

Appendix B

Summary of feedback from Formal Consultation between 26 June 2019 and 24 July 2019 on the School Organisation Arrangements of Roe Green Infant School

1. Overview

- 1.1 542 written responses were received by e-mail or post. The majority of respondents only indicated that they objected or disagreed with the proposals put forward by the council for the school organisation arrangements of Roe Green Infant School. One response indicated agreement with the proposals but gave no further comment.
- 1.2 Where comments were provided, similar concerns and issues were raised as in the information consultation that took place from 20 March 2019 to 7 May 2019. The comments received have been grouped into the following themes:
- The quality of school place planning considerations and the need for the provision
 - The quality of the education provided by the school
 - Promotion of the provision on the Strathcona site
 - The impact of the closure on pupils and staff
 - Alternative solutions to maintain the site as part of Roe Green Infant School

2. The Quality of School Place Planning Considerations

- 2.1 Questions were raised about the accuracy of projections of future pupil numbers. The point was made that, while the local authority is saying there will be fewer children, there are a number of flats being built across the borough, which will mean more families and more children. The point was made that many children join the school in-year rather than at reception.

Response: The local authority uses data provided by the Greater London Authority (GLA) to inform the demand for school places. The forecasts, updated annually, draw on a range of data including birth rates, housing supply data, migration patterns and trends in demand and therefore are subject to change based on changes to any of these key indicators. For example, a lower birth rate or increased migration away from the local authority area would result in a lower projected demand.

Roe Green Strathcona site has admitted fewer than 30 children into Reception since becoming permanent in 2016. The latest forecasts for Primary Planning Area 2 suggest that there will be a high number of spare places in Reception and it is very unlikely that the school's intake will increase, given the number of schools with spare places that are available. The Strathcona provision does admit a number of children through in year admissions in year groups other than Reception. However, the data shows that although pupils are being admitted, other children are leaving which has created a downward trend in numbers attending the school. Of the 2018/19 year groups, only Reception and Year 2 had the same numbers on roll as when the cohort started at the school. Years 1, 3, 4, 5 and 6 have seen decreases of 2, 3, 14, 15 and 11 pupils respectively.

- 2.2 The timing of the council's proposal to close the provision was questioned given that the provision was opened on a temporary basis in 2015 and made permanent in 2016. Respondents suggested that council should not have made the decision to make it permanent in 2016, but should have analysed the data before making this decision.

Response: At the time the Strathcona Site of Roe Green Infant School was opened in 2014, there was a clear demand for places. The Strathcona provision was part of a wider expansion of primary school provision across Brent. When the school site was made permanent, there

was a need to regularise the provision as well as an expectation that places were still required. However recent projections provided by the GLA are significantly lower than previous projections and show a clear reduction in demand. This is the case across London as well as in Brent. The local authority is in a position now where it has a surplus of primary school places across the borough and will continue to do so. 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 which equates to 25 classes.

2.3 Why this school and this particular site had been picked for closure was questioned and concerns raised that the LA seems to have already made a decision.

Response: The local authority has consulted to reduce the Published Admission Number at two primary schools which will take effect from September 2020. The local authority is also working with primary schools who will have more than 30 vacancies in Reception in 2019 to implement an informal cap to the numbers entering the school, 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).

2.4 Respondents felt that the council should be focusing on children and not pupil numbers.

Response: The local authority has a responsibility to provide a good quality education to all children in Brent. This means ensuring that resources provided through the Dedicated Schools Grant are effectively used to support all schools.

The number of vacancies for this year group borough wide on National Offer Day was almost 18% of the total capacity. The local authority has a duty to manage public funds effectively and efficiently. An efficient level of surplus capacity would be in the region of 5%, as set out in the School Place Planning Strategy 2019-23. The local authority has proposed the closure of the Strathcona provision at Roe Green Infant School as part of wider measures to reduce capacity across the borough.

3. The Quality of Education

3.1 A range of points were made about the quality of the Roe Green Strathcona provision:

- that the school was ranked in the top 3 percent in England in 2017/18
- that children who are new arrivals to the UK make considerable progress in English/ EAL at the school
- that children are thriving and achieving more in a small school rather than a big one, especially the more vulnerable children
- the quality and dedication of teaching staff is exceptional.

Response: The proposal to close the Roe Green Strathcona provision is not because of any concerns about the quality of education that children receive. The local authority recognises that Roe Green Infant School is a good school and acknowledges the comments made about the dedication of staff and the inclusive environment that has been created for the children who attend. However, in Brent, 95% of schools are rated either good or outstanding by Ofsted and there are a number of alternative schools that parents can choose for their children.

The proposal to close the Roe Green Strathcona provision is in response to falling demand for primary places and concerns that, given the high number of spare places across the borough, the provision is neither sustainable nor an efficient use of resources. Based on the historically low number of children entering the Strathcona provision at Reception, it will become very difficult to manage the key stage 2 provision (years 3 to 6) with less than 5 children in any year group.

4. Promotion of the provision

- 4.1 Respondents raised concern that people do not know that the school exists, that it is difficult to find the site on the local authority's school finder search map and that the school has not been given enough publicity.

Response: The Strathcona provision is a part of Roe Green Infant School and is not a separate school, in itself. This means that 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 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 provision also appears on Brent Council's Parent Portal for children who require an in year school place. The Strathcona provision has also been included in the local authority's Primary School Information booklet each year since 2016, when it was made permanent. The Community School pages explain that Roe Green Infant School has two sites and provides information on how applications can be made for children to attend either site. The local authority has noted that the Strathcona provision cannot be found as a separate part of the Roe Green Infant School on the School Finder pages of the Brent website.

- 4.2 The lack of advertising by the local authority was considered the reason for the school's low intakes. The council was asked to consider what steps might be taken even at this late stage, to remedy the situation in respect of supporting recruitment of future pupils for the provision.

Response: The local authority is responsible for providing information to parents about schools with Brent. This is undertaken through the eAdmissions system, Brent's Parent Portal and the annually published admissions booklet. The local authority does not take any additional measures to individually promote any school above another.

5. The Impact of closure on pupils and staff

- 5.1 Concerns were raised about the psychological and emotional impact of closing the provision on the Roe Green Strathcona site on children attending the school. The point was made that the process to date has already caused anxiety about the closure and that children are passionate about keeping the provision. Concerns were raised about the disruption that the closure proposal would cause to children and their families.

Response: The council recognises that closing the provision is difficult for the children and families who are currently accessing the provision. The proposal for a phased closure was developed to minimize the impacts on children. The phased closure will allow all children on roll in September 2019, other than those in Year 3, to complete their current key stage. This means that children would move school at either the end of Key Stage 1 or Key Stage 2, both of which are natural transition points. Year 3 would be able to continue at the school until the end of Year 5. The process of moving children to alternative schools will be carefully managed with parents supported to identify alternative schools for their children. Parents will be at liberty to choose from a number of schools available to them and will be able to decide which school they would prefer their child to attend. The local authority will also work with other schools with spare places to support this process.

Parents are also free to move their children at any time to another school with vacancies.

5.3 Concerns were raised about disruption to teaching staff facing redundancy.

Response: Any staff redundancies will be managed according to the local authority's human resources procedures. It is not possible to model how many staff will be affected by redundancy, as this depends on actual pupil numbers as well as the personal decisions of staff at the school. Based on the current staffing model, the school could reduce by at least one teacher and one teaching assistant in 2019/20 and 2020/21 as the number of classes reduce. The local authority would work with other schools and unions to minimise the impact of redundancies and to maximise the availability of alternative employment options.

6. Alternative Solutions to maintain the site as part of Roe Green Infant School

During the formal consultation, the council was asked to consider a number of proposals for alternative use of spare capacity on the Roe Green Strathcona site to supplement the declining numbers of pupils on roll and to support the financial viability of the education offer on this site. The council was also asked to delay the decision-making process to allow time for alternative courses of action to be constructively explored. The point was made that the council had invested considerable sums of money to update the building for educational use.

No proposals have been identified which would increase demand for mainstream places. Should Cabinet make a decision to close the Strathcona site then the building and site would in time become surplus to requirements for the primary school. The Council would consider potential future uses for the site, which could include educational use and which will maximise the investment already made by the Council in the site. Proposals submitted in this formal consultation will be reviewed as part of the consideration of future uses of the site.