

Appendix O

Initial Consultation Results

**12 September 2005 – 21 October
2005**

Consultation Summary

Following a decision to start consultation on primary school review proposals a series of meetings were held with individual Headteachers to support the process of informing staff, parents and children. Letters were sent to all parents informing them of the start of the consultation and details of consultation meetings. Copies of the Consultation Document were available in schools from 12 September 2005 and posted on the Dudley Council website. Briefings were also arranged for Union representatives, Members of Parliament and the media.

A copy of the consultation document was sent to the Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning's consultees, which includes all schools in Dudley, their Headteachers and chairs of Governing Bodies, Dudley MBC Councillors and key partnering agencies. In addition a letter of invitation was extended to all parents to make a response through the questionnaire copies of which were distributed to every school and further copies available on request. Copies of the documents were also published on the Dudley Council website.

Within the consultation document was a questionnaire that asked five questions. Four questions required a 'yes or no' answer and question 5 was open ended. There was also space for comments in questions 1 – 4 and respondents were invited to attach additional information. Additional information provided by respondents included:

- DVD presentations;
- letters;
- emails;
- petitions;
- photographs;
- telephone discussions.

All responses have been entered onto a database to assist with analysis and all original submissions have been retained. The consultation document was published on 12 September 2005. This stage of the consultation ended at 5pm on Friday 21 October 2005.

Consultation meetings were arranged for staff, governors and parents in separate meetings at each of the following schools:

- Beauty Bank;
- Highfields;
- Holt Farm;
- Sycamore Green;
- Mount Pleasant;
- Maidensbridge;
- Thorns.

Each meeting began with a presentation covering the background, main issues and specific details for the school. Questions were taken and answered where possible. Attendees were also able to record questions in writing for response after the meetings. Notes of all meetings were taken to assist with the consultation and the public record.

Information was posted on the Dudley Council website. As new questions were raised, the website was updated. This was essential to enable access to the very high volume of information available from Dudley, the DfES, ONS and other sources. Paper copies would also be provided for anyone that could not access information electronically.

The consultation document also made clear that information could be available in large print or other languages on request. No requests were received during the consultation period. For those individuals without personal internet access facilities in schools and libraries were available.

Respondents

11,000 questionnaires were made available to schools and the normal Dudley Consultees. The questionnaire was also posted on the Dudley Council website. In total there were 778 individual questionnaire responses received. In addition to this the following form of response was made:

- Letters 318
- Petitions 9
- Email 425
- Questions asked during Consultation 99

Number of Questionnaires Issued	11,000
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Number of Responses Received	778
Response Rate	7.07%
Pupil / Student	6
Parent / Carer	540
Headteacher	28
Governor	69
Other School Body Rep	56
Councillors	2
Trades Union Rep	4
Other	39
Not Stated	34

The views of parents and other local residents, including those who may be particularly affected by the proposals or have a particular interest in them

Every response has been entered on a database and the originals have been retained. The record of evidence, that is all submissions, is available to view on request by appointment. The following is a commentary on the responses with statistics summarising the breakdown of the respondents.

There were a total of 778 responses. Of these, 126 respondents made general comments or no comments. Responses were received with reference to 73 of the 82 primary schools. The 126 respondents in the 'none' category gave a higher 'yes' response to all questions.

The highest number of responses (386 almost 50% of total question responses) came from schools where either closure or amalgamation was proposed. The 'no' percentage responses from this group tended to be higher than the 'yes' responses for questions 1, 3, and 4.

Similarly the remaining 169 respondents from representatives of schools where there were no changes proposed or an adjustment in admission numbers, gave a higher 'yes' response.

Question 1

Do you agree with the case for changing the current pattern of primary schools as described in paragraphs 5 - 10.

Question 1 by description of respondent

Description of Respondent	Total	Yes	No	Unanswered	% Yes Total	% No Total	% Unanswered
Pupil/Student	6	3	2	1	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%
Parent/Carer	540	151	367	22	28.0%	68.0%	4.1%
Headteacher	28	21	6	1	75.0%	21.4%	3.6%
Governor	69	37	26	6	53.6%	37.7%	8.7%
Other school body rep	56	24	29	3	42.9%	51.8%	5.4%
Councillors	2	1	1	0	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%
Trade Union Rep	4	0	4	0	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
Other	39	16	20	3	41.0%	51.3%	7.7%
Not Stated	34	5	21	8	14.7%	61.8%	23.5%
	778	258	476	44	33.2%	61.2%	5.65%

Question 2

Do you agree with re-investing resources released back into education?

Question 2 by description of respondent

Description of Respondent	Total	Yes	No	Unanswered	% Yes Total	% No Total	% Unanswered
Pupil/Student	6	4	1	1	66.7%	16.7%	16.7%
Parent/Carer	540	341	150	49	63.1%	27.8%	9.1%
Headteacher	28	25	1	2	89.3%	3.6%	7.1%
Governor	69	54	8	7	78.3%	11.6%	10.1%
Other school body rep	56	36	13	7	64.3%	23.2%	12.5%
Councillors	2	2	0	0	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Trade Union Rep	4	2	1	1	50.0%	25.0%	25.0%
Other	39	24	12	3	61.5%	30.8%	7.7%
Not Stated	34	8	15	11	23.5%	44.1%	32.4%
	778	496	201	81	63.8%	25.8%	10.4%

Question 3

Do you agree with the overall approach based on reducing the number of primary schools?

Question 3 by description of respondent

Description of Respondent	Total	Yes	No	Unanswered	% Yes Total	% No Total	% Unanswered
Pupil/Student	6	2	2	2	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%
Parent/Carer	540	79	441	20	14.6%	81.7%	3.7%
Headteacher	28	18	8	2	64.3%	28.6%	7.1%
Governor	69	32	35	2	46.4%	50.7%	2.9%
Other school body rep	56	16	36	4	28.6%	64.3%	7.1%
Councillors	2	1	1	0	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%
Trade Union Rep	4	1	3	0	25.0%	75.0%	0.0%
Other	39	13	23	3	33.3%	59.0%	7.7%
Not Stated	34	2	31	1	5.9%	91.2%	2.9%
	778	164	580	34	21.1%	74.6%	4.4%

Question 4

Do you agree with the approach to achieve sufficient local places for local children by reducing the number of places in schools with surplus places and small increases in others to reflect local demand?

Question 4 by description of respondent

Description of Respondent	Total	Yes	No	Unanswered	% Yes Total	% No Total	% Unanswered
Pupil/Student	6	3	2	1	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%
Parent/Carer	540	141	369	30	26.1%	68.3%	5.6%
Headteacher	28	17	6	5	60.7%	21.4%	17.9%
Governor	69	34	29	6	49.3%	42.0%	8.7%
Other school body rep	56	19	33	4	33.9%	58.9%	7.1%

Councillors	2	1	1	0	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%
Trade Union Rep	4	1	3	0	25.0%	75.0%	0.0%
Other	39	12	23	4	30.8%	59.0%	10.3%
Not Stated	34	4	28	2	11.8%	82.4%	5.9%
	778	232	494	52	29.8%	63.5%	6.7%

Commentary

Response to Question 2 was positive in every category of respondent. Conversely responses were negative overall for the other 3 questions. There is also a distinct difference of view between the responses of parents and carers particularly those directly affected by the proposals and those of Headteachers generally. The responses should be interpreted with considerable care.

By far the largest number of respondents were parents or carers totalling 540 out of 778 responses. This is not unsurprising as they form the largest body of those involved in the consultation process. The highest number of parent/carers responses came from schools where closure or amalgamation was proposed and their responses were primarily 'no'. This situation was mirrored in the 'Other School Body Representatives' which was mainly made up of teaching staff.

Where parent/carers children do not attend schools identified for closure or amalgamation the response is very small with the vast majority of deciding not to respond. Again this was mirrored in the 'Other School Body Rep'.

Twenty-eight of the Headteachers responded and whilst this is a proportionally small number a high percentage supported by the educational arguments and indicated 'yes' in response to all 4 questions. A total of 69 governors made up of 41 individual governors and 28 governing body representatives responded and their views were generally closely divided between those who ticked 'yes' and those who ticked 'no' in three out of four questions.

Non - Questionnaire Responses to the Consultation

Petitions

School Petition	Title	No. of Signatures
Blowers Green	As a parent of a child / children who attend Blowers Green Primary School, I wish to support the Governors in their opposition to the proposals set out in the Primary School Review to reduce the School's Standards Number from 45 to 30.	117
Mount Pleasant	Leave Mount Pleasant Primary School Alone 156 Netherton CE We the undersigned would like to oppose the proposal for Netherton CE Primary School to reduce the admission number from 60 to 30.	210
Maidensbridge	We, the undersigned, oppose the closure of Maidensbridge Primary School.	15,978
Highfields	As you may know there are proposals to close the school and expand Christ Church and Wallbrook schools. If you object to the closure of Highfields in August 2006 please add your name to the petition.	66
Mount Pleasant	The names listed below support the attached letter regarding the proposed closure of Mount Pleasant Primary School (Home & School Association)	47
Holt Farm	Save Holt Farm School Now. Our Children are the future so lets save their school from closure. They are more important that a statistic on a balance sheet. Sign the petition now.	5,332
Beauty Bank	We the undersigned give our support to Beauty Bank Primary School. It is a good school, educating our children to a high standard. It has friendly, approachable staff and it is wrong to close it, disrupting the children's education.	10,319
Highfields	As you may know there are proposals to close	5,749

	the school and expand Christ Church and Wallbrook schools. If you object to the closure of Highfields in August 2006 please add your name to the petition.	
Sycamore Green	Save our School	4,000

Letters

Three hundred and seventeen letters have been received and entered on the database. Where requested a detailed response has been given. On some occasions the response has referred the writer to Dudley Council website where answers to questions are available.

Questions

The 99 questions raised at or as a result of the consultation process have been addressed in the same way as the letters.

Emails

There have been a substantial number of emails sent to the school organisation address. A substantial number of emails have also been sent to councillors or officers. All of these have been added to the record of evidence.

The elected members on the Cabinet took the decision to support the proposal and move to the publication of Statutory Notices for closure of the school.

A statutory notice for closure was published on 21 November 2005 and is included in the Prescribed Information.

Representation Period

During the representation period, 8 letters of objection were received by the Directorate of Children's Services, all in opposition to closure, setting out reasons and asking further questions. Some were signed by individuals and some by groups of people such as parents / carers.

These letters were logged according to recipient details immediately and acknowledged by the Directorate. The content of each letter was summarized and separate points of objection noted. Individual points of objection or query amounted to 38.

All of the representations, along with the Directorate's response to the objections lodged were copied to the Secretary to the School Organisation Committee, in accordance with Statutory Guidance. The letters are being copied to members of the Committee.

Parents and other local residents have expressed their opposition to the closure of Holt Farm Primary School. The strength of the views is emphasised by the number of objections and their detailed nature.

List of questions and objections arising from the initial consultation and posting of the first Statutory Notice on 21/11/05.

1. **History is an integral part of our lives and important for future generations. Holt Farm is 100 years old. If the school closes, an important part of Halesowen will be lost.**
2. **A petition against closure of Holt Farm was submitted to the Council that spoke for the majority of people in Halesowen and the surrounding area. Does this not count for anything?**
3. **Children have moved to Holt Farm because of bad experiences at other schools. You now want to close Holt Farm and send children back to these schools. This is a backwards step for these children.**
4. **Do local people who pay council tax not matter? Your original comments in the Halesowen News were all about saving taxpayers money, but surely building a new school is a waste of this money as both Holt Farm and Hurst Green have recently had money spent on them.**
5. **I wish you could appreciate how local people feel about your plans and the stress you have caused. Change creates a delicate time in the lives of many people and it will be very difficult for students and their families, as well as the community as a whole, to adjust. Should these**

plans be accepted, students will be required to learn while adjusting to new environments and will face anxiety about change; the anxiety will create difficult amounts of stress that will affect learning.

6. No adequate response has been received from the original consultation. Questions, concerns and suggestions were ignored, and alternative proposals that were offered have not been considered at all. We came up with ideas that could have brought in both more pupils and finance, but we are not being given the chance to put any of these into operation. We also did a brilliant plan of action for the next couple of years, and should be given the opportunity to try and improve things. Do you ever intend to reply to all the letters and / or questions sent to you from various people during the consultation process?
7. You stated 11,000 consultation documents were made available yet only received 778 back and almost three quarters of these respondents rejected the Authority's plans. How were the consultation documents made available? Do you think it would have been better to send these to every Council taxpayer?
8. DMBC failed to inform all four Borough MPs of their plans until after informing the local media. This I believe shows total disdain for the office of Member of Parliament and for the constituents we represent.
9. Teachers, administrators, and support staff will all be affected with potential losses of careers or job relocation. If the merger goes ahead do you promise to safeguard every job?
10. Dudley citizens will be affected by the change in traffic flow, especially around Olive Hill Primary School where the difficulties caused by people transporting their children to school by car are obvious, and business owners will be affected by the reduction in customers.
11. I am curious to know if there is a guarantee that students will be able to attend the closest schools to those that are being closed. It is very hard for students to transfer into different schools, and it will presumably be difficult for the students from the closing schools to transfer in. Having a guarantee will provide a smooth transition and

the least drastic amounts of change and will cause the least disruption in the communities. Even if Holt Farm is annexed to Olive Hill it will surely be difficult for the children of these two schools to integrate properly and it is very likely that it will become a "them and us" situation, especially as some Hurst Green parents have made it quite clear that they do not want the pupils from Holt Farm at their children's school. Can you imagine how these young children feel? As far as they are concerned they are wanted by no-one, and not knowing what will happen to them or where they will be going is extremely upsetting and unsettling.

12. Keeping the small schools provides a choice, which provides the best option for all students.
13. Teaching methods, and therefore the quality of teaching, can be very different when a teacher teaches a large class versus a small class. Do the two schools operate the same Curriculum? Do the two schools operate the same teaching methods?
14. I am curious to know how each of these schools was chosen. Although I have read the relevant documents it is hard to understand the rationale of choice as not all of the schools are losing pupils at a fast rate in fact one can point to other schools in the Borough whose rolls are falling faster.
15. In each case of the five schools earmarked for closure, their political representation at Council level is with an opposition party or in an area of high deprivation, minority ethnic concentration or on land which would release a high resale value. This is an unusual statistical anomaly which merits further investigation.
16. If the Holt Farm building is no longer a school, the role will be inherently different. Any converted buildings have different community roles. The needs of the community must be taken into account if the building is converted. If it turns out that Holt Farm must be converted then it must remain as a community centre and not be used for any other purpose or bulldozed in order to have the land sold. For example, have you decided where the ARC centre will be in the Halesowen Township? You could use Holt Farm for this. I would also

like to reiterate and receive assurance that all monies saved through combining the schools should be reinvested into education and should not be used in other pursuits.

17. Has the Borough explored the option to use the available space in the schools for alternative purposes or is this an attempt simply to cut costs demonstrating that the planners understand the costs but not the value of the service that these schools provide? If available space is used in more creative ways, education money can be saved and the changes in the community will be the least drastic. Many other authorities have faced falling rolls and employed creative ways of using premises such as children's centres, Sure Starts and so on. These will offer the school a better status. I would like the Authority to confirm and show evidence that they have investigated this and other options such as federation as suggested by local parents. I believe demonstration of such studies is a requirement of the Ministry's guidelines also.
18. The Authority has not specified exactly where additional funding will come from in order to 'merge' and build new schools. Nor does the Authority specify land available for new schools. Therefore, I ask the SOC to investigate where the funding will come from in order to merge and build the schools as well as to assist in the transition and identify land and timescales for the new schools.
19. The Borough's track record is less than sparkling when considering that its plans to merge two Church of England schools in Halesowen, St John the Baptist and Hasbury have been rejected by the Education Minister twice already. Can the Authority guarantee this will not happen to their plans this time around? Have there been any other annexes that have worked successfully? Can you provide examples?
20. While the annual birth rate in Dudley has gradually fallen from a peak of 4,116 in 1990, this falls in line with the cyclical nature of birth rates. ONS projected population numbers between the present and 2028 suggest that the population decline reaches a low point and then rebounds afterwards; supporting that the rise and decline of birth rates are cyclical. Since the decline will level off, how reliable is the 2010 prediction? How has this forecast been made?

21. Birth rates are not always an adequate predictor of future school numbers. For example, the numbers provided do not take into account a change in population based on people staying in Dudley longer and an increase in immigration which will add to the population should the objectives of the Black Country Study be achieved. There are a number of new estates e.g. Highfields, Drews Holloway, which will attract more families to the area.
22. I do not believe that the Authority has actually taken on board their responsibilities to the community and that the consultation was merely a paper exercise. It seems that "consultation" was never the aim of the game and that it was a done deal right from the beginning. How otherwise can everybody have ignored all the proposals put forward, particularly when they are in line with all your strategies laid out in the primary review? That really doesn't make any sense at all, you have to agree on that!!
23. We also need to know about the distribution of pupils amongst local schools, i.e. how has this been affected by the 'free market' approach? Is this policy leading to an imbalance between schools? The Council's 'solution' of sending pupils from closed schools to neighbouring schools is bound to exacerbate any imbalance already existing. The Council will obviously save money by reducing Headteacher and other salaries, but if there is an optimum size, is it not likely that the solution will cause this to be exceeded?
24. There has been a forum to discuss Holt Farm Primary School. I would have liked to attend but knew nothing about it. Was any attempt made to publicise this meeting? I saw no advertisement for an Area Committee meeting in the press.
25. I understand it has come as a real shock to the Headteacher at Hurst Green Primary when the news was broken to her by the Halesowen News. Again I understand they intend to object to the plans, likewise the other schools involved. Is it any wonder?
26. The original plan was for the council to save £1 million, well how can this be when you intend to now build new schools / or new buildings

on existing schools. When you put these buildings up on current schools, that ensures a loss in playground or playing fields, the children do not have enough as it is. Therefore the money you will now spend on new buildings far outweighs the money you will save losing 5 Headteachers. The £8 million Dudley has secured to rebuild 2 primary schools gives me an estimation of £20 million pounds for 5 schools. Basic maths tells me it does not save money, it will take years to recoup the monies.

27. In one of the committee meetings the question was asked about the plans for the land, it was said that someone had already made an unexpected offer for land at some schools but that could not possibly be looked at now.
28. In the SOP 2003 - 2008 it was identified that schools had surplus places in area 4, the highest being Caslon at 33.6 %, yet you propose to close Holt Farm with 27.5%. Why is this?
29. It appears that you have chosen three schools that border other LEA's. Is it because they have large imports of children from Wolverhampton, Staffs and Sandwell?
30. Why within a few days of being placed at the school did you remove the Statutory Notices?
31. After the first part of the consultation process you still propose to close all five schools. This indicates all five schools presented no arguments / alternatives to allow them to remain. Did you actually look at the information provided to you by the individual schools and treat them on their own individual merit or just take the decision 'on block'?
32. What happens now if Mrs Partridge at Hurst Green or the Governing Body object to the merger?
33. Is this actually a merger or just a filtration system?
34. If the merger goes ahead in what year do you intend to close the annex? Will the Annex eventually turn into a ghost building?

35. What is the actual intention for the school uniform, and will you pay for it? A lot of parents rely on hand me downs through family or friends, and cannot afford to keep swapping and changing.
36. With regards to the Schools Governing Body, if the school does turn into Hurst Green Annex, you state we come under their governing body. Does it not seem wrong that our Governors / parents will not have a say in our children's future?
37. How will you organize events over two sites? For example Sports Days / Xmas productions, year group photos? What will happen about daily matters such as assemblies? How will the discipline of the school be maintained without a Headteacher on site, one who knows the children and staff inside out? How can anyone justify this ludicrous plan of getting rid of a Head, amalgamating schools without first trying out other options. Surely this should be a last resort. Has anyone actually thought the basics through or was this just a last ditch attempt to keep us all quiet?
38. The governing body of Hurst Green asked you if you now think you should offer their parents the right to consultation. Do you? In fact the whole idea of an annex should go out as a new consultation to all involved. The original was for the closure of our school, not the amalgamation with another.