

Central and South Mid Sussex County Local Committee

School Place Planning in West Sussex

12 June 2019

Report by Head of School Organisation, Capital Planning & Transport

1. Background:
 - 1.1 Forecasting pupil numbers is based on a number of factors, such as birth data, migration trends and on anticipated future housing numbers but is also affected by parental preference and where parents seek to send their children. However, it is by no means an exact science and data is continually reviewed to ensure the latest evidence is incorporated; usually following the updates from school census returns. As a result, planning for school places is based on probabilities and not certainties and while pupil forecasts are derived from sound methodology, they come without absolute guarantees.
 - 1.2 Headteachers in each of the 24 school locality areas across West Sussex receive at least an annual update from officers in School Organisation & Development and Admissions on the pupil predictions for their area that looks forward for primary schools some 5 years.
 - 1.3 Details of the County Council's approach to School Place Planning is published in the report 'Planning School Places 2019' which is published at the start of each calendar year. The report can also be found at: <https://www.westsussex.gov.uk/about-the-council/policies-and-reports/school-policy-and-reports/planning-school-places/>
 - 1.4 In October 2018, across West Sussex there were 113,930 pupils but there were 127,323 places available, i.e. over 13,000 surplus places. The level of provision differs by locality but national guidance suggests a 'buffer' of 5% surplus is helpful to allow for some parental preference and late movers in to an area.
 - 1.5 In the Mid Sussex area, (Oct 2018) the level of occupancy was as follows:

Area	Primary	Secondary
Burgess Hill	90%	83%
East Grinstead	93%	89%
Hassocks	97%	92%
Haywards Heath	93%	83%

Questions are often asked

1. *How can we be reasonably confident about the provision of places between 2019 and, say, 2022 given the level of housebuilding that has been, and continues, to go on?*

The forecasts (attached) are showing an underlying fall in the demand for YR places with a decline from approximately 650 children a year to 600 children per year in the base projection by 2023/4 (based on population estimates from the Office of National Statistics). However the quantity of housing impacts on these figures with a forecast for Pupil Product Ratio (the number of children anticipated from new housing) of approximately 100 children per year creating demand for approximately 700 places in the longer term. Haywards Heath schools currently supply 703 places per year. This is potentially very tight but, as with the growth spurt from 2012, we are in a fortunate position that there is some latent capacity within many of the outlying schools, who are generally keen to take over numbers when they can to help with their revenue budgets. When Hurst Farm Primary (a new DfE funded Free School) is opened then we will have enough capacity creating a 5%+ buffer to allow for demographic changes and parental preference. The Audit Commission suggest a 5% buffer is optimum for school places across a locality.

2. *Who is responsible for creating extra places or new schools?*

West Sussex County Council has the responsibility for school place planning in its area. However, to do so, it requires regular assessments of projected pupil need and existing school capacity. WSCC will consider expanding existing provision but the opportunity to secure whole new schools (all of which must be academies) through either S106 contributions secured from housing developers or through the DfE's Free School Programme will be considered. Before any new school was considered, there would need to be agreement that existing provision could not expand further and that a whole new school was needed to meet long term growth in pupil numbers.

Additionally, a review of whether demand comes from the local area or further away would be undertaken. In some instances, children can secure a place at a school that is not their nearest or catchment school. Where there is increased demand for a particular school it can mean that applications are prioritised in accordance with the admissions policy for a school and typically those living nearest will often secure places whilst those living further away.

3. *Who provides Free Schools?*

The Department for Education (DfE) award Free Schools to successful Multi Academy Trusts and provide the organisation/funding to deliver them. In 2017, the DfE announced a new primary school at Hurst Farm, Haywards Heath. West Sussex County Council are in regular discussions

with the DfE about progress of delivering the Free Schools awarded in West Sussex.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Planning Area Profile Report - Primary

Appendix B - Planning Area Profile Report - Secondary

Background Papers

None