



Report of the Director of Children's Services

Executive Board

Date: 18 May 2011

Subject: Outcome of feasibility on providing girls-only education at a central location in Leeds

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the report)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the Executive Board with an update on the feasibility of providing single sex education for girls at a central location in the city as resolved at the 7 April 2010 Executive Board meeting.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 At its meeting in January 2010, the Executive Board approved a public consultation on a proposal to stop providing girls-only education in Leeds. The Executive Board approved this consultation alongside a separate consultation on a proposal to close Parklands Girls' High School and replace it with a coeducational academy.
- 2.2 The consultation on the proposal to stop providing girls-only education in Leeds ran from 7 January to 5 March 2010, during which time 8 public meetings were widely advertised and held across the City. The report summarising the consultation was considered at the 7 April 2010 Executive Board meeting, and recommended that the Executive Board agree to stop providing girls-only secondary education at Parklands Girls' High School in Leeds, and receive a further report on the feasibility of making single sex education available for girls in a more central location

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 The local authority has a duty to promote choice and diversity, as well as ensuring the sufficiency of all educational provision to make sure that it is meeting the needs of children and young people. The establishing of girls-only provision would require the local authority to identify, and prioritise, an appropriate site for the purpose. There are limited resources available and the increasing birth rate is currently affecting entry into primary schools most significantly.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Executive Board is asked to agree that:

- The Local Authority does not move to establish girls-only education in Leeds at this time
- The Local Authority continues to undertake a choice and diversity survey each year during its admissions process to inform its statutory duty.
- The Local Authority continues to take account of parental responses around choice and diversity, and effectively integrates emerging academies and free schools into strategic planning.



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3 Main Issues

- 3.1 Local Authorities have a duty to promote choice and diversity, as well as ensuring the

sufficiency of places for children and young people. Since the Education and Inspections Act 2006 local authorities have been the commissioners of school places, rather than the providers. Where a local authority identifies a need for a particular type of provision it is required to bring forward a consultation and competition in order to establish any new provision. Currently the local authority can choose to bid in that competition if it wishes to, in order to establish a community school. Alternatively, where it does not bid, the local authority is able to make a decision on its preferred bidder.

- 3.2 Whilst this was the position at the time the decision was made to stop providing girls only secondary education, and is currently the position, the Education Bill proposes to change this. It is likely that the Education Bill will have been enacted before such consultation and competition could take place, and as such current decisions should be made in light of the emerging legislation.
- 3.3 The Education Bill, if enacted in its current form, will require a local authority to first seek an academy proposer for any new provision, and only progress to a competition in the event of no academy proposer being forthcoming. The local authority will not be able to submit a bid at the competition stage and will only be able to open a new community school if there is no suitable alternative interested party.
- 3.4 The Academies Act 2010 delivers the new government's aims to provide a fast-track mechanism for schools to achieve academy status. Academies are publicly funded, all-ability independent schools, which are not maintained by the local authority. The Secretary of State has invited all schools to register their interest if they wish to become an academy. The Academies Act underpins the government's invitation for bids from groups who wished to put forward proposals to open 'Free schools'. Free schools are non-profit making, state-funded schools set up in response to local demand from communities.
- 3.5 Proposers who wish to open a Free School for September 2012 must apply between 16 May 2011 and 1 June 2011. This is a much faster process than local authorities must go through in order to open new provision. The advantage of the application window is that local authorities should be able to gain a clearer picture of Free school proposals that are likely to proceed, in order to inform the strategic planning of school places.
- 3.6 It is within this context of current and emerging legislation that this reports presents further information on the feasibility of providing girls only education in a more central location.
- 3.7 The original consultation did not expose any new or significant demand for girls-only education in Leeds other than that already at Parklands Girls School. Despite the scale of the consultation, the overall attendance at public meetings was low. At five of the meetings, there were no members of the public present, which suggested a lack of interest in the subject of girls-only education in those parts of the city. Parents across the city who did participate in the consultation emphasised the importance of high quality provision as the main factor influencing their decision when expressing a school preference for their children.
- 3.8 The consultation did expose some views that there should be some choice in the local area for those parents and carers who wish to express a preference for girls-only provision. In order to gain to understand this further a Choice and Diversity survey was hosted on the admissions area of the website, during the recent admissions application period, to seek views from a much wider range of parents on a number of issues. One question specifically asked parents if they would apply for a single sex school if one was available. Although over 10,000 parents applied online during this time, and many more visited the website, only 181 chose to complete the survey. Of these 25 answered yes to wishing to apply for a single sex school if one were available. There were no additional comments submitted by any parents on the subject.
- 3.9 Recent applications for secondary school show only one parent requesting a girl's only maintained school. All parents at Parklands were contacted, in November 2010, about its

closure and asked to indicate if they wished us to support them to transfer to an alternative all girls' school. Only one family has indicated that they wish to find an all girls' school for their two daughters. There were a number of other parents who expressed an interest in changing school, but all were seeking to move to an alternative coeducational school. This was reinforcing a point, made clearly during the original consultation, that the quality of education was the most important factor for the majority of parents.

- 3.10 A comprehensive site search has been undertaken to identify possible locations, throughout the city, as potential school sites. This work has also been necessary in light of the rapidly increasing birth rate and demand for Reception places. There are a limited number of suitable sites available for the purpose, and none that have been identified as suitable for girls' only secondary provision in a central location.
- 3.11 The local authority has a duty to balance its limited resources to best meet the needs of the whole City. The need to provide additional primary places to accommodate the higher level of births in the City has not yet begun to impact on the number of young people entering our secondary schools. The larger cohorts start to enter secondary schools in two to three years time, and will bring about a need for additional places in due course. At present there are more than sufficient places in our secondary schools.

4 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

- 4.1 The local authority's role in education is that of commissioner of school places rather than provider. Where the local authority seeks to establish new provision it must, at present, look to a competition, although it is possible that the Education Bill will be enacted before any such competition could take place, and the first consideration would be for an academy.

5 Legal And Resource Implications

- 5.1 The local authority has a duty to promote choice and diversity, as well as ensuring the sufficiency of all educational provision to make sure that it is meeting the needs of children and young people. The establishing of girls-only provision would require the local authority to identify, and prioritise, an appropriate site for the purpose. There are limited resources available and the increasing birth rate is currently affecting entry into primary schools most significantly.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 The local authority has a duty to ensure there are sufficient places available. To that end resources have been prioritised towards meeting the increased demand for primary school places. There is no significant pressure for secondary school places at present. The local authority also has a duty to promote choice and diversity. To emphasise its role as the commissioner of places there is emerging legislation that will make the local authority the provider of last resort when establishing new provision.
- 6.2 There is evidence of some interest from parents in girls only provision, but significant emphasis from parents that a good quality of education is the most important factor to them when choosing a school. The launching of the Choice and Diversity survey this year, linked to the Admission round when over 10,000 parents are using the website, enables us to capture a wide range of views to help us to better inform planning.
- 6.3 The application 'window' for Free School proposers will give the local authority an opportunity to incorporate such demand led provision to be integral to its strategic planning. Central government anticipate that successful bidders will have been notified by August if they have been successful. This route is most suited to smaller scale provision that is particularly seeking to fulfil perceived gaps in terms of choice and diversity, rather than sufficiency.

7 Recommendations

7.1 Executive Board is asked to agree that:

- The Local Authority does not move to establish girls-only education in Leeds at this time
- The Local Authority continues to undertake a choice and diversity survey each year during its admissions process to inform its statutory duty.
- The Local Authority continues to take account of parental responses around choice and diversity, and effectively integrates emerging academies and free schools into strategic planning.

Background Documents

Executive Board January 2009 – The National Challenge and structural change to secondary provision in Leeds progress report.

Executive Board March 2009 – The National Challenge and structural change to secondary provision in Leeds.

Executive Board October 2009 – The National Challenge and structural change to secondary provision in Leeds.

Executive Board January 2010 – The future of Primrose, City of Leeds, and Parklands Girls' High Schools, and of girls-only secondary education in Leeds.

Executive Board April 2010 – Outcome of consultation on closure of Parklands

Executive Board April 2010 – Outcome of consultation on the provision of girls-only education in Leeds.