

Meeting: Executive
Date: 4 December 2012
Subject: Consultation on Policy Principles for Pupil Place Planning in Schools
Report of: Cllr Mark Versallion, Executive Member for Children's Services
Summary: To approve the commencement of consultation on proposed Policy Principles for Pupil Place Planning in schools which, if adopted, will form the basis for the development of commissioning options for New School Places in Central Bedfordshire. If the consultation exercise is approved, the outcome will be reported to Executive on the 5 February 2013.

Advising Officer: Edwina Grant, Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services
Contact Officer: Pete Dudley, Assistant Director for Learning, Commissioning and Partnerships
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Executive
Key Decision: Yes

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The report supports Central Bedfordshire's Medium Term Plan: Delivering your priorities – Our Plan for Central Bedfordshire 2012-2016 and the specific priority of Improved Educational Attainment.

Financial:

1. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. The annual review of the Council's New School Places Programme, reported to Executive in February of each year, outlines the financial implications of the next five years of the rolling programme and of specific options for commissioning new school places.

Legal:

2. The Council has statutory responsibilities in respect of education provision for Early Years, compulsory school age children, post 16 and for pupils who have special educational needs.

3. Section 6 of the 2006 Childcare Act gives local authorities a duty to secure the provision of early education and childcare to meet the requirements of parents in their area who require childcare.
4. Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 places a duty on Councils to secure sufficient and suitable school places to provide for 5 – 16 year old statutory aged children in its area. The Education and Inspections Act 2006 gives Councils a strategic role as commissioners, but not providers, of school places to promote parental choice, diversity, high standards, the fulfilment of every child's educational potential and fair access to educational opportunity.
5. The Education Act 2011 has created a presumption that all new schools will be academies or free schools.
6. Section 19 of the Education Act 1996 places a duty on the Council acting as the Local Authority to provide full time education for pupils not in education by reason of illness, exclusion or otherwise and which is appropriate to individual pupil needs. This duty is discharged through the Pupil Referral Unit and the Alternative Provision Free School.
7. The Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 requires Local Authorities as strategic commissioners of 16-19 education and training to ensure suitable and sufficient opportunities are accessible to all young people of that age and those aged 19-24 who have a learning difficulty. This is further emphasised by the new duty on all young people to participate in education or training until their 18th birthday, from September 2015.
8. There is a range of legislation that establishes duties for the Council acting as the Local Authority in relation to provision for children and young people with special educational needs in schools, academies and pre school settings. The duties also include the requirement to ensure that children and young people with disabilities are not unfairly discriminated against.
9. In discharging each of its duties, the Council must comply with legislation, regulation and also have regard to statutory guidance. However, the commissioning of new provision also provides the Council acting as the Local Authority with options and flexibility to enable it to adopt local planning principles and ensure transparency in its role of strategic commissioner.

Risk Management:

10. The need to commission new provision through the Council's New School Places Programme implements the identified need in the previously published early years sufficiency assessment and in the school organisation plan and mitigates the risk on the Council of failing in its statutory duty to provide sufficient early years and school places. Key risks include:
 - Failure to discharge legal and statutory duties/guidance.
 - Failure to deliver the Council's strategic priorities.
 - Reputational risks associated with the non delivery of required school places.
 - Financial risks, including non realisation of anticipated Section 106 monies and anticipated levels of government grant.
 - Risks of equity and equality in terms of access to school places.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

11. Staff and Trades Unions are consultees on any proposals to expand schools or Academies, as part of the initial consultation and statutory process required by regulations.

Equalities/Human Rights:

12. Public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and to foster good relations in respect of the following protected characteristics: age, disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. All new schools will be reminded of their duties under the Equality Act 2010.
13. This statutory duty includes requirements to:
- Remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
 - Take steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
 - Encourage people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.
14. The consultation and decision making process set out in regulation for proposals to expand Council maintained schools requires an evaluation on a project by project basis of any equalities and human rights issues that might arise. This applies not only where the Council is the decision maker for proposals, but where it is strategic commissioner of all new provision. The recommendations include an annual assessment of equalities impacts arising out of the application of these proposals.

Public Health:

15. Services around school and early years settings will be further developed as a result of the growing early years and school population.
16. The range of extended services that may be provided in schools includes:
- Parenting and family support officers.
 - Transition support for pupils, schools and families.
 - Combined clubs and after school activities.
 - Holiday activities.
 - Support for vulnerable pupils and families i.e. siblings group and young carers.

Community Safety:

17. Whilst schools have an important role in working alongside a range of other agencies to ensure safety in their local communities, the expansion of schools and the creation of new Academies does have the potential to increase community safety issues around the school locations. Inconsiderate parking, low level anti social behaviour, noise, litter etc.
18. These are issues that can, in some instances, have a significant impact on residents living in the school vicinity and place additional demand upon the services responsible for dealing with them. To meet its statutory duty in relation to crime and disorder, the Council will work with schools and the promoters of new Academies to ensure that community safety issues are considered and appropriate measures are put in place to mitigate any risks with regard to community safety issues in these areas.

Sustainability:

19. Whilst there may be additional costs in order to meet sustainability objectives for new build and/or expansion of existing schools, these will be contained within the costs identified in the Council's New School Places Programme. These measures will contribute to reduced running costs through better energy and resource efficiency, and therefore limit the Carbon Reduction Commitment burden on the Council and the school, alongside creating a better learning environment for the pupils.

Procurement:

20. Where capital projects for new school places are commissioned through new or existing Academies the Council will seek suitable safeguards and assurances, as outlined in this report, for project management and construction procurement, following the Council's finance and procurement rules.

Overview and Scrutiny:

21. If approved by the Executive, a report on the New School Places Refresh will be considered by Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny on 15 January 2013, with all responses to this consultation exercise and a comment from Scrutiny reported back to Executive on 5 February 2013.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Executive is asked to:

- 1. approve the commencement of consultation on proposed Policy Principles for Pupil Place Planning in schools which, if adopted, will form the basis for the development of commissioning options for New School Places in Central Bedfordshire; and**
- 2. note that the proposals include an annual evaluation of the impact of the proposals by the Director of Children's Services/Deputy Chief Executive in consultation with the Executive Member for Children's Services along with an annual equalities assessment to provide an assurance that there are no unintended consequences of the application of the principles via scoring that would prejudice equality of access to a range of school places.**

Reason for Recommendations: To enable the commencement of consultation.

Executive Summary

22. The report sets out the legal framework and constraints that Local Authorities as Strategic Commissioners of New School Places must comply with. It also reflects the National policy context in place at the time of writing. It outlines nine key principles on which the Council is consulting which it considers are critical in considering school organisation proposals and in achieving the Council's Education Vision and key strategic priorities.
23. The report seeks the approval of the Council's Executive to consult on the range of local policy principles that will help to guide the development of commissioning options for new school places. The outcome of this consultation exercise will be reported to the Council's Executive on 5 February 2013 and if adopted, will be applied to all future commissions for new school places, each of which will be evaluated against grading criteria and be the subject of subsequent reports to Executive as and when decisions are required.

Introduction

24. As outlined in the report to the Council's Executive on 27 March 2012, the Council has approved a programme of capital investment in new school places to meet the challenges of demographic growth in Central Bedfordshire. In terms of new housing alone the area will see an estimated average of 2,100 new homes expected to be built each year for the next five years, contributing to the corresponding anticipated rise of approximately 6,000 additional pupils over that period.
25. The Council acting as the Local Authority must plan for and secure sufficient school places for their area in line with their duties under Section 14 of the Education Act 1996. New school places required as a result of demographic demand are commissioned by the Council acting as the Local Authority through investment and expansion of existing maintained schools and Academies or by the establishment of new provision.

26. In doing so the Council must have regard to statutory guidance for prescribed alterations to its mainstream schools and guidance on enlarging maintained schools, as it is the decision maker in these instances.
27. Proposals to enlarge or to alter in any way the capacity or organisational structure of an existing Academy must be supported by the Academy's board of trustees, its funding body the Education Funding Agency and the Department for Education. The Council is not the decision maker in proposals relating to Academies. Formal Department for Education (DfE) procedural guidance has not yet been published on implementing proposals of this nature.
28. In establishing a new school, the Council must have regard to DfE guidance and the presumption that it will be an Academy/Free School.
29. There are a range of other legal and investment constraints that the Council as commissioner of new places must work within when considering models for investment and potential changes to the organisation of school places. These include the protection against closure of designated rural schools, control over the transfer and disposal of school land and the inability of the Council acting as the Local Authority to introduce selection to Central Bedfordshire.
30. Although the Academies Act 2010 allows schools that already select all or some of their pupils on the basis of ability to continue to do so; it prevents any schools from adopting new selection by ability.
31. Maintained schools which already select some or all of their pupils by ability will be able to continue to do so when they become academies, but schools becoming academies cannot decide to become selective schools if they were not already selective as maintained schools.
32. Independent selective schools joining the academies sector are not able, by law, to continue to select by ability as academies.
33. The factors outlined above do not prevent a school from adopting new selection by aptitude. Any school with a relevant specialism can select 10% of its intake by aptitude in sport, modern foreign languages, visual arts or performing arts.

Local Policy Framework

34. In addition to the need to meet the demand for new education infrastructure, the Council also considers that the commissioning process should be used as a catalyst to raise educational standards and will therefore promote the expansion of popular and successful schools and Academies where possible. The establishment of new Academies will maximise opportunities for outstanding education promoters to establish new provision.
35. The principles support the Council's statutory obligations to promote parental choice, diversity, high standards, the fulfilment of every child's educational potential and fair access to educational opportunity and they are key to the achievement of the Council's renewed Education Vision for Central Bedfordshire, approved by the Council's Executive on 30 April 2012.

36. The Council may also increase places in areas where there is already good or outstanding provision through an existing school, whether that be Council maintained or an academy. In such circumstances, although the Council has always looked to expand provision which is in high quality schools, this is not a formally adopted policy and the need to build on the success of existing schools with high attainment is key to the proposals outlined in these proposals.
37. As the numbers of projected expansions peaks and the demand for new places is predicted to be at its height in the coming five years, the numbers of good and outstanding schools (71%) that are available to expand may be at plateau as a result of a challenging new Ofsted inspection framework. It is not possible to accurately predict but this may affect the outcomes of Ofsted inspections until schools respond to preparations for the new framework. To support this, briefing sessions have been arranged whereby schools can feedback to others their experiences of the new inspection regime. The plateau may last for 12 months or so after which the rate at which schools are deemed good or outstanding may start to increase again albeit slowly.
38. At the same time, the number of schools operating in formal collaborations is growing and is set to continue to grow as a result of national funding reforms and policy incentives. A consideration therefore arises as to whether the Council should adopt a policy of seeking to expand places in schools which themselves may not be good or outstanding but which are members of formal collaborative arrangements (such as trusts or federations) where outstanding provision exists, helping to revitalise the educational plans of existing schools and Academies that are already on the school improvement journey.
39. The number of issues to be taken into consideration by the Council in considering the location and nature of an expansion to a school (or trust) are increasing. This is partly because coalition government policy has placed schools, and particularly parents, in the forefront in determining the way their school develops. If there is sufficient parental demand then a school can seek leave from the Council (in the case of maintained schools) or from the Secretary of State (in the case of Academies) to consult on changing its designation or changing the age ranges it educates.
40. There is a growing knowledge base about the features of schools that are most closely associated with successful learning and achievement. These proposed policy principles are informed by the best and most current evidence available and also reflective of changes in local and national policy. There may also be unintended consequences of applying the principles and therefore it is recommended that there be an annual review of the impact of applying these principles which will be undertaken by the Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services in consultation with the Executive Member for Children's Services and reported to the Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Headteacher and Governor forums.
41. If agreed, this statement of policy principles will form the basis for the development of commissioning options to deliver new school places in Central Bedfordshire. It will be applied by officers to initial options appraisals which will be based on a scoring matrix and to the evaluation of the different models of education provision ie. expansion of any existing school or the setting up of a new school to meet the demographic and school improvement challenge.

42. Following scoring and evaluation, each resulting recommendation for significant new or expanded provision, as set out in the Council's New School Places Programme, will be the subject of a report to the Council's Executive accompanied with an evaluation of its alignment with these local principles.
43. The policy principles will provide clarity for schools and Academies on the strategic commissioning objectives of the Council and of the need for investment proposals to be assessed against the quality of the places being added to the system, based on the vision and educational plan of the proposer, be they an existing school, Academy or promotor of a new Academy or Free School.

Consultation

44. Consultation on the proposed policy principles will be undertaken with the support of the Executive Member for Children's Services, with the following:

The Council's Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Church of England and Roman Catholic Dioceses
Headteachers and Partners Reference Group
All Headteachers
Chairs of Governing Bodies
The Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education
Neighbouring Councils
Website consultation with other stakeholders

45. The consultation will commence immediately following Executive approval and will conclude on 15 January 2013 following the meeting of the Council's Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The outcome of the consultation will be reported to the Council's Executive on 5 February 2013.
46. The following sections set out the proposed Policy Principles for Pupil Place Planning in schools in Central Bedfordshire.

Principle 1 - The need to provide local schools for local children, ensuring a sense of community belonging and also promoting sustainable modes of travel.

47. Section 76 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 places a duty on local education authorities to promote the use of sustainable modes of travel to meet the school travel needs of their area. Ensuring the sufficiency of provision local to the areas of demographic demand supports this duty by reducing the need for car journeys and also limits potential growth in the cost of providing school transport on distance criteria to qualifying pupils to meet the Council's statutory responsibilities.
48. Section 38 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 also places a duty on governing bodies of maintained schools in England to promote community cohesion. Promoting local schools enables children living in the same local community to attend the same school fostering a coherent community identity and enabling community ownership to build around a range of extracurricular activities.

Principle 2 - The need to create schools that are of sufficient size to be financially and educationally viable

49. There are three sources of evidence that it is important to consider when determining the optimum size of a school. These relate to (i) international data of the effect of school size on pupil outcome measures, (ii) the minimum size needed to provide a rich curriculum offer and (iii) the effect of school size on leadership.
50. (i) The optimal school roll in terms of pupil outcomes is around 900 in a non deprived area. (This is based on all ages not only secondary or upper, but excludes Post 16 provision). This number can increase in areas of greater affluence and might drop to around 800 in areas of hardship and deprivation (in global terms). The proposals treat Post 16 education as an integral element of the main school roll.
51. (ii) In terms of supporting a broad curriculum offer, six forms of entry would be what most research and professional bodies consider to be the minimum year group size to support the kind of offer to meet the range of needs typical in a Central Bedfordshire context. It is acknowledged that research has taken place on provision that is historic and that there has been a considerable shift in the nature and offer of different types of schools in recent years.
52. (iii) The larger the school the more a governing body can pay a Headteacher according to scales that reflect pupils numbers . This may have an impact on the calibre of leader available to schools. The larger the school the more options an experienced leader has available in shaping an excellent school to meet the needs of students. Research shows that secondary schools tend to reach their peak performance when a headteacher has been leading the school for around 6 or 7 years and furthermore, a headteacher with experience of leading more than one school is generally held to be likely to be successful in a second or third school. Schools therefore need to be big enough to attract and retain experienced Headteachers for these periods if they are to be well placed to perform optimally.
53. Establishing or expanding schools of an appropriate size therefore is likely to contribute towards the likelihood of their success.
54. Comments on school size relate to single schools that occupy a single site. The minimum or maximum size of a school may be outside of the range of capacities implicit in these proposals if it is part of a non traditional governance and leadership structure as is the case in multi site schools, school trusts, federations, academy chains and multi academy trusts where a broad curricular offer, for example, may be achieved as a result of the collaborative arrangements.

Lower and Primary Schools

Minimum Size

55. Small rural schools have nationally shown themselves capable of delivering the National Curriculum and of providing a high standard of education. In determining a minimum school size, it is however not simply issues of quality that need to be considered but also but also organisational, social and community issues.

56. For example, where small numbers are nationally judged to operate against successful school management is where there are too few children to form at least one class for each key stage. Under present funding arrangements, this puts particular pressure on teachers and forthcoming changes to the local funding formula, as a result of national school funding reform, will increase the pressure to operate more efficiently. Therefore schools at or below the minimum size outlined below must consider options for federating, merging or joining an academy chain.
57. As a minimum, it is preferable that there should be one class for each of Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2, plus discrete part-time provision for children under five. In this way, there are no more than two year groups in each class. In total this equates to 2.5 classes. With a class size of 25-30 this means a minimum school size of 60-75 pupils for a Lower School.
58. For a Primary School also with years 5 and 6 in Key Stage 2 this equates to 3.5 classes. With a class size of 25-30 this means a minimum school size of 85 -105 pupils.
59. If three age groups need to be taught together school organisation becomes much more difficult, however there are some known mitigating factors. There are also organisational difficulties if the headteacher is the only full-time teacher. If the Headteacher is absent or leaves there may be no one left to manage where the other member of staff has no aspirations to lead or is not employed full-time.
60. Problems in delivering and monitoring standards in very small schools can occur. There may also be difficulties in recruiting enough able governors from such a small constituency of parents and supporters of the school. Finally, very small year groups may not provide sufficient peers of the same age for children to mix with although there may be some benefits of vertical grouping where younger children can learn from older peers.

Maximum Size

61. Ideally lower schools should have 2 forms of entry (i.e. two classes per year group), leading to a school size of 300. For Primary Schools this leads to a school size of 420. This gives headteachers a balance of some teaching, as well as time to manage and monitor, with the ability to employ appropriate non-teaching support in the school.
62. Above 3 forms of entry (450 pupils for lowers, 630 pupils for Primary Schools) it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain consistency, coherence and a 'whole school' ethos appropriate to pupils of this school age. The Council acting as the Local Authority consider it preferable to promote the expansion and creation of new lower/primary school provision at or above 3 forms of entry only in exceptional circumstances.
63. The larger the school, the more likely it is that the Headteacher and senior staff will spend most of their time managing resources rather than on education. If this time is spent on key issues known to promote school improvement in driving the ethos of the school towards raising attainment by a focus on pupil level data management, engagement with the teaching and learning process etc. their offer outside that of classroom input can accelerate school improvement and outcomes.

Middle Schools

Minimum Size

64. All middle schools are considered to need to have sufficient staff expertise to cover the curriculum and the teaching of basic skills at both Key Stages 2 and 3. The budget must also be sufficient to support the curriculum and an appropriate management structure.
65. It is proposed that as a minimum, a middle school should have 4 forms of entry (480 pupils in all) in order to deliver the National Curriculum. Below this figure the ability of a middle school to retain sufficient staff with the appropriate range of expertise comes under question.
66. 3 forms of entry (360 pupils) can be manageable in certain circumstances where there is an appropriate range of staff expertise, but below this number the costs of supporting even a minimum staff complement become disproportionate.

Maximum Size

67. Ideally middle schools should have 6 forms of entry (720 pupils). Beyond 7 forms of entry (840 pupils) it can be argued that the school becomes increasingly difficult to manage and to maintain an appropriate middle school ethos, and it may be more impersonal, particularly for the younger children.
68. Large middle schools face similar management challenges to any large school but community and parent views of the provision of a large middle school which pupils attend from age 9 are likely to be less positive than is the case for Upper schools where pupils start school at 13. Schools which were originally designed for a smaller number of pupils may lack specialist accommodation, both teaching and non-teaching, possess inadequate library facilities and study space, and may have social areas that are not capable of meeting staff or student needs and have congestion in corridors.

Upper and Secondary Schools

Minimum Size

69. For an upper or secondary school there need to be enough pupils in each year group to support the full range of the curriculum and generate a viable sixth form. Notwithstanding the potential for governance and leadership models outlined above, this suggests a proposed total minimum school size of around 900+ pupils for a single school. For schools engaged in collaborative and partnership arrangements this figure may be reduced to a minimum of 720 pupils where the schools in the federation or trust can demonstrate that a good, coherent educational offer is provided as a result of their sustainable collaborative arrangements. It should be noted that the Audit Commission takes the view that a sixth form of fewer than 160 students constitutes a small sixth form, with associated questions over viability.

Maximum Size

70. This is difficult to determine on curricular or organisational grounds. Larger schools have economies of scale which make for more flexible curricula and more specialist staffing but encounter organisational difficulties in accommodating large year groups.
71. In schools which were originally designed for a smaller number, there may also be a lack of specialist accommodation, both teaching and non-teaching, inadequate library and study space, social areas incapable of meeting staff and student needs and congestion in corridors.
72. A commonly held historical belief in historical principles nationally for education provision is that once numbers rise above 1500 including sixth form, the disadvantages of size may start to outweigh the benefits of economies of scale, however there are now known to be many larger schools nationally that provide a high quality of education and generally have the benefits of larger sixth forms and have overcome the potential disadvantages of large schools through internal organisation ie schools within schools and the house system. These schools, if successful have been invited to provide the cornerstone of some large Academy chains, particularly in the London area.

Principle 3 - The ability to support the expansion of local popular and successful schools or to link expanding schools with popular and successful schools

73. The Council is unlikely to support the expansion of an existing school or Academy unless it is at least rated as good and preferably outstanding by Ofsted or is in a Trust or Multi Academy Trust that includes good and outstanding schools that have the capacity to support the expanded school in terms of standards and quality in order that it can become outstanding itself.
74. The Council is committed to ensure that every parent can choose an excellent school for their child and that new places should therefore be allocated where parents want them. The Council will therefore seek to support the expansion of oversubscribed schools and Academies.
75. In every case the Council will require a business case to be provided by the school or Academy that is subject to the expansion proposal to guarantee the quality of the places being added into the system, based on the school's vision and educational plan. In addition to its Ofsted rating, the business case will also require the school to outline its performance in terms of results and improvement over time in key stage assessments, in terms of value added and in comparison with other schools in similar circumstances. The business case will require the school to establish its improvement targets and will be judged by evaluation criteria.
76. Where the school or Academy that is subject to an expansion proposal is also intended to procure and deliver the capital project with the support of the Council, the business case will require assurances of the capability and capacity of the school to deliver the proposal to time and on budget, based on their expertise and experience.

77. Where new schools are to be established and proposals are received in response to the Council's invitation, an initial assessment will be undertaken of each proposal against the criteria set out above to ensure that proposers with track records in successful and popular provision are also promoted to the DfE. The proposers' abilities to prove value for money in delivering the new provision within the financial envelope available will also be assessed in these circumstances.

Principle 4 - The potential to further promote and support robust partnerships and learning communities

78. The education 'offer' can be significantly enhanced from schools that collaborate effectively when compared with those that do not and the capacity for those schools to self improve and to recruit, train and develop their own staff and leaders are enhanced by well designed school to school support systems.
79. The Council has strongly supported such approaches including its joint work with the Central Bedfordshire Teaching School Partnership (CBTSP) designed to help both the Council and the CBTSP discharge their statutory duties in relation to school improvement and in relation to teacher education, qualification, induction and development and to leadership development and succession planning and also in relation to identification and transfer of successful practice. The growing success of this partnership is also evident in the successful joint bid for an alternative provision Free School aimed at eliminating permanent exclusions and increasing the pathways from education to employment.
80. The Council is developing a strategy of school community engagement in order to facilitate parental and school-led system development and as funding reforms are rolled out, so affecting the viability of some school budgets, this policy will continue in order to ensure small school settings serving rural communities can reconfigure the way they are run in order to continue to provide education close to home.

Principle 5 - The ambition to achieve a single phase of education 0 -19 and reduce school transfer points

81. There is evidence that learning can be lost at points of transfer between schools and also transition within schools from one phase or key stage to another. There are two ways in which this can be addressed.
82. The first is to design systems that limit the number of points at which a child transfers from one school to another. The second is to promote collaboration amongst schools through which a cohort of children will pass, on such issues as continuity of pedagogy, curriculum, expectations, progress, behaviour and ethos.
83. A federation or trust with close agreement between its constituent schools and with the knowledge of the community it serves could mitigate some of these effects. Reducing transfer and transition or the effects of transfer and transition is therefore suggested that this is a consideration that should be evaluated in the context of school place planning.

84. The Council will continue to develop integrated early years provision in a variety of settings, wrapping childcare around nursery education provision to ensure that all parents that require it have access to an extended and flexible early years offer so that they can access training or work.
85. Where new early years provision is needed as a result of demographic growth or changes in entitlement, and is forecast to be required in a similar timeframe and location as proposed new lower or primary places, the Council will seek to develop both new provisions on the school site and under its leadership.

Principle 6 - The need to support the Raising of the Participation Age (RPA)

86. Coalition Government policy is to ensure that all young people are in either education, training or work related education/training full time up to the age of 18 by September 2015. The Council will therefore need to consider the way in which proposals for new or expanded schools and Academies will support it in meeting this raised participation age and support educational establishments and employers in delivering this.
87. The Council will also support the maintenance of a diverse range of post-16 provision, enabling students to choose between remaining at upper school, transferring to an Further Education college or taking advantage of vocational routes of study. The Council will continue to support and strengthen the 14-19 strategic partnership subgroup of the Children's Trust so that it can work together to improve outcomes and it will support providers to access post 16 funding from the Education Funding Agency.

Principle 7 – To seek opportunities to create inspirational learning environments for the school and to maximise community use

88. The Council will adopt a high standard of design and community engagement as part of its evaluation of the proposals for major new and expanding school provision in Central Bedfordshire. This will define the basis for calculation of planning obligations that will be required from housing developers where additional infrastructure is required.
89. The briefing of projects to expand existing provision will include an assessment of the suitability of the premises to ensure pre existing deficiencies in provision can be considered in order to provide premises that are fit for purpose for the increased capacity of the school.
90. The Council will support opportunities to pool funding from other sources in any planned expanded or new provision and it will seek guarantees for sustainable, enhanced community use of the school's facilities where capital investment is being committed.

Principle 8 – To promote the diversity of provision offered in Central Bedfordshire to increase opportunities for parental choice

91. Central Bedfordshire has a comprehensive system of education providing educational opportunities for all its pupils and the Council recognises, supports and encourages the need for a diverse range and ethos within the schools in the area to provide opportunities for parental choice.

92. The Central Bedfordshire geographical area comprises only co-educational schools and the majority of schools are based on a three tier system of education although schools are encouraged to consider alternative models of leadership, governance and school organisation to achieve the Council's overarching aim of raising standards.
93. The Council's aim is to create a more diverse school system offering excellence and choice, where each school has a strong ethos and sense of mission and may act as a centre of excellence in particular areas or offer specialist provision in order to meet the aspirations of parents, help raise local standards and narrow attainment gaps.
94. While a good supply of non denominational provision is essential, parents have a right to select a denominational education for their children if they wish. Within Central Bedfordshire, there are Church of England lower, middle and upper schools although Roman Catholic provision is only represented at lower and primary school. No other faiths are currently provided for in Central Bedfordshire.
95. Some faith based provision is below national rates of representation in some phases in Central Bedfordshire. Where there is a need for new school places and there is unmet parental demand for particular faith provision, the Council will consider supporting an increase in such provision where it will bring the area closer to national averages for each individual faith based provision and where other factors such as an evaluation against the potential of the school to raise education standards will not be compromised. As part of the annual appraisal of the impact of the principles there will be an equalities impact assessment to ensure that there are no unintended consequences of promoting faith based provision on those who have minority or no faiths on access to school places.
96. The Council will continue to support the establishment of Trusts, Federations and Multi Academy Trusts who share the ambition of the Council's Education Vision and its principles which are now seen in the context of the enhanced complexity created by increased numbers of academies, academy chain partners and school self-determination.
97. The Council will welcome the parent or other promoter of any free school in Central Bedfordshire and will consider the allocation of financial support where the proposal is approved by the DfE and it meets a demand identified as a result of demographic growth in the area.

Principle 9 – To support vulnerable learners and integrate appropriate Special Educational Needs provision within mainstream schools

98. The Council will continue to support close links between mainstream and special school sectors, building better partnerships and improving co-ordination of services. While most children with special educational needs attend their local mainstream schools we will continue to support the model of area special schools.
99. The Council will also continue to maintain and support specialist provisions in some lower, middle and upper schools for children who require a more specialist approach to meeting their special educational needs.

100. The Council will also support the establishment of alternative provision for pupils who are excluded or at risk of exclusion and for whom an alternative curriculum is more appropriate.

Appendices:

None

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

None