



Primary School Place Planning Strategy

RECOMMENDATION

1. To agree the draft Primary School Place Planning Strategy for consultation.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION

2. It is necessary for the Council to have a secure strategy to address the range of issues involved in planning to deliver its statutory duty to secure sufficient suitable school places in the primary phase.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Council Cabinet agreed at its meeting on 5 April 2005 that proposals for a place planning strategy for primary schools should be brought to this meeting.
- 3.2 The drafting of a strategy has been delayed since the consideration of topic review reports from the Education Commission during 2004, while revised guidance was being formulated by the Audit Commission. This guidance has now been accepted and published by the DfES, and can be found as a set of web pages at <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/fallingschoolrolls/>.
- 3.3 The new guidance indicates a significant change of stance by the Government. There is recognition that surplus spaces in schools are not a simple economic issue, and that 'spare' capacity in schools may be essential for the delivery of initiatives such as extended schools and childcare. In line with this new thinking, Best Value Performance Indicators for surplus spaces have been deleted. The new inspection regime for children's services will not be making the sort of judgements in this area that were contained in the Ofsted/Audit Commission report of 2002, and which led to the Education Commission's topic review.
- 3.4 This does not mean that the Council no longer needs to give any attention to issues of school capacity. It does, however, allow for more balanced and strategic assessment of the need for school places, taking into account a wider range of factors than simple disparities between pupil numbers and school capacity. The draft strategy (see appendix 2) sets out a range of principles which would guide the formulation of

proposals for action, and the ways in which those principles would be used in reviewing schools, both individually and in groups.

- 3.5 The Education Commission's topic review has been extremely helpful in the formulation of this strategy. The Commission took a wide view of the topic, and considered evidence from national and local stakeholders, as well as examining practice in other areas. The large majority of the Commission's recommendations are embodied in the proposed strategy, or will be followed in the implementation process. Only two recommendations have not been incorporated. One of these related to the nature of faith schools, and falls outside the compass of the proposed policy. The other suggested the linkage of primary schools and secondary schools in pyramids for admission purposes. Consultation with the admissions forum and head teachers shows that there is not widespread support for this approach. As it would create substantial upheaval in the admissions process, and potentially disappoint many parents in obtaining their preference for secondary schooling, this approach has not been adopted in the draft strategy.
- 3.6 It is proposed that there should be wide consultation on the proposed strategy. It would be very helpful to develop a broad consensus among all the stakeholders about the principles and methodology for reviewing school places and organisation. With such a consensus, there would be much more likelihood of being able to conduct review exercises that reach widely supported outcomes.
- 3.7 Consultation would take place using written and electronic material, largely through established consultation mechanisms and advisory groups. Public participation would be encouraged through schools and the local media. It is proposed that consultation should run until the end of October 2005, followed by a further report to Council Cabinet in December 2005 or January 2006.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4. A range of possible principles and procedures were considered for inclusion in the draft strategy. The topic review report of the Education Commission enabled the range of options to be narrowed down, as the Commission had examined a wide evidence base and undertaken consultation with a range of interested parties. Consultation with the Heads' Liaison Group and the Deputy Heads' network has been helpful in establishing that there is a good measure of professional support for the approach suggested in the draft policy.

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Background papers:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 – Draft Place Planning Strategy

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

1. The costs of consultation will be met from existing Education Service budgets. Financial implications of the final proposed strategy will be included in the accompanying report to Council Cabinet in December 2005/January 2006.

Legal

2. None arising out of this consultation.

Personnel

3. None arising out of this consultation.

Equalities impact

4. An equalities impact assessment will be included with the proposed policy after consultation. Such assessments will also form part of any reviews conducted under the policy.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

5. The place planning strategy will provide a supportive context for the Council's objective of: providing a stimulating and high quality learning environment and the priorities of raising educational achievement, integrating and improving children's services and improving the Council's built assets for service delivery.



Primary School Place Planning Policy

Introduction

Derby City Council has a legal obligation to ensure that there are sufficient suitable school places to provide full-time education for pupils of compulsory school age. The Council's obligation is to secure places for all children whose parents wish them to be educated in a maintained school. Parents may also choose to educate their children at home or through a private provider. They may also secure places in maintained schools outside the city through the operation of parental preference in the admissions system.

Parents have a right to express a preference for the school that their children should attend. It is expected that the large majority of such preferences can be satisfied. It is also a reasonable expectation that the distance travelled to get to a preferred school should be as small as possible. The task facing the Council in planning to achieve this is not a simple one. A recent report of Ofsted and the Audit Commission said:

"Local authorities . . . face a task of enormous complexity. The issues involved touch on matters of political, economic and social policy at a local, regional and national level. While the basic concern of authorities has rightly been to manage as efficiently as possible the supply of and demand for school places, their freedom of manoeuvre is significantly constrained. The fundamental principles of parental preference and individual school autonomy, which underpin the legislative framework, are difficult to reconcile with efficient central planning".

This policy attempts to address these complexities, in the light of information about the situation in Derby, a thorough review by the Education Commission, and updated national guidance. The policy seeks to provide clarity, rather than simplicity, and indicates how priorities will be determined, and how the complexity within those priorities will be addressed. Fundamental to the whole approach is a commitment to dialogue and partnership with the range of partners involved, bearing in mind the fundamental need to ensure that the needs of children are paramount.

The Education Commission Review

The topic review carried out by the Education Commission gathered much national and local evidence about "good practice" in school place planning. It concluded that there was no single best answer - what works in one situation may not necessarily work in another.

The Commission reported that their evidence pointed to a need to consider school place planning issues in Derby in community based geographical clusters, rather than trying to deal with the whole city together.

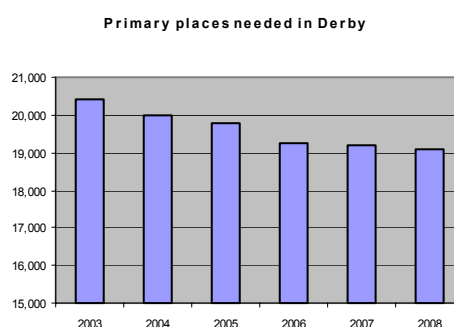
Some local authorities have developed matrix score sheets which use weighted factors to guide decision making on, for example, school closure or merger. The

Commission recommended that this approach should not be followed in Derby, but that a more flexible approach should be adopted. This would involve reviews using a range of factors drawn from evidence given to the Commission. The report suggested that this provided a way of taking account of priority issues, such as attainment and social inclusion, alongside the numbers of places and pupils.

The Commission made 19 recommendations about primary place planning. One of these related to faith schools and is not covered in this policy. Another proposed the linkage of primary schools to secondary school admissions criteria, and this has not been accepted for this policy. The Council believes that it would cause undue upheaval in the admissions system and lead to more parents not getting places for their children in their preferred school. The remaining 17 recommendations have been an important influence in the formation of this policy, and most aspects of them are reflected in it.

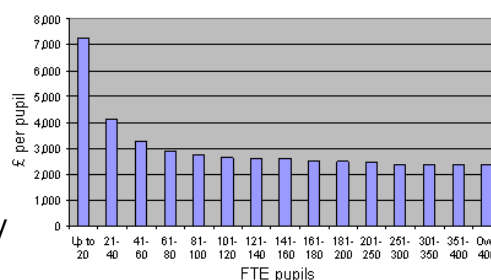
Context

From 2003 to 2008, we anticipate a 6.4% reduction in primary school pupil numbers. Superficially, this would suggest that there should be a programme to close a significant number of primary schools. However, this does not take account of the distribution of such reductions, which tend to spread widely across the city, with some concentration in stable areas and in areas of high university student population. In some of these areas which are relatively deprived, there are simultaneous developments which are increasing both the numbers of children admitted to school below statutory school age and the range of activities within the extended school and childcare fields. These developments have to be offset against the notion that the schools involved actually have 'surplus space' (as opposed to 'surplus places').



Nevertheless, there are very significant reductions in some localised areas, and some schools with apparently high levels of surplus places. 14 Derby schools have over 25%, and a further 13 have over 15%. The Audit Commission formerly regarded schools with more than 15% surplus places as problematic, and those with more than 25% surplus as requiring urgent action. This led to criticism in the last LEA inspection of Derby. However, further work by the Audit Commission with a range of local authorities has led to a more flexible position that has now been adopted by the DfES (see <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/management/fallingschoolrolls/>). The key task for authorities is now seen as seeking to ensure that schools offer value for money in providing effective education. It is clear that the position in Derby does not differ significantly from the national average picture; indeed the distribution of capacity means that Derby has a much more limited need for action than many urban authorities.

This is largely because Derby has very few small primary schools compared to most authorities in the country. Audit Commission national evidence shows that the cost per pupil of schools increases as size drops below one form of entry (about 210 total pupils, excluding nursery). However, the costs only increase very significantly when numbers go below 100.



There are no primary schools in Derby with fewer than 140 pupils, and therefore no significant need for action on economic grounds. The position of separate nursery schools, and of small infant schools, needs to be kept under review. These schools are relatively expensive, because of their high fixed costs per pupil. Although the funding formula ensures that they are viable, this is not the most efficient use of the resources available for schools as a whole, and can only be justified if there are continuing net advantages in outcomes for children and communities. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Derby has only 3 infant schools which are smaller than 100 pupils. The comparable figure for Derbyshire is 108 schools.

There is no area of Derby where an existing primary school could be taken out of use and its pupils absorbed by other nearby schools. This is in marked contrast to such authorities as Nottingham, where significant programmes to close surplus schools are underway. A small number of pairs of infant and junior schools in Derby could, in theory, be accommodated in the buildings of one school. However, in each case, substantial capital investment would be needed to allow the single school to cope with the needs of the expanded age range and pupil numbers. Without such investment, educational and care standards would be put at risk. It is not clear that investment on the necessary scale would generate sufficient return when compared with the other pressing demands on the school capital programme.

Proposals

Some action is required, but this cannot be a simple single set of steps to be applied across the whole city. Instead, the Council's strategy centres on a set of principles for considering change – in individual schools, groups of schools, or whole areas. These principles will be applied in three ways:

- A position statement for each school with more than 25% 'surplus places'. This would indicate proposed action or the justification for taking no action in the short to medium term.
- When unplanned opportunities arise in individual schools or small groups, particularly when head teachers leave posts or at the request of governing bodies.
- A programme of area based reviews, covering in priority succession those areas of the city where significant issues have been identified.

Further details of these proposed steps follow the section on principles.

As the principles are used, they will be explicitly linked to the Council's developing strategies for extended schools, children's centres and integrated delivery of children's services. In all place planning exercises, the Council will seek to work closely with other partners, particularly diocesan authorities. There will be thorough and open consultation with all stakeholders, particularly local councillors, parents, governors, head teachers and other staff, and trade unions.

Principles

The following factors will guide any proposals for action (along with others raised by schools and stakeholders). They link closely to the recommendations of the Education Commission. As the Commission's topic review suggested, there would not be a simple scoring process, or numerical outcome – judgement is needed for all factors.

- a. **Primary schools** – There is a well established national preference for primary schools with full foundation stage provision, rather than separate schools serving individual key stages (nursery, infant and junior schools). This

is based on evidence suggesting there are significant advantages of continuity, flexibility and efficiency

- b. **School size.** The ideal size of a primary school is based on 2 forms of entry (this means a total of about 420 pupils excluding Foundation Stage 1). If the needs of an area suggest smaller or larger schools, then 1 form of entry (210 pupils) and 3 forms of entry (630 pupils) are equally acceptable. In practice, the Council accepts that 1½ forms of entry (around 315 pupils) or 2½ forms of entry (around 525 pupils) will be needed to match the pupil numbers in some areas. It is more important to match the provision in a defined area to the need than to achieve an arbitrary target number in a school. Primary schools below 140 pupils would only be seen as justifiable in exceptional circumstances. The value for money offered by existing infant and nursery schools with fewer than 100 pupils will be examined as part of place planning reviews.
- c. **Trends in pupil numbers.** Demographic change is not simply predicted, but the Council is able to examine historical data, together with information about local birth rates and planned housing developments, to make fairly accurate predictions for pupil numbers in an area. In making predictions, close account will be taken of local knowledge, in schools and the communities they serve. Proposals for action need to be grounded in secure predictions covering a period of at least five years.
- d. **School standards and popularity.** Parental preference for some primary schools is substantially influenced – positively or negatively – by a perception of standards achieved. This can mean that objective analysis of pupil numbers does not accurately predict the demand for places. Nationally, it has been recognised this can lead to a polarisation whereby an unpopular and low attaining school with spare places can lose more pupils, and enter a spiral of decline. In Derby, decisions about place planning will be explicitly linked to strategies for school improvement. Unpopular schools will not be allowed to founder, and the expansion of popular schools will not be seen as a panacea.
- e. **Level of surplus places.** As demonstrated above, these are only of real significance in proposing structural change when an actual cost can be demonstrated. Where schools have surplus space not required for classrooms, priority should be given to securing alternative uses. Many schools exploit spare capacity to allow them to develop facilities and activities which are hard to accommodate in schools with 'standard' capacity. Others allow community schemes to function in dedicated space within the school building. Some have allowed Council services to support schools to be based in spare classrooms. The Council is only likely to make proposals to eliminate surplus space (for example by school or building closure) where there is a clear economic case for doing so, and where the impact on educational standards would not be negative.
- f. **Normal areas.** The Council believes that primary schools should have close links with meaningful communities, and should be centres through which services are provided to those communities. To ensure that schools are accessible, the boundaries of normal areas should, wherever possible, be defined by clear geographical features, such as main roads or railways. Many current normal areas are the result of long history, and they are not well matched to community or geographical boundaries. The Council does not propose that there should be change to existing areas, except where other factors suggest that the gain from such change would outweigh the likely disruption and resistance that could result. Boundaries of primary and secondary school areas would helpfully be common, but change solely to achieve this is not proposed.
- g. **Condition and suitability** of school buildings. It is clearly sensible to link place planning with consideration of asset management issues. The Council believes that such factors should generally be seen as secondary to the other factors listed here, but there will be occasions when organisational proposals

will be influenced by the nature of school buildings, and assessment of the level of capital investment needed to secure buildings fit to deliver education and extended facilities for the foreseeable future. The Council would not propose to build new schools other than in accordance with these principles. One implication of this is that new schools would be primary schools, with full foundation stage provision.

- h. **Finance.** In any place planning review, financial implications cannot be ignored. Any proposed outcome must be affordable and sustainable. However, in each exercise the Council will seek to identify the best possible solution, and indicate whether an alternative has to be proposed for implementation because of financial constraints. In some cases, proposals will have to be made for action only when resources become available. This will enable the construction of a priority list of projects which will influence longer term planning and the allocation of resources.

School position statements

In January 2005, Derby had 14 schools with more than 25% surplus places (see list in annexe 1). For each of these schools, the Council will prepare and publish a position statement and renew these on an annual basis.

The statement for each school will be developed in close consultation with the school's head teacher and governing body. It is hoped that it will be possible for there to be full agreement between all parties on the contents of the statement.

Each statement will set out the current and projected surplus. It will identify the financial consequences of the surplus for the school, along with action that has or will be taken by the governing body to mitigate these. The statement will also set out proposed uses of the surplus accommodation, by the governing body or through partnership with outside bodies, together with an assessment of the benefits of such uses to the school. Finally, the statement will indicate any strategic steps, including area-based reviews, or developments which the Council envisages could affect the position in the school in the next three to five years.

Unplanned opportunities

Sometimes it is appropriate, particularly when a head teacher leaves or there are serious concerns about school standards, to consider whether two or more schools should be brought together. In all such situations, the Council will initiate discussion with the affected heads and chairs of governors before deciding whether change is desirable. Consideration will particularly be given to the possibility of bringing together schools which each serve single key stages.

Formal *merger** of schools will only be proposed when there are compelling educational advantages, and necessary capital resources to allow the development of one school which can function as a single entity. The Council believes that *federation* provides a positive step forward for many separate nursery/infant/junior schools where merger is not appropriate. Governing bodies will be actively encouraged and supported in considering this possibility, because of the increased efficiency, continuity and flexibility which it can offer. Formal *collaboration*, with the formation of joint governing body committees with delegated powers, could be an alternative in some circumstances. The Council recognises that in some situations it will not be appropriate for there to be any change.

* Further information about merger, federation and collaboration can be found in Annexe 2

Area-based reviews

In many parts of Derby, there is no need for action to review place planning at a local level. Established schools are successfully recruiting pupils in a way that meets parental preference and are providing high quality education to meet their needs. The Council does not, therefore, intend to introduce unnecessary uncertainty to those areas by indicating that there will be a city-wide review of school places.

It is proposed that a series of area-based reviews will cover those areas where there are significant issues. Such areas will be identified and prioritised using the following factors:

- Schools with significant current and forecasted number issues (either surplus and over subscribed, and taking account of major new housing developments)
- Evidence of mismatch between normal areas and places/preferences
- Distinct areas with natural and/or community boundaries

Area reviews would be conducted by a project board and team, working to the Council's project management methodology. The project board would be constructed to include representation of all major stakeholder groups, including elected members, dioceses, governors, head teachers and staff. The project team for a review would be led by an asset management officer, and include membership covering personnel, finance, school improvement, property, early years and life-long learning. Full consultation would follow data collation and analysis, before proposals were formulated. A formal consultation period would then be allowed before Cabinet and other necessary approvals for action were sought. Many possible proposals for change would require the publication of statutory notices and, if necessary, approval by the School Organisation Committee and the Office of the School Adjudicator.

The following areas are initially proposed to be included at some point in the first stages of review – which could take up to three years to complete. All schools in an area would need to be considered to build up a comprehensive picture, including PFI schools which are only just being built. It is not, however, expected that proposals for change would affect all schools. Detailed timescales will be drawn up following consultation, with the first review to commence in the spring of 2006.

Alvaston, Boulton	Allenton Primary Alvaston Infant and Junior Boulton Primary Lakeside Primary Lord Street Nursery Moorhead Primary Oakwood Infant and Junior St John Fisher Primary
Sinfin	Ash Croft Primary Grampian Primary Redwood Infants and Juniors Sinfin Primary

Normanton, Arboretum	Arboretum Primary Dale Primary Hardwick Primary Harrington Nursery Peartree Infants and Juniors Rosehill Infants St Chad's Infants St James' Infants and Juniors St Joseph's Primary Stonehill Nursery Walbrook Nursery
Oakwood, Derwent, Chaddesden	Parkview Primary Cherry Tree Hill Infants and Juniors Chaddesden Park Infants and Juniors Roe Farm Primary Beaufort Primary Meadow Farm Primary Cavendish Close Infants and Juniors St Albans Primary Derwent Primary Breadsall Hill Top Infants and Juniors

List of schools with more than 25% surplus places (as at January 2005)

	% surplus places
Pear Tree Community Junior School	26
Boulton Primary School	27
Ashgate Primary	27
Asterdale Primary	28
Normanton Junior School	28
Ravensdale Infant School	29
Firs Estate Primary	29
Nightingale Infant School	31
Sinfin Primary School	31
Pear Tree Infant School	32
Ash Croft	33
Chaddesden Park Infant School	35
Nightingale Junior School	41
Beaufort Primary School	42

Merger, federation and collaboration – possible ways of bringing schools together

There are some advantages in bringing schools together into larger groups or units. Essentially, the potential gains are in three areas: continuity of provision for children and links with parents, flexibility of resource allocation and use (especially staffing), and economic efficiency (as resources can be rationalised and duplication reduced). As the managerial demands of running schools increase, bigger units or groupings can enable head teachers to focus more on teaching and learning, while other senior non teaching staff are employed to manage matters such as premises and administration. Staff development opportunities are significantly improved in bigger units.

In the past, the only way of bringing two or more schools together was through **merger**. Technically, this means either closing all the schools and opening a new one to replace them, or closing all but one, which then absorbs the other(s). Until 2004, the first method required all existing head teachers and deputy head teachers to be made redundant, and then appointments were made following a national advert. Not surprisingly, the upheaval and uncertainty associated with this process made merger attractive only in limited circumstances. Changed staffing regulations now mean that if there is only one head teacher in the closing schools (as would be the case when one head in a pair of schools is retiring) it is possible for the new governing body to appoint the remaining head to the new school without going through a recruitment process. The same flexibility applies if the number of remaining deputies is not more than the number of such posts in the new school.

Merging schools has some advantages over other ways of bringing schools together, mainly because of the fresh start that it implies. It creates a new school, and staff are reappointed. The new school receives a newly calculated single budget – and this will generally be smaller than the former separate budgets, because the Council's scheme for funding schools assumes there will be efficiencies, particularly in staffing. The resultant savings are then redistributed across other schools, sharing the benefit across the city.

As merger is a permanent step, the consultation and approval process is tightly regulated. If the Council proposes a merger, it has to undertake a full consultation exercise, publish statutory notices, and take any objections to the independent School Organisation Committee (SOC). If the SOC cannot agree the changes, then the proposal is passed to the national Office of the School Adjudicator, who may hold local meetings before coming to a final decision.

The Education Act 2002 introduced the possibility of schools coming together without merger, but under shared governance arrangements. There are two ways in which this can be done – collaboration and federation.

With **collaboration** the schools keep separate governing bodies, but establish one or more joint committees. These committees can have delegated to them any powers which are capable of delegation to the committee of a single governing body. This allows for joint working and decision making, but each school retains full independence. The constitution and terms of reference of joint committees must be reviewed annually, so collaboration is a temporary procedure which can come to an end if a governing body so decides.

Collaboration provides a flexible but formalised way of schools working together. The schools remain legally separate, and receive separately calculated budgets. The

extent to which the separate governing bodies establish joint decision making is determined annually by them. All staff remain as employees under the delegated powers of the separate governing bodies, so flexibility of deployment is limited. Essentially, collaboration is a way for schools to work alongside each other in a coordinated way, rather than becoming in any sense a single unit. It is best suited to situations where joint governance of some aspect of the schools' functioning would be helpful – for example, where schools are working together on providing community facilities, as extended school clusters, or where schools share a site and wish to work formally together on premises issues.

Establishing collaboration and joint committees with delegated powers requires no special procedure – simply the decision of the collaborating governing bodies. There is no requirement for formal consultation, and the permission of the Council or any other body is not required.

In a **federation** two or more schools come together under one governing body. They retain separate budget allocations, but can use these flexibly across the federation as a whole. Management arrangements are very flexible - there can be one head teacher for the federation as a whole, or the schools can have separate head teachers, or any combination decided by the governing body. The same flexibility applies to deputy head teachers and other aspects of the staffing structure. All existing staff would become staff of the federation, and subject to consultation, could be deployed across any of the member schools.

Federation potentially provides the advantages of merger – in terms of possibilities for improved continuity, increased flexibility and opportunities for efficiency – without requiring the formal processes or permanent change. Each school receives a separately calculated budget share, but the governing body can use the total budget flexibly across the federation as a whole. The total amount available to the schools is slightly less than if they remained outside a federation, because the School Standards Grant from the government is reduced, but this could be more than offset by efficiency gains in the federation. On the other hand, there is no gain for other schools through redistribution as there would be through merger.

If two or more schools want to form a federation, this is the process:

- Each governing body separately considers a report on the proposal, which has to be an agenda item at a properly called meeting.
- If the governing bodies decide to proceed, they jointly publish proposals (including makeup of governing body, staffing, and federation date), and send them to the Council, heads, staff, parents, and any one else they consider relevant.
- After not less than 6 weeks, the governing bodies jointly consider the responses to the proposals and individually decide whether to proceed (with modifications if desired).
- Those governing bodies that decide to proceed jointly notify the Council.
- On the federation date, the former governing bodies are dissolved and the federation governing body is incorporated.

The governing body of a federation is constituted in much the same way as the governing body of a single school, with provision to ensure that at least one parent from each member school is included. There are provisions for additional schools to join the federation, for individual schools to leave the federation, and for the federation to be dissolved – decisions on such matters are taken by the federation governing body, with a right of appeal to the Secretary of State for a school wishing to leave the federation.

The staffing, procedures and constitution regulations apply to federations in the same way as to individual schools, with modifications to include reference to the federation rather than the school. New staff can be appointed to work at a federated school or for the federation. The employer of the staff of federated community schools would continue to be the Council, with the federation governing body taking most of the employer's responsibilities under delegated powers.