



Children and Families Scrutiny Board

Statement to Executive Board

September 2021

Proposal to permanently increase learning places at St Edward's Catholic Primary School from September 2022.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 As part of Leeds City Council's School Organisation Proposals and Objections Procedure, it was brought to the attention of the Children and Families Scrutiny Board that 26 representations, including 17 formal objections, had been received during the Statutory Notice period for the proposal to expand St Edward's Catholic Primary School to permanently increase the number of places offered at the school in Reception from 20 to 30 places from September 2022.
- 1.2 The Scrutiny Board agreed to hold a meeting on 8th September 2021 to consider the proposal, including the formal objections, in more detail. The Director of Children and Families submitted a report to the Scrutiny Board which summarised the representations received during the statutory notice period, as well as setting out the directorate's response to the issues raised.
- 1.3 The Director of Children and Families and the Executive Member for Economy, Culture and Education attended the Scrutiny Board's meeting and were accompanied by other senior officers within the Children and Families Directorate. The Head Teacher of St Edward's Catholic Primary School was also in attendance specifically to address any direct questions from Board Members.
- 1.4 As a public meeting, all of the information presented to the Scrutiny Board is accessible via the Council's website, including access to the webcast recording of the meeting¹.
- 1.5 The Executive Board is expected to make a final decision on the proposal during its meeting on 22nd September 2021². The timeliness of the Scrutiny Board's meeting allowed for the Board to consider the proposal and submit comments and recommendations to the Executive Board prior to a final decision being made.
- 1.6 This Statement summarises the main issues considered by the Children and Families Scrutiny Board, including the Board's observations, conclusion and recommendations for the Executive Board's consideration.

¹ C&F Scrutiny Board meeting webpage <https://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1089&MId=11687>

² Executive Board meeting webpage <https://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=102&MId=11358>



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2. Main issues

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Board acknowledged that the areas of concern raised during the statutory notice phase were largely the same as those raised during the initial consultation phase in respect of traffic issues, faith-based admissions, impact on climate and carbon emissions and whether there is genuinely a need for additional places in the Boston Spa area. However, it was noted that additional concerns had also been raised in relation to how the representations made during the initial consultation phase had been reported to the Executive Board during its meeting on 23rd June 2021.
- 2.2 In consideration of the proposal, the Scrutiny Board addressed these main issues/areas of concern in more detail. A summary of the Board's observations is set out below.

Reporting of the consultation findings

- 2.3 The Scrutiny Board acknowledged that two respondents had raised concerns that the report of the Director of Children and Families that was provided to the Executive Board in June had not accurately summarised views raised during the initial consultation phase. The report submitted to the Scrutiny Board by the Director of Children and Families therefore included the consultation responses in full to enable Scrutiny Board members to consider the accuracy of the summarised version that was reported to Executive Board. The Director's report to the Scrutiny Board also included the consultation responses, in full, from the statutory notice phase.
- 2.4 While Board Members agreed that the Director's report to the Executive Board had provided an accurate summary of the key points made and the concerns raised at that time, they recognised the added value of Executive Board Members also having access to the consultation responses in full as part of the decision-making process moving forward.
- 2.5 Accepting that a summarised version may still be appropriate as part of the Director's formal reporting approach to the Executive Board, the Scrutiny Board recommended that Executive Board Members receive an electronic version of all the consultation responses received, in full, during the initial and statutory notice consultation phases to accompany the formal reports of the Director of Children and Families in relation to a school organisation proposal.

The case for additional primary school provision in the Boston Spa area

- 2.6 The Scrutiny Board was advised by the Director of Children and Families that there is an identified need for additional primary school provision in the Boston Spa area due to changes in the birth rate, increases in the numbers of children of primary school age and several new housing developments.



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- 2.7 In response to the growing demand for Reception places in recent years, the Scrutiny Board noted that some schools in the Boston Spa area have already admitted over their PANs, including St Edward's Catholic Primary School which had offered an additional 10 places in Reception in 2020.
- 2.8 There are five schools in the Boston Spa planning area and it was reported to the Scrutiny Board that Bramham Primary School has already been expanded from 20 to 30 places, Primrose Lane Primary School already has a PAN of 30 and cannot be expanded further due to site constraints, and Lady Elizabeth Hastings C of E Primary School is also on a constrained site that could not support expansion.
- 2.9 The two other remaining schools include St Mary's C of E Primary (voluntary controlled) and St Edward's Catholic Primary (voluntary aided), both of which have a PAN of 20 with the potential to expand to 30 on these sites. While it was reported that, at present, an additional 10 places would be sufficient to meet anticipated demand, the Board was advised that it is possible that both schools would need to be expanded to 30 in future years dependent upon general growth and further housing coming forward in the area.
- 2.10 Reflecting on issues that were primarily raised during the initial consultation phase, the Scrutiny Board sought further clarity as to why preference had been given to expand St Edward's Primary School at this stage.
- 2.11 The Scrutiny Board was informed that all schools and governing bodies in the local area have been involved in conversations regarding the selection process for the last five years and that the Council continues to work closely with each school.
- 2.12 In order to expand St Edward's Primary School from 20 places to 30 places, the Scrutiny Board was informed that one additional teaching space would be required, along with a review of the existing number of toilets and ancillary accommodation. Linked to this, it was highlighted that St Edward's Primary School has already undergone recent changes to add a sixth classroom and additional car parking facilities and that planning permission was also still in place to add a 7th classroom if required. As such, the proposal to expand St Edward's Primary School at this stage would be a simpler and more affordable expansion scheme to undertake if proved feasible and approval to expand is given.
- 2.13 Having been rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted at its most recent inspection, it was also highlighted that St Edward's Primary School is popular and consistently over-subscribed. Linked to this, the Scrutiny Board was advised that although there would be an increase in the admission limit of 10 places per year group for Reception to year 6, St Edward's Primary School already has more than 20 pupils on roll in most year groups. The overall number of children currently on roll is 169. Increasing the Admission number to 30 would eventually see this rise to 210 pupils, a net gain of 41 pupils rather than 70.



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- 2.14 The Scrutiny Board sought assurance that the proposal would not negatively impact other local schools and would help meet the current and future increase in demand, as well as ensure that local families are able to access local places and reduce journey times to and from school. The Scrutiny Board was advised that a decision not to proceed with the expansion of St Edward's Primary School could result in insufficient school places being available to meet local demand and the Local Authority's ability to meet its statutory duty for sufficiency of school places in the short term may be at risk.

Implications of the faith-based admissions criteria

- 2.15 The Scrutiny Board had sought further clarification surrounding the Admissions criteria of St Edward's Primary School in light of concerns raised by respondents about the proposed extra places potentially bringing in more children from outside the area as Catholic schools have larger catchment areas than community schools.
- 2.16 In response to the concerns raised, the Scrutiny Board was advised that although St Edward's Primary School prioritises places based on faith criteria, it is a school that is popular with both Catholic and non-Catholic families.
- 2.17 Having offered an additional 10 places in Reception in 2020 (a total of 30 places), it was highlighted that 18 of these places were offered to Catholic families based on faith criteria and 12 places were offered to non-Catholic families based on distance to school. The Scrutiny Board learned that there are 22 children due to start Reception in September 2021, 18 of which were allocated a place on faith criteria and 4 were allocated places on non-faith criteria. The Scrutiny Board was also advised that the majority of pupils attending St Edward's Primary School live within the Boston Spa area and as such, the expectation is for the proposed additional permanent places to continue to serve a local need.

Traffic and parking concerns

- 2.18 The Chair of the Scrutiny Board explained that as part of the approach agreed by the Children and Families Scrutiny Board back in 2019, it had been acknowledged that any formal objections relating to planning or highways issues would not normally need additional scrutiny given that such matters would be addressed more appropriately through the Council's highways and planning process should the Executive Board give its approval for a proposal to progress to the next stage of the process.
- 2.19 However, given that a large volume of the concerns raised during the Statutory Notice consultation phase related to traffic and parking issues on local roads (as detailed within the agenda report), the Scrutiny Board considered it appropriate to seek further clarity on how such issues and concerns are to be addressed as part of the overall process.



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- 2.20 Firstly, it was made clear that the Executive Board's decision-making role is to determine whether a school organisation proposal should be given approval in principle based on need and therefore progress to the next stage of the process.
- 2.21 In relation to St Edward's Primary School, the Scrutiny Board was assured that if the proposed expansion were to progress, then a full traffic assessment and Transport Statement would be commissioned. This next stage of the process would set out to understand the issues raised by residents and parents and to identify any mitigation measures that might be introduced to the area in order to address or reduce the traffic impact brought by the school.
- 2.22 The Scrutiny Board acknowledged the specific concerns raised by respondents in relation to existing issues with congestion and parking on Westwood Way that are clearly likely to be exacerbated by expanding the permanent number of places at St Edward's Primary School. The Scrutiny Board therefore emphasised the need for the Council to produce a comprehensive travel, transport and highways plan to address the cumulative impact of such issues on Westwood Way should the proposed expansion to St Edward's Catholic Primary School go ahead.
- 2.23 The Scrutiny Board was informed that although a decision has not yet been made as to whether this proposal will progress, the Council has already committed to undertaking a highways assessment as part of the design development process - should the Executive Board approve the expansion - to establish how the build scheme would be best delivered.
- 2.24 In recognition that any proposed school expansion scheme is likely to lead to residents raising highways and planning related issues and concerns, the Scrutiny Board discussed the potential merits of undertaking an assessment of highways and planning issues before a decision is taken by the Executive Board on a proposed school expansion scheme. However, it was acknowledged that by undertaking such assessments earlier in the process, this would result in the Council incurring significant upfront costs prior to the Executive Board determining whether or not such a scheme should be given approval in principle based on need. The Scrutiny Board was also advised that in committing to undertake such assessments either prior or during the initial and statutory notice consultation phases, local residents may feel that the decision has already been pre-determined by the Council.
- 2.25 The Scrutiny Board was informed that while it is communicated to the public that issues surrounding highways and planning matters would be subject to a separate consultation and approval process, people are still encouraged to share such views during the initial consultation and information gathering stage of the process to help inform the next steps.
- 2.26 Linked to this, the Scrutiny Board felt that, if legally permissible, any representations made during the initial and Statutory Notice consultation phases should automatically be submitted as part of the next stage of the highways and planning process to avoid



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respondents having to relay their issues and concerns again to the Council.

- 2.27 In relation to the St Edward's Primary School proposal, the Scrutiny Board was informed that should the proposal be progressed to the next stage, then the Council's 'TravelWise team' would also support the school to identify measures that could be incorporated into their travel plan to ensure safe routes to and from school and promote sustainable methods of transport and active travel such as walking, cycling and scooting. Linked to this, it was noted that local residents had also worked with the Council and the school to look at traffic mitigation measures too.
- 2.28 It was noted that St Edward's Primary School's close proximity to residential areas, which have experienced population growth, means that walking to school would already be a viable option. Linked to this, the Scrutiny Board acknowledged that the school already promotes walking, cycling and scooting to school and runs a "Walk on Wednesdays" initiative, with the children who take part each half-term being entered into a prize draw for a £5 reward voucher.
- 2.29 It was reported that the majority of children who attend St Edwards Primary School live within Boston Spa and currently 54 percent of pupils walk or cycle to school. The Head Teacher of St Edward's Primary School also highlighted that the school is hoping to increase this number by promoting use of the nearby Churchfields car park for those families that do travel by car.

Climate emergency considerations

- 2.30 The Scrutiny Board discussed the concerns raised by some respondents that the proposal to expand St Edward's Primary School would present challenges to meeting council priorities around the climate emergency and reducing carbon emissions. In particular, questions had been raised in terms of what consideration had been given to the sustainability of construction materials that would be used if the expansion went ahead.
- 2.31 Linked to its discussion around traffic concerns, the Scrutiny Board acknowledged that the Council continues to encourage sustainable travel and that an updated School Travel Plan would be commissioned in order to encourage travel by non-car modes by parents/pupils and staff.
- 2.32 The Scrutiny Board also sought assurance that any build scheme would explore the potential use of renewable energy and energy saving technologies, with the aim of increasing sustainability and minimising energy consumption. The Scrutiny Board was advised that full consideration would be given to the use of sustainable materials as part of the detailed design discussion to ensure they were in line with the Council's planning policies.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 Having addressed the main issues/areas of concern raised during the statutory notice phase, as reflected above, the Children and Families Scrutiny Board concluded that it did not wish to raise any objection in relation to the proposal to expand St Edward's Catholic Primary School to permanently increase the number of places offered at the school in Reception from 20 to 30 places from September 2022.
- 3.2 However, reflecting on the main issues raised during its meeting, a number of recommendations have been identified by the Scrutiny Board which are set out below for the attention of the Executive Board.

Recommendations:

Sharing all consultation responses, in full, with Executive Board Members.	When considering a school organisation proposal, Executive Board Members should receive an electronic version of all the consultation responses received, in full, during the initial and statutory notice consultation phases to accompany the formal reports of the Director of Children and Families.
Sharing consultation data surrounding highways and planning related matters.	If legally permissible, any representations relating to highways and planning matters made during the initial and Statutory Notice consultation phases should automatically be shared and submitted as part of the next stage of the highways and planning process to avoid respondents having to relay their issues and concerns again to the Council.
Ensuring that a comprehensive travel, transport and highways plan is produced to address the cumulative impact of issues specifically identified on Westwood Way linked to the proposed expansion of St Edward's Catholic Primary School.	The Executive Board should give a clear instruction for the Council to produce a comprehensive travel, transport and highways plan to address the cumulative impact of issues specifically identified on Westwood Way which are clearly likely to be exacerbated if the proposed expansion to St Edward's Catholic Primary School goes ahead.
Meeting the Council's Climate Emergency commitment.	The Executive Board should ensure that all school organisation proposals take account of required mitigations to address any climate emergency implications.