



Education Authority – Belfast Region

Area Plan for Primary Education

Review of Controlled Education Provision

in

**Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street
Primary Schools**

Consultation Response Document

Closing Date: 29 May 2015

Introduction

Before arriving at the final recommendation on the nature of future provision at Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street Primary Schools, the Education Authority is seeking the views of those most directly involved at a local level. Therefore, the Authority is seeking to engage in consultation with local, political and community representatives, the Boards of Governors, staff, parents of current pupils and other interested parties in the local community.

Vision

The aim of the Education Authority (Belfast Region) Area Plan for Primary Education is to facilitate the development of a network of viable and sustainable schools which can deliver the NI Curriculum effectively and provide access to a range of educational provision that is appropriate to the needs of the children and young people in the Belfast area.

Education Authority Position

At the March 2015 meeting of the Belfast Education and Library Board it was agreed to initiate consultation with local political and community representatives, the Boards of Governors, staff and parents of Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street Primary Schools on the amalgamation of the three schools. This matter will now be progressed by the Education Authority (Belfast Region) as the new organisation established on 1 April 2015.

Nature of the Education Authority Recommendation

Historically the Belfast Education and Library Board has been seeking to establish a new primary school to replace the existing provision in this area of South Belfast for a considerable period of time and will continue to liaise with all other public bodies in order to find a suitable site for this school. Not only will this provide a modern, fit-for-purpose new build school but it will reduce, also, the number of unfilled places in the area by around 800 places.

Following consultation at local level the Education Authority board will make a recommendation on the amalgamation of Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street Primary Schools and any subsequent action will be dependent on this recommendation.

Publication of a Development Proposal

The Education Authority is required to publish development proposals (DPs) outlining the proposed changes to the schools. The views expressed in this consultation will be forwarded to Education Authority board members prior to the board meeting for their consideration. In June 2014, the Department of Education (DE) published new guidelines relating to capital funding, **Major Works Projects: Protocol for Selection of Projects to Proceed in Planning**. These protocols make it clear that “schools will not be considered for capital funding announcement unless all outstanding area planning issues have been resolved and DPs have been published” (p3, para 2.5). Therefore, unless the Education Authority publishes development proposals amalgamating Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street Primary Schools it is clear that the Education Authority would not receive the capital funding required from DE to build a new primary school in the area.

Timescale

The Education Authority intends to consider the development proposals outlining the proposed changes, including the results of local consultation, in June 2015. If the development proposals are approved they will be published in the local press one week after approval is given and then forwarded on to DE for Ministerial consideration and approval. As part of this process DE undertakes its own two month consultation period (excluding the months of July and August).

Implications

In the event of the Education Authority publishing the development proposals recommending the amalgamation of Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street Primary Schools the Education Authority proposes the following:

Development Proposal (i) - to close Blythefield PS with effect from 31 August 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter;

Development Proposal (ii) - to close Donegall Road PS with effect from 31 August 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter;

Development Proposal (iii) - to close Fane Street PS with effect from 31 August 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter;

Development Proposal (iv) - to establish a new 21 class primary school, including a 52 part-time place nursery unit and a Key Stage 1 (including Foundation Stage) Learning Support Centre (LSC) and a Key Stage 2 Learning Support Centre (LSC) with effect from 1 September 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter.

Education Authority - Consultation Part 1

The Education Authority is proposing the amalgamation of Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street Primary Schools. The Education Authority, in consulting on this important issue, would welcome your comments on the following options, or an option of your own.

Option 1: Retain the Status Quo

Option 2: To close Blythefield PS with effect from 31 August 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter;

To close Donegall Road PS with effect from 31 August 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter;

To close Fane Street PS with effect from 31 August 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter;

To establish a new 21 class primary school, including a 52 part-time place nursery unit and a Key Stage 1 (including Foundation Stage) Learning Support Centre (LSC) and a Key Stage 2 Learning Support Centre (LSC) with effect from 1 September 2016 or as soon as possible thereafter.

Option 3: Any other alternative option - please give full details.

It is important to indicate in your response how any alternative option meets the Sustainable Schools Policy requirement *'that all schools are sustainable in terms of the quality of the educational experience of children, enrolment trends, financial position, school leadership and management, accessibility, and the strength of their links to the community.'*

It should also be noted that this process cannot be used to consider specific issues as they currently relate to any individual pupil or adult associated with the school. If for example as a parent you have concerns relating to your child's present education you are advised to contact the Principal or Education Authority as appropriate. Every effort will be made to address your concerns.

Option 1 – Status Quo (please tick one box only)	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
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Option 2 – Education Authority's proposal to amalgamate Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street Primary Schools (please tick one box only)	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree <input type="checkbox"/>
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Option 3 - Please use the space below to comment further or to detail any alternative options

NICEM feels that the best option would be to close Blythefield Primary School and allow pupils to join either of the remaining two schools on Donegall Road and Fane Street. This is the best possible outcome for a number of reasons: firstly, it resolves the low pupil uptake at Blythefield, which was the primary justification for action in the BELB's Area Plan for Primary Education¹; secondly, the merger of Fane Street Primary would present a high security risk of racist attacks against ethnic minority and Muslim families - which constitute 64% of the school population - when parents bring their children to school via the bridge connecting the current school and the Village area (almost a mile's walk) to get to any new/different site²; thirdly, the merger of Fane Street Primary would result in the loss of expert educational provision for newcomer pupils on EAL as given by the practiced staff at the school, which has recently been accredited as a best practice model by the British Council; fourthly, the merger of Fane Street Primary would dissolve the integrated, balanced and multicultural demographic at this school, which involves a mix of many racial and religious communities³; fifthly, it is anticipated that the demographic resultant from any merger involving Fane Street Primary will result in an increased vulnerability to racist bullying for BME pupils in the new school buildings.

In terms of the Sustainable Schools Policy requirement related above, it is clear that this solution would meet every criteria listed. As regards the quality of children's educational experience, maintaining the expertise, good practice and demographic at Fane Street is the most sustainable

¹ Belfast Education and Library Board, 'Belfast Education and Library Board Area Plan for Primary Education Consultation Findings Report' (2014) p.13

² South Belfast has the highest hate crime incidence rating of any area in Northern Ireland: Police Service of Northern Ireland, 'Table 2.11: Incidents with a Racist Motivation by Policing District and Policing Area, 2004/05 to 2013/14' (2014)

³ Of the 203 pupils recorded on the school census, 11 are Polish, 27 are Romanian, 26 are Saudi and 44 are Somali. In terms of religious breakdown, Fane Street Primary has 88 Muslim children and 17 Roman Catholic children (a number equal to the number of Methodist and Presbyterian pupils at the school). In total, Fane Street Primary has children from 22 different countries, speaking 25 different languages.

and economically viable method of achieving this outcome. In terms of enrolment trends, it is evident from school census data that Fane Street Primary's enrolment has gone up year on year since 2009/2010, with its enrolment over doubling in this period. It is expected that this trend will sustain, especially if Blythefield Primary School - which is far below the minimum enrolment requirement - is closed.

In terms of financial sustainability, it is worth noting that Fane Street Primary School has always been within budget and there is no reason to expect this to change. Furthermore, as regards school leadership and management, the extant skills present amongst the management are the best way of ensuring the sustainment of good quality education for newcomer pupils in South Belfast. Following this option would also best ensure sustained accessibility of education for newcomer children living in South Belfast, due to the maintenance of skilled staff, good practice and a safe learning environment. Finally, it is clear that Fane Street Primary, with its range of pupils from various racial, religious and cultural backgrounds has very sustainable links with South Belfast, which is the most ethnically diverse community in Northern Ireland⁴

⁴ South Belfast has the highest non-white ethnic minority population of any administrative area in Northern Ireland: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 'Census 2011: Ethnic Group: KS201NI (administrative geographies)' (2011)

Education Authority - Consultation Part 2 (a)

If the Education Authority proceeds with Option 2 interim arrangements will need to be put in place from September 2016 as no single site is large enough to accommodate all the pupils from the three existing schools. Therefore, the new school will operate over two sites until capital funding becomes available to build the new school. With this in mind the Education Authority would welcome your comments on the following options in relation to the use of the existing sites:

Option 1: Blythefield PS and Donegall Road PS sites

Option 2: Blythefield PS and Fane Street PS sites

Option 3: Donegall Rd PS and Fane Street PS sites

Preferred Site Option (please tick one box only)	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3

Please use the space below to provide any additional comments

NICEM reiterates that a system whereby the three schools are merged would be disagreeable for the above reasons. Any interim arrangement involving the merger of the three schools and the maintenance of two sites is likely to persist indefinitely, due to the inability to locate an appropriate site for a build, the lack of consensus amongst the schools on the appropriateness of sites and the lack of capital funding available to begin a new build. Indeed, due to the pending cuts in the Northern Ireland Assembly's budget, the realistic prospect of available capital for such a build is likely to diminish with time, rather than increase.

Education Authority - Consultation Part 2 (b)

If the Education Authority proceeds with Option 2 with the new school temporarily operating over two sites, the interim Board of Governors will have to decide on the most effective use of these sites. With this in mind the Education Authority would welcome your comments on the following options in relation to the use of two sites:

Option 1: Year 1 to Year 4 on one site and Year 5 to Year 7 on the other site

Option 2: Both sites operating Year 1 to Year 7 classes

Preferred Option (please tick one box only)	Option 1	Option 2

Please use the space below to provide any additional comments

NICEM reiterates that a merger of the three schools is an undesirable outcome. This is partially due to the lack of a sustainable, sensible option for running a two-site merged school. Hosting different age-groups in two different sites would present an extreme inconvenience for families with children of differing ages as regards travelling to each site every day, especially low-income families. Additionally, operating two sites with Year 1 to Year 7 classes would be similar to NICEM's suggestion to close Blythefield Primary School, but with the added cost and confusion of merging staff and management. Thus, it makes sense, both economically and logistically, to adhere to NICEM's proposal in this regard.

Equality Consideration

Under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 all public bodies are obliged to consider the implications of any decisions on nine different groupings before decisions are implemented. The two duties within this Equality legislation include promoting equality of opportunity and promoting good relations between all communities. The equality of opportunity duty requires that the Education Authority shall, in carrying out all its functions, powers and duties, have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:

1. Between persons of different religious belief.
2. Between persons of different political opinion.
3. Between persons of different racial groups.
4. Between persons of different age.
5. Between persons of different marital status.
6. Between persons of different sexual orientation.
7. Between men and women generally.
8. Between persons with a disability and persons without.
9. Between persons with dependants and persons without.

The Good Relations Duty requires that the Education Authority shall, without prejudice to their equality obligations, have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations:

1. Between persons of different religious belief.
2. Between persons of different political opinions.
3. Between persons of different racial groups.

In light of these obligations do you consider that the amalgamation of Blythefield, Donegall Road and Fane Street Primary Schools will impact positively or negatively on either Equality of Opportunity or the Promotion of Good Relations in any way?

Section 75 Category	Positive	Negative	Don't Know
Religious Belief		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Political Opinion		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Racial Group		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Age			
Marital Status			
Sexual Orientation			
Gender			
Disability			
Dependants			

If you ticked any of the above boxes please clarify your reason:

NICEM considers that the amalgamation of Fane Street Primary with Blythefield and Donegall Road Primaries would have a considerable negative impact on equality of opportunity between persons of different religious beliefs and racial groups, and on the promotion of good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group. This would be due to the potential creation of a Holy Cross Primary School scenario in South Belfast, the elimination of the specialist language support and staff expertise provided to newcomer pupils at Fane Street and the eradication of the diverse demographic that makes this school a good practice model for non-sectarian as well as racially-integrated education.

Arrangements for returning your completed questionnaire

Please return the completed questionnaire **no later than Friday 29 May 2015** to Blythefield, Donegall Road or Fane Street Primary Schools

Or by post to:

Carol Hall
Development Proposal Officer
Belfast Education and Library Board
40 Academy Street
Belfast
BT1 2NQ

Source of Response (please specify):

Governor _____

Parent _____

Teacher _____

Non-Teaching Staff _____

Teacher Union _____

Other (Please specify): Community Organisation - Northern Ireland Council for
Ethnic Minorities