

Planning Primary School Places in the Muswell Hill Area



Haringey Council

Note of Public Consultation Meeting at 6.00pm on 3 February 2015 held at Alexandra Park Secondary School

PRESENT

Cllr Ann Waters - Cabinet Member for Children and Families
Jenny Duxbury - Head of Education Services
Anji Phillips - Interim Director of School Standards
John Chilton - Clerk

25 members of the public (not all present at the start of the meeting)

Purpose of meeting

To encourage debate and seek a wide range of views and suggestions from residents and schools (parents/carers, staff and governors) on how to increase the number of primary school places to meet the anticipated increase in demand for places up to September 2014.

Welcome

Chairing the meeting, Cllr Ann Waters thanked everyone for coming, explained the purpose of the meeting and introduced Jenny Duxbury, the officer in charge of school place planning.

The need for additional primary school places

Jenny Duxbury explained that the Local Authority reviewed the provision of school places annually against known and anticipated demand. In predicting future demand for primary school places, the local authority took account of a number of factors including; birth rates and population movements, popularity of schools and new housing development in the area as well as the existing and proposed provision of places in adjoining boroughs. The Borough was divided into five areas for the purpose of planning school places.

Muswell Hill was part of the Local Authority's Planning Area One in which there was currently the need for one additional form of entry (ie a shortage of 30 places). Based on current figures and knowledge, it was anticipated that the requirement for additional spaces would continue to grow until September 2018 when a further form of entry would be required within the planning area (ie a total requirement for an additional 60 primary school places by September 2018). The current shortfall had been met by a September 2014 "bulge class" at St James CE Primary School; as would also be the case in September 2015.

Provision of additional places

Jenny informed the meeting that the Authority had agreed a set of five Place Planning Principles to guide decision making in determining how and where additional school places should be provided;

- seek to meet demand for places within established, new or emerging local communities, having regard for the role of schools at the heart of sustainable communities
- supporting work to make all schools good or outstanding, ensuring that every child has a place at a good or outstanding school. Where expansion is needed to meet demand for places, the LA favours the expansion of schools where there is proven demand and well-established and successful leadership and management at a good or outstanding school
- have regard to the impact of any changes on the viability and standards at existing and new schools
- bring forward proposals that make best use of scarce capital resources
- work with schools to provide the optimum forms of entry appropriate to the capacity of the school site and the level of demand for that school.

There were only three ways in which school places could be increased;

- "bulge" or one off classes (as at St James) to provide up to two additional classes in a school in agreement with the Head teacher and governors. There was no statutory requirement for wider consultation
- school expansion to provide an additional class(es) in every year group at the school following a formal consultation
- provide new schools - but under current legislation all new schools must either be free schools or academies and in order for them to open an application has to be made directly to the Department for Education. In short, opening a new school to meet additional demand is not an option for any local authority. A further practical obstacle to new free schools/academies was the shortage of suitable sites in the borough.

Anji Phillips informed the meeting that there was a possibility that the Secretary of State would invite a further tranche of applications for new free schools before the General Election in May 2015. However this wasn't certain and the opportunity to complete this before the General Election reduced each day.

Steps taken so far

As previously stated, bulge classes had been agreed at St James CE Primary School for September 2014 and September 2015. In addition the LA had consulted with the local area around St James School and with stakeholders on whether this school should be expanded. The feedback from this consultation was varied and could be summarised as;

- there was an acknowledgement of the need to provide additional local school places
- there were substantial concerns expressed about the expansion of St James from its current one form to three forms of entry
- there were concerns about the proposed redevelopment of the school which would then be partially located on the adjacent Cranwood House site

- local residents had expressed concerns about the impact of the potential development of St James School at the same time as the proposed redevelopment of the former Cranwood House site and part of the St Lukes site
- there was broad support for moving from 1 form of entry to 2 forms of entry.

A full account of the responses to the consultation is available on the Council's website.

Responding to the current consultation exercise

The current consultation, which started on Monday 19 January, would close on 24 February 2015. The Council was seeking a wide range of views and suggestions for increasing the number of primary school places in the Muswell Hill area by 2018 and there would be further opportunities for residents/schools to express their views on any detailed proposals once this consultation had finished.

Residents and schools were encouraged to express their views on this consultation:

- through questions and comments at this meeting
- by attending the drop-in sessions at Muswell Hill Library where there will be opportunities to ask questions, share views and hear the views of others
- completing the online survey
- submitting comments and suggestions by email

Once the consultation period had ended (24 February 2015) a report would be prepared for consideration by Councillor Waters on 26 March 2015.

Questions and Answers/Comments and responses

The meeting was opened up to questions and comments from the floor.

C.1 Representing St James CE Primary School - The School had learnt a lot from the process so far and were committed to expanding. They had accepted an additional (bulge) class for two successive years and had some concerns about how they might in future accommodate any younger siblings of the additional children in the two bulge year groups. The proposal for one additional form of entry based on the existing school buildings (and therefore the cheap option) was well supported by the school community. (This message, that St James had a strong desire to expand, was repeated several times throughout the meeting.)

Q.2 Was it better to provide the required additional two forms of entry across two schools or at one school?

A.2 Generally it would probably be more cost effective to carry out a single development providing an additional two forms of entry at one school. However in practice it would depend on the site, the capacity of existing buildings at the school in question (and at any alternative schools) to meet some of the additional need, and origin (location) of the additional demand. While a single development at one school was probably the most desirable outcome, if it wasn't physically possible or not cost effective, then expansion by one form of entry at two schools was the only possible long term solution.

C.3 This process has been going on for a long time. It is clear that locations capable of expanding by two forms of entry are rare. The Council has good experience in successfully expanding primary schools by one form of entry.

R.3 The key determinant for the successful expansion of a school is the quality of leadership and management at the school. Having only recently joined the Council, Anji had been struck by the way school expansions had been carried out in Haringey in the past; in her view exceptionally well compared to other boroughs.

C.4 Expansion at Coleridge to four forms of entry had been opposed but had not affected the quality of education offered by the school which had retained its outstanding Ofsted rating.

C.5 Addressing the meeting, the Head Teacher of Coldfall School described the process of school expansion as exciting, offering as it does opportunities for staff, better training and improved facilities for pupils and staff. Again, in her view, it wasn't size but all the other factors that had been mentioned that determined the quality and success of a school. The remodelling of the school required to increase its capacity had taken place over 2 years and had presented particular challenges for staff who had had to move equipment into and out of storage, move classrooms and occasionally had to use corridors at classrooms. Throughout the process the School had retained its strong family ethos.

C.6 Parents with children at St James School supported expansion of the School but preferred by one form of entry rather than 2.

R.6 At the moment the Council is just seeking people's views and suggestions as to how to go forward. Additional places are required now and a permanent solution from September 2016.

Q.7 Is the Council looking for places at other schools?

A.7 Yes, and there is always a need to have some spare capacity to allow for flexibility in the system. At the present time Highgate Primary School has some spare capacity. The Council tries to match any plans for additional capacity to the locations that are generating the additional demand. If St James School had not had a bulge class in September 2014 some children would have been able to attend Highgate Primary School, but would have had much further to travel each day. As a proposal, the bulge class at St James School had been discussed with the Head of Highgate Primary School which had interdependencies with other schools in other boroughs and in other sectors.

Q.8 What is the process for carrying out a consultation on ideas? (Alternatively, what are the steps in this process?)

A.8 Officers are looking for a wide range of ideas from the community. These will be evaluated and a set of recommendations identified which will determine the next steps. If it is proposed that a school should be permanently expanded then another, now formal, consultation would be undertaken on the specific proposal. Alternatively the solution to the shortage of spaces could be a new free school. That would require an application being made to the Secretary of State and would not involve the Local Authority.

Q.9 Muswell Hill Primary is at the centre of the Muswell Hill area with new homes being built in the vicinity. How feasible would it be to expand this school?

A.9 Nothing will be proposed until after this consultation exercise is concluded. Officers had spoken to the School (and included every other school in the Borough in this consultation) and understood that the School would like to expand, but it is a difficult site.

Q.10 What are the decision making criteria for determining the right solution and how soon will a decision be taken? St James School was in the position of accepting additional children into a bulge class (Sept 2014 and Sept 2015) without a firm prospect of being able to offer places to their siblings in September 2016 and beyond. St James positively wanted an additional form of entry and ideally wanted two additional forms of entry.

A.10 The final decision will be taken on the basis of cost and quality with the proviso that any solution will have to be affordable. The Council knew where the additional places are needed. It was also a given that Tetherdown Primary School couldn't expand any further. There had also been a lot of discussions with Head Teachers creating a degree of consensus of what might be the solution. This exercise was about finding new ideas that might provide alternative solutions, if not for immediate implementation then at some time in the future.

Q.11 St James School was desperate to expand, if perhaps not so keen about the disruption that would result in a decision to expand to two forms of entry in one development. How did the Council propose to take this forward?

A.11 The Council has met the immediate need for more primary school places. Expanding St James to three forms of entry would require the complete redevelopment of the school site and possibly part of an adjoining site. Initial estimates of cost indicated that this would exceed the Council's capital budget for schools which was also required for other development projects and for maintaining the Borough's ageing schools. It would be a major project and result in significant disruption to pupils.

Q.12 The turn-out this evening is disappointing. What attempts have been made to contact parents of future pupils?

A.12 Yes attendance was disappointing and it was difficult to motivate people about an idea. However, this was not the only event as there would be drop-in sessions at Muswell Hill Library; nor was it the only means for parents to express their views and a number had already commented by email. Councillors were aware that other schools were also considering whether or not they wished to expand if the circumstances were right.

C.13 Representing St James School, it was agreed that there is a need for creativity. Living in Alexandra Park Road there was no obvious local primary school and neighbours children attend five of six different schools. The road wasn't in any catchment area and her child only got a primary school place as a result of her church attendance. With some creativity, which might involve taking more land, it would be possible to redevelop St James Schools to three forms of entry.

R.13 Residents and parents also need to be aware of the Council's other duties to provide housing, achieve value for money and stay within budget, which is why the Council is looking for more creative solutions. The Council owned the Cranwood House site and had proposed a land swap with the diocese; but the housing development was still required to partially fund the comprehensive redevelopment of

the School that would be required following a decision to move to three forms of entry.

Q.14 What is the reach of this consultation exercise?

A.14 The Council is consulting as widely as possible. All nurseries, including private nurseries have been contacted. Letters have gone to all parents/carers with a child that has a nursery place.

Q.15 Has consideration been given to all the residential developments taking place in the Borough? There is a big development taking place in Hornsey.

A.15 The annual School Place Planning Report takes account of all known residential developments taking place in the Borough. Hornsey is in Planning Area Two where there is a need for an additional form of entry. Formal notice has been given for the proposed expansion of St Mary's Primary School.

C.15 While they may live in PA2, parents in the new Hornsey development may still seek places at St James School.

Q.16 Is it possible to see a street by street analysis of where demand for school places is coming from?

A.16 It is not possible to do a house by house analysis and some parents will only be identified at the point that they apply for a school place. In addition, parental preference can't be anticipated.

Q.17 How do free schools get established?

A.17 An application is made to the Department of Education who may find the site, purchase it and hand it to the school. Sites for free schools are often small and barely appropriate for their new educational use.

Q.18 Why is there no mention of free schools in this consultation?

A.18 There are no obvious sites for a new free school(s) and proposing a free school is by definition not a matter for the Local Authority. At the same time the Council can't rely on a new free school being proposed, developed and opened at the right time and in the right place.

Having thanked everyone for coming Councillor Waters closed the meeting at 7.30pm