

CABINET

9 FEBRUARY 2016

OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION FOR THE PROPOSED PRESCRIBED ALTERATIONS AT BLIGH INFANT AND JUNIOR SCHOOLS

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Mike O'Brien, Children's Services

Report from: Barbara Peacock, Director of Children and Adults Services

Author: Paul Clarke, School Organisation and Capital Programme Manager

Summary

This report outlines the outcomes of the informal consultation period on the Council's proposals to enlarge the premises at Bligh Infant and Junior Schools, by way of statutory prescribed alterations.

1. Budget and policy framework

- 1.1. The proposals to make prescribed alterations to Bligh Infant and Junior Schools are consistent with the provisions of the School Organisation Plan 2011-16, and with the Council Plan Priority of 'Children and young people having the best start in life' and is within budget. This would therefore be a matter for the Cabinet.

2. Background

- 2.1. On 30 September 2014, the annual review of the School Organisation Plan 2011-16 highlighted the forecasted need for an extra two primary forms of entry in Strood. Under decision 162/2014, the Cabinet approved an appraisal of options to provide sufficient additional places in Strood.
- 2.2. On 13 January 2015, under decision 5/2015, the Cabinet agreed that expansion at Bligh Infant and Junior Schools should provide one of the two required forms of entry.
- 2.3. At the same meeting, under decision 9/2015, the Cabinet agreed to authorise the Director of Children and Adults, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, to commence the statutory processes at the appropriate time for the expansion of Bligh Infant and Junior Schools.

- 2.4. The first stage in the statutory process required the Council to hold a period of informal public consultation, this took place over a four-week period between 2 and 29 November 2015, and the results of this are set out in sections 4 and 5 of this report.

3. The Proposals

- 3.1. The proposal is, by way of statutory prescribed alterations; The 'Enlargement of the Premises at Bligh Infant and Junior Schools' to provide adequate accommodation for the additional children who will attend the school as a result of an increase in the Published Admission number (PAN) from 60 to 90.
- 3.2. It is proposed, subject to the outcome of the consultation period and subsequent period of statutory representation, to implement the changes on 1 September 2017.

4. Results of the Consultation

- 4.1. As part of the statutory consultation process, there is an expectation that local authorities will conduct an informal consultation where the views of all interested parties can be expressed, and all views taken into consideration prior to formal publication of proposals.
- 4.2. The period of informal public consultation ran for four weeks from 2 to 29 November 2015. The process included;
- public consultation documents circulated to the stakeholders and organisations listed in Appendix 1;
 - publication of the consultation document on Medway Council's website, and on the schools' forum website;
 - a press notice placed in local newspaper to notify the public of the consultation period.
 - a public meeting held at the school on 4 November 2015. (Transcript attached as appendix 4).
 - hand delivery of the consultation document to all local residents shown on the map at appendix 5
- 4.3. There were 16 written responses in total to the consultations in the form of reply slips and emails, which were broken down as indicated below. However, one response was a duplicate and so was not included.

5. Proposal to 'Enlarge the Premises' to accommodate the additional pupils

- 5.1. The public consultation document (attached as Appendix 3) asked for a ticked response to one or other of the following statements:
- " I approve of the proposal to enlarge the premises at Bligh Infant and Junior Schools" or
 - " I object to the proposal to enlarge the premises at Bligh Infant and Junior Schools"

- 5.2. 15 responses were received to this consultation (excluding the duplicate response), of which seven supported the proposal, and seven objected. One respondent did not tick either box.
- 5.3. Of the responses that supported the proposal, six were from parents or guardians, and one from the principal of another school.
- 5.4. Of the responses that objected to the proposal, six came from local residents, and one came from a parent/guardian who was also a local resident.
- 5.5. The response form also provided space for further comment. The comments have been summarised against a series of categories matching the comments and concerns of the respondents in the tables below. Some respondents offered more than one comment, and some reasons were included in more than one response, which has resulted in there being a higher number of reasons shown, in the tables below, than actual response sheets received.

Comments from respondents who approved (seven respondents)

Comment	Number of respondents
More children will be able to go	1
Will benefit all children	1
Will make an excellent school even better	1
Should have also considered alternative schools	1

Comments from respondents who objected (seven respondents)

Comment	Number of respondents
Parking	7
Road safety	1
Building work	1
There are other schools in the area	1
Parking affecting business	1
Disappointed there were no plans at the meeting	1

Comments from neutral respondents (one respondent)

Comment	Number of respondents
Parking	1
Road safety	1

6. Advice and analysis

- 6.1. Bligh Infant and Junior Schools are community primary schools, which, across the two schools, provide education for pupils aged 4 to 11. The schools are popular with parents, and at the last full Ofsted inspection in July 2015 the Infant school was rated as 'outstanding' in all areas. The junior school was last inspected in February 2013, and was rated 'good' in all areas.

- 6.2. Under its current admissions arrangements (PAN 60), the school has in recent years been oversubscribed and for the September 2015 reception class intake received 69 first preferences for the 60 places available.
- 6.3. The proposals to expand the provision at Bligh Infant and Junior Schools are demand led, and the popularity of the schools is likely to continue, due in the main to an increasing local population, with ongoing housing developments likely to continue to produce future demand.
- 6.4. Consultation will take place as part of the school admissions consultation process at the appropriate time to ensure that the PAN has formally increased to 90 in time to take effect from September 2017,
- 6.5. National policy emphasises that the Local Authority has a key role to support parents and families through promoting a good supply of strong schools and should focus on supplying enough good spaces rather than reducing surplus places. Medway's School Organisation Plan principles state that popular and successful schools should expand.
- 6.6. It is not expected that the proposals will have a detrimental impact upon the numbers or standards at the other primary schools in Strood. Forecasts indicate that without expansion of provision in the area, there will most likely be a shortage of spaces in reception classes in Strood from September 2016, and the expansion of Bligh Infant and Juniors will help to alleviate that pressure.
- 6.7. The remainder of this section sets out officer responses to the issues and concerns raised during the consultation period and highlighted in section 5 above; not only from the written responses received but also from the public meeting.
- 6.8. Eight respondents commented on current parking issues around the school site, or how parking could be made worse by the school expanding. **Officer response** – As part of the expansion project to provide additional buildings, parking and traffic management will be considered and the Council's Safer Journeys team have and will be involved as part of the planning consultation, and will continue to have input as the project develops, as will officers from Highways and Transport. In partnership with the school, officers will explore opportunities to alleviate residents concerns including providing walking buses and extended out of hours provision, as well as the arrangements for parents to pick up and drop off their children.
- 6.9. Two respondents commented that there are other schools in the area and these should have been considered for expansion. **Officer response** – All schools in the area were considered. Bligh's performance, Ofsted rating, popularity, site size and willingness to expand meant that it was chosen as one of two required expansions in the area.
- 6.10. One respondent said they were disappointed that there were no building plans at the public meeting. **Officer response** – The current stage of the consultation is only to consider the principle of expansion, and so no design or planning work has yet been undertaken. As part of the planning process,

residents will have the opportunity to comment on proposals as they develop.

- 6.11. One parent at the public meeting asked if the bulge class at Elaine Primary would affect the intake at Bligh Infant School. **Officer response** – The intake at Bligh will remain at 60 for September 2016, while Elaine will take an extra 30 children in that year. From September 2017 onwards, Bligh will take 90 children into reception, and Elaine’s intake will drop back to 50. This will not affect children who already have places.
- 6.12. A member of staff at the public meeting asked if, with the increase in numbers, the catchment area for Bligh Infant and Juniors would be widened. **Officer response** – Medway does not have catchment areas for schools, but one of the admission criteria is distance from home to school. Therefore, increasing the capacity of the school may mean that there are spaces available for children who live further away.
- 6.13. A local resident asked whether Elaine Primary or Cedar Primary had more room for expansion than Bligh Infant and Juniors, and whether there would be a need to expand further in the future. **Officer response** – It is forecasted that two extra forms of entry will be required in Strood. Bligh Infants and Juniors is providing one of those forms of entry. Bligh has been selected ahead of Elaine because the Infants are graded ‘outstanding’ and the Juniors are graded ‘good’ by Ofsted, while Elaine is graded as ‘requires improvement’. Cedar Primary already takes 90 children each year, and so is not suitable for further expansion.
- 6.14. Cllr Brown-Reckless asked if the bulge class would remain at Elaine all the way through, or move to Bligh. **Officer response** – The bulge class would remain at Elaine all the way through.
- 6.15. Cllr Brown-Reckless asked if the expansion would put pressure on the school facilities. **Officer response** – The expansion at Bligh Infants and Juniors will provide both extra classroom space, and an appropriate increase in supporting facilities. The requirements for these will be developed from a combination of consultation with the school and government recommendations
- 6.16. Cllr Brown Reckless asked if the expansion would affect standards for the children at the school. **Officer response** – There is no evidence that increasing school size affects school standards. School standards are related to quality of teaching, and as the Infants are rated as ‘outstanding’, and the Juniors rated as ‘good’, this is expected to continue. The expansion will lead to extra resources for the school, which will balance the extra pupils.
- 6.17. A local resident asked if the expansion was happening because other schools were failing, and if other schools are full to capacity. **Officer response** – Elaine and Cedar Primary schools both had full reception intakes in September 2015, so the need for expansion is led by increasing pupil numbers.

- 6.18. The headteacher, Emma Poad, and the Governing Body are together fully supportive of the proposed expansion. This is highlighted by their recorded comments at the public consultation meeting on 5 November 2016 (see appendix 4), including the headteacher stating "...I think by having a PAN of 90 children per year group will allow for more children to come into our school and achieve an outstanding education and we can do more for the children of Medway".

7. Public consultation meeting

- 7.1. The public meeting was held at the school on the evening of 4 November 2015, where interested stakeholders were invited to listen to the proposals and then to ask any questions and raise concerns. The meeting was chaired by Councillor Mike O'Brien, with an officer panel comprising of; Pauline Maddison (Interim Assistant Director of School Effectiveness and Inclusion) and Chris McKenzie (Head of Performance and Strategic Planning). A Listening Panel was in attendance.
- 7.2. The Listening Panel comprised of Members from each of the political groups represented on the Council. These were Councillors Brake, Johnson, Brown-Reckless, and Royle. The role of the Listening Panel was to ensure that all the points and concerns raised at the meeting, and the responses given, are accurately reflected in this Cabinet report.
- 7.3. A drop-in open session took place on Tuesday 8 December 2015 at Gun Wharf. Members of the Listening Panel, Cabinet and the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee were invited to review the written responses to the consultation and the transcript of the public meeting, to ensure that the concerns raised at the meeting are fairly and accurately reflected in this report.
- 7.4. A transcript of the meeting is available as Appendix 4.

8. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 19 January 2016

- 8.1. The School Organisation and Capital Programme Manager introduced the report which outlined the outcome of the informal consultation period on the Council's proposals to enlarge the premises at Bligh Infant and Junior Schools, by way of statutory prescribed alterations.
- 8.2. In response to a question about why the level of feedback had been so low, the School Organisation and Capital Programme Manager explained that this was common for consultations which related to relatively non-controversial proposals. Due to Bligh Infants and Junior Schools being outstanding and good schools respectively, there had been little objection to the proposals for expansion, except those concerns relating to parking and road safety, which would be considered as part of the design.
- 8.3. The Committee noted the report and recommended the Cabinet to progress the proposals further.

9. Diversity Impact Assessment

- 9.1. A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) screening form is attached as Appendix 2. The DIA looks at how the proposed changes could impact upon various groups. The report shows that there could potentially be some impact upon certain groups, however it shows that any impacts are expected to be positive ones. The screening form indicates that a full DIA is not necessary.

10. Impact of the proposal on arrangements for looked after children

- 10.1. Looked after children receive the highest priority for admission to all Medway schools. If necessary, the Admissions Code allows the council to place looked after children in schools that would otherwise be deemed full. This ensures that the council can secure appropriate provision for children that are looked after by the local authority. This strategy covers both mainstream and special schools and as such includes Bligh Infant and Junior Schools.

11. Publication of a statutory notice

- 11.1. If Cabinet accepts the recommendation to progress the proposals further, it would be necessary to publish a statutory notice and formal proposals of the proposed changes to Bligh Infant and Junior Schools, by way of prescribed alterations, to provide an opportunity for formal objection. This would run for a four-week period from 22 February 2016 through to 20 March 2016. The process would follow the guidelines set out in "Making changes to a Maintained Mainstream School (A guide for Local Authorities and Governing Bodies)", and "The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013".
- 11.2. Cabinet would also be requested to approve that, should no objections be raised during the statutory period, the determination on the proposals be delegated to the Director of Children and Adults in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services. However, if any formal objections are received during that time then the decision will revert to Cabinet.

12. Risk management

- 12.1. The following risks arise if the proposals as stated in this report are not implemented. These are:
- A risk that it could undermine the Council's need to ensure the most effective use of resources, and in turn, the aim to raise standards across all schools.
 - The Council's statutory duty to provide sufficient good quality school places will be at risk if additional provision is not made available in the Strood area.
 - That by not increasing the provision at Bligh Infant and Juniors Schools, more parents will be required to transport their children to schools further afield, which would mean increased traffic in the wider Medway area.

- Parents dissatisfied at not being able to access their local school, potentially leading to parents having children at different schools and the logistical problems that this would bring.

12.2. The following risks could arise if the proposals are implemented:

- If the expected numbers of additional pupils do not materialise, then the school may find itself having a surplus places as well as larger buildings to maintain without the funding to do so. Current forecasts based upon roll numbers, birth rates and inward migration together with Bligh Infant and Juniors being good and popular schools mean that this risk is likely to be minimal.

13. Financial and Legal implications

- 13.1. Medway maintained schools are funded from central Government via the local authority in the form of the dedicated schools grant. This is a ring-fenced grant for the provision of education across Medway and must be used to fund schools (and certain specified services to schools), and cannot be used to fund other Council services.
- 13.2. The expansion of Bligh Infants and Junior School will be funded via the Children and Adults Capital Programme, which is mainly funded by Government grants, targeted grants and section 106 developer contributions.
- 13.3. The Council has the power under sections 18 and 19 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to make "prescribed alterations" to a maintained school. The procedure for making prescribed alterations is set out in the School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013.
- 13.4. From 24 January 2014 there is no longer a prescribed 'pre-publication' (informal) consultation period for prescribed alterations, there is however a strong expectation on Local Authorities to consult interested parties in developing their proposal prior to formal publication as part of their duty under public law to act rationally and take into account all relevant considerations. This consultation satisfies that expectation.
- 13.5. The Council has a statutory duty to provide sufficient good quality school places.

14. Recommendations

- 14.1. The Cabinet is requested to consider the responses to the informal consultation together with the advice and analysis from officers and the comments of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to instruct the Director of Children and Adult Services to commence the period of statutory representation for the proposed changes to Bligh Infant and Junior Schools, as set out in paragraph 11.1 of the report, when statutory notices and full proposals will be published.

14.2. The Cabinet is requested to delegate authority to the Director of Children and Adults Services, in consultation with Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, to determine whether to approve the proposals at the end of the statutory consultation period if no objections are received. However, if any objections are received during that time then a report will be prepared and presented to Cabinet for determination

15. Suggested reasons for decision

15.1 Approval to proceed to a period of statutory representation will ensure the Council complies with its duty to follow the full consultation process when proposing changes to school organisation.

Lead officer contact

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Background papers

1) Making changes to a Maintained Mainstream School (A guide for Local Authorities and Governing Bodies).

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/DFE-30002-2010>

2) The School Organisation (Prescribed Alterations to Maintained Schools) (England) Regulations 2013.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/3110/contents/made>

3) Medway's School Organisation Plan 2011 - 2016

<http://www.medway.gov.uk/pdf/School%20Organisation%20Plan%202011-2016%20revised.pdf>

Appendices

- 1) List of consultees
- 2) Diversity Impact Assessment screening form
- 3) Consultation document
- 4) Transcript of Public Meeting
- 5) Map of residents consultation document drop

List of Consultees for Public Consultation Documents
All Councillors
Children & Young People Overview & Scrutiny members
Medway Youth Parliament
Kelly Tolhurst MP
Rehman Chishti MP
Tracey Crouch MP
Patrick Leeson, Director of Educational Services, KCC
Alex Tear, Director of Education
Professor Anne Bamford, Director of Education
Mark Devlin, Chief Executive (PA – Michaela Jones)
Dr Peter Green, Shadow Accountable Officer for Medway Clinical Commissioning Group
Neil Davies, Chief Executive
Richard Hicks, Director of Regeneration, Community & Culture
Barbara Peacock, Director of Children's & Adult Services
Simon Wakeman, Communications
Mark Holmes, Early Years (cc Richard Cooke & Caroline Webber)
Helen M Jones, AD Commissioning & Strategy
Phil Watson, AD Children's Social Care
Pauline Maddison, AD Inclusion (SEN)
Ian Sutherland, Deputy Director of Social Care
Stephen Gaimster, AD Environment & Regeneration
Stephanie Goad, AD Communications, Performance & Partnership
Tricia Palmer, AD Organisational Services
Andrew McGrath, AD Frontline Services
Perry Holmes, AD Legal & Corporate Services
Phil Watts, Chief Finance Officer
Laura Bechelli, Senior HR Support Officer - Schools
Carrie McKenzie, Head of Organisational Change
Anne Robinson, Governor Services
Norman Gregory, Insurance Officer
Tracey Barefoot, Health & Safety Adviser
Jan Guyler, Head of Legal Services
Steve Hewlett, Head of Integrated Transport
Dave Harris, Development Control Manager
Jill King, Section 106 Monitoring Officer
Customer Contact Seniors
Simon Harrington, Student Services Manager
Shelley Marsh, Student Services Operations Manager
Hilary Gerhard, School Challenge & Improvement
Jacqui Moore, School's Commissioning & Traded Services
Chatham Contact Point, Riverside One
Rochester Contact Point
Gillingham Contact Point
Rainham Contact Point
Strood Contact Point
Black Lion Leisure Centre
Splashes Leisure Centre
Deangate Ridge Sports Complex
Hundred of Hoo Swimming Pool

Kings Rochester Sports Centre (formerly Sterling Centre)
Strood Leisure Centre
Chatham Library
Cuxton Library
Gillingham Library
Grain Library
Hempstead Library
Hoo Library
Lordswood Library
Luton Library
Rainham Library
Rochester Library
Strood Library
Thomas Aveling School Community Library
Twydall Library
Walderslade Hook Meadow Library
Walderslade Village Library
Wigmore Library
Mr Mike Ongley
Karen White – Delce Junior
Ms Julia Harris
Nicola Brocklesby
Ms Sue Calder & Mr Nick Childs
Mr Michael Barton
Kim Gunn
Assistant Branch Secretary Medway Towns LG Tania Earnshaw
Ms Sharon Wentworth & Malcolm Bonnet
Baha'I Community of Gillingham – Mr F Forghani
Bangall Language School Shishu Kishor Club – Nilufar Chowdhury
Community Interpreting Service – Elizabeth Bird
Hindu Sabha – Mr Ajay Attra
Kent Muslim Welfare Association - Dr Craig Kennett AKA Azeem Nader General Secretary
Kent Ramgarhia Darbar Sikh Temple & Community Centre – Mr M S Paddom
KUT O Chinese Association
Medway English Training Community Interest Company – Cathy Rahmazadeh
Medway Town Gurdwara Sabha – Parminder Singh Uppl
Siri Guru Ravidass Bhawan
Swarah Arts Foundation – B Balagopal
Medway Human Rights & Equality Council – Azhar Mahmood
Polish Saturday School – Monika Limanowska
Czechoslovak Society in Medway – Lenka Wyatt
All Playgroups, Pre schools & Nurseries within Medway
Medway Parents and Carers Forum
Medway Community Healthcare
Adjacent Residents to school
All Governors, staff & students
Chairs of Governors
All Headteachers (schools forum & SIB)
Medway Website
Local press

Diversity impact assessment

TITLE <i>Name/description of the issue being assessed</i>	Enlargement of physical premises at Bligh Infant and Junior Schools
DATE <i>Date the DIA is completed</i>	2 December 2015
LEAD OFFICER <i>Name of person responsible for carrying out the DIA.</i>	Paul Clarke

1 Summary description of the proposed change

- *What is the change to policy/service/new project that is being proposed?*
- *How does it compare with the current situation?*

The proposals are to enlarge the premises in order to accommodate extra pupils at Bligh Infant and Junior Schools. This is to meet forecast demand for more primary school places in Strood. The proposals are in line with the School Organisation Plan 2011-16. The schools are popular and therefore there will be a greater percentage of first preference satisfaction amongst parents. In recent years the infant school has been oversubscribed in reception and these proposals will cater for that level of demand. The enlarged buildings will be designed to improve the learning environment for pupils.

2 Summary of evidence used to support this assessment

- *Eg: Feedback from consultation, performance information, service user records etc.*
- *Eg: Comparison of service user profile with Medway Community Profile*

A public consultation has been carried out over a 4-week period when views were expressed and any concerns regarding issues could have been raised. Of a number of concerns raised and comments made, none related to the potential for any impact on any protected characteristic groups.

Diversity impact assessment

3 What is the likely impact of the proposed change?

Is it likely to :

- *Adversely impact on one or more of the protected characteristic groups?*
- *Advance equality of opportunity for one or more of the protected characteristic groups?*
- *Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't?*

(insert ✓ in one or more boxes)

Protected characteristic groups	Adverse impact	Advance equality	Foster good relations
Age			
Disability		✓	
Gender reassignment			
Marriage/civil partnership			
Pregnancy/maternity			
Race			
Religion/belief			
Sex			
Sexual orientation			
Other (eg low income groups)			

4 Summary of the likely impacts

- *Who will be affected?*
- *How will they be affected?*

None of the current pupils are intended to be displaced and there will be no reduction to staff numbers made as part of this proposal. There is however expected to be an increase in the number of pupils who attend the school and it is possible that there could be an increase in the number of pupils with disabilities. It is expected that these extra pupils will benefit from the improved facilities that will come as part of the enlargement of the premises, and as such it is expected that the outcomes for these pupils will be positive. A public consultation has been carried out over a 4-week period when views were expressed and comments received however none relating to this issue were raised. Local authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality and all schools in Medway are responsible for ensuring equality in their schools and for promoting community cohesion.

Diversity impact assessment

5 What actions can be taken to mitigate likely adverse impacts, improve equality of opportunity or foster good relations?

- *Are there alternative providers?*
- *What alternative ways can the Council provide the service?*
- *Can demand for services be managed differently?*

The alternative schools in the area, Elaine Primary and Cedar Primary, have been considered. However, Elaine has an Ofsted rating of 'requires improvement', and Cedar is already a 3 form of entry school making it too large to expand further.

Expanding schools in another area would require pupils to travel further, and therefore would disadvantage lower income families, and the Council could incur transport costs.

Parking issues were raised at the public meeting and through written consultation responses. As part of the design and planning process work will be undertaken to minimise any impact of extra school traffic due to the increased number of pupils.

6 Action plan

- *Actions to mitigate adverse impact, improve equality of opportunity or foster good relations and/or obtain new evidence*

Action	Lead	Deadline or review date
Involve the Council's Safer Journey's Team as part of the design process to ensure parking and road safety issues are addressed	Paul Clarke	Sept 2017

Diversity impact assessment

7 Recommendation

The recommendation by the lead officer should be stated below. This may be:

- to proceed with the change implementing action plan if appropriate
- consider alternatives
- gather further evidence

If the recommendation is to proceed with the change and there are no actions that can be taken to mitigate likely adverse impact, it is important to state why.

To proceed with the change

8 Authorisation

The authorising officer is consenting that:

- the recommendation can be implemented
- sufficient evidence has been obtained and appropriate mitigation is planned
- the Action Plan will be incorporated into service plan and monitored

Assistant Director

Date

Contact your Performance and Intelligence hub for advice on completing this assessment

RCC: phone 2443 email annamarie.lawrence@medway.gov.uk

C&A: phone 1031 email paul.clarke@medway.gov.uk

BSD: phone 2472 or 1490 email: corppi@medway.gov.uk

PH: phone 2636 email: david.whiting@medway.gov.uk

Send completed assessment to the Corporate Performance & Intelligence Hub (CPI) for web publication

Consultation on the expansion of Bligh Infant and Junior Schools

2 November to 29 November 2015



Raising achievement through quality learning environments

Enlargement of the premises at Bligh Infant and Junior Schools, Bligh Way, Strood, Rochester, ME2 2XJ

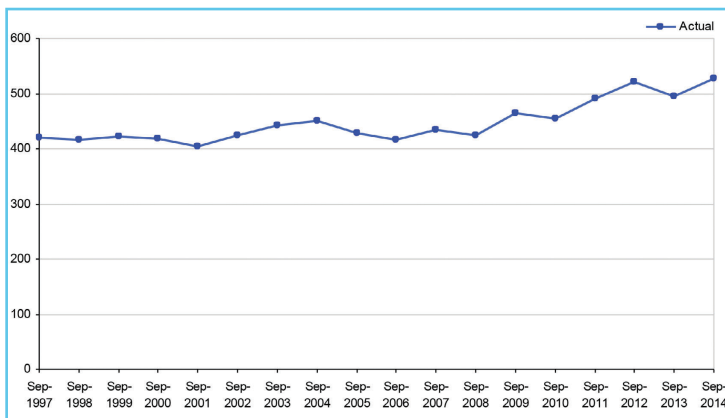
This document is designed to:

- Notify you of Medway Council's proposals to make statutory prescribed alterations at Bligh Infant and Junior Schools with effect from 1 September 2017, which will result in the enlargement of the premises at the schools to allow for the expected increase in pupil numbers
- Explain why these changes are being proposed
- Invite your comments on these proposals
- Inform you of, and invite you to, a public meeting to be held at Bligh Infant School on Wednesday, 4 November 2015 at 6pm where this proposal will be discussed and questions answered.

Why is there a need to expand schools in the Strood area?

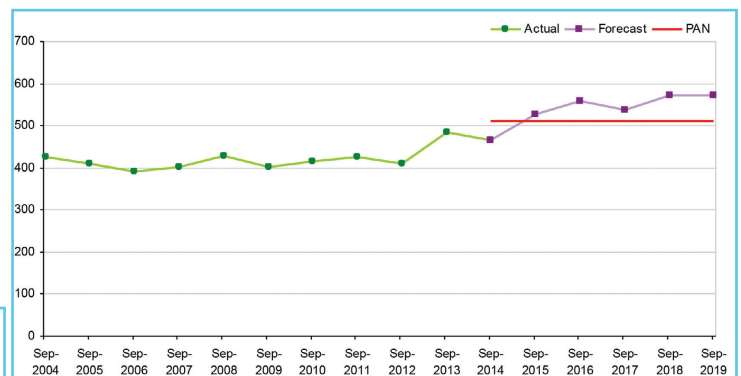
In Strood, as the graph below shows, the past four years have seen the highest birth numbers on record and the trend overall is increasing. These children will enter reception classes over the next four years.

Actual births



The next graph to the right shows the actual and expected numbers of children requiring a reception place in Strood, with the red line showing the current number of available places. These forecasts take account of expected numbers of children who will move into the area prior to requiring a school place. As these increased numbers progress through the schools they will replace the smaller year groups in the older primary years. For 2016 a temporary solution has been arranged at another school in Strood to help meet the demand.

Actual and forecast Year R - Strood



The uncertainty surrounding future births and inward movement of families with children means that the council needs to be cautious when deciding how much, and when, additional provision is required. However, the recent trend of higher birth rates, together with ongoing new housing developments in the area, does suggest that the increase in children requiring a reception place will continue for the foreseeable future.

The proposed expansion of Bligh is one of the measures planned to address the expected pressure on primary school places in the Strood area. Further provision in addition to that proposed at Bligh will be required to ensure sufficient places are available and separate proposals and consultations will take place at the appropriate time.

Why is the enlargement of the premises to Bligh Infant and Junior Schools being proposed?

The federated Bligh Schools currently provide Key Stage 1 and 2 education for children from the age of three until they transfer into secondary schools at age 11. It has been one of the most popular primary phase schools in Medway in recent years.

The Bligh Schools are currently two Form of Entry (FE) schools with a published admission number (PAN) of 60. This means that the school admits 60 pupils into the reception year group each year. Following the proposed expansion, initially at the infant school in September 2017, the school will admit 90 pupils into the reception year group; the schools will then grow year on year. The first additional intake at the junior school will take effect in September 2020.

As a 2FE primary school the pupil capacity is currently 420, plus the nursery children and as a 3FE primary school pupil numbers could rise to 630 when all year groups are full.

In July 2015 Ofsted carried out an inspection at the infant school and gave a rating of 'Outstanding' across all aspects of the report. This is likely to increase the popularity of the school. In February 2013 Ofsted rated the junior school as 'Good'. The proposals are, therefore, in line with current local and national policy, which allows good and outstanding schools to expand to meet the preferences of parents.

We are consulting on the proposal, by way of a statutory prescribed alteration, to enlarge the premises to give the school sufficient capacity to provide for the additional pupils. A feasibility study to explore the options for the physical expansion of the school is underway. The feasibility study will consider the requirements for the additional accommodation, the suitability of existing accommodation, and the access arrangements to the site, including the management arrangements for additional staff, pupils and parents. To minimise disruption to the education of pupils it is likely that the building works will be phased in line with expected demand.

The project to expand the premises will be financed using the Central Government basic need grant, which is a fund for the creation of additional school capacity to ensure that sufficient school places are available in each local area. Further funding as required will come from developer contributions for new housing schemes in the area. This is where developers of new housing schemes pay a contribution to the Council to assist in the enhancement and expansion of essential community facilities.

The next stages

Following the four-week consultation period, Medway Council's Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee may ask to see a report on the responses and comments to this proposal, which would be presented to them on 19 January 2016.

On 9 February 2016 Medway Council's Cabinet will consider the responses to this consultation and the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. They may then decide not to proceed with the proposal, or to authorise a four-week period of statutory representation when notices will be published to give interested parties the opportunity to formally object or comment.

If there are no objections to the statutory notice period in March 2016 Medway Council can decide to go ahead with the proposals. If there are one or more objections Medway Council, as Schools Commissioner under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, will consider the objections before determining the outcome.

Consultation timetable

Four week public consultation period	2 – 29 Nov 2015
Public consultation meeting in Bligh Infant School hall	4 Nov 2015, 6pm
Report to Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee with outcomes of consultation	19 Jan 2016 (TBC)
Report outcome of consultation to cabinet	9 Feb 2016
Four week statutory notice period	22 Feb 2016 – 20 Mar 2016
Council decision on proposals	Apr 2016
Implementation of expansion proposals if approved	1 Sep 2017

No decisions will be made until the consultation has been completed and local views have been carefully considered.

How to make comments

We would like to hear your views on these proposals.

Email your comments to **prim.reorg@medway.gov.uk**

Alternatively you can hand the form below to the school office at Bligh Infant or Junior Schools or send it to:
FREEPOST RRUY-ZBTJ-CZZC, School Organisation, Medway Council, Gun Wharf, Dock Road, Chatham ME4 4TR

Unfortunately it will not be possible to acknowledge receipt.

All responses must be received by **Sunday, 29 November 2015**.

It would be helpful to have the following information:

Name:

Address:

.....

I am (please tick)

Parent / Guardian

Governor

None of the above (please specify)

Member of staff

Local resident

With regard to the proposal to enlarge the premises at Bligh Infant and Junior Schools to enable the school to increase its numbers in line with demand for places;

Please tick one box

I approve of the proposal to enlarge the premises at Bligh Infant and Junior Schools

I object to the proposal to enlarge the premises at Bligh Infant and Junior Schools

Comments

Please give your reasons as fully as possible to help us build the arguments for and against the proposals.

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This information can be made available in other formats from **01634 333333**

If you have any questions about this leaflet and you want to speak to someone in your own language please ring **01634 335577**

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中文	331781	हिंदी	331783	Polski	332373	একুশফর	331786	فارسی	331840	Lietuviškai	332372

PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING

BLIGH INFANT AND JUNIOR SCHOOLS

HELD ON THURSDAY, 5TH NOVEMBER 2015

Chaired by: Cllr Mike O'Brien, Children's Services

Listening Panel: Cllr David Brake, Portfolio Holder for Adult Services
Cllr Clive Johnson, (Labour)
Cllr Catriona Brown-Reckless, (UKIP)
Cllr David Royle (Conservative) Chair of Children's and Young People's
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Officers: Pauline Maddison, Interim Assistant Director of School Effectiveness and
Inclusion
Chris McKenzie, Head of Performance and Strategic Planning

Welcome by Councillor Mike O'Brien who chaired the proceedings.

Good evening, thank you very much indeed for all of you for coming here for this public consultation on the future of Bligh Infant and Bligh Junior schools. I am Cllr Mike O'Brien, the Portfolio Holder that has responsibility for Children's Services and I will be facilitating the meeting this evening.

The reason we are using the microphone is everything everyone says this evening will be recorded and will be typed out at a later stage to ensure everyone gets to know what was said. We will do a presentation first and will then end up with questions from you and that's the most important thing and I can assure you if you put your hand up everyone will have an opportunity to ask a question if they have questions to ask.

Thank you to Emma, the Headteacher here for allowing us to use this hall and these facilities and Kate Broom the Chair of Governors is also here as well, thank you.

The role of the listening panel is to ensure that everything that is said to you is fairly represented and that the views of the meeting are fully taken and accurately reflected in the subsequent reviews to Overview and Scrutiny Committee, everything you say tonight will be presented both to Overview and Scrutiny which is a cross-party scrutiny group and it will also then go on to Cabinet.

Firstly, Chris will explain the proposal on a slideshow and its technical elements, at the end I will summarise the key points and check with our independent panel that they are happy with what has been said and I will then ask the Headteacher and the Chair of Governors for any comments that they would like to add and we will then throw the meeting open to questions. Is everyone happy with that?

Chris McKenzie

Good evening everybody. I am going to take you through the detail of the proposals in relation to Bligh Infant and Junior schools. I am going to explain what is being proposed and why and then invite your comments and questions on the proposals and also tell you about what happens next. It is really important if you do have questions or comments, that you take the opportunity to ask them this evening. We are here to clarify any questions you have got so if there is anything you don't understand or you would like me to explain more fully, I am more than happy to do that.

Also, as Cllr O'Brien said, the comments you make and the questions you ask will be recorded and will then form part of the considerations made by the Council's Cabinet when they make their decisions. As well as asking questions this evening, hopefully you have all got a copy of the

consultation document, if not, we should have some spare copies at the back, so do pick up a consultation document if you haven't already got one. You can fill in your views on those consultation documents and send them back to us at the Council or email us with your comments as well and they will all be taken into account as we move forward through the next stages.

A little bit of context first of all to the proposals. We have in Medway what are called some school organisational principles, we use these to help to ensure that as a Council we are able to meet our statutory responsibility to ensure that we are providing enough school places to meet local demand. So, we as a local authority have to make sure there are enough school places for the local population.

Our school organisational principles in Medway also say that as well meeting that duty to provide sufficient school places we also want to promote high standards, we also want to ensure that our schools are viable, and there is also a principle that when we are looking to expand schools, that we will seek to expand popular and successful schools. We will look at schools in terms of how popular they are, how many parents apply for places through the admission arrangements and also how successful they are in terms of their results and also in terms of OFSTED ratings as well.

So, some additional context to the proposals. Overall in Medway, not just in this area, across the whole of Medway what we have seen in recent years is a significant increase in the birth rate. So the number of children being born in Medway has increased year on year for quite a number of years in Medway. That has also happened in the Strood area specifically and has continued to rise in recent years. We will show you on the next slide a graph that shows how that has increased in recent years.

The other thing we have seen in Medway is a significant amount of inward movement of families with children to the Medway area. So what we have seen is families moving into the area, bringing children with them, who then need a school place.

We have also got ongoing housing development planned in Medway. I will talk a little bit more about some of the areas where that housing development is planned and obviously as more housing developments are built, again more families potentially move into the area, again with additional children who will need school places.

All of these factors combined mean that actually what we have seen in recent years is a significant increase in demand for school places in Medway.

The graph behind us shows the actual birth numbers for the Strood area. You can see from Sept 1997 there were just over 400 births and we are now at a point in the last year, where we had well over 500 children born, so over 100 more children just being born in the Strood area within Medway, year on year.

This slide actually shows visually the impact of the inward movement of families, again into the Strood area. What the bars show there is each year, year on year the additional number of children that have moved into the Strood area with their families who will go on to require a school place. These are pre-school aged children, so this is the numbers of additional children that moved in that aren't yet of school age but will become school age within a few years, so a significant number

The overall impact of these combined factors; if you look at this graph here this shows the actual forecast reception year numbers of children in the Strood area. We have got the numbers there you can see, up until sept 2019 in terms of our forecast. The red line you can see which is the straight line is what we call 'published admission numbers' for all of the schools in the Strood area. So effectively that is the capacity that we have got in Strood, the number of places currently available, and you can see that even from this year and certainly from next year we expect that the numbers of children that will need a school place will be more than the number of places that we have available. So clearly we need to do something to make sure that we have got enough places available for the children that will need a place.

This slide tells us a little bit about some of the recent and ongoing housing developments in Strood, just to give you a bit more information, a bit more detail. We have got some bigger developments that have already happened, so Liberty Park, which is over in Wainscott and also the Medway Gate development are becoming established, lots of families already moving into those. We've got others that are about to start, so Templers Rise is about to commence, Brompton Farm, which is a smaller development that was recently completed. We have also got some bigger developments on Temple Waterfront and Strood Riverside, which are likely to start in the next couple of years, which could potentially allow over 1000 dwellings. So again, a significant number of potential dwellings and potentially a significant number of additional families needing school places. On top of that a number of smaller developments have recently completed or are coming forward soon. There are even some smaller developments around this part of Strood as well.

We just thought it would be helpful to show that visually. Bligh Infant and Junior schools are just over there on the left side of the map and this shows some of the bigger developments that are either already happened or are planned to happen in the Strood area. It doesn't show all of the developments or the smaller ones but some of the major ones and you can see there is a significant amount of development happening.

I talked earlier about the school organisational principles and one of the principles is that when we are looking to expand schools we want to expand schools that are good and popular. In terms of Bligh Infant and Junior schools we would consider them both to be meeting that criteria. Bligh Infant was rated as an outstanding school by OFSTED at its recent visit in July, Bligh Junior was rated as a good school in its last inspection in February 2013 so certainly in that aspect it supports our local policy that successful schools should expand and also that is national policy as well. It is not just Medway saying that we want to expand good and outstanding schools but nationally it is recognised policy that we should be looking to expand good and outstanding schools.

In terms of the schools' popularity, the school is popular so this year the school had 60 places available in reception, there were 95 first and second preferences this year for Bligh Infant in reception so clearly there is more demand for places in the school than there are places available. We expect that increasing demand to continue and obviously particularly bearing in mind the recent OFSTED judgement of the Infant School as outstanding, what tends to follow is an increased popularity of that school, so those numbers we would expect to rise.

The proposal would be to increase the published admission number from 60 to 90 from sept 2017 which will mean pupil numbers across the whole school will increase by 30 in reception and then increase year on year, so it's not the case that suddenly the school will fill up across all year groups immediately. What we normally do is start by taking on additional pupils in reception year, those pupils work their way up through the years and each year we take on 30 additional pupils.

So, just a bit about the formal proposals now. The formal proposal, and this is in line with the requirements of how we need to consult, the formal proposal is to expand the physical size of the school by enlargement of the premises. We are proposing, in order to take those additional number of pupils, we will have to 'Expand the Premises', so we will have to undertake some building work to provide the additional space that is needed at the school.

There is a legal process that is required to put these proposals into effect and at this stage this isn't a consultation about the buildings or about what they will look like. We haven't started any detailed work yet on the buildings or what they will look like although we have had some initial discussions with the school about that and we will be doing more detailed design work. As part of that process we will have to put in planning permissions and obviously as part of that process, then local residents and other interested parties will be able to put forward their view on the proposals as far as the building works are concerned. But this proposal isn't about the building works as such, it's about our proposal to expand the premises to enable us to take on the additional pupils.

It is the first step in a statutory process, so it is a process that we have to follow which is prescribed by the Department for Education. The first part of this process is a 4-week informal consultation period, which we are in now. So the consultation period started on Monday, on 2nd November, we are holding a public consultation evening this evening and during that process, any interested parties

will have the opportunity to put forward their views to the Council. The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee which is a committee of the Council which is made up of elected members, may wish to review the responses received and if so, that will take place in January 2016.

The Cabinet, so Medway Council's Cabinet who are the decision maker here, they will review the responses in February 2016 and then having taken all of the points that are raised during the consultation into consideration, they can choose to do a number of things, they can either decide to stop the proposals at that stage, or they can approve the proposals for the next stage of the statutory process. That next stage is called the statutory representation period and that is an additional 4 week period, where any formal objections can be raised and that will take place during February and March, so at that point we will publish statutory notices, we will publish something in the paper and people will have the opportunity to object to the proposals at that stage.

If no objections are received during that period then the Cabinet can delegate powers the Director of Children Services to determine the outcome of the proposals. That means they can make the decision at the end of the process to go ahead with the proposals. If there are objections however, then the Cabinet will consider those proposals and those objections before taking the final decision whether to approve or object the proposals.

The final slide, this is just a summary of the timeline, so we are in the public consultation period now, there would potentially be a report to Overview and Scrutiny before we report to Cabinet, following that statutory notice period before the Council makes a decision on the proposals.

Cllr O'Brien

All of those slides, we won't be asking you questions on them, but they are all in the consultation document and if for any reason, although you will have the opportunity to ask questions in a while, if you think of something when you get home, on the back page there is the facility there to either send it in by post or to email any questions that you would like ask.

Can I ask please the acting Headteacher if you would like to add anything? Mrs Broom the chair of governors, anything you would like to say?

Kate Broom - Chair of Governors

Hopefully everyone can hear us, but please let us know if you can't. I suppose for us it is an absolute huge compliment, we see ourselves as a federation. There are four elements, and three elements of that at the moment are currently outstanding. The junior school is good under the current leadership we have here, OFSTED came in one year after we assumed leadership of the Junior School. We look forward to them coming in as then all four elements will be outstanding.

As governors we work with parents and families from when their children are first conceived actually, they come in and see the midwife. They go through a centre of excellence - our nursery, they go through our day care, they go through our foundation and actually we have to turn away parents because there is not enough room and they want to come here because it is a centre of excellence. This gives us the opportunity to engage further and to positively Influence those families' children's lives.

My daughter who is 19 came here, I became involved in the school a very long time ago, I am privileged to be Chair of Governors here and if it wasn't for the start she had, she would not be studying law at university as she is now. So I think everyone deserves that right and right now, we turn away a lot of children and that is really difficult for us and our governor colleagues.

Headteacher

I can't really add much more that Kate said, apart from the fact that here at Bligh we want to do more for children in Medway, and I think by having a PAN of 90 children per year group will allow for

children to come into our school and achieve an outstanding education and we can do more for the children of Medway.

Cllr O'Brien

Ladies and Gentlemen as promised Pauline Maddison is here, I did introduce you and your position earlier on, I will also mention that we also have Cllr Mrs Pat Cooper at the back who is a member of the labour group and we have local ward Cllr, John Avey, who is the Conservative Cllr sitting at the back taking an interest in what is going on.

So, you have the presentation. Hopefully now you have got questions. Who is going to lead off with the first question?

Will you please say, who you are and whether you are a parent, governor or member of staff please?

Local resident

I know you have taken a lot of extra people in but what about the people who have got extra cars and parking around the area, what are you going to do about that? Extra people parking in our street. Are you going to make extra provisions for people to park in the school area?

Chris McKenzie

Obviously we do understand that there is potentially an impact from the school taking on additional pupils and will understand that impact and will want to take that into account when planning the next stages. Typically what we would do when we are looking at the design of the building and any works that are necessary to undertake to increase the size of the building, we will also take into account the impact in terms of traffic, additional people coming to the area and to the school as well, we will take that into account as part of that process and also as part of the planning process we will need to consult on any plans through the planning process as well. We will take that into account when we look to design the school building.

Cllr O'Brien

Is that clear? There will be a planning process....

Local resident

So there are no plans at the moment that is what I thought it would be.....

Chris McKenzie

That will come at a later date.

Local resident

What time do you think that will be?

Chris McKenzie

We will probably start work on the design in the new-year and will then be looking to consult from a planning perspective later next year.

Local resident

Do you know if it will be a single storey or double storey?

Chris McKenzie

We don't at this stage...

Cllr O'Brien

No we don't sir that is for planning this tonight is purely the principle of expansion. Hopefully you are reassured that you will have the opportunity at a later stage. Who is next please?

Parent of Nursery Pupil

Just as the two ladies said there, they have to turn children away. My wife and I are parents that are hoping to be able to get in in this roster. Apologies if this was covered but I arrived late, in the actual birth section it says here, for 2016 a temporary solution has been arranged for another school to help meet demand. Is that going to affect the intake this year or is it the intake next year and if so what schools are you looking at as the secondary option?

Chris McKenzie

It's been agreed Elaine Primary school is going to take what we call a bulge class next year for September 2016 so they will take an additional class of children because they already have capacity within their existing school buildings to do that and actually as an academy they can decide to do that anyway.

That will provide some additional capacity for next year, the proposals are for Bligh to expand from 2017 so for an additional intake to come in from September 2017 and that will link in with the works that we need to do to the building to make sure there is sufficient capacity.

Parent of Nursery Pupil

So that is not going to affect the children that are potentially now waiting for places, ready to start in what would be Jan 2016?

Chris McKenzie

No, so the intake for next September will be 60 as in previous years.

Sylvia Balding, Member of staff, Clerk to the Governors

I just wanted to know with the increase in numbers, will that mean the catchment area will be widened?

Chris McKenzie

The school doesn't operate a catchment area as such, but by increasing the numbers it does mean potentially that children from further afield will be able to attend the school so the school's admissions criteria will apply and the majority of children will gain a place at the school based on the distance from where they live in relation to the school. So by increasing the number of children who can attend the school then it will extend the distance potentially that children will be able to attend the school from.

Local resident

We live just two doors away from the entrance to the Junior School and the parking is terrible, anyone bringing children to the school or collecting them they

Cllr O'Brien

I don't want to cut you short but as I explained to the previous questioner we are not here to discuss parking or planning but you will have the opportunity.....

Local resident

I would like to sow the seed of an idea to have some off road parking in the area, like there is some parking for teachers and other staff opposite the entrance to Bligh Junior School, perhaps there could be some additional parking off road for parents to drop children and pick them up again later on. That would help the local parking situation no end. We are not able to get in and out of our drive during those relevant periods of time. Not just because of cars parking in front of our drives.....

Cllr O'Brien

Point well made.....

Kate Broom - Chair of Governors

I think it is really important and whilst it isn't about parking this evening, I think two residents have brought it up so while I'm here I'm going to take the opportunity. With any incidents of illegal parking, if you come in and speak with the school, we work with our colleagues at Medway daily and the local police. We have cones that we put out, we've had bollards put in place now. We take your safety and the children's safety so seriously so, so seriously so if people are not abiding by that then if you come into the school and let us know.

One of my colleagues here at the back, Sue Ormes, one of the governors and also an employee in Medway has a background in parking and has done a huge amount of work. We have engaged with individual parents and actually took things very seriously with them when we found on a number of occasions they had been illegally parked. We take it really seriously because it is about your safety and the safety of the children so if people are illegally parking actually, you as a resident of that home is the only person who can inform Medway. Medway can send a parking warden round to issue tickets. Now we routinely throughout the year work with our colleagues at Medway to ask them to come out and to bring the camera up and down and we do that when we hear lots of complaints coming in about parking. Every engagement we have with you about parking we take very seriously.

Local resident

???

Cllr O'Brien

I'm sorry sir, I don't want to be rude but tonight is not the night to talk about parking. You will have the opportunity when it comes up for planning. You have made your point sir, thank you.

Local resident

Follow up to the earlier point about Elaine school taking next September bulge into 30. Will they take on extra children on a permanent basis every year and further to that question, have Elaine and indeed Cedar, have they got more room for expansion in comparison with the Bligh Schools here? I just wondered whether there is demand for more than 30 in the whole of the Strood area on an annual basis meaning that other Strood schools will also need to expand.

Cllr O'Brien

Would you like to explain the bulge please Chris?

Chris McKenzie

What we call a bulge class is typically just for a single year so that will just be that we need that additional capacity for that year. So that group of children that join the school in that year will move up through the school but will not necessarily take on an additional class the following year, so that class will move through. Having said that, we will almost certainly need additional capacity in the Strood area in addition to the additional form of entry we are planning at Bligh. We envisage that this will be the first stage in the Strood area, which may be Elaine but potentially could be at other schools. The reason we are doing Bligh and the reason we are doing Bligh first is as I said early, Bligh Infant is an outstanding school and Bligh Junior is a good school and that is within our principles that we want good and outstanding schools to expand.

Cllr O'Brien

Anyone else on the expansion? In that case then, can I ask the listening panel, do you have any questions to ask?

Cllr Catriona Brown-Reckless

I've got one very specific question and one more general bigger question. The specific question is the bulge class which is going to go into Elaine in September 2016, is that going to then move over from Elaine to Bligh the following year or go all the way through Elaine?

Chris McKenzie

It will go all the way through Elaine.

Cllr Catriona Brown-Reckless

Thank you. The wider question I have, there is a lot of information here this evening, there is some material in your presentation about the need for more places in Strood and that is well made, birth rates are up etc. there is a wider common good argument for the need to expand good performing schools and congratulations for the outstanding you achieved this summer. It is also legitimate for parents of children at the school, if I was to play devil's advocate to question whether or not the expansion could impact on the education of children here at the moment, both in terms of disruption because of buildings works which can interfere or secondly because it could mean that you have got far more children crowded into the same facilities ultimately. You have got less playground space if you put more buildings on them, you have got more pressure on existing gym halls and other facilities and I know parking tonight is not the subject but ultimately there will be more pressure on local parking as well, how would you answer the substance of that? We may not have specific plans yet on exactly what shape or form the school is going to be but what about the general point with the concern that many parents might have that it could be detrimental to the standards here for the existing children already at the school?

Cllr O'Brien

Can I just say that really you are here to listen and just ask pertinent questions rather than make any speeches please?

Cllr Catriona Brown-Reckless

Thank you, I would like to answer that then. I am a UKIP Councillor, I have got a labour Councillor here on my right and everyone else here are Conservative Councillors. I think it is important people understand that the policy of increasing school places comes from a central Conservative Government, it is a conservative controlled..... I would like to make the point.....

Cllr O'Brien

I have got to stop you as we are talking about children here.....

Cllr Catriona Brown-Reckless

I would actually like to finish what I am saying. We have not been involved in the decision here this evening so we are truly independent here. To say that we can come and listen but not articulate, it is wrong and we should be entitled to do that and there is nothing inappropriate.....

Cllr O'Brien

Chris has already explained why it is necessary to expand our schools in this particular area and indeed in other areas. Is there anything you would like to add?

Pauline Maddison

Perhaps if I pick up the standards issue because it is a really important one and thank you for raising it because any parent at any consultation like this might think that a bigger school might actually reduce standards. Actually there is no evidence at all of that, anywhere across the country.

As we all know standards is about the quality of teaching which leads to the quality of learning rather than the size of the school so we would expect that the quality of teaching will continue at Bligh. Clearly Bligh with more children will get more resources to be able to employ more teachers, will structure the schools in such a way that they can manage the children with sole focus to continue to improve standards rather than reduce. Often those additional resources will actually enable schools to use them more effectively so that they can improve. So I would urge people not at all to worry that standards will fall.

Cllr O'Brien

And indeed as Chris said earlier on, we have an outstanding and good school here.

Cllr Catriona Brown-Reckless

That means more teachers and things but it still doesn't address the central point which is you are still stretching the same facilities and same space and playground space amongst more children so that may be a point of concern in some parents' minds.

Chris McKenzie

And just to pick up on that point, we will be working very closely with the school, with the Headteacher, with the senior leadership team and the governors to make sure that the facilities we provide are absolutely appropriate for a school of that size.

Cllr Catriona Brown-Reckless

So as well as expanding school size it is also planned to expand facilities at the same rate so that happens.

Chris McKenzie

Yes absolutely, so an expanded school doesn't just need additional classrooms it will need appropriate facilities across the whole school to make sure it is able to meet the needs of those children so that is what we will look at in consultation with the school.

Headteacher

We had our initial meeting with the LEA obviously before this meeting and it was very pleasing to hear that they are going to involve us in a lot of the talks about the building as well and we have already set up a working party within school which combines long standing members of staff that know the building very well, know what works and what doesn't work and what we need for our

children and that is across the phases, all the way from the day care because it is obviously going to affect the federation, even though it is four schools, from early years all the way up to KS2 but also our site managers, it is a working party and we have already met and talked about what will work for our children here at Bligh and the space that we have.

Kate Broom - Chair of Governors

Can I just add on behalf of myself and the governing body that we didn't get to outstanding by accepting anything sub-standard. So having worked with the team previously we have been through building already, we have already expanded and we have no fear in terms of our involvement and setting the expectations around what we can do and those plans will be able to facilitate our exemplar, we deliver outstanding, we are not going to agree to anything that will take those judgements away.

Like I say, we have four elements here, three elements are outstanding, we have just got the Junior School to get, they just came in a little bit earlier than we needed them to; when they next come in, all four elements will be outstanding. This building work will allow that to happen, it will not detract anything at all, our role as governors will not allow that to happen.

Clr O'Brien

Thank you and indeed it is a school you can all be proud of and I am sure you are. A couple of questions from local residents, sorry to be short with you but this is not the time... and obviously you will have that opportunity. Other than that, is everyone in favour of the expansion? All going to be good for your children?

For those who haven't asked any questions, don't forget, have you got one of these consultation documents?

Local resident

Is this expansion only happening because the other schools have failed? Are the other schools full to capacity, is this needed?

Chris McKenzie

The majority of schools in the Strood area, the reception intakes for this year were full for Elaine and Cedar for example for September.

Clr O'Brien

It isn't just Strood of course, we have a similar problem in Gillingham as well. It's great because we have more and more children, more young people coming in.....

If you have any questions...

On that point we will have to agree to differ.

Any questions you have, on the back of the pamphlet you have the opportunity to sit down at home and think, 'I wish I had asked that', send it in and it will be answered so it won't be a waste of time.

Can I thank the Headteacher again for allowing us to come here for the consultation and thanks to the governors? Thank you everybody for coming here; thank you to the listening panel.

You will have the opportunity to make your views to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in due course...

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Chris McKenzie

We always arrange prior to the reports going onto the Council's Cabinet for any members of the listening panel, indeed any members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and any other members, to come in and have a look at any responses that are received. You will have sight of if you want to of all the consultation responses, we do a full transcript of this evening's meeting and that is attached to any reports that go forward so there is a full public record of the questions that have been asked.

Cllr O'Brien

That will go to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to Cabinet.

