

A review by the Education, Youth, Culture & Leisure Overview & Scrutiny Panel

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL RECOMMENDATIONS PRESENTED TO SCHOOLS ON 7TH JUNE 2004 TO BE PRESENTED TO COUNCIL EXECUTIVE ON 30TH JUNE 2004

Aim of review

The aims of the review across all school clusters are the removal of surplus places, improving the funding per pupil across the Local Education Authority, and thereby improving the overall quality of the education environment to achieve a better education for all pupils in Bath and North East Somerset.

General

The Panel were unanimously of the opinion that re-organisation of the primary schools within this cluster area was necessary and achievable in the medium term and needed serious consideration.

In addition the Panel recognised the contributions and hard work the Head Teachers, teaching staff and school staff have made to the teaching environment and educational output of the schools.

The Panel have gathered a great deal of evidence, undertaken visits, listened to contributions and studied current statistics and future trends. The underlying factor recognised by the panel is that current surplus places in the cluster are 261 (against an actual take up of 1441). The schools are broadly arranged in Infant – Junior pairs including two pairs of schools are on shared/adjoining sites.

Trends show a level or small reduction in primary school age children in the coming years. It was noted that in 4 years the situation and trend may then be different (The Panel made a general observation that the amount of housing let out to students in the cluster area may skew the housing situation and impact on the predicted numbers of children).

They wished it noted that their recommendations implied no reflection on the quality of the education provided in the schools and recognised the schools' commitment to quality where the cluster served areas of significant educational and social deprivation.

On the issue of amalgamation the Panel made the following general recommendation to the Council Executive:

- The Panel noted that current Council policy was for all through Primary Schools.
- The Panel's view was that amalgamation of schools should only be recommended where it would improve the educational provision and standards within the area.
- Amalgamation should not be undertaken purely as an act of policy.
- There should be a proven tangible benefit to any amalgamation.

- There should be a willingness from the school and governors for any amalgamation.
- Overall, the Panel remained in favour of all-through primary schools within B&NES which it felt were more appropriate for the characteristically small schools (no more than 2-form entry) in the Authority.
- The Panel felt that all-through primary schools were preferable for a number of educational and social reasons. In particular, all through Primary schools simplify continuity and progression between Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. Staff are able to take part in planning the curriculum and assessment procedures from Reception Year (R) to Year 6 (Y6). Staff can take curriculum leadership for a subject right through the school and with more staff; each member of staff has to take responsibility for fewer subjects. The role of the SENCO can be developed as a whole school responsibility, supporting parents and children from entry to the school through to Secondary transfer. All staff from R to Y6 will be involved in training and over time staff can teach in both Infant and Junior classes if this is appropriate to improve the quality of teaching. With a great deal of hard work, very effective liaison can be achieved between separate Infant and Junior Schools, but an all through Primary School can more easily achieve these advantages.
- The Panel noted that the provision of any new build would need to attract capital funding and be dependent on amalgamation.

The Panel made the following specific recommendations with regard to the individual schools:

The recommendations below would be subject to statutory consultation.

1. Moorlands Infant and Junior Schools

Moorlands Infant School

- There are few surplus places
- The Panel noted their strong community links
- The Panel welcomed plans to develop their accommodation e.g. the library
- The school had a very large maintenance liability.

Moorlands Junior School

- The Panel noted that the school had a high maintenance liability
- There were not many surplus places

Recommendation

The Panel recommended that consideration be given to the amalgamation of Moorlands Infant and Junior Schools utilising the existing sites to best effect within new buildings, following full consultation with the schools and the community. Panel members note that there needs to be a willingness for both schools to engage positively in an 'amalgamation' once capital funding is identified. No capital funding is identified at the present time or in the foreseeable future.

2. Oldfield Park Infant and Junior Schools

Oldfield Park Infants School

- The Panel noted that there were no surplus places.
- The Panel noted the significant distance between the Oldfield Park schools.
- Panel noted the current building work and that the maintenance backlog figure quoted has now been significantly reduced.

Oldfield Park Junior School

- The Panel noted the difficulties with the small site and lack of playing field.
- There were no large maintenance issues.

Recommendation

The Panel recommended that within 6 months officers carry out a study (including costings) to look at the feasibility of; acquiring some land behind the Junior School playing field or rearranging the current site to provide a range of possible options for site usage

Consideration should also be given to amalgamating the Oldfield Park schools on a new site in consultation with the schools and the community.

3. Twerton Infant school and St Michael's CE VC Junior School

Twerton Infants School

- The Panel noted that the current intake numbers for the school and from Ward data believe that they are likely to remain stable for the foreseeable future.
- They had no immediate concerns about the School.
- The Panel noted the significant distance between the Twerton schools.
- The Panel welcomed the community development work within the School.

St Michael's CE Junior School

- The Panel noted the high number of unfilled places at the school
- The school has a high level of maintenance liabilities
- The Anglican diocese is unlikely to have objection to an amalgamation provided the new school is a Church of England Voluntary Controlled School.

Recommendation

A feasibility study should be undertaken in nine months, assessing the physical potential for an amalgamated school on the Junior site, in consultation with the schools and the Diocese of Bath & Wells. Panel members note that there needs to be a willingness for both schools to engage positively in an 'amalgamation' once

capital funding is identified. No capital funding is identified at the present time or in the foreseeable future.

4. Southdown Infant and Junior Schools

Southdown Infants School

- The Panel noted that the school had a nursery class.
- They also noted that the Head and governors were in favour of amalgamation.
- They felt that the school occupied poor quality buildings.
- There is a large maintenance liability.

Southdown Junior School

- The Panel noted that there were a large number of unfilled spaces at the school.
- There was a large maintenance liability.
- The school had large grounds, much of which were under-utilised.
- They noted that a recent Ofsted report stated that the school had ‘serious weaknesses’.

Recommendation

1. Consideration should be given to the closure of both of these schools in order to create a new extended primary school either with 1-form entry (210 places) or with no more than 315 places – the capacity would depend on the distribution of school places in nearby areas of the cluster, especially Twerton.
2. The Panel felt that creating a high-quality extended school in the area would meet the local demand and eliminate the unfilled places – it also felt that raising standards in this area was an obligation for the Education Authority.
3. The Panel supported the proposal for bidding for extra funding for the schools in this area, because of the levels of educational and social deprivation and noted that these schools had been identified in the School Organisation Plan as ‘strategic schools in areas of educational deprivation’.

Final Recommendations

The Panel wished the Executive Member to consider the proceeds from any amalgamation of these school premises to be viewed as a capital receipt that could be re-invested in education to help the backlog of maintenance and building works. This was not currently Council policy, but the Panel felt it should be strongly considered within this review.

The Panel noted that any school which is built in the future to serve the new development at Western Riverside could have an impact upon schools in this cluster and that the LEA should take note of this.

The Panel also noted that it is likely that St John's School will be in this cluster in the future and this should be of a size to have no adverse impact on the number of surplus places in the cluster.