



Children and Young People's Services

Proposed School Organisation **Policy and Entitlement**

1 Introduction

This document sets out a range of proposed entitlements to educational provision in the mainstream primary sector, and a school organisation policy which will deliver the entitlement. Guidance is given to officers and decision makers undertaking reviews of provision based on the policy.

2 Entitlements

All Shropshire children are entitled to access the Every Child Matters outcomes - to:

- be safe;
- be healthy;
- enjoy and achieve;
- make a positive contribution to the community; and
- achieve economic wellbeing.

and in particular to the following services within reach of their home community:

- high quality, inclusive pre-school and primary school education;
- access to extended services and support from multi-agency provision where required; and
- support with special educational needs where required.

3 School Organisation Principles

In order to provide these entitlements, Shropshire County Council will organise primary education to:

- P1 provide a sustainable network of schools across the county serving their geographic communities;
- P2 support and challenge schools to provide a high quality of education to all children including to children with special educational needs;
- P3 ensure access to a primary school place within six miles of each pupil's home address except where a statement of special educational need names a particular school;

Appendix 2

- P4 promote the provision of lifelong learning, extended services (including wrap-around care), out of school activities and access to multi-agency support;
- P5 support geographically isolated communities to access school places and other services.

4 Primary School Organisation Policy

This section sets out the policy for organising the provision of primary school places in Shropshire, having regard to the entitlements and principles set out above (and noted in parentheses after each policy statement). Apart from the first statement, these policy statements are not presented in priority order. They represent the characteristics of a successful network of schools and should all be present in the Shropshire schools network.

4.1 Access to Education (P1, P3, P5)

In order to provide access to services within reach of each pupil's home, the network of schools should be arranged so that in rural areas there is a school within six miles (measured by road) of each house, except for isolated dwellings in the most geographically isolated areas, and in urban areas there should be a school within two miles (measured by the shortest safe walking route). These distance guidelines have been set out as being capable of objective measurement but are based on planning to exceed the DCSF's best practice guidelines on home to school travel, which are that pupils of primary school age should not walk more than two miles to school and that primary age pupils travelling to school by bus should not spend more than 45 minutes per journey.

In determining catchment areas for schools, consideration should be given to including significant settlements without schools in the catchment area of the nearest school in order to minimise travel to school distances. Consideration should also be given to natural barriers, and existing community links and travel routes. Consideration should be given to reducing the six mile limit if there are significant travel problems within an area, which would mean exceeding the time limits referred to above.

In considering the future of rural schools, there should normally be a presumption against the closure of a rural school serving a rural community where the proposal would result in a school being created that would be larger than one form of entry. This is in addition to the protection given to rural schools by the guidance on school closures which says "in considering statutory proposals to close a rural school, the Decision Maker should have regard to the need to preserve access to a local school for rural communities. There is therefore a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school should never close, but the case for closure should be strong and the proposals clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area."

4.2 A Sustainable Network of Schools (P1, P4, P5)

In order to ensure the stability and sustainability of schools, schools must be of a sufficient size and occupancy to provide a sound educational experience in a financially viable and stable institution. Note that all school sizes here exclude nursery classes or units attached to schools.

Except where very small schools are needed to maintain access to education in areas of geographical isolation, schools should be planned to sustain at least four classes of 23 pupils or above. Four classes is the smallest size of school which has the ability to operate separate classes for Key Stage 2 only and maintain no more than two age groups in a single class. Where smaller schools are planned to maintain access to education additional appropriate support should be put in place. This would include additional resources to support the level of staffing and curriculum offer for pupils. It might also include, for example, consideration of hard or soft federation with another local school in order to share resources which would not otherwise be available to a very small school.

Schools should not normally be reorganised to form classes of five or six classes as these result in patterns of class organisation in which it is difficult to achieve a balance of ages in mixed age classes. Consideration should be given as to whether it is possible to adopt a pattern of school organisation which maintains a larger number of four class schools in rural areas, or a smaller number of seven class schools in urban areas. Seven classes is the largest school which should be considered in rural areas and then only in the situation where the majority of pupils will come from a single large settlement (not a market town) and there are historic links with the proposed catchment. This is because larger schools in rural areas will reduce the number of viable schools in the network.

Urban schools should normally be planned as either one form (7 class) or two form (14 class) entry primary schools. Where there is separate infant and junior education, the minimum size should be two form entry (160-180 pupils) for infant schools and two form (220-240 pupils) for junior schools. The minimum size of primary school in urban areas is set at 7 classes because this is the smallest size of school which can organise in single age group classes. The maximum size of primary school is set at 14 classes because recent research suggests that this is the maximum size of institution which can be considered as a single community.

4.3 Continuity of Primary Education (P2)

The consultation on the principles for school organisation showed that there was a broadly supportive consensus around the principle of primary education. As a result, there should be a presumption that infant and junior schools should be amalgamated to form primary schools as the opportunity presents. However, due consideration should be given to issues which might mean that immediate amalgamation is not

Appendix 2

appropriate. The prime consideration is that the new school should either be under 420 pupils or moving from a maximum of 510 towards 420 pupils. If the medium term forecast for the school is over 420 pupils, then no steps should be taken towards amalgamation at this time. Another consideration should be that the new school should be on a single site.

4.4 Diversity in Provision

Shropshire County Council should maintain diversity in its provision of early years and primary education.

Shropshire County Council will work with its key partners in the private and voluntary sector to maintain diversity in provision of early education and childcare. There is no intention for the Local Authority to align primary and early years provision together under Local Authority management.

Shropshire County Council will work with its key partners, the Diocese of Lichfield, the Diocese of Hereford and the Diocese of Shrewsbury, to ensure that the proportion of denominational places is at least maintained across the county. In any reorganisation there is likely to be change in the pattern of provision of denominational places in localities, but in considering proposals officers and decision makers should take into account access to denominational places.

Once the new network of schools is established, Shropshire County Council will work with headteachers and governing bodies to identify possible alternative commissioning models to support the provision of high quality education.

4.5 Inclusive Education (P2)

School policies should welcome children of all abilities and ethnic backgrounds. Schools should be capable of access by pupils of as wide a range of abilities as possible. This will ensure that as many children as possible are educated in their home communities.

4.6 Access to Other Services (P4)

In addition to delivering extended services from their site, schools should consider delivering elements of out of classroom experiences and extended school services in other parts of their catchment area communities. This will help to ensure that all areas of the school's catchment will be involved in the extended life of the school. In addition, schools should have access to and draw on support from other child and family support services through a system of multi-agency teams. In considering the pattern of school organisation, the Local Authority should consider access to multi-agency teams by parents, pupils and teachers both at the school and at a central point.

5 Review Process

A separate County Council procedure (updated on 12th September 2007) sets out the review process for Primary Schools. Review processes continue to feature careful educational, community and environmental appraisals. Any school change proposal continues to feature local consultation discussions with staff, governors, parents and the wider community. Any proposal includes (by longstanding protocol) involvement of Parish and District Councillors. Decision making on school organisation proposals takes into consideration the circumstances of the individual school community.