary Places Review, due to begin in Autumn 2009, would not allow enough time for the Joint Church school to settle prior to being reviewed.
- 4.18 On this basis, it is recommended that if the Joint Church proposal is implemented, that the Leasowe area be moved to Phase 8 of the Primary Places Review, due to begin in Autumn 2011.

### **Religious education, choice and diversity**

- 4.19 A small number of respondents felt that the 60/40 split in responsibilities between the two Diocese, and if oversubscribed, in relation to admissions, was unfair and lacked equality. The 60/40 Admissions ratio has been proposed by the two Dioceses and neither see it as detrimental to the working ethic of the new school. They advise that of the existing 18 Joint Church Schools in England and Wales nearly all operate on different ratios as required by local circumstances.
- 4.20 One respondent felt that teaching children "two religions" would be confusing. The National Curriculum applies to all primary schools, so that pupils in Community schools and in faith ethos schools, including Catholic and Church of England schools, learn about Christianity and other major world faiths. Teachers in primary schools already teach pupils about different faiths, philosophies and beliefs, and there is no reason why attending a joint church school should make this confusing to children.

The two Dioceses advise that they have worked on policies relating to collective worship and Religious Education that will emphasize what the two Christian traditions have in common.

- 4.21 With regard to removal of choice, the Authority and both Dioceses are proposing a Joint Church School so that parents will retain the option of community or denominational education in line with Government policy on diversity. If the option goes ahead, parents of children living in Leasowe, New Brighton, Liscard, Seacombe, Wallasey and Poulton who currently have no choice of attending a Church of England primary school would have an opportunity to express a preference for the joint church school.

### **Traffic and transport**

- 4.22 One respondent was concerned about the impact of additional pupils attending the Joint Church school on traffic and road safety on Gardenside. This is an important factor, and colleagues from Highways will be asked to examine parking and drop-off facilities at the Joint Church school accordingly.

## **5.0 Implications for Pupils**

### **5.1 Admission Arrangements: present and future pupils**

The new school would be Voluntary Aided, with the Governing body as its admission authority, subject to the Admissions Code. The DCSF have advised that there is no requirement to consult separately on any changes to admission arrangements as long as full details are provided to parents in the statutory public notices on the proposed alterations to the school provision. This would include details on how the Authority would propose to manage the transfer of pupils to alternative schools, and also deal with applications from parents living in the areas concerned for places in Foundation 2.

- 5.2 Current children and siblings attending Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School are to be automatically admitted – should they choose to be. Once the school is established, priority – after the legal commitment to children in public care– will be given to baptised members of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England on a 60:40 ratio from within the designated Roman Catholic parishes of Our Lady of Lourdes, English Martyrs and the Anglican Parishes in Leasowe, Liscard, New Brighton, Poulton, Seacombe and Wallasey.
- 5.3 The current Catholic catchment parishes of Our Lady of Lourdes would remain unchanged, that is to say, Our Lady of Lourdes and English Martyrs. The Anglican parishes in Liscard, Leasowe, New Brighton, Poulton, Seacombe and Wallasey would be “zoned” to the new Joint Church school.
- 5.4 In relation to the potential transfer of existing pupils to alternative schools, the Authority would invite parents to indicate a preference. If their preference was for a placement in a community or controlled school, then the Authority would seek to meet that preference, within the admission criteria set out in the Authority’s booklets for parents.
- 5.5 If any pupil has a Statement of Special Educational Needs then the Statement will be amended to reflect the new school, and the provision specified in the Statement will be delivered appropriately. Any pupils who are currently placed in designated special provision such as a Special Needs Class would be transferred to an alternative placement according to parental preference. For all those pupils on the SEN register who are affected, the Authority would deploy an element of any savings to provide enhanced support at their new school. Details of how such a scheme may operate would need to be developed.

## 6.0 **Staffing Implications**

- 6.1 Under this proposal, an existing Aided school will close, and a new Aided school immediately opens on the same site. Technically all the existing staff would be made redundant. The consultation document indicates that the initial appointment of staff will be ring-fenced to the staff of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School. Thereafter vacancies for the post of Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher, and RE Co-ordinator will be reserved to 'practising' members of the Church of England or the Roman Catholic Church. For all other future teaching posts priority will be given first to 'practising' members of the two churches whenever possible and thereafter to practising members of churches within Churches together.
- 6.2 A small number of respondents felt that ring-fencing Our Lady of Lourdes staff to the Joint Church school was unfair in a situation where a community primary school was to close, however, this is not the case under this proposal.

## 7.0 **Financial Implications**

- 7.1 The recommendations contained in this report have capital implications in respect of allocation of future pupils to schools. The two Dioceses are intending to establish a Joint Church multi-purpose centre on site. In addition to signalling a new beginning and a new initiative, the Dioceses hope that its presence will demonstrate that they, in partnership with the Local Authority, are addressing the key issues of Extended Services and community cohesion. The project is costed at £220,000 and it is intended that this will be drawn down from the Local Authority administered LCVAP budget which is given over to capital projects in the Voluntary Aided sector. The two Dioceses are looking to contribute LCVAP allocated funds to the project on a 60:40 ratio. Given the funding available for Joint Church initiatives in the current Targeted Capital programme the Dioceses are also exploring the feasibility of a bid under that programme.
- 7.2 There are no revenue savings resulting from this proposal.

## 8.0 **Equal Opportunities Implications**

- 8.1 There are none arising out of this report.

## 9.0 **Human Rights Implications**

- 9.1 There are none arising directly from this report.

## 10.0 **Local Agenda 21 Statement**

- 10.1 The removal of old, inefficient accommodation contributes to Council principles and targets in respect of Agenda 21.
- 10.2 New school buildings and extensions are required to achieve a minimum standard of BREEAM energy rating "Very Good". The design of any future extension would follow as far as possible the DETR/DCSF guidelines in BB87 for "Energy efficient design of new buildings and extensions for schools and colleges". This includes items such as low-energy electrical fittings, water saving devices and sustainably sourced timber.

## 11.0 **Community Safety Implications**

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

## 12.0 **Planning Implications**

- 12.1 The relationship between housing development policy and school place provision is a factor in considering surplus place removal.
- 12.2 Construction of any new classroom provision would be subject to the usual planning permissions.

### 13.0 **Local Member Support Implications**

- 13.1 Primary place planning and potential surplus place removal have relevance to all Wards.
- 13.2 The current option affects the following Wards directly: Wallasey, New Brighton, Seacombe, Leasowe and Moreton East.

### 14.0 **Background Papers**

Audit Commission Report: Planning School Places in Wirral September 2004.

School Organisation Plan.

LA document "Pursuit of Excellence: Primary Education in Wirral".

School pupil number returns, January 2009 (Annual Census return to DCSF).

School Net Capacity Calculation, July 2008, to DCSF requirements.

Consultation Documents

Other data held in Department including that provided by Wirral Health Authority.

### 15.0 **Summary**

The two Diocese have developed a scheme which satisfies both Anglican and Catholic requirements on ethos and admissions and opens up parental preference for a Church of England primary school places to an area of Wirral which has not previously had such a choice. This is an exciting proposal, and with the recommended amendments, would be the first such school on Wirral. If successful, this could form a template for other similar Joint Church schools elsewhere in the Borough.

### 16.0 **Recommendations**

- (1) The two Diocesan bodies be given all necessary assistance in submitting an application to the Secretary of State in order to seek a waiver of the requirement to hold a competition;
- (2) The Director of Children's Services be authorised to take all necessary steps to publish proposals, ensure the prescribed procedures are followed for the closure of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Primary School and the establishment of a Joint Church school at the Our Lady of Lourdes site, the exact procedure being dependent on the outcome of the application in (1) above.
- (3) the published admission number of the Joint Church school be maintained at 25 pupils for a period of three years from implementation, reviewed and amended if preference popularity is deemed to have increased.
- (4) should the Joint Church school be approved and implemented as in (2), the Leasowe area be moved from Phase 6 of the Primary Places Review to Phase 8 accordingly.

**Howard Cooper**

**Director of Children's Services**