

## Appendix B

### Summary of feedback from Informal Consultation on the School Organisation Arrangements of Roe Green Infant School

1. This document provides a summary of responses received by the council during informal consultation on the School Organisation Arrangements of Roe Green Infant School. It draws on comments and issues raised on proposals to cease primary provision on the Roe Green Strathcona site in meetings with staff, governors, parents and the wider public and feedback received through written responses.
2. Over 200 people attended consultation meetings and a total of 463 written responses were received and a petition with 396 signatories (Table 1). The majority of respondents opposed the closure of primary provision on the Strathcona site.

**Table 1: Summary of Written Responses**

	Number of responses received	Percentage of response overall
Agree with proposal	3	0.6%
Disagree with proposal	460	99.4%
Unclear	0	0%
<b>Total responses</b>	463	100

3. A number of themes emerged during the informal consultation and the responses have been grouped into the following categories:
  - **School Place Planning**
  - **Promotion of school**
  - **Quality of Education**
  - **Impacts of the closure proposal**

#### 4. School Place Planning

##### 4.1 Points raised

- The majority of attendees at the consultation meetings raised questions about the accuracy of projections and concerns that the council was concentrating on pupil numbers rather than children.
- Questions were raised about why the council was proposing to close the Strathcona provision now, if it was opened as a temporary site in 2014 and only made permanent in 2016. Respondents suggested the authority should have

analysed pupil projections more carefully before making the decision to make the provision permanent.

- The point was made that before the provision was made permanent, teachers were on temporary not permanent contracts. It was suggested that the authority should have taken corrective action then before the provision became permanent.
- Questions were raised about the amount of new accommodation being built across the borough that would increase the number of families meaning that there would be more children, whereas the Local Authority was saying there will be fewer children in the future.
- Parents and staff wanted to know why this particular site had been picked for closure with a concern that the school had been unfairly chosen.
- The school made the point that many children join the school in-year rather than at reception and stated that the school played a key role for the authority in taking these children.
- The Local Authority was criticised for expanding other schools, such as Preston Park, and for expanding some schools from 3FE to 5FE. The council's decision to expand other schools was questioned and whether account had been taken of the impact of these expansions on the Roe Green Strathcona provision before they were agreed.
- It was suggested that the Local Authority should reduce larger schools, taking pressure off those schools to keep Strathcona open. The Local Authority was asked to look at options, such as moving children from schools that have higher numbers of pupils on roll to the Strathcona site.
- Staff at the Roe Green Strathcona site said that more could have been done to make the school a success and that if other schools had not been allowed to expand the children would have come to Strathcona.
- The Executive Headteacher of the school stressed that the school had not wanted to expand but did so at the authority's request. She explained that originally the expansion was going to be on the Kingsbury High School site, but the accommodation was then taken by The Village School. She explained that the provision was initially temporary with parents offered permanent places elsewhere as they became available. The head teacher emphasised that at every step of the process the senior school staff have engaged with the borough about the provision.
- The issue of a new school opening in Wembley was raised and why this was planned if forecasts say there are not enough children.

## **4.2 Response**

The Local Authority relies on population forecasts provided by the Greater London Authority (GLA) to inform the demand for school places. This data draws on birth rates, migration trend data and housing supply data from the Local Authority. Population forecasts are updated annually and are subject to change based on changes to any of the key indicators. For example, lower birth rates or increased migration away from the Local Authority area would result in lower projected demand.

At the time the Strathcona Site of Roe Green Infant School was opened, there was clear demand for additional places and the Strathcona provision was part of a wider expansion of primary school provision across Brent. When the school was made permanent, there was still an expectation that the places would be required. However, primary schools are now experiencing reduced intakes and the most recent projections provided by the GLA show that this pattern is expected to continue across the borough until at least 2022/23. The Local Authority currently has a surplus of primary school places across the borough. On National Offer Day (16 April 2019) for Reception places in 2019, 30 of the 57 schools that offer places in Reception had vacancies, and there were over 750 vacancies in total.

The Local Authority has undertaken informal consultation on the closure of the Strathcona provision at Roe Green Infant School as part of wider measures to reduce capacity across the borough. The number of vacancies for Reception in 2019 is expected to be over 15% of the total capacity, whereas 5% spare places is considered to be a reasonable planning margin to allow for unanticipated increases in demand or in-year pupil movement. A high number of spare places means that parents have increased choice, but can make it difficult for schools to manage given the uncertainty about demand.

The Local Authority has already consulted to reduce the published admission number at two schools which will take effect from September 2020. Officers are also working with a number of primary schools who will have more than 30 vacancies in 2019 to implement an informal cap to the numbers entering the school in 2019, so that they do not have to open an additional class unless there is a particular need to do so (such as increased demand in the school or the area).

The Strathcona provision admits a number of children throughout the academic year in year groups other than Reception. However, the data shows that although new pupils are being admitted, other children are leaving which means that overall the numbers attending the school have reduced over time. Of the current Key Stage 2 year groups, only Year 3 has seen an increase of 3 pupils on roll since the cohort started at the school. Years 4, 5 and 6 have decreased by 6, 5 and 3 since 2016/17.

The Local Authority has no role in the opening of new schools. The proposed new primary school (Ark Somerville) in the Wembley Park area is a Free School that has been approved by the Department for Education. Any future decisions on the school will be subject to the agreement of the Secretary of State for Education. The Local Authority's view is that the school should only open if there is sufficient pupil demand as new housing comes on stream.

## **5. Promotion of the school**

### **5.1 Points raised**

- Parents raised concern it is difficult to find the site as it is not on the Local Authority's 'School Finder' search map.

- A view was shared that because the Local Authority had not given enough publicity to the school, people are making a preference for other schools. The point was made that, as the provision does not have a catchment area like other schools, parents do not know it exists and therefore are not encouraged to apply for a place.
- The leadership of the school said that it had contacted the Local Authority on several occasions to raise concerns about the school not being marketed in the same way as other schools. The lack of advertising was considered by the school as the reason why the school has low intakes and it was suggested that if this was rectified, there would be sufficient pupils for the provision on the Strathcona site to be sustainable.
- The point was made that, when Strathcona first opened, parents were told that it was only temporary provision, so children only stayed until they were offered a place somewhere else.
- The Local Authority was criticised for not offering the school any help to increase numbers and for relying on the school to be creative. Staff said that the school is very flexible and can offer vertical streaming. The school has also considered providing nursery provision or a centre for children with additional needs. The school's view is that they have not been given the chance to increase admissions as it can take up to 10 years for a new school to establish itself.
- Concern was raised about whether the Local Authority has considered how the proposed closure of Strathcona will impact on the good reputation of Roe Green Infant School.

## 5.2 Response

The Local Authority notes that the Strathcona provision cannot be found on the School Finder pages of the Brent website. As the Strathcona provision is a part of Roe Green Infant School and is not a separate school, in itself, the school has only one entry on the 'Get Information About Schools' website run by the Department for Education (DfE) and it only has one DfE number. The provision does, however, have a separate entry on the eAdmissions website for applications for children starting in Reception and can be found using the admissions system map search. The school also appears on Brent Council's Parent Portal and drop down menu of schools for children who require an in year school place. The school also appears on other search engine maps.

The Strathcona provision has been included in the Local Authority's Primary School Information booklet each year since 2016. The introduction of the Community School page explains the uniqueness of Roe Green Infant School and how applications can be made for children to attend either site. On preference forms, parents can make it clear for which site they would like to be considered for a school place.

The Local Authority does not take any additional measures to individually promote any school above another. Schools use a range of marketing strategies to make parents aware of what they offer.

This proposal is driven by reducing demand across Brent which has resulted in low intakes on the Strathcona site. Within this context, there is no evidence that intakes would significantly increase if the more time was allowed to market the provision.

## **6. The Quality of Education and School Budgets**

### **6.1 Points raised**

- Staff, governors and parents all stated that the quality of provision provided at Roe Green Infant School was good. Several parents and staff raised that fact that the school was in the top 3% in England (based on the year 6 SATs progress measure) and had received a letter from the Minister for Education congratulating them on this performance.
- Many parents, teaching staff and pupils explained that the school provides an inclusive environment that helps all children thrive and to be confident. One parent, for example, thanked the school for the support they had given to their son who has autism that had helped him to become more independent and to develop his capacity to learn.
- Staff talked about the unique opportunities they have access to working in a school that has both infant and primary provision. The school said that the primary phase experience meant that staff would be well-placed to work with Roe Green Junior School in the future should the two schools ever come together as one.
- The quality of the staff was praised and the support they provide to children and their families, especially children who join the school with limited English. Many parents and children and young people talked about their personal experience of the school and the dedication of staff. One parent, for example, said that their daughter had started at the end of year 2 with no English. The school had offered extra lessons and with the support of staff, she was one of the highest achievers in her SATs. Other parents said that they travelled some distance to attend the school because of the quality of education and because their children were happy there (from Watford and Edgware, for example).
- The fact that provision on the Roe Green Strathcona site is effectively a small school was highly valued by parents and staff. The point was made that not all children can cope in large schools. The view was that the Local Authority should nurture, not close, a small school.
- The issue of how you measure value for money was raised. The leadership team noted that the split site funding the school receives gives them a much lower budget than a one form entry school would receive. The school feel that they give very good value for money.
- Other responders said value for money should be about the quality of provision not the cost of providing it.
- The point was made that Roe Green Infant School does not operate as a 1FE school – it is a split site school. The view was given that the larger site helps to off-set the smaller site's costs and allows the school to do lots of flexible things that other schools cannot do.

### **6.2 Response**

It is agreed that Roe Green Infant School is a good school and the authority acknowledges the dedication of staff and the inclusive environment that has been

created on the Strathcona site for the children who attend. There are, however, other good schools in Brent and 93% of children in Brent attend good or outstanding schools.

The proposal to close the Strathcona provision is due to falling demand for primary school places, not the quality of provision. The Local Authority is responsible for ensuring that the Dedicated Schools Grant is used effectively to provide a good education for all pupils.

The proposal to close the Strathcona provision is being made in response to the low numbers of pupils attending the site in the lower year groups and the projected number of pupils expected to apply in future years. If pupil numbers continue to reduce on the Roe Green Strathcona site, the cost of provision on the site will increase. In the longer term it would become increasingly difficult to manage Key Stage 2 provision with only around 7 children in each year group, even if vertical grouping is used, and this could impact on the quality of provision for pupils at Roe Green Infant School, as funding reduces and fixed cost expenditure remains stable.

## **7. Impact of closure**

### **7.1 Points Raised**

- Concerns were raised about the psychological and emotional impact of the consultation on the health and wellbeing of children, many of whom are worrying about their school closing, and the Local Authority was criticised for not mentioning this.
- Concern was raised that the proposals would be disruptive to children's education and would impact on vulnerable children and families who attend Strathcona, many of whom have moved around a lot. The view was that closing the site down would not be in the best interests of the children or parents.
- The impact on teachers was raised, in relation to potential redundancies and financial hardship, many of whom have mortgages.
- The point was made that it is misleading to suggest that the proposal could only affect staff on the Strathcona site, as Roe Green Infant School is one school with two sites and all staff, including senior staff, would be affected. Concerns included low staff morale and potential redundancies.
- The Governing Board of the school stated that Roe Green Infant School is currently stable financially and in terms of pupil outcomes, but the closure could destabilise the Princes Avenue site and the Local Authority has not considered this.
- The authority was criticised for the consultation document reading like a business document and not recognising there is a human element to the proposals - the council needed to think about the children.
- Staff raised the point that the kitchen on the Strathcona site is used to prepare meals for both sites and previously also provided food for other schools. The council was asked what the plan was in relation to catering.

- Questions were asked about where children would move to if the provision closed, if parents would be guaranteed their choice of alternative schools and if all pupils in a class could move to the same school with their friends.

## 7.2 Phased Closure

As part of the informal consultation, respondents were asked to provide a view on the form that closure of the provision should take in the event that the council decided to proceed with the proposal. The majority of respondents did not answer this question (300). Of those that did respond, only 17 suggested the Strathcona site should close at a fixed point in time. 64 said a phased approach should be followed and a further 17 that a combination of a phased closure and closure at a fixed point in time should be pursued. 63 said that a different approach should be taken, but did not elaborate on what this could be.

**Table 2: Views on implementation**

Respondent	How the school should be closed					
	Phased	At a fixed point	Phased and a fixed point in time combined	A different approach	No option stated for closure	Multiple options stated for closure
Parent	41	17	12	37	164	2
Governor				1	5	
Staff	5		3	10	55	
Other	15		2	9	51	
Did not indicate	3			6	25	
Total	64	17	17	63	300	2

## Response

The Local Authority recognises that consultation on any changes to school provision can be unsettling for the community that it affects and creates a climate of uncertainty.

If the proposal is taken forward, then implementation would aim to minimise the direct impact on children currently attending the Strathcona site through a phased closure. The Local Authority would facilitate any transitions that may be required for these pupils, although parents would also be free to move their children at any time to another school with vacancies. The Local Authority would not prescribe to parents which school their child must attend and the closure of any particular year groups would be managed carefully.

The council recognises that as Roe Green Infant school is one school operating from two sites, staff work across the two sites and that the impact of this proposal will affect the whole school. Any staff redundancies would be managed in line with established procedures. The Local Authority would work with Roe Green Infant School, other schools and unions to minimise the impact of redundancies and to maximise the availability of redeployment options should the proposal proceed.

Regarding the use of kitchens, no decisions have been made about the future use of the school site. If the site was to close, the Local Authority would work with the Governing Board of Roe Green Infant School to ensure that children continued to have access to school meals.