

Brighton & Hove City Council

Special Children, Young People & Skills Committee

Agenda Item 61(c)

Subject: Review of School Allocations. Petitions for debate referred from Public Engagement meeting held on 16 December 2021

Date of meeting: 31 January 2022

Report of: Executive Director for Governance, People & Resources

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Wards affected: All

For general release

1. Purpose of the report and policy context

1.1 To receive the following petitions for consideration which were debated at and referred from the public engagement meeting held on the 16 December 2021.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That the Committee responds to the petitions either by noting them or writing to the petition organisers setting out the council's views, or where it is considered more appropriate, calls for an officer report on the matter.

3. Context and background information

3.1 To receive the following petitions along with the extract from the public engagement meeting which is detailed in appendix 1:

(1) [Keep Carden Nursery & Primary School as a thriving 2 form entry \(brighton-hove.gov.uk\)](#)

Lead petitioner Esther Garibay

We the undersigned petition Brighton & Hove Council to reject the proposal to reduce the number of pupil places at Carden Primary School to 30, which would be hugely detrimental to the children and staff at the school, as well as the local community.

Justification:

Situated in the border between Patcham and Hollingbury, Carden Nursery and Primary School has been a thriving community hub for the families of this area since 1948.

Carden is a fantastic school on a trajectory of growth. It has agile leadership that has continued to improve the quality of its educational offer. This has happened regardless of fluctuation of pupil numbers over the years.

The most recent Ofsted inspection (Good, Sep 2021) described the school atmosphere as 'buoyant', the early years programme as 'highly effective', and recognised pupils' wider development as a particular strength of the curriculum.

Hence, we strongly reject the proposed reduction of pupils on the following basis:

- 1 Reducing the intake in the school will mean significant budget cuts, for an area rated in the 20% most deprived in the country.
This puts additional pressures on Carden School because a single-form school:
 - is at greater risk of financial difficulties due to lack of economies of scale
 - is more likely to attract a higher concentration of SEND pupils than larger primary schools
 - will result in staff reductions and fewer resources for building maintenance, equipment and enrichment activities.This is all to the detriment of current and future pupils.

- 2 Reducing the PAN at Carden will directly result in more pupils needing to travel to other schools by car, and/or have longer commutes in public transport. This adds to pollution and congestion.
 - Carden is at the edge of town, in a hilly area, making it impractical to walk or bike to other schools further away.
 - This contravenes the Council's Climate Emergency plans toward a carbon neutral city.
 - It also further disadvantages families in this area by increasing their drop-off and pick-up times, and cost of transport.

- 3 Reducing the number of pupils will tear the social fabric of this truly diverse school where:
 - 36% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, 20% have Special Educational Needs, 44% are BAME and 15% have English as an additional language.
 - Carden is host to a Speech, Language and Communication Unit, and specialises in this provision.
 - Ofsted (Sep 2021) commended the school's commitment to equality and diversity, and noted Leaders are highly successful at engaging members from all corners of the school community.
 - By reducing places available to local families, you will be splitting children in the area from their friends and neighbours, taking away the opportunity to foster interconnecting social tissue and a sense of belonging and pride in the neighbourhood that Carden currently enables.

- 4 Reducing Carden to a single--form will create significant disparity in choice and outcome for children in Hollingbury and Patcham. This is at best unfair, and at worst discriminatory.

We acknowledge the Council is concerned with surplus primary school places across all of Brighton and Hove. This is particularly projected to affect the City Centre, The Deans and City East.

- We call for an equitable city-wide approach that doesn't further disadvantage smaller, thriving schools like Carden that often have large well-ventilated buildings with lots of green space to accommodate pupils.
 - A reduction of an entire entry form would affect Carden School disproportionately, compared to larger neighbouring schools.
- 5 We request that an Equalities Impact Assessment be carried out before any more consideration is given to reducing the size of Carden. In summary, we strongly request that Carden Primary School remains a viable 2 form entry for the future of our children, neighbourhood and great city.

- (2) [Bevendean Primary School - SAVE OUR SCHOOL \(brighton-hove.gov.uk\)](https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk)

Lead petitioner Abby Vaughan

We the undersigned petition Brighton & Hove Council to reject the proposal to reduce the number of pupil places at Bevendean Primary School from 60 to 45.

Justification:

Bevendean Primary School and Nursery is situated approximately 3km from Brighton's city centre and is a hidden treasure. Because of its location, most children live close to the school and many parents are former pupils. In fact, 91% of the children live within the BN2 4 postcode – we are a Community School – in the heart of Bevendean. The school is surrounded by beautiful down land and set in extensive grounds with wide-open spaces. Bevendean Primary School and Nursery enjoys a peaceful and unspoilt location.

Before 1950, Bevendean Valley was mainly farmland. However, after the war, this farmland was developed. At this time, the school became the heart of the community – and to this day remains so! Originally two schools, these were joined together in 1990 to form Bevendean Primary School. In 2020, 'and Nursery' was added to the school's name to ensure the name reflected the school's offer.

Bevendean Primary School and Nursery is a GOOD School (Ofsted December 2019) and our results (prior to COVID-19) showed that our children make excellent progress in the core subjects of Reading, Writing and Maths. We have a Hearing Support Facility for deaf children – we are a very inclusive school!

The school and community strongly oppose Brighton and Hove City Council's recommendation to reduce our PAN (Published Admission Number) from 60 to 45, for the following reasons:

1. Reducing the intake in the school will mean significant budget cuts, for an area rated in the 20% most deprived in the country – 49% of our children are Pupil Premium.
2. Fewer school places at Bevendean Primary School and Nursery will mean that existing families of children, or new families to Bevendean might miss out on a school place, and then consequently, enrol at another school. This means that children and their families needing to travel to other schools by car, and/or have longer commutes in public transport. This adds to pollution and congestion.
3. Smaller schools mean MUCH smaller budgets. This will mean job cuts, further reductions in staff, less support for children with SEND or who need additional support such as reading or phonics groups. It will mean fewer trips and visits and no possibility to subsidise the ones we do run. It will mean less building maintenance and money spent on resources such as books, stationary etc.
4. Bevendean is a GOOD school. With a PAN of only 45, classes will be full – with 30 children or more in each class! This will mean less 1:1 and small group support for children who need this.
5. We are a fantastic community school. 91% of the children who attend our school live within the BN2 4 postcode! We are a community school and there must continue to be school places available for those families who move into Bevendean.
6. Bevendean has the highest percentage of disadvantaged pupils of any school in not just the east of city, but all of Brighton – we cannot let a proposed reduction in pupil numbers impact on the progress and attainment of our pupils.
7. The development of University accommodation along the Lewes Road will create additional housing for families in Bevendean as the large number of H.M.Os (Houses of Multiple Occupancy) are reduced. Long-term, we must ensure that Bevendean, as a community school, has places available for new families.
8. The reduction of PANS across the city must be fair and equitable. Large, middle-class oversubscribed schools, faith schools should also be considered – not just schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils.

Please support the school in signing this petition, showing your support in ensuring that Bevendean Primary School and Nursery remains a 2-form entry school that serves the Bevendean Community.

(3) [Stop Woodingdean Primary School from having its pupil numbers reduced](#)

Lead petitioner Karen Meeres

We the undersigned petition Brighton & Hove Council to reject the proposal to reduce the number of pupils joining Woodingdean Primary School each year from 60 to 45, with effect from 2023.

Justification:

Woodingdean Primary School is a thriving, popular, oversubscribed, two-form entry school situated to the east of the city in Woodingdean. The school has been at the heart of the village in its current building since 1948. We are proud to boast that multi-generations of families have enjoyed their school years with us.

We are a good school (according to Ofsted), but our community know that we are a fantastic school, committed to nurturing and developing all our pupils in partnership with our local community. Due to our robust financial management, our strong and positive budget will enable us to make our plans a reality over the next year: a new science lab, new library, Forest School, and many other exciting initiatives.

To reduce our pupil numbers would have a considerable impact on our school and our local community. We, therefore, oppose the proposed reduction for the following reasons:

Parents have the right to choose

Woodingdean Primary is a very popular, inclusive school. For September 2021, we were oversubscribed with 69 first choices for our 60 places. Reducing our pupil numbers from 60 to 45 would impact parental preference when the Council has an overriding responsibility to seek to increase opportunities for parental choice, not reduce them. Local parents wishing to send their children to their local school would be less likely to get a place.

Our location in the east of the city means our families do not have the same number of school choices available as in many other parts of the city. Any school outside of Woodingdean village would mean families travelling by bus or car, therefore going against the Council's stated aim to become carbon neutral. It also goes against the messages we share with the children, encouraging them to look after the environment by walking or scootering and will hit hardest, those who can least afford it.

Mixed-age classes

Reducing our numbers by half a class from 60 to 45 would not mean smaller classes but would result in a different structure to the classes. This is called mixed-age teaching, where children of different ages are taught together. There are currently no other schools in Brighton and Hove with this structure, and the local authority has told us this is a trial to see what parents and the local community think. Research into mixed-age teaching provided by the Council says that 'parent views tend to be negative as do teachers' and 'mixed-age students in one study were found to have more negative views of their own behaviour and believe themselves to be less popular'.

We are naturally very concerned about the impact on our children and the wider school community if we are to trial something this new and unknown. Covid has put enormous demands on schools as they try to support children to make up for all the time lost over the last 18 months. The proposed change would mean our whole curriculum would need redesigning and staff restructuring, and retraining. Most importantly, our staff are not experienced with this approach to teaching and would not choose to teach in this environment. We could lose our fantastic staff team. Our school would be at a disadvantage when recruiting new staff, compared to other Brighton and Hove schools who are not being forced down the mixed-age route. Our children deserve the excellent teachers and support staff they currently have. We do not want them to be part of a costly and potentially damaging experiment that would be equally costly and problematic to reverse.

It is proposed that both Woodingdean schools should face mixed-age classes, which further reduces the choice for our local parents who may prefer a two-form entry school and one without mixed-age classes.

Why Woodingdean Primary School?

The Council's proposal states that it will focus pupil number reductions on schools that get fewer applications than their published admission numbers. This is the case with other schools whose pupil numbers will be reduced in 2021, 2022 and 2023... except for Woodingdean Primary.

We are an oversubscribed school, and the Council's own proposal states, "It is therefore not a realistic strategy for the Council to look to the larger popular schools, which are oversubscribed or admit enough pupils to be close to their PAN as a way of reducing the number of surplus primary school places." Therefore, the inclusion of Woodingdean Primary School goes against the Council's own proposal, and we believe we are being unfairly targeted for a reduction when other, undersubscribed central schools are not being included.

To summarise, we are against the reduction in pupil numbers from 60 to 45 and urge the Council to reverse its proposal and leave Woodingdean Primary School as the thriving, vibrant two-form entry school it is today.

4. Community engagement and consultation

- 4.1 A consultation exercise has been undertaken and a report of the Executive Director for Families, Children & Learning is listed elsewhere on the agenda.

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MEETING

4.30pm 16 DECEMBER 2021

VIRTUAL

MINUTES

Present: Councillor Robins (Chair), Allcock, Appich, Atkinson, Bagaeen, Barnett, Brennan, Brown, Childs, Clare, Davis, Deane, Druitt, Evans, Gibson, Hamilton, Heley, Hills, Janio, John, Knight, Mac Cafferty, McNair, Meadows, Mears, Nemeth, Nield, Osborne, Peltzer Dunn, Pissaridou, Powell, O'Quinn, Shanks, Simson, C Theobald, Wilkinson and Williams.

5(A) PETITIONS FOR DEBATE

- 5.1 The Mayor noted that the Council's Petitions Scheme provided that where a petition secured 1,250 or more signatures it can be debated at a meeting of the full Council. He noted that he had been informed of three such petitions which he had agreed to take at today's public engagement meeting, in light of the cancellation of the full council meeting. The petitions concerned school places for children across the city and the Mayor stated that he intended to call each of the spokespersons to present their petitions before opening the matter up for debate.
- 5.2 Laura Bissonnet thanked the Mayor and outlined the reasons for the petition which sought to keep Carden Nursery & Primary School as a thriving 2-form entry.
- 5.3 Leila Erin-Jenkins thanked the Mayor and outlined the reasons for the petition which sought to keep Bevendean Primary School at its current size rather than reduce the number of places available.
- 5.4 Gemma Chumnansin thanked the Mayor and outlined the reasons for the petition which sought to keep Woodingdean Primary School at its current size rather than reduce the number of places available.
- 5.5 The Mayor thanked the petitioners and invited councillor Clare to respond as Chair of the Children, Young People & Skills Committee, before opening the matter up for debate.
- 5.6 Councillor Clare thanked the petitioners and stated that this was an important issue of which I know many councillors are considering their response to and I have spent significant time this evening providing responses to. At this present time, there is a consultation open on these proposals and I urge you to fill these consultations in if you haven't already. This is the best way we can ensure that the potential impact of these proposals are thoroughly considered by councillors in the depth they deserve to be.

The timing of these consultations is set by both the school admissions code and the council's democratic timetable. However, I note that the close of the consultation on 2 January ahead of the meeting of the Children, Young People & Skills Committee on 10th January will not give councillors much time to weigh up all the responses to each consultation and consider the impacts of each school.

I am therefore calling a special meeting of the Children, Young People & Skills Committee on Monday 31st January to discuss these proposals specifically.

- 5.7 Councillors Brown, John, Hamilton, McNair, Nield, O'Quinn, Simson, Hills, Meadows, Allcock Knight and Appich all spoke on the issue and expressed their concerns and impact on schools where numbers were reduced. It was recognised that the pupil numbers were reducing and were projected to continue to do so which meant that places had to be reviewed. However, it was also important to take account of the impact on individual schools and on the children and the special meeting for January was welcomed.
- 5.8 Councillor Clare noted the comments and stated that she agreed with a number of them but also noted that the situation was governed by the School Adjudicator who had told the council to look at the option of having mixed-age classes. She also noted that the recent decision concerning Brunswick Primary School would have an impact on the number of places that could be offered across the city's schools. She fully supported the need for smaller classes but there was a budget for schools and the council due to the reliance on school numbers. She hoped that the consultation would have a good response and a full and considered debate could be held at the special meeting in January.
- 5.9 The Mayor thanked everyone for their comments and stated that he needed to put the recommendation to note the petitions and refer them to the special meeting of the committee to the vote, which was agreed.
- 5.10 **RESOLVED:** That the petitions be noted and referred to the special meeting of the Children, Young People & Skills Committee on the 31 January 2022.