

Updated 4th February 2015

School Places at Dobcroft Infant & Junior Schools

Frequently Asked Questions



This document will be updated as required throughout the remainder of the consultation period (at www.sheffield.gov.uk/schoolplaces) and is to be read as an addition to the original consultation newsletter and document.

What have the school Governing Bodies told us so far?

We are in regular dialogue with the school leaders and Governing Bodies of both schools and they have been keen to hold the Council to account during the early stages of discussions. The Dobcroft Junior Governing Body has put together a formal response to the consultation and this can be found at Appendix 1.

TRAFFIC

How can you propose this given the existing traffic issues at drop off and pick up times?

The Council is now aware of the concerns of parents and local residents about the traffic around the Dobcroft site. This has probably been the issue raised most frequently across the drop-ins and in written responses to date.

This is a common issue around many school sites where parents choose to drop their children off by car rather than walk to school. It is in fact an existing problem which many feel would be made worse by more children traveling to the site. During the consultation some parents and residents have raised ideas about how to improve the situation and make access to the school safer. These ideas should be explored fully irrespective of the outcome of the consultation.

Should the proposal for 2016 to be approved by Cabinet, the plans to expand the buildings would need to gain planning permission. This is a separate process which looks in detail at the physical impact of the proposed development including car usage, traffic flows and parking. It will assess the impact of more children being on the site and what measures could be taken to reduce the impact. On a similar expansion scheme at Hallam Primary School, additional access points and parking arrangements were put in place through engagement with local residents and families through the planning permission process. In order to take on board suggestions and listen to people's particular views about the highways impact we would look to arrange drop-ins for families and local residents prior to the formal planning permission process.

DATA & THE NEED FOR PLACES

The data provided so far is unclear. Does the data really suggest the need is in the Dobcroft catchment?

The data covering preference, population, young families moving into the area, and their impact on school demand can provide a complex picture. The work inevitably involves

building predictions of future patterns on top of this data and is therefore always open to interpretation. In addition to the description of the data given in the Consultation Document, the data and evidence lead for Dobcroft Infants Governing Body has worked on some of the data to give a separate interpretation in the hope that this will support people in responding to the consultation. The findings are appended to this document in full (appendix 2).

If the extra places are meant to target some areas of growth from outside the catchment, how can you ensure that children from those areas get the places?

There is always room in the admissions process for changes in patterns of preference and the relative locations of families from one year to the next. The recent trends show some patterns of 2nd and 3rd preferences for Dobcroft from neighbouring areas of growth, including Holt House/Carterknowle, Ecclesall, Dore and Totley, and these are the growth areas we are trying to target. Were this expansion to be approved and then patterns altered so it did not ultimately meet those areas of highest demand then the Council could consider, through further consultation, whether those neighbouring areas could be given some priority within the admissions process. This is not proposed at the current time and could only be done through a further consultation process at the earliest for the 2017/18 intake.

If the catchment area demand is not significantly higher than the current 90 places, will the additional places be taken by non-catchment children who will have to travel to school by car, therefore increasing congestion and pollution?

As shown in the data presented through this consultation, if the current pattern of young families moving into the Dobcroft catchment area continues, then the school would continue to be oversubscribed from the catchment area. However, these extra Dobcroft children would probably only take up only a portion of the additional places. The remainder would go to children from out of catchment. Up until 2014/15 when catchment children were refused a place, the intake at Dobcroft Infants, with 90 places on offer, always included a proportion of children from outside the catchment. It is not always possible, to provide a perfect match between the numbers of children and the number of places in a catchment area.

Are there proposals to amend the existing catchment areas in 2016/17?

As stated above, there are no proposed changes and catchment areas will remain unchanged for the 2016/17 academic year. If there were to be any proposed catchment area changes for future years, they would be subject to full statutory consultation procedures with schools, parents and local communities.

Why didn't you add a class last year since catchment children were refused a place at Dobcroft?

Whilst the Council had anticipated pressure on places across the southwest schools, we did not anticipate refusing 29 catchment applicants. When a system is operating with reduced

slack, small changes in preference patterns or families moving into the area can have a greater impact. In the majority of cases in the current Reception year we were ultimately able to offer a local primary school place. This does however represent a system without sufficient slack to take account of small changes and this is one reason for the proposal to add places in 2015 and beyond.

What is happening at other local schools in terms of places and expansion?

The Council has already agreed a proposal to increase places at Greystones Primary. Greystones will increase from 60 to 90 places per year and this is through a permanent addition to accommodation on the school site, including replacing what are currently temporary classroom buildings. In recent years both Abbey Lane and Hallam primary schools have increased from 60 to 90 places per year, whilst The Nether Edge and Lowfield primary schools have increased from 45 to 60 places per year.

THE EXTRA CLASS IN 2015

Why has the Council decided on an extra class in 2015 without consultation?

One extra class in 2015 means a temporary increase to the school's capacity on a relatively small scale. An extra class has been provided at a number of schools in the recent past without significant accommodation difficulty and without adversely impacting everyday school life. There is no legal requirement to consult on a change of this scale and the most important effort goes into ensuring that the extra class can be accommodated and resourced properly – this is an ongoing discussion with the school leadership and governors who are being rightly challenging to make sure the result is right for everyone.

How will the extra class in 2015 be accommodated?

The work with the school will focus on how best to create an extra classroom. If that means a scheme that requires planning permission, that process would be undertaken. At the moment the focus of work with the Infant school leadership team and governors is looking at how the existing school buildings could be used and then how we can support the school to make sure we continue to offer all elements of the curriculum appropriately and meet all basic needs. This would include meeting current guidelines on aspects such as the number of toilets (which has been a recurring theme during consultation).

BUILDINGS, DESIGN & SITES

How can you ask us to comment without details on what this would mean for the buildings and site?

This has been a particular issue in the responses so far and is addressed in some detail in the consultation document. There have been a number of concerns raised around the current operation of the schools, including toilets, playspace, and lunchtime arrangements.

The Council understands that it can be frustrating not to have a detailed building and accommodation plan to comment on as part of the consultation. Equally, were the

consultation process to take place following detailed development of plans with school leaders and governors, the amount of resource and capital spent would be a large commitment that would lead to the accusation of a 'done deal' and we would likely be asked why we had not consulted earlier. The key is for the Council to listen to the concerns raised by all parties during consultation and beyond so this can be fed into the design work. In nearly all cases, rather than exacerbating existing issues, the end result of the design process is that schools have been able to address existing accommodation issues as part of the building project to increase places.

Who has decided that it would be possible to expand both Dobcroft schools?

The early work to assess the feasibility of the physical expansion provides a basic understanding that there is space on the site to accommodate the additional building that would be required. This is undertaken by officers experienced in working on school sites. The actual development work, as described above, would be a more detailed exercise in partnership with school leaders and governors.

What would the impact be on the after school clubs?

We have heard from a number of people during the consultation about the after school provision at DASH and understand the importance of this for many families. We will be working with the school to manage any potential impact on the accommodation for the after school club, both in terms of the temporary and permanent solutions, so that it can remain fully available to parents.

How would parents be able to engage in the design process?

If the proposal were to proceed following consultation, the intention would be to engage with parents and local residents on the design and the wider impacts (i.e. traffic/highways) prior to planning permission so that people can start to answer all the detailed questions about what this would mean for the buildings and so that comments and ideas can be taken into account. This would include being able to look at the initial designs with a chance to comment and make suggestions prior to plans being submitted for planning permission.

What would the budget be for the building work?

The Council receives an annual allocation of funding to provide extra school places. For the next two years this is around £17.5m per year (to cover all types/age ranges of statutory schooling across the city). The job of the Council is to manage a programme to provide the extra places it needs within that overall budget. Every school site or building is different and therefore setting a fixed budget for each individual scheme within the programme, prior to design work taking place, would mean that some simpler schemes are overfunded and more complicated schemes are underfunded.

IMPACT ON THE SCHOOLS

How will you make sure standards at the school and the educational experience for children is maintained?

Through working with the school and further engagement with governors and parents around the design we are confident that were the proposal to proceed the facilities would be there to enable the current standards to be maintained and improve. This confidence is based on previous schemes across the city to increase or rebuild schools and a confidence in the current leadership of the schools.

How will the school cope with an increased number of children with special educational needs (SEN) in terms of provision and resources etc?

A number of responses raised the issue of children with SEN. At the last school census point the Dobcroft schools when taken together had just below the Sheffield average proportion of pupils identified as having some level of special educational needs (20.7% compared to a city average of 21.4%). We would not see any clear reason to anticipate that proportion rising as a result of this proposal. In line with admissions law, pupils with the school named on their statement (now Education and Health Care Plan) would be placed at the school as a priority. This happens now and numbers would not therefore increase as a result of an increase in overall capacity. All other children are placed in line with the normal criteria (catchment, siblings, other with distance as a tie-breaker). The schools should therefore be able to operate in broadly the same way as they do now and any accommodation needs would be considered through the design process. The per pupil funding the school receives would remain in line with national and local policies.

Won't this make the schools too big?

Respondents have talked about the proposal making the school very large and the potential downsides of this such as an impersonal feel, practical impacts on the building, or pupils feeling intimidated. Most primary schools in Sheffield are 'through' primaries, meaning they offer places from Reception up to Year 6, and many include a nursery. A standard size for a through primary school in Sheffield would be 60 pupils per year. This means 420 pupils often with a nursery that can take the overall total number of pupils over 450. Were the proposal to proceed the infants school would have capacity for 360 pupils and the junior school would have capacity for 480. There are a number of primary schools in Sheffield that are already operating successfully at a larger size than this, including Greystones, Hallam, and Westways Primary schools within the southwest. There is also Lydgate Infant and Lydgate Junior Schools that operate successfully as separate phase schools with 4 classes per year – mirroring the size that the Dobcroft schools would be were the proposal to go ahead. Whilst we understand that parents often perceive benefits in a smaller school environment, the factors that really make for a high quality education for children are not size dependent – they are leadership and management and the quality of teaching and learning provision.

How will the school manage this in terms of resources and managing day to day operation?

Ultimately how this is managed within school would be the responsibility of the school leadership. There will be extra revenue funding provided so the school can employ staff and purchase appropriate resources. Costs of setting up the classrooms will form part of the Council's capital scheme. The overall design and how this works with existing arrangements, such as dining space, are all part of the process that the Council will undertake in detail with the school and governors to make sure there is a workable solution to all these issues.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

There is support for expansion at Clifford/Ecclesall schools, why isn't the Council consulting on that instead or in addition?

Our assessment is that around 30 additional Reception places are needed in September 2015 to provide for the population growth in this area. However, this pressure is spread across a number of primary catchment areas and is not in any single school. Last year a small number of pupils were unable to access a catchment place across a number of local schools, including Dobcroft, Dore, Greystones and Ecclesall – which was a very difficult situation for those families. This makes finding an appropriate solution difficult. As well as being a waste of limited funding, providing too many could lead to schools not filling their places and having to run mixed age classes. The Council's starting point for consultation is therefore to provide a 30 place expansion at a single school. Given that Dobcroft is more centrally located within the area of pressure, it is better placed to meet the local need.

The Council is continuing to explore the physical implications of increasing places across the Ecclesall/Clifford schools should the decision be taken not to proceed with the proposal at Dobcroft, or indeed if a further addition of places is needed in the area in the future. At this stage there is no simple option to increase places across those sites and the difficulties indicate that a scheme could be disruptive and/or expensive. However, work is continuing to explore all the possibilities. The option being put forward by Clifford Infants is to create a junior phase on the Clifford Road site of Sheffield Inclusion Centre, alongside an expansion of Ecclesall Infants. The physical implications of this option are being explored further although our initial work indicates that the Clifford Road site would not provide sufficient internal or external space for a junior phase. There would also need to be a plan to rehouse the current and planned provision from Clifford Road.

THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

What is the purpose of consultation? Is the permanent proposal a 'done deal'?

The primary purpose is to listen to the views of interested parties in order to inform the Council's decision on whether or not to proceed. That decision would be taken by the Council's Cabinet, probably in March 2015, and the views received during consultation

would form the report that would go to Cabinet. No decision has been taken beyond a decision to consult on this proposal.

What would happen if the Cabinet decided to reject the proposed expansion?

Our forecast data would suggest that by not providing 30 additional places in this area it is likely that up to 30 local children would not be able to secure a local primary school place. The Council would then need to take into account whether there is an alternative way forward that is feasible, affordable, and better meets the needs across the area.

APPENDIX 1: RESPONSE FROM DOBCROFT JUNIOR GOVERNING BODY

Proposed Expansion of Dobcroft Infant and Junior Schools

Dobcroft Junior School Governors' Response to the Proposal

The Governors of Dobcroft Junior School recognise their social responsibility to the need for extra places in the SW of the city. In 2014 there were children from the Dobcroft area who were unable to attend the school, and without the planned expansion this would again be the case for 2015. We support in principle that children should be able to attend their local school. However, we also have a specific responsibility for the well-being of children at Dobcroft both now and in the future.

Following the end of the consultation period on Wednesday February 11th, there will be a Cabinet Meeting which is likely to be held on 18th March 2015. This is a public meeting. If the proposal is approved at the meeting, it will then be subject to planning permission which will include consultation about, and impact on, local highways.

At this point initial designs would be drawn up and displayed in and around schools which staff, parents and local residents can comment on and input into the final design.

Although the council continues to explore alternative solutions to the lack of primary places in the SW of the city, the Governing Body of Dobcroft Junior School has raised the following concerns should the proposal proceed here:

Congestion around the school gates and surrounding neighbourhood

- If the proposal goes ahead, there will ultimately be 840 pupils attending the Dobcroft Infant and Junior Schools.
- The above numbers would increase the pressure on the existing roads in the neighbourhood making parking increasingly challenging and potentially dangerous. This is already a well-documented problem for the two schools. Being on a cul-de-sac and in close proximity to both St Wilfrid's and Mylnhurst School, this would compound the issue. Furthermore, the issues around parking are not confined to the Pingle Road entrance but are also in evidence on Dobcroft Road where it meets Silverdale Road and also on Millhouses Lane.
- The proposed extension will accommodate increased demand from outside the catchment, which will guarantee that the majority of additional children are arriving in vehicles.
- The cul-de-sac situation of the school and the tight residential area is an ongoing and significant concern for all existing children and parents at the school and increasing the size of the school to cover the whole of the South West will lead to disproportionate and unsafe conditions in the surrounding neighbourhood.
- We have safety concerns: access to the school is already limited by the fact that it is on a cul-de-sac and due to the sheer numbers trying to park on the neighbouring streets at drop off and pick up times, the proposition would need to be approved by the fire brigade and parking services. Access by the emergency services would be

further hampered by increasing the numbers from 580 to 840 plus the additional staff needed and the additional traffic this would create.

- Suitable modifications would need to be made to the surrounding roads such as one way streets or drop off zones to combat the above issues.

What measures do the council intend to put in place to deal with these issues?

Can the council give us an irrefutable guarantee that the safety of children and residents would not be compromised in any way by the expansion of the schools?

Will the council commit to regularly enforcing parking regulations?

Impact on the school building and site including Health and Safety issues

- While restructuring the school building could prove positive for pupils and the funding currently put aside to improve our buildings would be welcome, none of this is guaranteed and would depend on grants available at the time and negotiation between the school and the architects.
- If expansion were to take place at Dobcroft, additional car parking places would be required for additional staff and this would have to be taken from the existing play area making the playground smaller, yet still having to accommodate additional children.
- If expansion were to take place at Dobcroft Junior School, then additional toilet facilities would be required as the existing toilets were only built to accommodate 240 children.
- Is the kitchen able to cope with the additional numbers and where would the additional children sit to eat lunch as it is already overcrowded in the dining area which doubles as 2 classrooms. If we have a staggered lunchtime, children will have to queue up in the classroom whilst children are working in there, impacting on their learning which would not be satisfactory. We anticipate that this would realistically mean having to install an additional 6 classrooms as opposed to four to ensure the dining room is separate. If replacing the current mobile classrooms were also within the plans, an additional 9 classrooms would have to be built. Does the funding support this or will compromises have to be made?
- Additional children would mean additional staff and support staff. This would affect the day to day management of school, the need for a larger admin team and the requirement of a larger staff room and admin area.
- The school is open plan which means that children need to walk through classrooms to get to other parts of the school. We already struggle with this and the proposed scale of expansion and the impact on lack of circulation space in a school which has no corridors is not feasible without a significant impact on the quality of teaching and education.
- The proposed expansion would lead to less space for the children to play, yet there will be additional children using this space. (490 instead of 370). The field has poor drainage and cannot be used between October and April.
- Our Dobcroft After School Hours (DASH) provision will no longer be able to cope with the additional numbers without itself having an extension.

- After school extra-curricular clubs also have a limited number of places and so an increase in children would make it even harder to get a place at a club.
- Should the proposal go ahead, the school would welcome newer, purpose built classrooms which were self-contained, together with additional toilets and hall space, if there were sufficient funding to support these developments.

What level of design / planning has taken place?

Will expansion cover toilets, dining, hall and sports provisions for an additional 210 pupils and staff?

Will the changes to school design take into account the increased pupil traffic and its impact on the children in an open plan school?

How do the council intend to deal with the need for extra staff parking?

Will there be increased hard areas for the children to play?

Funding implications

- Any expansion at Dobcroft would need to be fully funded by the LA as both schools have a low revenue funding. This would need to include all resources for the new classrooms.
- Although the expansion would be fully funded initially for the first year, we have concerns that in the future, should numbers drop to between 90 and 120, the per-pupil funding would not be enough to support having an extra teacher. This could result in having to support classes well in excess of 30 pupils.
- Children at Dobcroft Junior School only receive £3,394 per pupil compared to the Sheffield average of £4,000. This shortfall of £606 times 370 pupils has a massive impact on our budget. (£224,220 shortfall). If this figure is multiplied by 490 children (370 + additional 120), this shortfall is magnified (£296,940 shortfall). We do not receive much funding from Pupil Premium to soften this blow as we are in an advantaged area, **so we consider lack of funding to be a major concern to this proposal.**
- Dobcroft Infant and Junior Schools both have a larger percentage of children with additional needs (22.3%) compared with both Sheffield (21.4%) and nationally (17.4%). Both schools are popular and are seeing a further increase in children with additional and complex needs due to changes in the SEN Code of Practice. This allows parents to choose a suitable school for their child without having to go through the usual admissions appeal system. Creating additional spaces at these schools will attract additional children with complex needs from across the city, who may need 1:1 or additional adult support, further impacting on both space and budget. The reduction in space on both sites will have an impact on these children and especially those with an Education and Health Care Plans. (EHCP).
- Surveys/research show that pupils with SEND cope and progress well in the smaller, nurturing environment provided by primary schools but cope less well once at the larger, impersonal environment of secondary. Smaller schools are better able to adapt their systems to respond appropriately to the needs of vulnerable pupils.

- A main concern for the Junior School would be the division of the funding. We are concerned that once the infant option has been built, there may well be insufficient funding left to expand the junior site, or that the funding may be withdrawn by future governments.

How can the council reassure Governors on these issue?

How can the council reassure Governors that SEN children at Dobcroft will not be affected by the plans?

Can the council reassure us that the SEN withdrawal areas that the school has already created will not be swallowed up by the creation of and need for additional classrooms?

Can the LA commit to providing the school with additional space, staffing and resources to ensure that the rights and needs of our vulnerable pupils are not compromised?

What assurances will be put in place that funding will be agreed for both schools and will not be reduced after this agreement?

Impact on the Curriculum- inclusion

- At the moment Dobcroft Junior School runs an annual residential in every year group. Sometimes it is a challenge to find accommodation to support taking 90 children away on a residential experience but each trip is fully inclusive. If a suitable venue for 120 children is required this will impact on residential visits and may mean that residential visits will no longer be able to take place.
- Dobcroft Junior School currently holds two productions each year. We stage plays to accommodate 90 children performing and their parents in the audience. It would be impossible to stage a play with a cast of 120, meaning that we would have to be selective.
- The Hall is not sufficient to allow 16 classes to access 3 hours of PE a week, especially when the weather does not allow children to use the outdoor yards.
- The hall is not large enough to hold whole school assemblies for 120 additional pupils and the staff.
- Planning Preparation and Assessment time for teachers would have to change. At present, staff plan together and the classes rotate around three activities during the afternoon, led by three specialist teachers. If there were four activities, these lessons would become less than half an hour in length, making them less effective for learning.

How can the council reassure Governors that residential visits will not be impacted?

How can the Council reassure Governors that mandatory PE classes and school performances will not be impacted, for example by including expansion of the school hall in building plans?

Possible Implications for schools in the neighbourhood

- If places at Dobcroft increased and were not filled by children from the catchment area, it will have a domino effect of attracting children from the Holt House and Carterknowle Schools and this in turn would allow children to make the transition from the Nether Edge School to Holt House and Carterknowle Schools, possibly leaving Nether Edge School with empty places and threatening them with possible closure.
- From the chart made available, the figures for the area look set to decrease over the next four years from 487 pupils in 2015/16 to only 400 by 2018/19.

Other considerations

- The schools would both become too large and not as personable as at present. 4 form entry (120 pupils per year) is considered by some as too big for a primary. Should the two schools become a through primary school in the future, as others have done, it will be enormous i.e 7 year groups times 120 pupils per year = 840 pupils on roll. This is the size of some secondary schools. In the initial meeting on 5th November, it was stated by members of the council that their preferred option with primary schools is to have 30 children per class and for there to be a maximum of three form entry in each school.

Alternative options

- We would prefer a solution to be found in the Ecclesall schools whereby the Infant School also became three form entry. This would mean that all children in Ecclesall Infant School (3 forms) would be able to move into Ecclesall Junior School (3 forms). The children who currently attend Clifford Infant School would need to be found a suitable junior school for transition. However, this accommodation would not be needed until 2018, allowing plenty of time to find a solution. Could the funding (£2.1 million) that is proposed in the expansion of Dobcroft Infant and Junior Schools be better spent extending Ecclesall Infant school by three classes and an additional junior school be built on a suitable nearby site e.g. The Bannerdale Centre, or the old Primary Inclusion Centre which is located close to Clifford Infant School? From the chart, the main expansion appears to be in the Greystones area making Ecclesall a nearby suitable alternative if Greystones reaches capacity in the future.
- An alternative solution would be swapping Ecclesall Infant School with Ecclesall Junior School site. This would allow a three form entry at the new Ecclesall Infant site and then an expansion on the current Ecclesall Infant site to house the additional junior school children, including the children from Clifford. Again, part of this expansion would not be needed until 2018.

To support our proposal for a preferred option to take place at an alternative location, please see the chart below which was prepared by a Governor at Dobcroft Infant School, Iain Bradley, Data and Evidence Lead. He has presented a responsible estimate of catchment demand in future years, based on a blend of the best available data as follows:

- a) The number of children in the catchment area population of a particular pre-school age

- b) A weighting for the amount of inward/outward migration that one could anticipate before that group reach school age. This can be done in two ways. Growth as a percentage based on past trends, or growth in absolute terms based on past trends. Modelling both and splitting the difference seems sensible. [let's call this a population growth factor].
- c) A weighting for the proportion of children in catchment who are likely to apply to the school, to estimate the anticipated demand for a place in each catchment school. This can be based on the total number of 3 year olds and the number of those who put their catchment school down as 1st preference in each catchment in the last three years. [let's call this a 1st preference factor].

Expressed as a formula this is as follows for any future intake:

$$\frac{[\text{Children in Catchment} * \text{population growth \%age factor} * \text{1st preference factor}] + [(\text{children in catchment} + \text{recent migration absolute numbers}) * \text{1st preference factor}]}{2}$$

2

Table 1: Predicted numbers of in catchment applications in future years.

	Intake	Catchment population 1st pref forecast					4 year average Vs 1st pref catchment apps
		2015	2016	2017	2018	4 year average	
Nether Edge	60	25	27	28	26	27	-33
Hunter's Bar	90	40	37	47	46	42	-48
Lowfield	60	28	27	27	25	27	-33
Totley	30	39	41	52	49	45	15
Ecclesall	60	84	64	86	78	78	18
Holt House & Carterknowle	60	48	42	34	34	39	-21
Dobcroft*	90	82	99	105	101	97	7
Springfield	30	22	19	20	23	21	-9
Greystones**	90	80	79	63	68	73	-17
Dore	60	61	68	62	57	62	2
Sharrow	60	36	42	40	35	38	-22

*Modelled at 90 per year, i.e. ignoring the temporary expansion in September 2015

**Current intake of 60 is returning to 90 from 2015

This evidence indicates that although there is a demand for places at the Dobcroft schools in the future, the real demand comes from the Totley and Ecclesall catchment areas. In addition, there are a number of parents in the catchment area who choose to educate their children privately, reducing the strain on Dobcroft.

In addition, the deadline for primary school applications for 2015 is 31st January. This information is key to the decision making process on the future expansion of the school and we request it is made available to all interested parties. The closing date of February 11th of the consultation does not allow for full consideration and factoring in of new information on the current cohort application across the South West.

We have considered the many issues involved and realise that many of them may appear negative. However, the possible lack of funding and its impact on the education, health and safety and well-being of the pupils, both currently on roll and in the future, has to be our prime concern and is of paramount importance. Moreover, we feel that there is a real alternative to the expansion of Dobcroft Infant and Junior Schools by pursuing the Ecclesall/Clifford or the Totley options. Although costings are as yet unknown, the addition of nine extra classrooms at Dobcroft Junior School and two/three additional classrooms at Dobcroft Infant School has to be weighed up against the costs of expansion at the alternative locations. **We are deeply concerned that the cost of expansion on this scale cannot be met by £2.1m.**

Have these alternative options been fully investigated and designs costed as, without full information, it would be prejudicial to proceed with a Dobcroft expansion?

Is there the option of applying for an extension to the consultation deadline in light of the 2015 primary school application data being available in February 2015 and an opportunity for the school to fully consider and respond to the proposals?

Is there an e-forum or web page that parents can access and communicate a shared and collective approach to the expansion?

The Governing Body of Dobcroft Junior School.

APPENDIX 2: ASSESSMENT OF DATA

FOREWORD FROM SCHOOL ORGANISATION TEAM AT SHEFFIELD CITY COUNCIL

The following note has been put together by the data and evidence lead for Dobcroft Infants' Governing Body. It is not the view of Sheffield City Council. This work has been supported by the Council's School Organisation Team in terms of the data, existing forecast methods, and discussions of the methodology used. The conclusions are those of the author, however these broadly match the findings of the School Organisation Team - i.e that there is a need for additional primary school places in the southwest area of Sheffield and that the area of pressure is around Ecclesall, Dobcroft, Dore and Totley. The data presented around families moving into the area and the predicted impact on school applications suggests that if current trends continue then there is the potential to require a further addition of places. Again, this broadly matches the position of the School Organisation Team as presented in the consultation material to date. The change in pre-school cohorts is a significant factor as discussed in the Council documentation. The Council's position is to be even more cautious than usual with predictions that include this factor. Forecasting demand for school places is already subject to a number of changing variables such as population, preference, relative distance of families to schools, number of siblings, and incorporating a prediction of the number of families that will move into an area, though necessary around the southwest of Sheffield, adds a further level of uncertainty.

We hope that by sharing this note publicly, interested parties will have access to an alternative view of the very complex data that underpins this area of work and that this supports people to contribute to the consultation.

Iain Bradley

Data and Evidence Lead,

Dobcroft Infant School Governing Body

23-01-2015

The evidence related to expansion of places in South West Sheffield / Dobcroft Schools

Introduction

The purpose of this note is to set out my understanding of the data and evidence that has led Sheffield City Council (SCC) to reach the conclusion that increasing the number of primary places in SW Sheffield is necessary, and that expansion of Dobcroft schools appears the currently favoured solution to the issue. It is based upon:

- Data provided by SCC during discussions with them
- Nationally available school preference data from Department for Education
- A meeting with SCC to understand the broader context and approach to school capacity planning

The analysis and any interpretation is my own, not necessarily reflecting the views of Dobcroft School, its Governing Body, or SCC.

Section 1: Overview

School capacity planning is undoubtedly a complex science. At the city level it is relatively straightforward, on this scale birth rate data is an extremely strong predictor (within +/- 1%) of the number of school places needed when each year group reaches school age. The complexity comes in establishing *where* in the city the changes in capacity are needed. At this point you are not just at the mercy of the birth rate, but other issues including but not limited to:

- Migration patterns into, and within the city
- Changing preferences from parents as the quality of local schools changes over time
- Changing preferences from parents in terms of desirability / affordability of private schooling and/or faith schools (e.g. Clifford and St Wilfrid's in our area).
- Unpredictability in terms of applications such as those by Looked After Children and certain Special Educational Needs, which are prioritised above catchment children in the allocation process.

SCC must strive for a balance between predicting parent choices, and having long planning pipelines to allow smooth implementation of changes. The conundrum for a planner is that the former is most accurately done as late as possible, and the latter is best done as early as possible.

Section Two : The city wide context

The last 15 years have been pretty evenly split between 7 years of falling demand on places in Sheffield, followed by 8 years of increasing demand driven by a steadily increasing birth rate since 2002 (20% increase). Birth rates for children who are somewhere between 0 and 3 years old predict that demand is set to rise further for 2015/16, before peaking in 2016/2017 and then dropping off in 2017/18. After that, then the children to take school places haven't been born yet and you are at the mercy of long term population forecasts which are much less reliable.

Thus, SCC probably operates with a 3-4 year warning system of what is needed within the city in future. After that, things become unreliable.

In theory, the 'perfect' planning department would have an exact match in the number of places offered, and the number of children looking for places. A taxpayer would be delighted with such an efficient system, but a parent would be horrified, as people want to have choice and go to local schools rather than be trekking across the city. Because of the unpredictability below City level, SCC and others operate with a degree of surplus places, or 'slack'. As demand has increased and budgetary pressures have bitten in recent years, this has fallen from around 15 per cent in the early 2000's to around 6 per cent now. This is apparently in line with other Local Authorities.

A reduction of slack is only a problem if it increases the proportion of children who do not get into their catchment schools when they might reasonably expect to do so. For some time now, and reflected again in latest figures, 96 per cent of children in Sheffield get into their chosen or catchment school. This is bang in line with national average, suggesting Sheffield is neither exemplar nor poor at balancing the supply and demand of school places at a local level.

As school capacity management evolves as a science, you would expect SCC and others to get better at minimising slack as they develop better analytical tools and models to predict local preferences and migration patterns. However, such a marked fall in recent years (halving of the number of spare places) whilst maintaining the proportion of children who get into their preferred/catchment school should be considered a success and be welcome news to citizens as taxpayers.

The demand for extra places in recent years has not just been met by driving out surplus places in the system. To maintain meeting 96 per cent of catchment applications SCC has increased primary provision in a number of areas. Locally this includes Abbey Lane, Lowedges, Greystones and Hallam. Across the city roughly 20 primary schools have recently increased, or are soon set to increase, their intake.

Section Two: The Southwest Issues

As one focusses on smaller areas, the issues identified earlier in terms of people moving house or shifting preferences as regards local maintained and private schools become harder to predict. SCC cannot put provision in place by planning purely at city level, and cannot predict terribly accurately

at catchment level, and so to balance this out, it looks at catchments in clusters. The Southwest of Sheffield area includes Totley, Dore, Dobcroft, Ecclesall, Abbey Lane, Holt House and Greystones.

For the 2013/2014 intake, Dobcroft infants did not have any catchment children who could not be placed at the school. The only school in the area which had this problem was Totley, with 6 catchment children not securing one of the 30 places.¹

For 2014/2015 intake, The South West schools had bigger issues. A total of 29 out of 799 children did not initially gain a place in their catchment school (this finally settled at 20/799 following the reserve places & appeals processes). These 29 were split across catchments as follows:

- Dobcroft : 8
- Dore : 6
- Greystones : 8
- Totley : 7
- Ecclesall : 0
- Abbey lane: 0
- Holt House: 0

So, an increase in the problem between 2013-14 and 2014-15 can be seen in SW Sheffield – with 8 unsatisfactory outcomes for parents/guardians increasing to 29.

29/799 is roughly 4 per cent. At first glance this appears comparable with the Sheffield and national average of 96 per cent gaining a place in their preferred school. However, this is not quite true. The national picture of 4 per cent **not** gaining a place at their preferred school includes those who put down risky/odd choices in terms of applying for schools out of catchment. Thus, the 29/799 in SW Sheffield last year **who did apply for their catchment school** is indicative of an above average sized issue.

Pre-school take up within the south west of Sheffield has also grown by 8 per cent each year in the last two years. This aligns with the birth rate in suggesting there is a problem stacking up in future cohorts applying to primary schools in the area.

It is likely that it is this spike in oversubscription last year, and the pre-school data, that has convinced SCC that the 6 children in 2013/2014 at Totley was not an isolated blip, and represented the tip of a bigger through-flow problem in the area, evidenced by the 29 children not gaining a place in their catchment school at the initial application process. This has led to the decision to increase capacity by 30 places via the Dobcroft 2015 expansion, and a belief that a permanent solution is also needed. The council considers SW Sheffield to have been ‘tight’ for a while, and we’ve now tipped over to the point where if capacity is not increased, significant numbers of children will not get their catchment school when they choose ie.

Section Three: Predicting the future

¹ <https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/search-result.html?queryStr=details+of+oversubscribed+schools&n=10&advanced=false>

Schools cannot expand quickly, and to be efficient and viable both SCC and schools would prefer schools to expand/contract in units of 30. SCCs job is to try and piece together the concrete evidence of recent application rounds with predictions about future demand. At a local area, this is part science and part art.

What data can we use?

SCC holds data from the NHS about the number of children of each age in each catchment. Blended with its admissions data it therefore knows:

- a) The number of 0,1,2 and 3 year olds in each catchment for any given year.
- b) The number of applications for each school, from 3 year olds in each catchment for any given year
- c) By comparing this over time, it can observe the changes in pre-school populations within catchments as parents move in to / out of particular catchments prior to their young children starting school.
- d) It also knows the number of children pre-school settings in each area. But, pre-school is a more transient issue, without 'catchments' – people frequently choose pre-schools well away from where they live and is thus not a good predictor of catchment demand for particular schools

What does the data tell us?

The number of 3 year olds in an area is quite changeable. Of the 21 catchment areas from which someone applied to Dobcroft, the average number of 3 year olds in each catchment is 78, and this varies within catchments on average each year by 10 per cent².

The NHS population data is not fully reliable for use in this context – in 2013/14 SCC received applications from 9 more Dobcroft catchment children than NHS data suggested were living in the Dobcroft catchment. This may be partly or wholly explained by the fact that NHS data is an annual snapshot around September, and so anyone moving into the area after that but before school application (January) would not be in the NHS data, but would be in catchment numbers for applying. By comparing year on year population data, you can estimate the extent to which particular year groups grow / shrink from birth up to Foundation age. The number of children in moving into SW Sheffield does increase between birth age and school age (Fig 1), and this varies a good deal by catchment area.

Figure 1. Increases in cohort populations as they move towards school age in SW Sheffield, based on an average of 2013-14 and 2014-15 intakes (annex 2)

² Calculation based on analysis of 'Forecasts of Reception 1st preferences (on time and late) from NHS population data provided by SCC (Annex One)

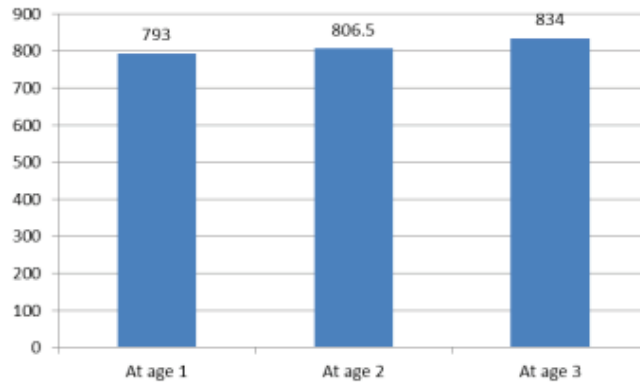
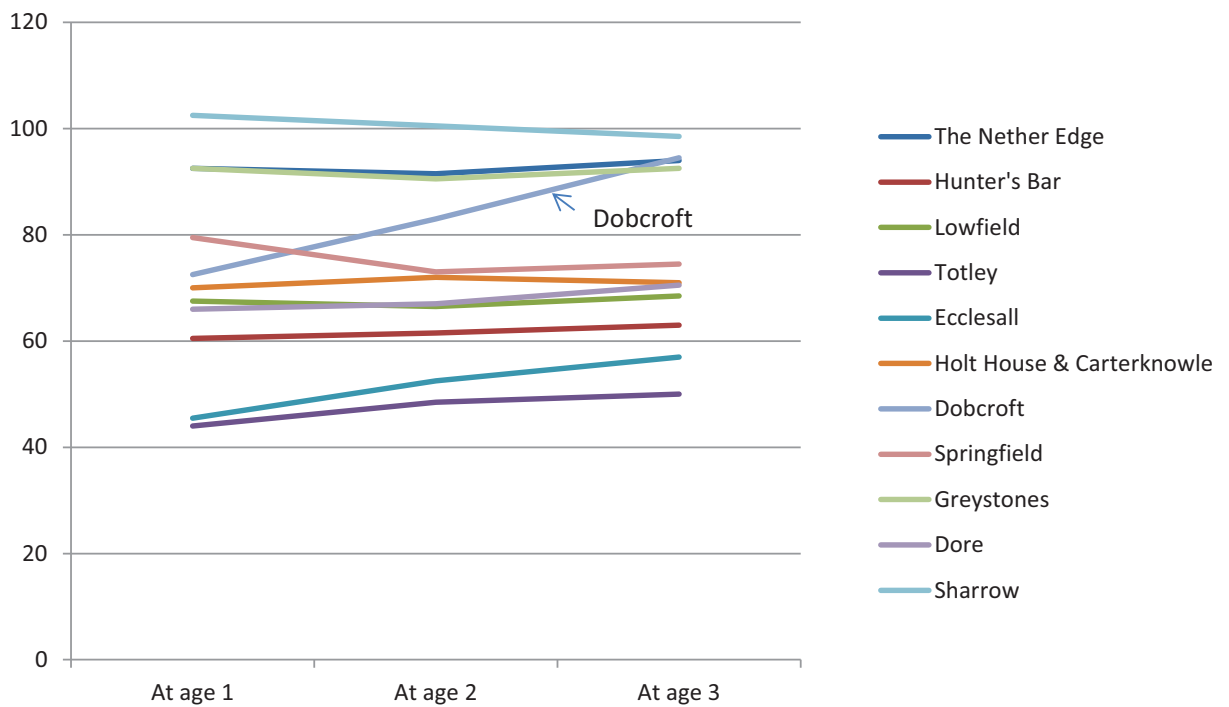


Figure 2. Increases in cohort populations as they move towards school age in SW Sheffield, based on 2013-14 and 2014-15 intakes, by school catchment area. (Annex 2)



The data suggests that:

- Inward migration to SW catchments varies a lot between catchments
- Dobcroft catchment has the highest level of inward movement of children between being born and starting school in the SW. Thus, assuming that because there are less 0 and 1 year olds in Dobcroft catchment than there are 2-3 year olds means that any pressure on places may be a temporary one, may well be missing the point.

In predicting future demand, we should not therefore apply a 'SW wide' estimate of inward migration to catchments, but instead do it at catchment level.

Section 4: Piecing this all together

Given the different inward migration patterns at catchment level, I believe it is more robust to apply forecasting at catchment level. To present a responsible estimate of catchment demand in future years, the best available data to blend together is as follows:

- d) The number of children in the catchment area population of a particular pre-school age
- e) A weighting for the amount of inward/outward migration that one could anticipate before that group reach school age. This can be done in two ways. Growth as a percentage based on past trends, or growth in absolute terms based on past trends. Modelling both and splitting the difference seems sensible. [let's call this a population growth factor].
- f) A weighting for the proportion of children in catchment who are likely to apply to the school, to estimate the anticipated demand for a place in each catchment school. This can be based on the total number of 3 year olds and the number of those who put their catchment school down as 1st preference in each catchment in the last three years. [let's call this a 1st preference factor].

Expressed as a formula this is as follows for any future intake:

$$\frac{[\text{Children in Catchment} * \text{population growth \%age factor} * \text{1st preference factor}] + [(\text{children in catchment} + \text{recent migration absolute numbers}) * \text{1st preference factor}]}{2}$$

Table 1: Predicted numbers of in catchment applications in future years.

	Intake	Catchment population 1st pref forecast					4 year average	4 year average places Vs 1st pref catchment apps
		2015	2016	2017	2018			
Nether Edge	60	25	27	28	26	27	-33	
Hunter's Bar	90	40	37	47	46	42	-48	
Lowfield	60	28	27	27	25	27	-33	
Totley	30	39	41	52	49	45	15	
Ecclesall	60	84	64	86	78	78	18	
Holt House & Carterknowle	60	48	42	34	34	39	-21	
Dobcroft*	90	82	99	105	101	97	7	
Springfield	30	22	19	20	23	21	-9	
Greystones**	90	80	79	63	68	73	-17	
Dore	60	61	68	62	57	62	2	
Sharrow	60	36	42	40	35	38	-22	

*Modelled at 90 per year, i.e. ignoring the temporary expansion in September 2015

***Current intake of 60 is returning to 90 from 2015*

There are some schools (e.g. Nether Edge, Hunter's Bar, Lowfield, Sharrow, Springfield) who are expected to receive far fewer catchment 1st preference applications than they have capacity. Analysis of School Census data from 2013-2014³ intake (latest available) SW Sheffield seems to highlight an issue here in SW Sheffield that to date has not yet been discussed. There are schools which are likely to be quite oversubscribed, and quite undersubscribed at the same time. Those schools are rated 'good' by latest ofsted reports, with the exception of Springfield which 'requires improvement'. Combining Published Admission Numbers (i.e. places/capacity) from last year, with school census data from last year shows the following:

Table 2: Take up of places in SW Sheffield last year: Schools appearing to be under-occupied

School	Published Admission Number 2013-2014	Pupils on Roll January 2014 (school census data)	Unused places
Lowfield	60	49	11
Nether Edge	60	39	21
Hunter's Bar	90	89	1
Sharrow	60	58	2
Springfield	30	26	4
Total			40

Source: DfE School Census Jan 2014.

Although not available from DfE yet, SCC's monitoring reveals that at the last census count (Oct 2014) the latest cohort had just 8 places unfilled across the SW area. Relating this back to the surplus debate discussed in section one, this is a small number.

SECTION 5: EMERGING CONCLUSIONS

- The Dobcroft 2015 expansion *appears* to be happening for a year group when the number of in catchment applications is likely to be lower for last year.
- The data suggests that for 2016 and 2017 intakes, applications from in catchment would be up . For those years, if the level of outside catchment but priority applications replicated the 12 received this year (CLA and certain SEN) then in each year 20 and 27 children respectively, living in Dobcroft catchment, would not get a place despite applying for Dobcroft school without expansion.
- The South West crowding problem is likely to be more severe in the catchments of Totley and Ecclesall than it is in Dobcroft. It is not clear how Dobcroft expansion therefore addresses what seems to be the biggest problems in the area.

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/schools-pupils-and-their-characteristics-january-2014>, underlying data, school level file

- Whilst some parts of SW Sheffield are likely to be overly popular, others (notably Lowfield and Nether Edge) look set to continue a trend of having far fewer 1st preference catchment applications than they have places available. These may, of course, be filled up with 2nd/3rd preference applications that were unsuccessful with 1st/2nd preferences, or by out of catchment children having them as their first preference. But in the last 2 years, there has been some surplus in those areas.

The current proposals suggest the only solutions to the problem presented by SCC are expansions to overly popular and outstanding schools. Re-distribution of catchment areas, or funding to improve the attractiveness of under-subscribed schools (moving from 'requires improvement' or 'good' to outstanding) should, in my opinion, be options SCC publically consider prior to any significant capital investment projects.

The data tells us that the pressure on places will be felt across a number of catchments, and it is unclear at present how injecting additional places into just one school will unravel to meet the future needs across several catchments.

SECTION 6: LIMITATIONS.

There are several limitations with this modelling work. Including

- The population data that they are all based on is imperfect for this use, as demonstrated by the fact that in 2013, 88 children in Dobcroft catchment submitted 97 applications
- The time series from which we can estimate migration patterns and 1st preference applications within catchment is short. This data is quite volatile and so any estimates would have large tolerances around them.
- We are modelling human behaviour in terms of migration, school choice etc. These things vary over time... 'we cannot count everything that counts'.
- This work only models 1st preferences within catchments. Parents who choose their catchment schools as 2nd or 3rd choices will also have preference if unsuccessful at schools they choose above it. These are small in number and probably represent 'noise' within SW Sheffield rather than any major disruption to the figures.

Despite these limitations, my discussions with SCC did not surface any more comprehensive data sources or analytical models or scenario-planning software which is more sophisticated than the approach taken here.