

Item No. 8.	Classification: Open	Date: 13 June 2023	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		Keeping Education Strong Recommendations	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
Cabinet Member:		Councillor Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees	

FOREWORD - COUNCILLOR JASMINE ALI, DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, EDUCATION AND REFUGEES.

Education in Southwark has never been stronger following our £200m investment in school buildings and the subsequent 97% Ofsted *Good* or *Outstanding* ratings. Yet steep demographic change in the capital present real challenge.

This paper follows the Keeping Education Strong Strategy that I brought to Cabinet in December 2022 outlining the challenge and our approach to keeping education strong.

The paper is to update Cabinet on the current school's plan. The strategy follows the principle to work *with* and not to *do to* schools and represents a collaboration between our education department, Southwark schools, including academy schools and those governed by the Catholic and Church of England diocesan bodies.

The plan benefits from external oversight from an independent consultancy firm Isos, their work informs our recommendations. In addition we have undertaken a detailed Equalities Impact Assessment for this work – balancing the impacts of the negative disruption for those who need to move school and the positives of full schools and therefore better funding.

The Isos work (Appendix 2) is along with the *Equalities Impact Assessment for the Keeping Education Strong* strategy and the *Equalities Impact and Needs Assessment for the recommendations* set out in the appendices to the report.

What is the plan?

This work started with a desk top school rolls assessment of 74 Southwark schools followed by a further deep dive and rolls assessment into 49 schools.

Following this intense work we agreed to recommendations made by our independent consultants to manage surplus capacity in Southwark's primary schools down to 10%.

The recommendations are that seven schools reduce their Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) they are; Bessemer Grange, Goose Green, Grange, St Joseph's Infants, Rye Oak, St Francis and St Paul's.

In addition three schools are asked to consider amalgamation with neighbouring schools, they are; Comber Grove, Harris Free Primary and St Mary Magdalene.

Actions taken outside of the scope of the strategy

Some schools have already taken remedial action for a range of reasons including falling rolls. This has clearly contributed to a more positive outcome than first anticipated. Remember there were reports that high numbers of schools faced financial pressure.

In 2018 we asked the schools adjudicator to reduce the PAN numbers for 13 schools, in 2021 we reduced the PAN numbers for a further six schools. Two faith schools have subsequently closed and today we are looking at the closure of a community school.

In advance of the recommendations - Coburg and Camelot Primary Schools are already amalgamating. In addition, St Jude's Church of England Primary School and Charlotte Sharman Foundation Primary School are at an early and exploratory stage of seeing how they might come together.

Southwark Council will support everyone impacted by falling school rolls

The council will support everyone that is impacted by proposed change - including school staff, parents and not least our children. Council education staff are and will continue to work with families and schools to secure places in good or outstanding neighbouring schools. I have briefed all councillors on how they too can support families.

Lobbying

Following my letter in 2021 to the Education Secretary highlighting the issue of falling school rolls and asked for support – backed by many London authorities. We have secured a cross party London wide lobby for government support.

Southwark believe that schools should be funded as organisations, not per capita and lobby for a new schools funding formula to keep our schools open with smaller class sizes. To continue school improvement, enabling our children and young people to get the best possible education, narrow attainment gaps and improve outcomes for all.

Supporting schools and communities

This extensive work on falling school rolls exists because of a demographic crisis in London and beyond.

We are not the only authority affected by this - we are the first to apply a comprehensive strategic approach. It is hoped this work will be instrumental in supporting our schools and communities through this difficult and challenging time. It will enable us to be ready in future years for further demographic shifts, in the event we see *fewer* or *more* pupils in Southwark.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Cabinet agree to the following pan reductions and amalgamations:
 - A) That the council continues to have discussions with the schools, Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) or Diocesan bodies concerned for the following schools about reducing their PAN:
 - i. Bessemer Grange Primary School
 - ii. Goose Green Primary School
 - iii. Grange Primary School
 - iv. Rye Oak Primary School
 - v. St Francis Roman Catholic Primary School
 - vi. St Joseph's Camberwell Catholic Infants School
 - vii. St Paul's Church of England Academy

Note, as regards changes to the published admission number of a school, these can be made by the relevant admission authority. For community schools this is the council. For other schools the council will need to discuss their proposals with the relevant admission authority. Where it is proposed to vary admission arrangements already in place, this will need the agreement of the schools adjudicator after consultation with any relevant school.

- B) That the council continues to have discussions with the schools, Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) or Diocesan bodies about proposing a consultation on an amalgamation for the following schools:
 - i. Harris Academy Free (Academy Free, PA3, Rye Lane) with Harris Primary Academy Peckham Park (Academy, PA3, Peckham)
 - ii. Comber Grove primary school with another Southwark primary school to be identified.
 - iii. St Mary Magdalene Church of England primary school with another Southwark primary school to be identified.

Note, statutory processes apply to any proposal to alter a maintained

school. Where amalgamations are recommended that will include the closure of a maintained school any proposals will be subject to statutory consultation and publication under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, and in accordance with regulations and guidance issued under that Act.

Any decisions to close a maintained school will ultimately need to be made by the Cabinet.

Decisions regarding academies will be made by the relevant academy trust in consultation with the Department for Education.

2. That the Cabinet note the report and appendices.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. Local authorities have a legal duty to provide sufficient school places, in the right location, for the population. The number of school places required fluctuates over time as a result of local and national changes, for example, in birth rates, migration and housing.
4. Between 2010 and 2016, as demand and projected demand across London increased rapidly, Southwark, and other local authorities, needed to add primary school places. Within Southwark, the number of children entering Reception grew from approximately 2950 in 2007/08 to nearly 3600 in 2015/16: a 22% increase. The number of school places was increased through provision of additional classes and expanding some schools in order to meet demand.
5. Since 2016, we have seen a steady decline in demand for primary school places across London, including Southwark and its neighbours. The reasons for this decline are covered in more detail in the Keeping Education Strong Strategy (see background papers) and are complex: primarily a declining birth rate, and more recently, the impact of Brexit and the Covid pandemic.
6. This means we have seen pupil numbers fall across our primary schools. Schools are funded per pupil, and so, as pupil numbers fall, this places an increasing pressure on school budgets, posing a financial risk to the council for its maintained schools, and will ultimately have an impact on quality of education. Currently, 97% of Southwark's schools are judged Good or Outstanding by Ofsted.
7. By September 2022, Southwark had considerable over capacity in the primary sector, with 924 Reception year (Year R) vacancies and 5,855 vacant places across school year groups Year R to Year 6. A number of actions to address this had already been taken by the Local Authority, including: school mergers, PAN reductions and the closure of a primary school. GLA projections anticipate that primary reception demand overall

will continue to decline until at least September 2031 and, most likely, beyond this date.

8. Across the system, we currently have an average vacancy rate of 22%. The Local Authority has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient places for children in its schools, and to ensure that there is enough space maintained throughout the year for any in year changes. This is usually managed at between 5-10% spare capacity.
9. The Local Authority has a number of levers it can pull to manage surplus capacity: it can restrict the opening of new community schools; it can request changes to Published Admissions Numbers (PAN) in schools; and can propose amalgamations of schools that are no longer sustainable, which would result in the closure of at least one school.
10. Between 2019-2023, Southwark, in consultation with its school leaders, implemented a number of changes to manage capacity, including reducing PAN in 17 schools and two schools losing bulge classes. These actions removed 495 Reception places, which, once they have worked through the system, will result in 2100 primary school places being removed by 2028. However, these changes have not kept pace with the continuing decline in birth rate, and in 2022/23.
11. This means that further changes will need to be made in our schools to bring the surplus capacity down to the 5%-10% stated above in paragraph 9.
12. In 2021, Senior Local Authority officers began to work closely with members and with primary school leaders across the borough to address concerns about surplus capacity in schools and to develop a set of principles for a planned approach and strategy in order to reduce the surplus capacity across our primary schools.
13. The “Keeping Education Strong: A strategy for future proofing primary schools and protecting the quality of education in Southwark” report (linked to in Background papers) was ratified by Cabinet in December 2022. It provides detail of the strategic approach Southwark developed with its school leaders and which it has applied to managing its surplus capacity in the borough.
14. The strategy aims to ensure school places are sufficient in number, character, diversity and equipment to provide all children with the opportunity of receiving a good quality education; to maintain parental choice of schools; to support schools to be financially sustainable in the medium and long term; to ensure that we have the right number of places in the right areas; to minimise disruption and distress to children and families, communities and staff, so that if a school move is required, it is only required once.

15. The strategy prioritised working closely with school leaders and coordinating communications, as well as receiving independent oversight, in order to provide a fair and transparent process that anticipates and mitigates any potential disproportional impact on communities.
16. However, outside of this strategy, some schools had already started to make their own proposals for change. These proposals are currently (May 2023) at various stages, from agreement to close St Francesca Cabrini RC school (see link to background paper below), consultation for closure-Townsend primary school, and amalgamation of Coburg and Camelot schools. Early exploration of the possibility of an amalgamation between St Jude's Church of England primary school and Charlotte Sharman primary school is underway.
17. An independent research and advisory company, with a track record of working with the public sector, [Isos Partnership](#), was commissioned to support the London Borough of Southwark over the autumn and spring terms, to review publicly available data to provide an independent view of the health and context of schools and pupil numbers.
18. After ratification of the Keeping Education Strong strategy by Cabinet in December 2022, Local Authority officers worked with school leaders to conduct a number of exercises to identify where surplus capacity was causing the greatest concern. This included an assessment of pupil rolls and trends across the whole primary estate, including in academies and faith schools.
19. The results of this assessment provided a group of 49 schools (appendix 3) for further evaluation, based on an agreed, broader range of criteria including: pupil rolls; quality of education; budget health; buildings and the estate; local issues.
20. Isos consultants scrutinised and tested the data analysis carried out by Southwark across primary schools which were potentially at risk from falling rolls, alongside its own independent analysis, and made a series of recommendations for possible future school reorganisations based on an objective analysis of the data. The final report from Isos Partnership is attached as appendix 2, and a summary can be found below:
21. The work Isos undertook with Southwark had three distinct stages: firstly, confirming direction of travel; secondly, collating agreed data to begin considering possibilities; and the third stage, agreeing analysis.
22. They used these data to start making an assessment of the areas in which changes should be recommended. Schools were broken down further from large planning areas to local groups of neighbouring schools to provide a more meaningful assessment.
23. A series of workshops were held with LA officers to discuss initial ideas for meeting the declining school population needs. These workshops enabled

Isos to check their rationale for recommendation- making, and refine their understanding of the likely impact of changes, both on provision and the sustainability of quality future provision.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

24. The recommendations for Cabinet are based on the outcomes of the work with the Isos consultants, which can be found in full in the report in appendix 2. These are also summarised in paragraphs 26- 31 below.
25. We believe the proposed actions will help us achieve our target of reducing surplus capacity to an acceptable excess of 10%.
26. Based on the current numbers of pupils, look to remove a further 630 places as a matter of priority.
27. Keep a watching brief on actual numbers and set a target to take out a minimum of 630 and a maximum of 1,773 places over the next five years.
28. Manage the uncertainty of fluctuating pupil numbers by approaching this reduction in phases and prioritising options that build flexibility into the system.
29. Look to reduce primary numbers by around 1 form of entry in the Bermondsey, Kennington and North Dulwich areas, around 2 forms of entry in the Camberwell area and up to 3 forms of entry in the Peckham and Nunhead area.
30. Soutwark's councillors and officers continue to work with schools to both ensure that currently planned reductions are realised and that up to 8 further forms of entry are removed from primary schools in a phased approach. Suggestions for which schools might be approached, and why, are set out in Appendix 3 of the Isos report. These form the basis of our recommendations.
31. Recommendations:
 - A)** That the council continues to have discussions with the schools, Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) or Diocesan bodies concerned about reducing their PAN:
 - i. Bessemer Grange Primary School
 - ii. Goose Green Primary School
 - iii. Grange Primary School
 - iv. Rye Oak Primary School
 - v. St Francis Roman Catholic Primary School
 - vi. St Joseph's Camberwell Catholic Infants School
St Paul's Church of England Academy/

Note, as regards changes to the published admission number of a school, these

can be made by the relevant admission authority. For community schools this is the council. For other schools the council will need to discuss their proposals with the relevant admission authority. Where it is proposed to vary admission arrangements already in place, this will need the agreement of the schools adjudicator after consultation with any relevant school.

- B)** That the council continues to have discussions with the schools, Multi-Academy Trusts (MATs) or Diocesan bodies about proposing a consultation on an amalgamation:

Harris Primary Academy Peckham Park (Academy, PA3, Peckham) with Harris Academy Free (Academy Free, PA3, Rye Lane)

Comber Grove primary school with another Southwark primary school- to be identified.

St Mary Magdalene Church of England primary school with another Southwark primary school- to be identified.

Note, statutory processes apply to any proposal to alter a maintained school. Where amalgamations are recommended that will include the closure of a maintained school any proposals will be subject to statutory consultation and publication under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, and in accordance with regulations and guidance issued under that Act.

Any decisions to close a maintained school will ultimately need to be made by the Cabinet.

Decisions regarding academies will be made by the relevant academy trust in consultation with the Department for Education.

Policy framework implications

32. Southwark's Borough Plan commits to giving residents "a great start in life", which includes closing the attainment gap and committing to 100% inclusion of all pupils in schools.
33. These recommendations will strengthen the ability of Southwark's primary schools to deliver a full and high-quality education to its pupils.

Community, equalities (including socio-economic) and health impacts

Community impact statement

34. Our schools are the heart of their communities and we know that making any changes to them can be unsettling, both to the families of the children attending them and for the staff. We are using this approach to mitigate disruption and have been careful to develop the strategy and our approach to making changes in as transparent a way as possible, and have supported our school leaders to help keep their families and communities informed,

and our communications team to help keep residents informed.

Equalities (including socio-economic) impact statement

35. An Equalities impact statement has been completed for the Keeping Education Strong Strategy (background papers and appendix 1). In addition, for the purposes of being able to consider equalities in making the recommendations, further equalities data was collected and analysed around ethnicity, Special Educational Needs and Disability, and economic disadvantage (those eligible for Free School Meals). These data can be seen in appendix 3. There will be further, individual Equalities Impact Needs Analyses (EINAs) completed for each school directly affected and recommended to make a change. These are being created now.
36. On the following contextual factors: ethnicity, SEND, Free School Meals, the vast majority of Southwark's schools are above the national average.
37. Reducing the number of schools will increase the capacity to meet the needs of the most vulnerable and to strengthen diversity across all of our schools.

Health impact statement

38. We understand that making changes, such as having to move school or employment, can have an impact on mental health. We have provided school leaders of all of our schools with access to support resources for their staff and have also provided support to our children and families through our education services.

Climate change implications

39. Southwark has many primary schools in close proximity to one another and we actively encourage children to travel to school on foot, by bicycle or on public transport. We do not anticipate any of the changes above having a significant impact on this.
40. As we repurpose any school buildings for alternative educational use, we will have an opportunity to ask new providers to invest in making them more environmentally friendly and moving towards our ambition of net zero.

Resource implications

41. There are additional human resource requirements to manage the change process.
42. There are also costs attached to closing down a school, including data storage, furniture storage, etc.

Legal implications

43. Please refer to the Assistant Chief Executive- Governance and Assurance's comments below.

Financial implications

44. The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Schools Block, which is awarded to fund education provision, is primarily calculated using pupil numbers and pupil characteristics. Consequently, there is expected to be minimal impact on the amount of the grant as a consequence of the closure, amalgamation and PAN reductions. With a similar amount of income spread over a smaller number of schools, there will be a positive impact on the financial position of the remaining schools.
45. The anticipated actions within the strategy will also incur costs such as redundancies, site security, uniforms for children transferring to other schools, archiving/disposal. In order to minimise the costs of closure it is important that the school and officers work together to maximize redeployment opportunities to existing staff to alternative, suitable positions.

Consultation

46. We have consulted extensively with our primary school leaders throughout this process, by holding workshops and webinars, hosting presentations at different forums, and setting up stakeholder consultation groups to inform how we move forward. We have supported school leaders to keep their parents and communities informed by providing key messages from our communications teams and sharing presentations and key information.
47. In addition, we have kept informed and consulted with other stakeholders (Trades Unions, Councillors, senior council officers and the media) at key milestones throughout this process.
48. As we move to proceed with the recommendations made by Isos, we will continue to discuss how to move forward with the schools directly involved and to keep informed all schools and stakeholders so they are able to manage any potential impact of changes on their communities.
49. All statutory consultation processes in regards to any agreed closures (St Francesca Cabrini) have been followed, and where a statutory process is required (as will be the case for any amalgamations) this will be followed. Please see Background Papers for a link to the statutory process for opening or closing a maintained school, which includes details of how to consult.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Head of Procurement

50. There are no procurement matters for consideration.

Assistant Chief Executive – Governance and Assurance

51. The council has duties under the Education Act 1996 to secure that there are sufficient schools for providing primary and secondary education for their area. These schools need to be sufficient in number, character and equipment to provide for all pupils the opportunity of appropriate education. Appropriate education means education that offers such variety of instruction and training as may be desirable in view of the pupils' different ages abilities and aptitudes and the different periods for which they may be expected to remain at school including practical instruction and training appropriate to their different needs. In exercising these functions the Act requires councils to have particular regard to the need for securing that primary and secondary education are provided in separate schools and the need for securing that special educational provision is made for pupils who have special educational needs. In practice, discharging these duties requires the council to actively monitor demand for school places, and plan to match supply to demand.
52. The report sets out some proposals for next steps to make changes to primary school provision in the light of the current over capacity.
53. As regards changes to the published admission number of a school, these can be made by the relevant admission authority. For community schools this is the council. For other schools the council will need to discuss their proposals with the relevant admission authority. Where it is proposed to vary admission arrangements already in place, this will need the agreement of the schools adjudicator after consultation with any relevant school.
54. Statutory processes apply to any proposal to alter a maintained school. Where amalgamations are recommended that will include the closure of a maintained school any proposals will be subject to statutory consultation and publication under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, and in accordance with regulations and guidance issued under that Act.
55. Any decisions to close a maintained school will ultimately need to be made by the Cabinet.
56. Decisions regarding academies will be made by the relevant academy trust in consultation with the Department for Education.
57. Cabinet is reminded that the public sector equality duty under section 149 Equality Act 2010, applies to the exercise of these functions. This requires that due regard be given to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations between people with

protected characteristics and those with none. Cabinet should take account of the Equality Impact Needs Analysis included as an Appendix to the strategy and give this due regard in considering this report. Any proposals to alter a maintained school will be subject to a full equality impact assessment which will be submitted for consideration when taking any relevant decisions.

Strategic Director of Finance REF: [CAS23/19]

58. The Strategic Director of Finance notes the recommendations in this report to agree the strategy and approach for future-proofing the quality and supply of school places. Noting the rapidly declining financial situation across the school estate it is important that the proposed approach is implemented robustly and that the schools estate is rightsized as swiftly as possible, both to ensure the sustainability of the schools and to protect the financial stability of the Local Authority.
59. Schools governing bodies have a responsibility to manage their delegated budgets in accordance with the Southwark Scheme for Financing Schools, which in turn is based on national regulations. The scheme was last updated with effect from April 2023. Therefore, any revenue consequences flowing from the changes contained within the report to individual schools delegated budgets will need to be managed closely and carefully by schools having due regard to the provisions set out in that document and any existing financial arrangements agreed with the Local Authority set out in the scheme.

Other officers

60. There were none.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Keeping Education Strong: A strategy for future proofing primary schools and protecting the quality of education in Southwark	Education Directorate, Children and Adult Services, 4 th Floor 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	Poppy Charlton 0207 525 5000
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s110486/Appendix%201%20Place%20planning%20across%20Southwarks%20Primary%20Schools%20A%20Strategy%20for%20future-%20proofing%20quali.pdf		
Annual School Place Planning Report, October 2022	Education Directorate, Children and Adult Services, 4 th Floor 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	Poppy Charlton 0207 525 5000
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/mgIssueHistoryHome.aspx?IId=50029861&PlanId=737&RPID=8764558		
Closure of St Francesca Cabrini Primary School, Cabinet Report, December 2022	Education Directorate, Children and Adult Services, 4 th Floor 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	Poppy Charlton 0207 525 5000
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://moderngov.southwark.gov.uk/documents/s110487/Report%20Closure%20of%20St%20Francesca%20Cabrini%20Primary%20School.pdf		
Managing Surplus Places in London Schools	Education Directorate, Children and Adult Services, 4 th Floor 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	Poppy Charlton 0207 525 5000
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/download/file/fid/29061		
Southwark's Borough Plan	Education Directorate, Children and Adult Services, 4 th Floor 160 Tooley Street,	Poppy Charlton 0207 525 5000

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
	London SE1 2QH	
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://starfishsearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Southwark-Borough-Plan.pdf		
Opening and closing maintained Schools	The Department for Education	The Department for Education
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1131568/Opening_and_closing_maintained_schools_Jan_2023.pdf		
Southwark Council's Equality Objectives	Education Directorate, Children and Adult Services, 4 th Floor 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	Poppy Charlton 0207 525 5000
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://www.southwark.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/equality-and-diversity/equality-objectives		
Southwark Council's response to tackling the climate emergency	Education Directorate, Children and Adult Services, 4 th Floor 160 Tooley Street, London SE1 2QH	Poppy Charlton 0207 525 5000
Link (please copy and paste into browser): https://www.southwark.gov.uk/environment/climate-emergency		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Keeping Education Strong: EQIA
Appendix 2	Isos Partnership Southwark Primary Place Planning - Final Report
Appendix 3	Supplementary data: List of 49 schools, equalities piano charts, borough-wide changes slide, criteria and templates

AUDIT TRAIL

Cabinet Member	Jasmine Ali, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Refugees	
Lead Officer	David Quirke-Thornton, Strategic Director of Children and Adult Services	
Report Author	Nina Dohel, Director of Education	
Version	Final	
Dated	5 June 2023	
Key Decision?	Yes	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Assistant Chief Executive – Governance and Assurance	Yes	Yes
Strategic Director of Finance	Yes	Yes
List other officers here	N/a	N/a
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	5 June 2023	