

SALFORD 21ST CENTURY LEARNING COMMISSION

REPORT ON THE PRIMARY SECTOR

Date: 28 October 2010

1. Background

- 1.1. This report addresses some of the matters set out in Section 4 of the Commission's Initial Report as they apply to the primary sector. The report attempts to:
 - a) investigate issues place planning in the primary sector, taking into account the financial situation of the schools, the condition of the estate and the predictions for pupil numbers;
 - b) identify opportunities for strengthening leadership and governance;
 - c) identify opportunities for co-location and collaboration with other sectors and service providers.
- 1.2. The national context in which our reports have been prepared remains uncertain. The new government has yet to clarify many aspects of its education policy. The White Paper planned for October 26th has now been delayed for at least one month. However, there are some areas where the general direction is already clear. Funding has grown rapidly in the period from 1997 to 2009, rising from £2900 per pupil to £5140. ⁱThis level of spending will not be continued and schools can expect to have to deliver with fewer resources for the foreseeable future. While the schools budget will rise by £4 billion over the period of the recent Comprehensive Spending Review, the non-schools budget will fall by 12 per cent in real terms over the same period. The £7.2 billion pupil premium has been confirmed, but as the Secretary of State recently stated, there will be cuts in the budgets of some other schools to pay for this. Depending on what formula is eventually agreed to distribute the pupil premium, it is likely that the majority of Salford schools, where there are high levels of disadvantage, should do reasonably well. However, cuts in the non-schools budget are likely to mean that schools will have to provide for themselves services and support which have previously been available through the local authority and agencies like the National Strategies.
- 1.3. There is likely to be a drive towards the creation of different types of schools from a range of providers. This has been seen in government statements about academies and free schools.
- 1.4. The strategic leadership role of the local authority in relationship to schools is not yet clear. A function in the commissioning of pupil places, in quality control and in Special Educational Needs had been widely predicted. However, recent statements seem to point to the disappearance of the school improvement partner (SIP) role and questioning of the extent of the local authority's monitoring role. The government has said that it wishes to encourage partnerships between schools. However, the principle of competition to drive up standards remains and may be enhanced. Although the assumption still is that local authorities will have a responsibility to commission places, their role in decommissioning surplus capacity is less certain. It may well be that the intent is to leave unsuccessful schools to "wither on the vine". This could mean that the authority has more

leeway to consider the relative costs and risks of maintaining surplus places against those of maintaining surplus capacity.

- 1.5. The local context for this work is complex. Our initial report set out clearly the extent and costs of surplus places in the primary sector. The evolving situation is one where rapid population growth will mean that surplus places will rapidly give way to an acute shortage of places by 2016-17. This will have consequences for how the local authority's estate is managed and for finances. These issues are discussed at greater length in the body of the report.
- 1.6. Many of the local authority's primary schools perform well when viewed in terms of their challenging contexts. Over 60% of the schools are outstanding or good and only 2 schools are in an Ofsted category. The nursery and early years provision is very well regarded by many of the stakeholders we spoke to in our initial enquiries.
- 1.7. The local authority has made use of the Primary Capital Programme to replace a number of schools which were in poor condition. There are acute problems of building condition in the much of the rest of the primary estate which will need to be addressed. This will be a challenging task in a time of cuts in the capital available to schools. The CSR provides £15.8 billion towards the provision of new school buildings, repairs and refurbishment. Just how much of this will be available for the provision of schools in areas of demographic pressure is not clear, since the same funding appears to have to cover the remainder of the BSF programme, the Academies and Free Schools initiatives.
- 1.8. There is considerable scope for further development of productive relationships with the voluntary sector providers. More than half the city's primary schools are Voluntary Controlled or Voluntary Aided. There is also scope to develop some primary schools as gateways for other services, notably those provided through the PCT and through other areas of the council. Most parents are comfortable with contact through the primary schools and these other services could benefit from the quality of this relationship.

2. Guiding Principles For The Review

We have identified a number of principles against which we have tested our recommendations. These are:

- The need to continue to raise attainment and achievement across a broad range of competencies. In their primary schools, Salford young people must acquire the skills and competencies which will enable them to gain full benefit from secondary education.
- The opportunity for every family to have reasonably easy access to a primary school which is equipped to deliver education in the 21st Century.

- Though the commission has seen excellent examples of good practice in one form entry schools, Salford should aspire to providing schools of at least 2 forms of entry. Where this is not possible the local authority should promote partnerships of varying degrees of formality which deliver organisational resilience and financial stability.
- The need to develop effective structures for partnership which will ensure the spread of good practice and access to support for school improvement.
- Given the high levels of social disadvantage and exclusion, the need to develop delivery solutions which are inclusive on a broad range of issues e.g. education, health, religion and lifestyle.
- The need to address the challenges presented by an ageing estate and rising pupil numbers.

3. Scope And Methodology

- 3.1 In our report on the secondary sector we provided evaluated options for individual schools and groups of schools. Given the timescale within which we have worked it has not been possible to do this in the primary report. We have instead made more general observations about the likely demand for places in the sector, its finance, the condition of the estate and the options for its development.
- 3.2 In the course of our work in the primary sector we visited a sample of 22 schools. The schools were selected after discussions with officers and studying data. The sample reflected the varying size, age, condition and status of schools in the sector.
- 3.3 In addition to relying on the interview notes from our initial hearings and further meetings for our secondary report, we held meetings with:
- Officers of the local authority
 - Representatives from Urban Vision
 - Chairs of two governing bodies
 - The Lead Member for Children's Services

We referred to documentation and statistics supplied by the local authority and other bodies.

The pupil numbers used are the most recent available from the local authority and take account of recently acquired population data from the PCT of pre-school children registered with GPs in Salford.

4. Finance and Pupil Numbers

- 4.1 In our initial report we concluded that the city had too many small primary schools. Currently, only 4 schools have numbers in excess of 400 and only 17 have more than 300 pupils on roll. One of the schools has an admission number of 15 and a roll of less than 90, 16 of whom attend a special unit at the school. Our view was that such a large number of small schools placed a strain on the schools budget in terms of building maintenance, leadership and governance. We also felt that small schools were inherently unstable and prone to problems arising from staff absence and turnover. Although there are some small schools doing an excellent job and delivering high standards, we have seen nothing in our more detailed work with primary schools to dissuade us from the view that the local authority should aspire to creating schools with a minimum of two forms of entry. We feel that this number will give greater stability in terms of staffing and finance and create schools which are more resilient to staff illness, turnover and small variations in pupil number.
- 4.2 One area where there is obvious scope for collaboration to achieve efficiencies is where there are two schools in very close proximity. Examples of this are in Irlam at St. Joseph's and Moorfield, in Swinton at St. Peters and The Deans, and in Broughton at Marlborough Road and St. Thomas of Canterbury. The most obvious example is at Light Oaks where the separate infant and junior schools share the same building. Collaboration was certainly not a given in all of these situations.
- 4.3 Some of the most difficult issues are created in schools where the admission number is 45, i.e. one and a half forms of entry. This leads to a number of organisational difficulties, the most serious of which is mixed age teaching. We were made aware of a number of creative approaches to ensuring that this did not detract from the education being provided.
- 4.4 Until this year, there has been pressure from central government on local authorities to remove surplus places. This has led in many cases to the flexibility in the formula for generating planned admission numbers to be used to set some of these numbers below what could be accommodated. The most obvious example of this is where schools have an admission number of 25. In many, if not all, of these cases there could be a limit of 30. If these schools were allowed to recruit up to their full capacity, their budgets could benefit by around £75000 with no additional staffing required.
- 4.5 The number and spread of schools in Salford means that on average pupils do not travel far to a primary school. The distance is .77 of a mile to a community school but slightly further to faith schools. However, an examination of the postcodes for the pupils in each school show that many parents are willing to travel considerable distances to their child's school. This may be for educational reasons; in other cases it has more to do with extended family links or the

parent's place of work.

- 4.6 Undoubtedly, the most significant challenge for the local authority will come in terms of planning for a rapid and unexpected rise in the primary population. Numbers of pre-school age children registered with GPs in Salford would indicate a rise of more than 2000 in the potential primary roll. The most recent figures we have (see fig 1) show that 1027 surplus places in 2011-12 will convert to a shortfall of more than 1400 by 2016-17 – roughly the equivalent of 3 large primary schools. However, the population rises are not spread evenly. As can be seen in figure 2 below there is a large demand for places predicted for the Swinton, Claremont and Pendlebury area though in all areas the rise in population is significant. It is possible that these cohorts may not survive and there may be migration out of the area. However, given the plans for building in the area and the current pattern of cohort survival, this is unlikely. It is tempting to conclude that given a lead-in time of around 2 years to build a new school, this problem could be put on hold until the numbers are firmer. This is not an option since already there is severe pressure on nursery and reception places in some areas.

Fig.1

	City Summary							
	Rec	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Year 5	Year 6	Total
2011/12	-113	42	3	135	301	293	366	1027
2012/13	-164	-108	22	14	129	294	323	510
2013/14	-208	-161	-130	36	0	120	290	-53
2014/15	-224	-205	-183	-112	31	-9	116	-586
2015/16	-319	-219	-227	-166	-118	24	-14	-1039
2016/17	-380	-313	-240	-208	-171	-128	20	-1420

Fig 2

Shortfall surplus by area 2016-17	
Weaste Seedley Langworthy Ordsall	-216
Little Hulton	-195
Worsley	-184
Kersal Broughton Blackfriars	-218
Swinton North Swinton South Claremont Pendlebury	-401
Eccles Winton Barton	-101
Irlam and Cadishead	-105

- 4.7 Some of this shortfall could be dealt with by changes in the planned admission numbers for schools where this is artificially low. There may have to be some

provision of temporary classrooms and re-commissioning of teaching space currently being used for other purposes in schools. However, there will be some basic need, particularly in the areas which are under most pressure. Whether in the current climate there will be capital to meet it, is a key issue.

- 4.8 It has been suggested that, given the predicted rise in numbers, the authority has been less than prudent in closing schools when rising demand in the system could have been foreseen. The commission does not take this view. The local authority had to deal with an estate in which many of its schools were no longer fit for purpose and to use that opportunity to take out surplus provision and build new was reasonable. If there is a criticism which could be levelled, it may well be that the LA were too timid in closing schools which were not fit for purpose. In turn, the local authority would argue that its room for manoeuvre was severely limited by lack of capital.
- 4.9 Salford's primary sector accommodates 1703ⁱⁱ pupils from neighbouring authorities – 585 from Manchester, 489 from Bury, 190 from Wigan and 112 from Bolton plus smaller numbers from 8 other authorities. The commission found little evidence of a history of cross border place planning. At a time when there will be severe pressure on places, it would be prudent to work closely with the other Greater Manchester councils to ensure a co-ordinated approach to these issues.
- 4.10 Since our initial report, the financial situation of the city's primary schools is looking better. This is due in some part to the rising rolls and in part to a far more robust approach taken by the local authority towards financial discipline. The sector is predicting a surplus of £1.2million at the end of the current financial year with continued improvement. However, there are five schools with deficits in excess of £100k and efforts must continue to rectify this situation. It is also worth noting that there are risks as well as benefits in a scenario of rising rolls. Once capacity has risen beyond the point of maximising current capacity, expansion can be very expensive and need to be carefully managed.
- 4.11 In some schools there is the reverse problem, where there is a very large surplus being run – in three cases well over £100,000. Unless there are exceptional circumstances where a major project is planned, it very difficult to see why a school needs to accumulate these sums. Some of the schools where there are large surpluses have serious condition backlogs. Governors in these schools should ensure coherence within their financial and asset management planning.

5. The Primary Estate

- 5.1 Condition backlog record shows that it would cost more than £15 million to bring them up to an acceptable standard, with costs ranging from £8k to £828k per school. In many cases, the data is at least eight years old and, therefore, the estimated costs could be many times greater.
- 5.2 Some of the schools with most serious building issues have been tackled through the city council's Primary Capital Strategy with schools being amalgamated into new buildings which are either open or due to open over the next three to twelve months. The local authority has used New Deal for Schools money to respond to issues of greatest need. Devolved Formula Capital has been made available to schools to maintain their buildings. Some governors and heads have done this well, working carefully planned programmes. However, our conversations seem to indicate that there is an uneven understanding amongst governors of their responsibilities in this area.
- 5.3 The Primary Capital Strategy made recommendations about the first tranche of replacement schools. These have now been implemented. However, there were no further recommendations about the remainder of the school estate, nor have there been any more recent attempts to revise and update the strategy. Furthermore, the strategy at that time was based on the assumption that there would be a continuing reduction in the numbers of primary aged pupils and therefore a need to address the issue of surplus places. As discussed above in section 4, many parts of the City are now facing increased demand for places.
- 5.4 Urban Vision is a joint venture company between Salford City Council and Capita Symonds. As part of its work, it holds the schools' asset management plans and provides surveys and reports on schools as commissioned by the local authority. Through a framework agreement, all capital work in schools which is funded by the local authority is carried out by Urban Vision. This same framework agreement also commits the local authority to using Urban Vision for any new builds outside the BSF programme. The company is currently working in about half of the 77 primary schools where the school or the local authority has commissioned repairs or improvements. It has been reported that, when governing bodies are commissioning work through Devolved Formula Capital for large projects such as window replacement etc, they do not use Urban Vision as its service is perceived as being too expensive. Urban Vision, in turn, expressed concern about quality control issues in some cases when they are not involved in building projects.
- 5.5 The exact date of the school condition surveys is unclear. The majority were carried out before 2002. Since that time, particularly as part of the Primary Capital Programme in 2007, further work has been done. However, it is a concern that the only consolidated authority wide data held by the asset management team is 8 years out of date. An original plan to carry out a rolling programme of condition

surveys where 20% of the estate would be reviewed each year has not been implemented.

5.6 A significant proportion of Salford's primary schools consist of voluntary aided church schools and as such these schools receive their funding through the Local Coordinated Voluntary Aided Programme (LCVAP). It is reported that both dioceses have clear development plans which include up to date information on the condition of their schools.

5.7 Commission members visited a wide selection of Primary Schools across the City. We saw the challenges facing some schools in terms of premises. These included:

- defects in the fabric of buildings e.g. ill fitting and corroded window frames, leaking roofs, poor toilet facilities;
- steep and narrow staircases;
- high ceilings;
- inflexible teaching spaces;
- multiple use of common areas;
- access to some teaching spaces being made through other teaching areas;
- lack of suitable outdoor learning spaces;
- difficult access arrangements.

However we also saw commendable efforts being made by heads and their staffs to ameliorate the effects of these challenges and provide a pleasant working environment for the children. Most of the schools visited were on reasonably sized sites and heads and colleagues were proud of the ways in which outdoor areas were used, especially in the Foundation Stage.

5.8 School buildings range from Victorian through system-built 1960s and 70s schools to the brand new Willow Tree Primary which opened in September this year. Our visit to Willow Tree Primary served to emphasise the transformation which can be brought about through an environment purpose built to serve the needs of the 21st century.

5.9 This school and the other new primaries are fully accessible to people with disabilities. DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) money has been available since 1995, yet many of the older buildings seen by the commission, even those 40 or 50 years old, were not fully accessible to young people with mobility problems. The commission has not been able to obtain figures for the number of children with disabilities in mainstream schools. During our visits we gained the impression that there were very few children with disabilities in mainstream primary schools. Further, it is difficult to see how some of the oldest buildings could ever be made accessible without the spending of very large sums of money.

- 5.10 The capacity of school buildings has changed over the years as alterations have been made internally. As numbers on roll have dropped so classroom bases have been converted to other uses so that the school could not now easily admit the original number without investment in the building. A number of schools thus have an admission number of 25 – five fewer than the usual one-form entry Primary School. A higher admission number would enable these schools to play their part in addressing the increasing pressure for places and also help those with budget problems tackle their deficit.

6. Leadership and Governance

- 6.1 In this section of the primary review, the Commission has focused on the potential that partnerships, both formal and informal could bring to the future development and sustainability of primary schools in Salford. From our initial review and consultation with primary headteachers, it is apparent that in recent years there have been few initiatives by the local authority or by governing bodies to promote partnerships or alternative forms of leadership and governance in primary schools. However, some primary headteachers reported good examples of collaboration in the Education Improvement Partnerships which have evolved from the former Education Action Zones. This has included shared staffing around inclusion and family support, ICT, raising attainment and primary/secondary transfer. Funding for these activities has now ceased and in future they will need to be funded from the schools' own resources. The local authority has an important role to play in encouraging these partnerships and other groups of schools to develop collaborative approaches to school improvement.
- 6.2 It is evident that there is much good practice within the primary sector. The local authority is already beginning to develop arrangements for partnership working in a number of areas. Given the radical changes in the way that school improvement services will be delivered from April 2011 onwards, it is important that schools work with the local authority to support the development of more formal partnerships that will enable school to school support to flourish.
- 6.3 There is research evidence to support the commission's view that the most important factor in successful schools is high quality leadership at all levels and good governance. Manchester University's report for the National College "the impact of federations on student outcomes" (October 2009), looks at the whole range of formal collaborative structures referred to as federations and concludes that they can have a positive impact on student outcomes. A second report for the National College, "Emerging Patterns of School Leadership 2: a deeper understanding" (October 2009) found that strong formal systems and procedures established through partnerships collaborations or federations add strength to a group of schools and have a positive effect on pupil outcomes. These formal arrangements make long term developments more sustainable because they

support systematic joint working, rather than relying on individuals who may change over time.ⁱⁱⁱ

6.4 Given the current size of schools in the primary estate, where 26 of the 77 schools are one form entry or less, and where almost half of that number have budget deficits (see section 4 above), it is important to consider alternative solutions to ensure the future viability of primary provision in some areas of the city. In considering the development of federations or partnerships the following issues should be considered. Can the proposed structure (Partnership or federation) secure:

- a significant contribution to improving standards;
- the recruitment of staff, particularly headteachers and governors where this has proved difficult;
- support for schools causing concern;
- support for schools to move from good to great;
- opportunity to maximise resources and expertise, particularly where there are budget issues or low pupil numbers;
- opportunities for the creation of new roles which can be shared across schools e.g. business manager, ICT technician

6.5 Federation can offer many benefits but is not a universal solution; nor is it being proposed here as the only solution. There are some circumstances where federation would be inappropriate as it brings too few longer term benefits. For example where leadership capacity is weak, where schools are too small or where falling rolls mean that a school would be educationally unviable.

6.6 The commission has noted that the authority has worked with governing bodies to secure and strengthen leadership in some schools through the use of interim, associate and executive headship. Where necessary the authority has acted to strengthen governance through the appointment of Interim Executive Boards and additional governors.

6.7 Recruitment of high quality leadership is a challenge, particularly for small schools. The same can be said of recruitment to governing bodies. Partnerships and federations offer the opportunity to maximise the impact of highly effective governors and leaders at all levels.

7. Other issues

7.1 Many of the people who spoke to us were concerned with the delivery of services in health and well-being. They pointed to the potential in primary schools which are at the heart of their communities for co-location of services for families. The health service nationally is about undergo a period of radical change. This may offer opportunities for locally provided care based on school sites.

- 7.2 There has also been mention of collocation of primary and secondary schools. The commission can see advantages to this but feel that co-location must not be used to support either school if that school is not in itself educationally viable. It has been suggested to us that co-location of primary and secondary schools will assist transition and reduce loss of pupils at age 11. Our view is that this is by no means certain and that schools will need to make as much effort to recruit pupils from their own sites as from elsewhere.
- 7.3 There have also been suggestions concerning co-location of special schools and other specialist provision on mainstream sites. The commission has not had the opportunity to explore this in any detail.

8. Recommendations

- 8.1 The local authority's asset management team and Urban Vision need to review their working practices to ensure that the synergies which should accrue from a joint venture are maximised.
- 8.2 There needs to be a more robust system for monitoring the use of Devolved Formula Capital, so that the local authority is able to maintain a strategic overview of the condition of their school estate.
- 8.3 Review planned admission numbers to ensure that maximum use is being made of the net capacity of buildings.
- 8.4 The pressure on the overall primary budget and the sustainability of all schools is created by the current need to fund a large number of small schools. 50% of schools where the roll is one form of entry or smaller, are experiencing budgetary problems. Wherever the opportunity arises, the LA commission schools of 2 forms of entry or larger.
- 8.5 Given the current size of schools in the primary estate, the local authority works with governors and other partners to promote partnerships, collaborative and federations of varying degrees of formality which will ensure the strengths of schools are shared and the risks inherent in small schools are minimised.
- 8.6 The Commission cannot see the rationale for maintaining separate infant and junior schools in the same building at Light Oaks. The duplication of functions and facilities, for example the current creation of two kitchens, does not represent an efficient use of resources.
- 8.7 The local authority needs to ensure that it is a key partner in the forthcoming organisation of health services in the community in order to maximise opportunities for co-location.

- 8.8 The local authority should take the opportunity afforded by its restructuring of SEN to address issues of accessibility and inclusion for children with disabilities and special needs who could attend mainstream primary schools.

ⁱ DCSF August 2009

ⁱⁱ 2009-10 figures

ⁱⁱⁱ A National College Guide to Partnerships and Collaborations 2010.