

## **Peasedown Area Review**

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

### **Aim of Review**

The aims of these primary school reviews which are being carried out by the Education, Youth, Culture and Leisure Overview and Scrutiny Panel 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 majority of the Panel were of the opinion that no re-organisation of the primary schools within the Peasedown cluster area was necessary. The issue of school amalgamation is not relevant in this cluster, although Federation of schools in the rural areas needs to be considered.

The Panel noted that all 4 schools were successful and generally achieved above KS1 and KS2 national average standards. It should be noted that figures at the small schools have to be quoted with caution due to the low statistical numbers.

The Panel wished it noted that their recommendations implied no reflection on the quality of the education provided in the schools and they recognised the schools' commitment to high educational standards.

The panel has 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 55 (September 05 against an actual take up of 664), this equates to over 8% with the vast majority of surplus places at one school. All schools in the cluster are arranged as 'All through' Primary schools.

Population trends show a levelling within Peasedown and a reduction in the villages in numbers of primary school age children in the coming years. The Panel took into consideration that within 4 years the situation and trend may be different. They also made a general observation that potential additional housing planned through the Regional Spatial Strategy is unlikely in this area in the immediate future, but might halt the predicted decline in numbers of children in the cluster.

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

**None of the recommendations below would be subject to statutory consultation.**

## **1. St Julian's Wellow C of E VC Primary School**

The school has been full for a number of years, with few surplus places. A large proportion of the children (at least 50%) come from Peasedown St John, the remainder from the village itself and nearby hamlets. The school is well integrated into the local community.

The current numbers on roll are 105 (maximum size being 112 pupils) with a Planned Admission Number currently of 16. The school has 3 surplus places. There are 4 classes, arranged as (numbers approximate) Reception =17 (6 are with Year 1's), Yr 1 & 2 =26, Yr 3& 4 =32, Yr 5 & 6 =30. There are 13 first preferences for September 2006 entry

### **Buildings**

The Panel thought that the buildings were cramped and some were in a poor state of repair although they acknowledged that some improvements had been completed in the past year and the school had appointed an architect to oversee further works. The Panel felt that they could usefully use some of their devolved capital for these smaller projects. They noted that the temporary Elliot classrooms had been refurbished and their life extended. It is noted that replacement of temporary classroom are an Asset Management priority, subject to the availability of funding. The school has identified new classrooms and a new hall as priorities. The toilets were felt to be inadequate for both staff and children (especially Year 6 girls). Secretarial and staff accommodation and facilities were generally poor. The school hall is also very small.

The access to the school is generally poor and security to the rear of the school is a weakness. However, the Panel felt that the outside spaces were in good condition and they had made creative use of the play areas.

### **Curriculum**

The panel are concerned that the restricted size of the teaching spaces could inhibit delivery of the full curriculum.

### **Transport**

50% of the children came from Peasedown and were brought to the school in parents' cars. The Panel suggested that, in the absence of public transport, the parents might wish to organise a bus to bring the children to school, which would improve traffic safety around the school and be better for the local environment.

### **Panel Recommendations**

The Panel recommended no change to the standard number as the school attracts a consistent and adequate intake year on year. In addition, all efforts should be made by the school and governors in conjunction with the LEA to improve the layout and

teaching space of the school and to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

The Panel do not consider that the school needs any organisational changes.

## **2. Shoscombe Cof E VA Primary School**

The school is the only voluntary aided school within this cluster.

The current numbers on roll are 92 (maximum size being 102 pupils) with a Planned Admission Number is currently of 14. The school has 10 surplus places. There are 4 classes, arranged as (numbers approximate) Reception =10, Yr 1 & 2 =25, Yr 3& 4 =30, Yr 5 & 6 =28. There are 13 first preferences for September 2006 entry.

Roughly 30% of children come from the immediate area, 50% from Peasedown and 15% from a wider area.

### **Buildings**

The Panel felt that the school had made imaginative use of the devolved capital and VA funding to improve its buildings and make the most of its site. They had made creative use of the space available and had a particularly good library and staff room. The school was closely involved in the local community. Panel noted the problems that the walking bus was having over an access issue with a local farmer.

The Panel noted the plans for further development of the playing field and the plans for levelling the pitch. There were also plans for providing a covered area for the reception year children at the back of the school, which could also be used by parents when waiting for their children. Further plans were being considered to construct a mezzanine level to provide additional teaching space.

### **Recommendations**

The Panel recommended no change to the standard number as the school attracts a consistent and adequate intake year on year and plays a central role in the small community.

The Panel also recommend that the LEA, together with the Diocese, look into resolving the pedestrian access route to the school.

The Panel do not consider that the school needs any organisational changes.

## **3. Peasedown St John Primary school (Community)**

The current numbers on roll are 414, the school has a capacity of 420, with a Planned Admission Number of 60. However, the Standard Number was raised to 75 for a trial three-year period in 2004. These numbers have not been sustained, so the admission level will revert to 60 after 2006. There are 6 surplus places. There are 59

first preferences for September 2006 entry. The school is the only community school within this cluster.

## **Buildings**

The Panel noted that the buildings were accessible, despite being on two floors. They have the flexibility to rotate classes to suit any disabled access needs that might arise. The classroom space is used well and they have an excellent library and infant reading room. It was noted that corridor space was used for breakout teaching areas. Some rooms are undersized for the number of pupils. The staff accommodation was smaller than expected.

The Panel noted that such a large school could do with a dedicated kitchen. At present, approximately 250 meals per day are brought from Paulton Junior school.

There is a good size playground, but use of the playing field is restricted due to security issues. The school makes use of the recreation field across the road instead. Options are being explored for a long-term solution to this issue.

The school has benefited from a lot of recent investment and the panel noted the nursery on site. They have good links with the community and the school has played a key role in forging positive links between the original village community and the residents of the new housing estate. It was pointed out that if there was another major expansion of housing in Peasedown, then another school would have to be built and if were the case the social cohesion that the school has brought may be undone.

## **Recommendation**

The Panel recommended no change. The school has improved its reputation considerably in recent years and attracts a consistent intake year on year. It also plays a central role in the local community.

The panel also recommend that options need to be explored with the Head teacher, school governors and LEA for the future use of the school land and the use of playing fields.

### **4. Camerton C of E VC Primary school**

The current numbers on roll are 52 (the school size being 85 pupils) with a Planned Admission Number is currently 12. There are 3 classes arranged as (numbers approximate) Rec & Yr 1 & 2 =17, Yrs 3 & 4 =16, Yrs 5&6 =18.

Despite the appointment of a new and dynamic head, there has continued to be a consistent decline in numbers at the school. Only 3 pupils have registered for the reception class in September 2006 – 8 pupils will be leaving Year 6, making 45 children for next year in total. There are currently 33 surplus places. Funding per pupil currently stands at £4258.

The Panel were concerned that a small number of children who would be eligible to attend Camerton were being provided with free transport to St Mary's Timsbury, from the Meadgate area. If these children attended Camerton they would also have access to free transport as it is deemed a hazardous route. However, it would still not make a significant difference to the overall numbers in the school. Currently 8 Meadgate children catch a bus on the route from Tunley to Timsbury.

It is unlikely that Camerton would be a location for major housing development in the future. There is the social cost of closing schools – Camerton is not a strategic school as neighbouring schools are not full (Trinity, Radstock and St Mary's Timsbury), but it is an important part of the local community. The Panel were concerned that if the school were closed and the children had to attend another school it may be difficult for many parents to visit that school due to the lack of public transport.

### **Buildings**

The school is generally in good condition and good use has been made of the available space. It was noted that the school had a small hall. The Panel noted the issue of the temporary classroom which is planned to be removed or replaced in 2007 due to a temporary planning permission. However, despite the investment in the school, it has not been reflected in higher numbers of children attending.

### **Curriculum**

The Panel noted the improvements made to academic attainment at the school and the high percentage of children taking part in music and outdoor activities. However, they acknowledged that it was difficult to deliver the full curriculum to such small classes.

### **Recommendation**

No action at present, but the Panel decided that the numbers attending the school should be closely monitored and that officers report back to the Members in Spring 2008 with an update - at this point the September 2008 entries should be known.

The Panel acknowledged the real improvements that had been made to the school over recent years and the considerable efforts and success of the new headteacher. However, the Members recognised that, unless the numbers improved, the schools' financial viability and its ability to deliver the curriculum would be seriously affected and its long-term future would be open to question.

The Panel noted that an extension to the temporary planning permission should be applied for as soon as practicable.

The Panel therefore would encourage key local stakeholders including the LEA to work together through the Parish Plan to help the school increase their numbers on roll.

The Panel do not consider that the school needs any organisational changes.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the panel received information from the Education officers on financial data, standards, site and building areas, outstanding planned maintenance, home to school transport, free school meal entitlement, SEN figures, and surplus places and the nearby schools.

Information forthcoming regarding the regional spatial strategy indicated that the plan is mainly for development within Bath and on an urban extension to south Bath, with smaller developments of the District's towns and villages.

No organisational change is therefore recommended for the 4 schools in this review area, but an update report on Camerton School should be made in Spring 2008.

Councillor Andrew Furse

Chair of the Education, Youth, Culture and Leisure Overview & Scrutiny Panel

27th February 2006