

## **Report for Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee on the Planning of School Places**

**April 2013**

A report on the current position of school place planning is attached.

This report is updated each year as new information is received both from the Health Authority and from the School Admissions Team.

There has been a steady upward trend in the birth rate within the Borough since 2007 and the development of new housing also generates a need for more school places. This demand for additional primary school places has been achieved by bringing existing accommodation back into use, extending some existing primary schools (for example at Lawley Primary) and where there is substantial new development in an area without an existing school providing a new one (for example at Lightmoor).

At the current time extensions are being built at Muxton Primary School, Newport Infant School and Newdale Primary School. At each of these schools there will be a net gain of two class bases.

Over the next two years further extensions are planned at Meadows and Teagues Bridge Primary Schools. A new primary school is also planned to serve the Ironstone development in Lawley as the number of houses to be built there will produce more children than can be accommodated solely by the extension of the existing schools in that area.

The cost of providing places is met from a combination of government funding and negotiating contributions from developers through section 106 agreements.

The projections that are used to determine how many school places are needed are based on a complex formula which looks at the number of known children in an area (from birth records) and how this has historically related to the intake into reception classes. Additions are also made from housing developments and we have a formula to work out how many children, of both primary and secondary age, each type of house is likely to produce. This formula has been examined and approved by the Department for Education (DfE). The government guidelines allow us to have up to 5% surplus places. This is to facilitate a degree of choice for parents. The borough has been divided into geographical planning areas to allow us to look at places in a pragmatic manner as well as in the area as a whole.

At the present time there is no pressure on secondary school places. The increased birthrate will not have an effect on secondary schools until approximately 2017. For the past few years secondary schools have experienced falling numbers as large cohorts leave the top of the school and have been replaced by smaller ones. The new secondary schools being built through the BSF project will accommodate all the pupils in the borough. They are also being designed in such a way that extensions will be easy to add in the future if necessary.

The Local Authority will retain the duty for ensuring that there are sufficient school places in the area. However, academies are able to choose to increase their planned admission number if they wish and can apply to the DfE for funding to expand. In the current year both Newport High School and Priorslee Primary Academy have availed themselves of this funding and chosen to increase their

capacity. Priorslee has increased its planned admission number from 50 to 60 per year group and Newport High from 56 to 84 per year group. This ability of academies to expand without recourse to the local authority raises challenges in the field of school place planning. It is not yet certain whether the DfE will offset places allowed in academies against any request that a local authority makes for basic need places in another part of their area.

Another area of uncertainty is what funding mechanism there are for providing an increased number of special school places. We are currently experiencing pressure at The Bridge Special School partly because of an increase in the birth rate and partly because its excellent reputation attracts applicants from outside Telford & Wrekin.