

REVIEW OF SMALL SCHOOLS - BRILLEY PRIMARY, ST. MARY'S OF HOPE CE PRIMARY, KINGS CAPLE PRIMARY, LONGTOWN PRIMARY AND DILWYN PRIMARY

Report By: HEAD OF POLICY AND RESOURCES

Wards Affected

Castle, Golden Valley South, Hampton Court, Golden Cross with Weobley, and Old Gore.

Purpose

1. To provide information about pupil numbers in 5 very small schools at the start of the autumn term, 2004 and invite the Committee's comments about the extent to which the position of any of the five schools, whose pupil numbers are below the review levels specified for in Herefordshire's School Organisation Plan, should be examined further.

Financial Implications

2. There are no financial implications at this stage.

Report

The Review Policy in the School Organisation Plan

3. The policy concerning the review of primary schools is contained in Section 2D of the School Organisation Plan, (paragraph 2.27), i.e.

"2.27 The Council would normally review schools in the following circumstances -

Primary Schools

- (a) *a school with fewer than 36 pupils in the September of a school year, or a school whose numbers are expected to fall below that level within the following 5 years, would be reviewed by the Council, in consultation with the relevant Diocesan Education Authority where a Church school is concerned;*
- (b) *schools with 36-45 pupils, which would be monitored by the Director of Education, with the relevant Diocesan Director of Education where a Church school is concerned, to assess whether or not numbers are likely to drop below 35 pupils within 5 years, and to determine whether or not there are other grounds for concern about the future of the school;*
- (c) *where a pyramid of primary schools has unused capacity at a level that could accommodate the closure of the smallest school, with up to 15% unused capacity still remaining if closure were to occur;*

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- (d) *where a school is identified by Ofsted either as having serious weaknesses or in need of special measures;*"

Schools falling within the review categories in the Autumn Term 2004

Review Categories (a) and (b)

4. Under categories (a) and (b) above, there are 3 Primary schools with fewer than 35 pupils and 2 with 36 to 45 pupils on roll at the start of the autumn term, 2004. The size of each year group, and the number of children under the age of 5 known to be living in the catchment area of each school, are given in the table below.

School	CHILDREN IN CATCHMENT AREA AGED				CHILDREN IN SCHOOL AGED							
	0 note 1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total In School
St. Mary's of Hope CE Primary	?	4	4	3	1	2	1	2	4	2	3	15
Brilley	?	3	4	4	2	4	6	3	2	11	1	29
Kings Caple	?	5	4	8	1	5	6	5	6	5	7	35
Dilwyn	?	4	5	5	8	2	4	7	8	6	6	41
Longtown	?	5	10	3	5	5	8	7	7	4	8	44

Note 1. Data for children under 1 year old is awaited.

St Mary's Primary School at Hope Under Dinmore

5. St Mary's remains the smallest school in the County. A previous proposal to close the school was rejected by the National Adjudicator in June 2002, when the school roll was 23 pupils. The policy within the SOP now applies i.e. "If, following (such) review, a school is judged to be currently viable, then no further review of that school would be undertaken for at least 5 years, unless pupil numbers were to fall by a further 25% below the level considered during that review." The current roll of 15 pupils amounts to a drop of 35% compared with the 23 pupils on roll at the time of the previous review. The Happy Days Nursery group, which is located at the school, currently has 3 three year olds attending but no four year olds.
6. The standard of teaching and learning does not cause concern. The school had a recent Ofsted inspection which recognised improvements since the last inspection and concluded that it is a good school with good leadership and teaching.
7. The latest information, including the figures for take-up of places set out in paragraph 8 below, indicates that St Mary's will struggle to sustain its present pupil roll of around 15 pupils though there may be minor variations up and down as families leave or come into the Cherrybrook estate which provides most of the children at the school. The known children database indicates that only 3 or 4 pre-school children per year group live in the school's catchment area. Current and previous experience suggest that only a proportion could be expected to enrol. At the time of the previous review, there were approximately 6 children aged 3 living in the catchment area, giving the potential, it was argued, for the roll to rise towards 30.
1. Parental support for the school seems to have diminished since the previous review. In summer 2004 (the latest available County pupil database), 34 children were resident in St Mary's catchment area but only 13 of those children attended the

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school despite the fact that neither free home to school transport nor good public transport is available to other schools. Most of the local children who do not attend St Mary's are enrolled at Bodenham, St Michael's Primary School, but there are also a few children at Wellington, Stoke Prior, and the two Leominster schools.

9. In view of the very small number at the school - at Key Stage 1 there are now only 5 pupils in aggregate across the three year groups – further discussions will be held with the Diocesan Education Authority and the school to consider options for the future.

Brilley and King's Cagle primary schools.

10. Numbers at both schools have been falling slowly for several years. Indications from the statistics suggest that pupil numbers available within both schools' catchment areas will fall further over the coming few years.
11. Brilley currently has 29 on roll. There is only one pupil leaving in July 2005 but there is a large group of 11 pupils due to leave in July 2006. Known children in the area number only 3 or 4 per year. If present admission levels continue, therefore, the school roll would drop to the low 20s in 2 years time. In the past, Brilley has relied on out of area admissions to keep its numbers above 30. In the summer term 2004, 25% of pupils on roll were from Brilley's own area.
12. Falling rolls across the County have increased the number of spare places elsewhere and Brilley's geographical location close to the Welsh border is less convenient than other schools. The school had an Ofsted inspection in March 2000, which concluded that it was a good school and that teaching and learning are generally good. A range of improvements was suggested and the school has been taking action over the last 3 years to address those suggestions.
13. Numbers on roll at King's Cagle have fallen over the past few years to its present level of 35. Known children in the area have dropped from approximately 11 per year 5 years ago to 4 or 5 below school age at present. Parts of its designated catchment area are not far from several other schools. The Ofsted inspection in May 2000 concluded that Kings Cagle was an effective school with more strengths than weaknesses with standards above the national average.
14. Both schools have recently appointed headteachers who will need time in which to demonstrate the longer term prospects for the school. Over the course of the coming year, further information will be gathered about the demography of the catchment areas of the two schools and included in the annual review report in September, 2005.

15. Longtown and Dilwyn primary schools

Longtown and Dilwyn primary schools have been small schools for many years, with pupil admissions rising in some years and falling in others. They differ from the schools discussed above, however, because they do not appear to be in immediate danger of falling further.

16. Longtown's roll has remained between 35 and 45 pupils for over 10 years. The school takes a very high percentage of pupils from its own catchment area. The number of known children of pre-school age available in the school's area continues to indicate a similar number of admissions as in the past. The Ofsted inspection in

January 2003 concluded that the school was very effective with consistently good teaching.

17. Dilwyn's roll was around 40 pupils ten years ago, peaked at 54 five years ago and is currently 41. With around 5 pre-school children per year available in the catchment area, the school could expect to sustain 35 children in the medium term. The school's Ofsted inspection in December 2001 praised the quality of teaching, achievements and good relationships but had concerns about some aspects of management. The school is currently operating with an acting headteacher.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the Committee note the report and indicate views as to further action that may be needed.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- None identified.