



REPORT TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF EDUCATION LEEDS

EXECUTIVE BOARD: 14 June 2006

SUBJECT: Framework for Managing Primary School Places

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1** This report presents the Executive Board with a policy document for the planning of primary school places that replaces the existing Strategy for School Reorganisations that was approved by the Executive Board of the City Council in early 2005. It establishes a framework for action that reflects the current demographic context and recent government policy shifts.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The structure of primary provision, in particular primary school size, is an important issue for many authorities because of the declining birth rate and the impacts of falling rolls. In Leeds we have seen a steady year on year decline in births since a peak the early 1990s and this has been reflected in a declining primary population. Since 2001 there have been an annual increase of 200-300 births and based on forecasts of births provided by the Office for National Statistics, the primary population is expected to stabilise by 2010.

- 2.2** In 2001/02 there were nearly 10,000 surplus places in Primary School in Leeds, 14.5% of the total number of places available. The total primary population has been falling at around 1000 per year and the number of surplus places would by now have been even higher had it not been for targeted action. A number of strategies have been used to reduce surplus and address the issues associated with small primary schools, including formal reorganisations of provision, and have reduced the number of surplus places to around 6,700 (January 2006).

3. MAIN ISSUES

- 3.1** The attached policy provides the strategic context within which primary school places are managed. The purpose of the policy document is to:

- provide a consistent framework for the structure of primary provision across the city

- discuss the appropriateness of 'small schools' in an urban setting and propose a preferred size model;
- describe the rationale for taking action in respect of falling pupil numbers
- set out the criteria that would lead to a review of primary school provision in a given area.
- ensure that all stakeholders know their roles and responsibilities

3.2 The policy links together key policy strands and is a clear articulation of the City Council's Closing the Gap priorities and the 5 Outcomes specified by the 'Every Child Matters' agenda. Proposed changes in the Education and Inspection Bill currently before Parliament are acknowledged.

3.3 The policy provides an assessment of the current pattern of provision. There are 225 primary schools in Leeds (January 2006), which range in size from 63 to 634 pupils. 111 of these schools have fewer than 210 pupils on roll, with 77 having fewer than 190 pupils which is the threshold that triggers small school protection funding.

3.4 The policy introduces a two form of entry school as Education Leeds favoured model for the benefits, opportunities and economies of scale it can provide. This is not intended to under-value the quality of provision of schools below this size.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 The key objective of the management of primary school places is to ensure that all primary schools are successful, thriving and sustainable schools that offer a range of services to their communities and provide for the efficient and effective use of available resources.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Executive Board is asked to approve:

- a) the attached policy document on the Planning of Primary School Places and
- b) the framework for taking appropriate targeted action across the city.

Agenda Item:

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REPORT TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF EDUCATION LEEDS

EXECUTIVE BOARD: 14 June 2006

SUBJECT: Framework for Managing Primary School Places

Electoral wards Affected: ALL

Specific Implications For:

Ethnic Minorities

Women

Disabled People

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call-in

Not Eligible for Call-in

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report presents the Executive Board with a policy document for managing primary school places. This policy replaces the existing Strategy for School Reorganisations that was approved by the Executive Board of the City Council in early 2005. In so doing it establishes a framework for action that reflects the current demographic context, what we have learned from the changes we have managed over the last four years and recent government policy changes.

2.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 All Local Authorities have a statutory responsibility to ensure that schools in their area are sufficient in number, character and resources to provide a high standard of education suitable for pupils of different ages, abilities and special education needs. They have a duty to promote the best provision not only for those children currently in a school, but also for future generations of children.

2.2 In 2001/02 there were nearly 10,000 surplus places in Primary School in Leeds, 14.5% of the total number of places available. A number of strategies have been effective in reducing the number of surplus places, including formal reorganisations of provision. Based on agreed proposal as at the end of January 2006, 38 primary schools will have been either closed or amalgamated by September 2006 as a result

of reviews of primary provision to reduce surplus places and consolidate primary provision in 20 primary planning areas. Other strategies used to manage surplus include supporting schools to implement alternative uses of accommodation. By the summer of 2005 the number of surplus places had fallen to around 7,500 or 12%. However, the number of surplus places will continue to rise as the number of pupils in primary schools continues to fall.

- 2.3 The structure of primary provision, in particular primary school size, is an important issue for many authorities because of the declining birth rate and the impact of falling rolls. In Leeds we have seen a steady year on year decline in births since a peak at 10,000 in the early 1990s, to a low of around 7,500 in 2001. Since then we have seen annual increase of 200-300 births. This pattern of decline has been reflected in admissions into primary schools.
- 2.4 In 1996 the primary population peaked at 63,118 children. By January 2006 there were 7,441 pupils in reception classes, nearly 2000 fewer than in 1995, and a primary sector total of 55,010. The total number of pupils in primary schools will continue to fall for as long as the number of pupils entering reception is lower than the number of children progressing from Year 6 to Year 7. Projections, based on forecasts of births provided by the Office for National Statistics, suggest that the primary population will stabilise at about 54,000 in 2010.

3.0 MAIN ISSUES

- 3.1 The attached policy provides the strategic context within which primary school places are managed. The purpose of the policy document is to:
- provide a consistent framework for the structure of primary provision across the city
 - discuss the appropriateness of 'small schools' in an urban setting and propose a preferred size model;
 - describe the rationale for taking action in respect of falling pupil numbers
 - set out the criteria that would lead to a review of primary school provision in a given area.
 - ensure that all stakeholders know their roles and responsibilities

The policy links together key policy strands and is a clear articulation of the City Council's Closing the Gap priorities and the 5 Outcomes specified by the 'Every Child Matters' agenda.

- 3.2 The policy provides an assessment of the current pattern of provision. There are 225 primary schools in Leeds (September 2005), which range in size from 63 to 634 pupils. 111 of these schools have fewer than 210 pupils on roll, with 77 having fewer than 190 pupils, the threshold that triggers small school protection funding.
- 3.3 Consideration is given to the size of schools in relation to a range of aspects, including funding, diversity and choice and attainment, and to the concept of through primary schools. The policy introduces a two form of entry school as Education Leeds favoured model for the benefits, opportunities and economies of scale it can provide. This is proposed as a baseline for developing options when reviewing school provision and is not intended to under-value the quality of provision of schools below this size.
- 3.4 The policy makes reference to alternative models of provision in the form of

federations and collaborations and to the opportunities presented by extended schools. It notes, however, that neither are a panacea to falling school rolls and the difficulties that small schools face.

3.5 Attached to the policy is a framework for reviewing primary provision and the process to be followed. The criterion for selecting an area for consideration are:

- there is at least one school with 25% or more surplus places
- there are low intakes into primary schools in an area and demographic projections do not support an increase in the number of pupils.
- There are one or more small schools defined as having fewer than 190 pupils in an area and concerns exist about their long-term viability
- A school is in Special Measures or there are concerns over a school's ability to deliver a full primary curriculum
- The Asset Management Plan indicates serious issues in respect of school buildings
- Pupil number projections suggest insufficient places to meet demand

4.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL POLICY AND GOVERNANCE

4.1 Planning Primary School places is relevant to a number of key priorities identified in the Education Development Plan, the Asset Management Plan and the Corporate Plan, in terms of managing the supply and demand of school places and school improvement. It is also relevant to the Closing the Gap agenda, with the planning of school places taking consideration of wider socio-economic factors and regeneration.

4.2 Policies of this type were previously set out in the School Organisation Plan, which is no longer a statutory document. School Place Planning will be a component of the Children and Young People's Plan, outlining how planning the use of school buildings will meet the Every Child Matter's agenda. This policy document provides the detail that will supplement the Children and Young People's Plan.

5.0 LEGAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The removal of surplus places often involves capital costs in the context of adjustments to buildings and arrangements to relocate pupils affected. In addition to this, to achieve the objective of securing sustainable, value for money schools, that operate in inspiring environments every attempt is made through primary review schemes to invest in the education estate. For this reason, Education Leeds will seek to have first call on the capital receipt for any school site declared surplus to facilitate improvements in the quality of remaining school accommodation.

5.2 This report and the attached policy provide information on how Education Leeds fulfils the LEA's statutory responsibility to ensure that schools in their area are sufficient in number, character and resources to provide a high standard of education suitable for pupils of different ages, abilities and special education needs.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

This new policy outlines how the strategic planning of school places will respond to recent government policy drivers and link policy strands within the Every Child Matters umbrella. Any reviews of provision will include engagement with several service areas. The key objective of the management of primary school places is to ensure that all primary schools are successful, thriving and sustainable schools that offer a range of services to their communities and provide an efficient and effective use of available resources.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Executive Board is asked to approve:

- a) the attached policy document on the Planning of Primary School Places and
- b) the framework for taking appropriate targeted action across the city.