

Determination of the Statutory Notice to Enlarge Whitchurch Primary School

Summary of Representation Responses Report and Consultation Drop-In Session Comments

Total representation responses received: 13 + 48* = 61

From: Parents: 7
 Parents and Local Residents: 2 + 48* = 50
 Other Interested Parties: 2
 Neighbouring Local Authorities: 2

Objections: 8 + 48* = 56
 Comments/Concerns: 5

*51 individually signed copies of a standard letter objecting to the proposal were received, stating that the response was from a parent at the school as well as a resident of Whitchurch village. 10 were from the village and 41 from further afield. Comments are listed under Parents and Local Residents section below. 3 of the copies were from parents who had also responded with objections by email.

Total consultation session comments received: 16

From: Parents: 11
 Local Residents: 2
 Other Interested Parties: 3

Objections: 3
 Comments/Concerns: 13

Representation Responses

Parents:

Parking and the road is already dangerous, causing the residents problems, without increasing this figure by 33%.

The school is already failing - it seems ridiculous to add more children to the problem.

The playground barely fits the current children.

Catering is already a massive problem with children rushing meals to make way for the next children.

The school would benefit from a nursery and Special Education Needs unit as pupils with additional needs aren't supported as well as they could be with a special unit.

How is the expansion of half a year group going to work? Is this going back to previous attempts of having mixed year groups? Will there be two classes per year? I would not be happy with my children being in a 45 pupil class. I don't feel that any of the classes should be changed and additional children added or mixed with different years.

Not fair on the pupils to have to learn under construction noises. It will be like a builder's yard, they will lose a lot of space whilst this is being built and it will disrupt their learning. I chose this school as it was only one class per year and has a village feeling. Everyone knows each other and the kids know everyone.

I have other children joining, I wanted them to have the same experience which won't happen if it's changed to two classes/more pupils to a class. I am very upset about this. I can't go to an alternative school as I don't drive and wouldn't get my child to Whitchurch and my other children to another school on time. My first child is looking forward to them starting. It wouldn't be fair to move them as they have all their friends.

I don't feel comfortable with my child who is due to start 2019 to be the guinea pig year. There will be teething problems which will interrupt their learning - being the youngest it will be hard enough.

Because there is a new housing estate there should be a new school, not an old school disrupted to accommodate the housing.

I struggle to get to and from the school on the small paths as it is. Let alone when there is more children.

Where will the additional teaching funding come from?

The school is not yet Ofsted Good and does not have any outstanding areas. Putting additional pressure on resources and staff at this point does not seem a logical plan. Class sizes of 30 are already large - taking them up to 45, even at Key Stage 2 is madness!

Children need to be able to focus on their lessons. Larger classes mean more distractions and teachers less able to spend time individually with children or oversee their tuition properly.

It puts additional strain on the teachers who, according to Ofsted, are not always able to tailor homework/activities to individuals. Adding 50% to class sizes will not help.

Part of the charm of the school is its small size and single form entry. If the expansion is granted I will definitely consider other options for my children.

A more appropriate expansion would be to increase the number of classes not the size of them. Have those classes grow in size naturally over time. Doing this could assist the school in upping its Ofsted rating rather than putting additional pressure on it.

The expansion could involve class size expansion and mixed age classes rather than an additional class in each year group. I have huge concerns about this. The school has been classed as Requires Improvement. If children are not working to full potential currently how will increasing class sizes benefit them? And mixed age classes have proven to not work in other local authority schools.

My priority is my children's education, to increase Key Stage 2 classes at a critical time for learning does not make sense. You should act in the children's best interests - all I can see is to fulfil the places quota so the housing application submitted for Whitchurch can go ahead. Parents urge you to look at the pupil's best interests and expand the school with this in mind.

In January 2017 the school was given its second Ofsted rating of Requires Improvement,

the same as the previous inspection. The school is working extremely hard to raise standards but the quality of teaching, learning and outcomes are still rated below standard, so we believe expansion at this time will be detrimental to children's education, as this will no longer be their primary focus/aim.

The Governors have said that the proposed increase of 105 pupils could be added anywhere across the school age range.

Guidelines permitting, Key Stage 2 class sizes will therefore increase from 30 to 45.

Budgets are generally stretched - would additional funding be available for extra teachers, to cover the increased class sizes.

For a school the size of Whitchurch, this can only mean mixed year groups, mixed abilities, etc., which becomes a minefield to implement.

The school building is over 100 years old, with very small classrooms, corridors and limited space. The hall can currently host a full school assembly - would this be possible with the additional numbers. This loss of pupil interaction would be a huge loss to the existing pupils.

It states that an additional adjacent area of land would be added to the site. We presume this will be for the additional classrooms required.

The land either side of the school is already developed, so no space to increase the hard play space. When the field is 'out of bounds' due to weather, there is insufficient play area for pupils our children tell us. Very serious concerns, that if the building did go ahead, there is no access to the adjacent land than through the existing school from the A37.

Has any consideration been given to the construction process and how vehicles will access the site. It is very likely that it will be a traditional build as there is such limited access for modular cabins to be delivered, so the build would take longer than the six week summer holidays, introducing a significant safety risk to the pupils.

The school is situated on the A37 and is very heavily congested at most times - we believe that this will increase. Traffic regularly queues beyond the village in all directions. There is little scope for mitigating measures on the approaches to the school.

On numerous occasions the school has requested a 20mph speed limit - this has been refused on the basis that further congestion would result.

There are limited busses so additional car journeys are inevitable. The school is within walking distance from many parts of the village but in today's car-reliant lifestyle, the reality is parents will drive and park close to the school not walk.

Under the current school policy, pupils are not permitted to cycle to school unless in Year 6, deterring younger pupils from walking or cycling.

The walking routes are very narrow and potentially unsafe, further compounded by lack of quality street lighting and low numbers of safe crossing points.

The additional traffic will exacerbate congestion and parking issues in the village as well as increasing air and noise pollution

The additional land for the expansion must be the historical railway line. This land is greenfield with established trees providing an excellent habitat for wildlife. Removal of this would adversely affect wildlife many of which are protected species.

The increased pupils will result in a direct increase in noise pollution, a mere 3dB increase is the equivalent of doubling the level for the human ear.

A retirement home is located adjacent to the school – an increase in noise pollution for residents and inconvenience this may cause.

I believe that expanding the school will have a negative impact on my children's education.

My children would benefit from being in a smaller/village school with an intake of 30 - one class per year. They would have struggled in a larger school. An expanded school would remove parental choice as all other local schools have 60 or 90 pupils per year.

The school is Ofsted Requires Improvement - how can increasing class sizes help the school improve its performance?

A large proportion of children live in the Bristol area. Could the places required be provided by giving priority to children living in Whitchurch village in Bath and North East Somerset?

The school is on a very busy road with limited parking - concerned about the increase in traffic and pollution and impact on road safety around the school.

Where will funding come from for ongoing extra resources? E.g. extra teaching staff, books, computers.

Class sizes are large enough already - to increase some to 45 per class is ridiculous. Children's education will suffer due to disruption, reduced individual teaching time reducing or eliminating a child's individual needs, children's abilities are all different and these would not be catered for due to lack of time. Mixed classes seem ridiculous as each year has their own curriculum to follow.

A small village around a very busy main road, traffic during school drop off and collection is appalling - this is only going to get worse. Many people drive, there is very limited parking, cars park in residential areas as well as on pavements, on corners of junctions, etc. To add more cars is ridiculous.

It seems it has just been a case of build houses and expand the school! If more houses are being built then maybe a new school, doctor's surgery, etc. need to be built as well. Are other schools in B&NES having their class numbers increased?

Parents and Local Residents:

Increasing Key Stage 2 classes to 45 in an already under performing school is preposterous. The recent Ofsted states the school 'Requires Improvement' and is especially falling short in its quality of teaching, learning and assessment and outcomes for students - most particularly in Key Stage 2.

The impact of large classes on children's attainment is well documented. One study states that it reduces the time students actively engage with each other, it increases disruptive behaviour, it reduces the time teachers can spend with each pupil, it reduces the material the teacher can cover, it can eliminate many methods of assessing students and it can reduce the learning by restricting the kind of teaching methods employed.

According to research, pupils in smaller classes consistently performed higher on standardised tests in both maths and reading.

An article published by a prominent figure at a University states, 'from experience alone, we can state with full confidence that large class sizes have, are and continue to wreck many positive advances in education and learning - the future of our children does not look good if we continue to ignore this fact'.

There is already severe traffic congestion along this stretch of the A37, to increase this would be ludicrous. There is heavy congestion daily, utter chaos around the school and surrounding roads due to blocked roads and poorly parked cars. This congestion, with inconsiderate and dangerous parking, has already led to several near misses with children put in danger by vehicles mounting or getting incredibly close to the pavement outside the school.

To increase this traffic by potentially another 100 cars, without putting a strategy in place to ease current congestion and provide safe parking, would be putting our children at risk of injury or death.

The likelihood of parents walking their children to school is small as most of the new pupils will come from households where parents work, dropping them to school in the car enroute. Also, many of the additional pupils are expected from the new housing in Staunton Lane, which does not have a good walking route to the school.

Other Interested Parties:

We are very concerned about the impact the enlargement will have on the traffic and car parking in Whitchurch. The A37 through Whitchurch is a very busy road and even more so at school times.

We are situated close to the school and are experiencing huge problems with parents using our car park. It is extremely difficult to get parents to park elsewhere and these spaces are needed by those members of the public using the facilities here. Frequently people get blocked in and there is also a safety aspect with both children and cars trying to get in and out.

If the situation gets worse, as it obviously will with more parents driving, we shall have to put a barrier across our driveway. This will be very costly for us and inconvenient for those using the facilities or with a right of access across our property.

We would urge you to find a designated parking area or failing this provide the funds for a barrier to protect our car park from unauthorised trespass of additional school users.

This would hopefully mitigate the severe inconvenience endured by ourselves, those using the facilities and those with a right of access.

We have concerns regarding the location of the school and safe routes to it.

The speed of 30mph outside the school has been a concern for many years but requests to reduce the speed for the safety of children walking to school have been turned down.

Many other local schools have a reduced speed of 20mph.

HGV vehicles are causing air pollution.

Parking issues around the school will increase with extra pupils and no parking facilities.

Cars park on double yellow lines obstructing those walking to school and local residents.

The pavements along Staunton Lane from the Horseworld site are very narrow in places, making them unsafe and impossible for buggies or wheelchair users.

There are no safe crossings from the Horseworld/Sleep Lane sites to the opposite side of the road, which will be required.

A copy of the Neighbourhood Plan (NP) Risk Assessment of the safe routes to school will be sent in with this response.

The aspiration from the NP is for a new larger school to be built in a more sustainable location.

Neighbouring Local Authorities:

North Somerset Council and Bristol City Council - no reason to oppose the expansion of the school to meet basic need in its (*B&NES*) local area and no objections.

Consultation Session Comments

Parents:

I would like to object against the proposal to increase the school intake. There is not sufficient information about the plans for us to feel that this would be in the best interests of the school or the children that currently go there.

The school is currently 'Requires Improvement' and should be able to focus its efforts on reaching at least 'good' for the children it supports before accepting more children.

At present, there isn't capacity, space, funding or resources available to accept more children and maintain a decent standard. I find it unlikely that this will change in time for a 2019 intake. Until there is enough teachers, funding or space (including play space) etc. to ensure that classes do not go above 30 for KS2, cause the implementation of mixed year groups, or negate the school's hard work to improve, increasing the school intake should not be considered by any responsible Local Authority with the children's best interest in mind.

Many of the families that have selected the school made a personal choice to send their children to a smaller school for their own reasons – of which you are now disregarding. If you build new houses and a new community, you should also ensure that you build the new infrastructure and amenities needed, such as doctors, school etc. ready to support the new families. Otherwise the community will be forced to encroach and negatively impact on the existing local communities and its families. I do not believe that putting a school under pressure so that it is unable to attain the expected standard is the correct approach. Ultimately what is right for all the families and the children should be the paramount consideration.

I would be grateful to receive acknowledgement of my correspondence/objection. Please also inform me of the process going forwards so that I (and others who feel the same as me) can be involved in the decisions that will affect the future of my child and their school friends.

I would also ask if you could pass on my request to the necessary department for the walk to school to be made safer for the children. It should be a restricted speed limit during school start and end times to 20mph. There is heavy traffic and large vehicles travelling at speed next to small pavements and small children. I would be grateful if this could be addressed quickly to try and prevent a serious accident.

I am concerned about the impact on traffic and congestion in the area. It is already very congested along Staunton Lane and the Wells Road. The school is on the busy A37. I walk to school with my children and it worries me when walking along this road in terms of safety, traffic speed etc. I understand that the new development is only half a mile away but this does not mean people will walk. The majority of parents work and are likely to drive to school and then onto work. Preparing a travel plan would not change this.

You suggest that the 45 pupils per year group would be spread across 11 classrooms. Therefore there are likely to be mixed year groups which I believe is not in the children's best interests in terms of developing their education. There will be children who struggle being in a class with those older/younger than them. Is there any evidence this can work? I understand that larger schools can lead to increased revenue e.g. Special Needs Co-ordinator etc., however I chose this school as my children benefit from being in a smaller school and would have had difficulties in a larger school. There are no other smaller schools in the area. Therefore you are potentially taking that choice away from parents. The school currently Requires Improvement. How can increasing the numbers of pupils help towards improving the quality of education?

I understand that the new development does not justify a new school being built. However other additional homes are planned to be built in the area according to the joint spatial plan. Would a new school not be considered with this?

We formally object to the above proposal with the following in support of our objection:

The school has a current Ofsted rating of 'Requires Improvement'

In January 2017 the school was given its second rating of 'Requires Improvement'. Whilst we acknowledge that the school is working extremely hard to raise standards, the quality of the teaching, learning and outcomes are still rated below standard, therefore we believe that expanding the school at this time will be detrimental to the education of the children, as this will no longer be their primary focus / aim.

The Governors of the school have communicated that the proposed increase of 105 pupils could be added anywhere across the school age range. Guidelines permitting, therefore Key Stage 2 class sizes will increase from 30 to 45. As school budgets, generally, are currently stretched, would the additional funding be available to recruit extra teachers, to cover the increased class sizes. For a school the size of Whitchurch this can only mean mixed year groups, mixed abilities, etc., which itself becomes a minefield with regards to implementation.

The school building is over 100 years old, therefore classrooms and corridors are very small and space is limited. Currently the school is able to host a full school assembly in the hall, for all of the 210 pupils, however would this be possible with the additional increase in numbers. This loss of pupil interaction would be a huge loss to the existing pupils.

The proposal states that an additional area of land, adjacent to the existing school, would be added to the school site. We presume this will be for the additional classrooms required to accommodate the additional pupil, as the current class room provision is fully utilised.

We note that the land either side of the school is already developed, in the form of retirement homes to the north, with the Community Centre adjacent to the southern boundary, therefore no extra space is available to increase the hard play space. Our children already inform us, that when the field is 'out of bounds', typically due to weather conditions, there is insufficient play area for the existing pupils.

We have very serious concerns, that logistically there is no alternative access to the adjacent land than through the existing school access from the A37.

Has any consideration been given to the construction process and how construction vehicles will access the site. It is very likely that the build be a traditional build, as there is such limited access that modular construction, such as modular cabins joined together will not be able to be delivered to the school, hence the build would take longer than the 6 week summer holidays, which introduces a significant safety risk to the pupils whilst they are at school.

Whitchurch Primary is situated on the main A37 Wells Road, one of the arterial access routes to Bristol. This road, at most times of the day, is very heavily congested and we believe that expanding the school will increase this. Traffic from the A37 currently queues in both directions, regularly queuing beyond the village in all directions from the signal controlled junction at Staunton Lane and A37.

Further, there is little scope for the introduction of mitigating measures on the approaches to the school, through highway capacity improvement works or demand management.

On numerous occasions, the school has requested that the Council reduce the speed limit of the road to 20mph for the safety of the pupils, however the Council has refused these, on the basis of the road being so busy that reducing the speed limit will introduce further congestion.

There are limited buses to the school, therefore additional car journeys are inevitable.

Whilst we acknowledge that the school is within walking distance from many parts of the village, the reality is that in today's car-reliant lifestyle, children will not walk to school, with parents driving much of the way and parking close to the school.

Under the current school policy, pupils are not permitted to cycle to school unless they are in Year 6, therefore deterring some the parents of some younger pupils from walking or cycling with their children.

The walking routes within the village, primarily from the south, are very narrow and potentially unsafe. This is further compounded by lack of quality street lighting and low numbers of safe crossing points.

In summary, the additional traffic will exacerbate existing congestion and parking problems in the village as well as increasing both air and noise pollution.

The Governors advise that additional land will be added to the school to facilitate the expansion. The land adjacent and beyond the north and south boundaries is currently developed, therefore the only area the school can feasibly expand into is to the east, on to land of the historical railway line.

This land is greenfield and includes established trees providing an excellent habitat for wildlife. Removal of this area would adversely affect the quality of the environment for wildlife such as bats, badgers, slow worms, etc., many of which are protected species. It is inevitable that children at play will make some noise. The proposal to increase the number

of pupils will therefore result in a direct increase in noise pollution to the neighbourhood - a mere three decibel increase is the equivalent of doubling the noise level for the human ear. A retirement home is located adjacent the northern school boundary we would question the added increase in noise pollution for residents and inconvenience this may cause. We trust that the above sets out the reasoning for our objection and will be taken in to consideration in any future decision on the potential expansion.

Class sizes worry me. 45 is too many in a class – even 35!

There are no road safety measures outside school. Bath and North East Somerset Council were working for 20mph speed limits outside schools on A37 but stopped at Pensford.

What about our school?

How to split classes – are children going to be overlooked in their class due to size regarding their learning?

Ofsted is already 'Requires Improvement' how is this going to improve?

Concerns re. traffic volume and speed – reduce speed limit to 20mph?

Consider conversion to academy – potential for new enthusiastic staff.

Shake up system – quality of teaching not satisfactory at present – how will this improve with more children and potentially no extra staff.

Can under-performing staff be moved on? Letting school down and children.

Is there enough outdoor space?

Main concerns are class sizes – how will this work? Has not worked in a number of other schools.

School is currently Requires Improvement, would expanding add to this issue – what will be done to improve?

Increased volume of traffic through the village. Already dangerous for pupils going to school. Narrow pavements, increased number of HGV vehicles. Parents drive because walking is not safe, plus come from outside Bath and North East Somerset.

Pollution levels are very high, effect on children in school.

Will the playground be decreased in size?

Please prepare a timeline, sequence of events.

Please provide opportunities to improve education through increased intake – example of best practice.

Please commit to keeping the school updated – Senior Leadership Team and Governors so we can exploit this situation to our benefit.

Please review any budget increase potential.

Please highlight opportunities to make this positive.

Worried about class size affecting children's education

Worried about traffic, parking and safety.

Pointless Drop-In – been here half an hour and not been able to speak with two Key Council representatives. Should organise a presentation with opportunity for questions.

Will there be extra funding for more books, computers, teachers, etc?

Concerned children will be overlooked if not Special Educational Needs.

What assurances can you give that no child will be placed in a class larger than we presently have?

What additional building will take place and will this be at the expense of the school playground?

What additional resources are you proposing? Will there be a larger school hall to cater for school lunches, extra library space, ICT, additional education support?

With the additional 15 pupils per year are you getting funding not only for teachers but also Learning Support Assistants, Teaching Assistants, School Meals Supervisory Assistants?

What assurance can you give that the school won't expand any further than 45 per year?

The school entrance and paths approaching the school are not wide enough to handle 100 additional parents and children.

Cycling to school is currently not an option, it is too dangerous with narrow paths and few railings.

The waiting space at the front isn't sufficient for additional people.

Parking is non-existent, the current agreement with the pub would not work for increased numbers.

My child is asthmatic with a dust mite allergy how would this be handled adjacent to a building site.

We have been told new pupils will be taken in 1 year at a time is this correct?

Our main concerns over the proposed expansion are around the fact that the school remains as Requires Improvement (RI).

The statutory guidance 'Making Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools' states that where possible only outstanding or good schools should be included in expansion plans. The expansion could put undue pressure on the school at a critical time when it tries to obtain a good Ofsted after a recent RI report (Feb 2017). The expansion could result in increased class sizes or mixed year groups putting increased pressure on teaching standards. Teaching standards were assessed as RI in the recent Ofsted. Again the government's guidance states that no expansion should be agreed where it is detrimental to the school's standards and most importantly negatively impact on the children's education.

The report states funding is available for the expansion (buildings etc). It seems to be conveniently silent on funding for teachers and Learning Support Assistants which if the right level of pupil intake was not received would not be sufficient enough to recruit new teaching staff and so will result in larger classes and/or mixed year groups. This is a major concern for parents and teachers and one which had not been addressed by the Local Authority.

The report rejects the idea of creating a new school due to lack of children to create full classes. This is the same point that will create undue pressure on teachers by increasing the class sizes and the proposal to change the school intake should be considered on the same ground revisiting options of another school's intake or a new school (bearing in mind new housing demand).

The report also seems to brush over many of the parents' concerns and objections. Finally the process followed in the consultation of the proposal appears to have been underhand and not follow best practice. The link to public notices were not working online and the plans were advertised in the Western Daily Press a paper that is not widely received in Bristol and one which we would not consider a local paper.

Another point of contention is the fact that the notification of expansion was provided to the school during half term holidays and the meeting was arranged during the school holidays. This restricts the number of parents who could partake in the full consultation period and ability to attend the meeting due to pre-arranged holidays with their children. This is against the government's own published guidance.

There seems to have been a failure from the Local Authority to interact with the public as per best practice guidance or provide the relevant information easily. This means many calls and emails had to be made extracting and researching the process bit by bit over what turned out to be a short period of time. The advice we were given was inaccurate and misleading at times. Details of the meeting and the process to attend and address the Cabinet was also not widely shared.

After the drop-in meeting I still feel strongly that there are concerns on putting pressure on an RI school and that we have been left in a situation where we are being told this is the only option to provide required school places without the children's education being the first concern. I am also keen to be kept involved in the process and decisions made.

Local Residents:

Car parking is essential.

The expansion should make proper arrangements for car parking when parents drop off their children. It is already a nightmare and will get worse and worse. Please listen.

Other Interested Parties:

As neighbouring organisation to the school we have for years suffered from parents using our car park. Parents continue to park although asked not to – causing disruption to events.

Safety of the children – the school is on an arterial road into Bristol.

Insufficient infrastructure to take increase in vehicles.

Why has land been purchased at the back of the school, on 16/3/17?

Lack of communication very disappointing.

We would like to be informed of parking arrangements if this goes ahead before planning applications.

No information given to us - a neighbouring organisation - about the proposal.

Several people were a bit surprised at the lack of plans etc. to look at.

Could we please contact all people who have attended to keep them informed of progress.