

SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLAN PRINCIPLES 2008

January 2008

INTRODUCTION

For many years each local authority has been required to publish a school organisation plan setting out the approach to planning school places. Whilst there is no longer a statutory requirement to do so, the Council believes that such a plan is essential to manage the supply of school places at a time when rolls are falling in some areas whilst ambitious new housing developments are proposed for others.

We are proposing a new approach to developing a plan. Firstly, we believe that it is important to establish a set of planning principles which will be used to direct decision making. The principles should be clear and allow all those with an interest in place planning to understand how decisions will be made.

Once the principles are established, we intend to produce a plan which sets out the agreed principles, provides detailed analysis of current forecasts of place planning requirements and establishes a plan for implementation.

Where application of the principles results in a proposal being made about an individual school, full consultation will take place before a final decision is taken.

AIMS

The overarching aims of the Council's school organisation arrangements are to promote the five outcomes set out in the Government report 'Every Child Matters' and in particular to drive up standards. To this end:

- Popular and successful schools will expand wherever possible,
- Published admission numbers will be set in multiples of 30 wherever practicable to support schools in curriculum planning. Legislation prevents classes for 5 – 7 year olds and replicating this structure throughout the school will assist in class organisation,
- The future of schools with consistently low standards will be reviewed,
- The future of schools that are or at serious risk of becoming unviable will be reviewed,
- The number of transition points will be reduced wherever possible within the phases of primary and secondary education. In the primary phase this means creating schools for pupils aged 3 – 11 and removing transitions for pupils midway through the foundation stage and between separate provisions for Key Stages 1 and 2. In the secondary phase this means all schools offering provision for students aged 11 to 19, within a consortium.

In the secondary education sector, the Council is committed to achieving these through a selective system.

PRIMARY SCHOOL PHASE

To review the future of schools with low standards

The Council is required, by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), to consider the future of any school that has been judged as unsatisfactory by the local authority (LA) or OfSTED. Its responsibilities have changed as a result of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The outcome of such a review may conclude that there is a robust plan of action in place to secure improvement. Alternatively, it could conclude that a more radical approach is needed, such as federation with another local school or that the school places are not required in the area and the school should be closed. These reviews will be on-going and take place whenever a school is judged to be causing concern. The LA can determine that a school is a cause for concern. Such a decision is made where test results are consistently below floor targets (65% of pupils achieving level 4 in English and Maths) or where a school has consistently poor value added scores. Given that the cohort size in some schools is small, an analysis of a three year trend will be used.

Rationale – Medway’s priority is focused on outcomes for pupils. If the only option for securing appropriate outcomes is to take radical action then that course will be pursued.

All Infant and Junior schools should be amalgamated over time

Current policy is to look at amalgamation on the resignation of one of the Headteachers. Suggested new policy is to expect to amalgamate on the resignation of one of the serving Headteachers unless there are exceptional reasons not to do so. In preparation for this, all Infant and Junior schools will be asked to develop an amalgamation plan to be implemented when one of the Headteachers resigns.

Rationale – Amalgamation reduces the number of transition points for children and allows for a more strategic use of accommodation across buildings to help meet other strategic priorities e.g. foundation stage units. It also improves value for money by recycling resources that were used to fund duplicate staffing arrangements (i.e. 2 Headteachers and senior management teams) to increase spend directly on pupils.

To review the future of schools that are at risk of becoming unviable

If a school hits certain viability triggers then a review will take place. The triggers will be when a primary school roll approaches 100 pupils and is falling, or where it is admitting around half a form of entry (15 pupils) at point of entry for the previous two years. This approach is not appropriate for designated rural schools where rolls can expect to be small and no other school is available to that community.

Rationale - If a school becomes too small, there are serious risks that the curriculum offer cannot be met. It also improves value for money as more resources are recycled to other Medway schools.

To enable popular and successful schools to expand

Schools that are regularly oversubscribed and can expand to accommodate more pupils will be able to do so, provided that sufficient resources and space are available. However, the optimum size for a primary school is considered to be either two or three forms of entry (60 – 90 pupils admitted each year).

Rationale – Enabling more parents to be offered the school of their choice supports the statutory duty to comply with parental preferences and offers a better service to Medway residents.

SECONDARY SCHOOL PHASE

The overarching principles for the secondary school phase will support a network of high achieving schools within a selective system. Proposals will:

Address issues of low standards

By reviewing schools judged by the LA and OfSTED to be unsatisfactory, where performance is below floor target for two years (30% of students achieving 5+ GCSEs at grades A*– C) or where performance is below national expectation in terms of floor targets of contextual value added for two years.

The new statutory guidance on schools causing concern states that LAs are required to assess the scope for a school to be closed if judged by OfSTED to require special measures or significant improvement. The Education and Inspections Act also places a new statutory duty on LAs to promote high standards when exercising its functions.

Address viability issues

By reviewing schools that are at risk of admitting below four forms of entry (120 students each year). Once a school admits below four forms of entry, its ability to deliver an effective curriculum is compromised, particularly if there is a continued downward trend.

Extend co-educational places when new schools are established

Whilst there are undoubtedly sections of the community that prefer single sex education, other sectors of the community value co-educational provision. However, when establishing new schools, co-educational education is more cost effective as only one institution needs to be provided rather than two. Any new provision will therefore be co-educational.

Within Medway's selective system, enable all secondary schools, including special schools, to achieve specialist status to create a network of complementary specialist schools across Medway

Many schools already have achieved specialist status. Other schools, including any new schools will be able to enhance their own identity by becoming a specialist school. Schools where performance is below the Government floor target are unable to achieve specialist status.

Delivery of vocational education through consortium working

The Medway consortium arrangements are well established and any change in provision will support this arrangement. Delivery of the diplomas is key to the strategy for improved vocational achievement across Medway.

Promote learning and work based learning to the age of 19

Reducing the number of young people not in education, employment or training and increasing the number of young people entering higher education are key targets in the Medway Children and Young People's Plan, and part of the Local Area Agreement.

Respond to parental preference

The Education and Inspections Act 2006 places a new duty on LAs to exercise their functions with "a view to increasing parental choice". The implication is that popular and successful schools will be expanded.

Ensure a reasonable geographical spread of schools

Whilst parents have the right to express a preference for any schools, all young people should be able to access a good local school.