

Council	Agenda Item 67
16 December 2021	Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject:	Review of School Allocations- Petitions for Debate		
Date of Meeting:	16 December 2021		
Report of:	Executive Lead Officer for Strategy, Governance & Law		
Contact Officer:	Name:	Mark Wall	Tel: 01273 291006
	E-mail:	mark.wall@brighton-hove.gov.uk	
Wards Affected:	All		

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 Under the Council's Petition Scheme if a petition contains more than 1,250 signatures and is not petition requesting officer evidence, it will be debated by the Full Council.
- 1.2 Three petitions concerning the review of school allocations in the city have resulted in triggering a debate at the council meeting, having exceeded the threshold with a total of 1,591, 1,444 and 1,327 signatures confirmed at the time of printing the report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the three petitions are noted and referred to the Children, Young People & Skills Committee meeting for consideration.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION / CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

3.1 The Petitions:

- (1) [Keep Carden Nursery & Primary School as a thriving 2 form entry \(brighton-hove.gov.uk\)](https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk)

Lead petitioner Esther Garibay

We the undersigned petition Brighton & Hove Council to reject the proposal to reduce the number of pupil places at Carden Primary School to 30, which would be hugely detrimental to the children and staff at the school, as well as the local community.

Justification:

Situated in the border between Patcham and Hollingbury, Carden Nursery and Primary School has been a thriving community hub for the families of this area since 1948.

Carden is a fantastic school on a trajectory of growth. It has agile leadership that has continued to improve the quality of its educational offer. This has happened regardless of fluctuation of pupil numbers over the years.

The most recent Ofsted inspection (Good, Sep 2021) described the school atmosphere as 'buoyant', the early years programme as 'highly effective', and recognised pupils' wider development as a particular strength of the curriculum. Hence, we strongly reject the proposed reduction of pupils on the following basis:

- 1 Reducing the intake in the school will mean significant budget cuts, for an area rated in the 20% most deprived in the country.
This puts additional pressures on Carden School because a single-form school:
 - is at greater risk of financial difficulties due to lack of economies of scale
 - is more likely to attract a higher concentration of SEND pupils than larger primary schools
 - will result in staff reductions and fewer resources for building maintenance, equipment and enrichment activities.This is all to the detriment of current and future pupils.
- 2 Reducing the PAN at Carden will directly result in more pupils needing to travel to other schools by car, and/or have longer commutes in public transport. This adds to pollution and congestion.
 - Carden is at the edge of town, in a hilly area, making it impractical to walk or bike to other schools further away.
 - This contravenes the Council's Climate Emergency plans toward a carbon neutral city.
 - It also further disadvantages families in this area by increasing their drop-off and pick-up times, and cost of transport.
- 3 Reducing the number of pupils will tear the social fabric of this truly diverse school where:
 - 36% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, 20% have Special Educational Needs, 44% are BAME and 15% have English as an additional language.
 - Carden is host to a Speech, Language and Communication Unit, and specialises in this provision.
 - Ofsted (Sep 2021) commended the school's commitment to equality and diversity, and noted Leaders are highly successful at engaging members from all corners of the school community.
 - By reducing places available to local families, you will be splitting children in the area from their friends and neighbours, taking away the opportunity to foster interconnecting social tissue and a sense of belonging and pride in the neighbourhood that Carden currently enables.

- 4 Reducing Carden to a single--form will create significant disparity in choice and outcome for children in Hollingbury and Patcham. This is at best unfair, and at worst discriminatory.

We acknowledge the Council is concerned with surplus primary school places across all of Brighton and Hove. This is particularly projected to affect the City Centre, The Deans and City East.

- We call for an equitable city-wide approach that doesn't further disadvantage smaller, thriving schools like Carden that often have large well-ventilated buildings with lots of green space to accommodate pupils.
 - A reduction of an entire entry form would affect Carden School disproportionately, compared to larger neighbouring schools.
- 5 We request that an Equalities Impact Assessment be carried out before any more consideration is given to reducing the size of Carden. In summary, we strongly request that Carden Primary School remains a viable 2 form entry for the future of our children, neighbourhood and great city.

(2) [Bevendean Primary School - SAVE OUR SCHOOL \(brighton-hove.gov.uk\)](https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/Bevendean-Primary-School-Save-Our-School)

Lead petitioner Abby Vaughan

We the undersigned petition Brighton & Hove Council to reject the proposal to reduce the number of pupil places at Bevendean Primary School from 60 to 45.

Justification:

Bevendean Primary School and Nursery is situated approximately 3km from Brighton's city centre and is a hidden treasure. Because of its location, most children live close to the school and many parents are former pupils. In fact, 91% of the children live within the BN2 4 postcode – we are a Community School – in the heart of Bevendean. The school is surrounded by beautiful down land and set in extensive grounds with wide-open spaces. Bevendean Primary School and Nursery enjoys a peaceful and unspoilt location.

Before 1950, Bevendean Valley was mainly farmland. However, after the war, this farmland was developed. At this time, the school became the heart of the community – and to this day remains so! Originally two schools, these were joined together in 1990 to form Bevendean Primary School. In 2020, 'and Nursery' was added to the school's name to ensure the name reflected the school's offer.

Bevendean Primary School and Nursery is a GOOD School (Ofsted December 2019) and our results (prior to COVID-19) showed that our children make excellent progress in the core subjects of Reading, Writing and Maths. We have a Hearing Support Facility for deaf children – we are a very inclusive school! The school and community strongly oppose Brighton and Hove City Council's recommendation to reduce our PAN (Published Admission Number) from 60 to 45, for the following reasons:

- 1 Reducing the intake in the school will mean significant budget cuts, for an area rated in the 20% most deprived in the country – 49% of our children are Pupil Premium.
2. Fewer school places at Bevendean Primary School and Nursery will mean that existing families of children, or new families to Bevendean might miss out on a school place, and then consequently, enrol at another school. This mean that children and their families needing to travel to other schools by car, and/or have longer commutes in public transport. This adds to pollution and congestion.
3. Smaller schools mean MUCH smaller budgets. This will mean job cuts, further reductions in staff, less support for children with SEND or who need additional support such as reading or phonics groups. It will mean fewer trips and visits and no possibility to subsidise the ones we do run. It will mean less building maintenance and money spent on resources such as books, stationary etc.
4. Bevendean is a GOOD school. With a PAN of only 45, classes will be full – with 30 children or more in each class! This will mean less 1:1 and small group support for children who need this.
5. We are a fantastic community school. 91% of the children who attend our school live within the BN2 4 postcode! We are a community school and there must continue to be school places available for those families who move into Bevendean.
6. Bevendean has the highest percentage of disadvantaged pupils of any school in not just the east of city, but all of Brighton – we cannot let a proposed reduction in pupil numbers impact on the progress and attainment of our pupils.
7. The development of University accommodation along the Lewes Road will create additional housing for families in Bevendean as the large number of H.M.Os (Houses of Multiple Occupancy) are reduced. Long-term, we must ensure that Bevendean, as a community school, has places available for new families.
8. The reduction of PANS across the city must be fair and equitable. Large, middle-class oversubscribed schools, faith schools should also be considered – not just schools with a high proportion of disadvantaged pupils.

Please support the school in signing this petition, showing your support in ensuring that Bevendean Primary School and Nursery remains a 2-form entry school that serves the Bevendean Community.

(3) [Stop Woodingdean Primary School from having its pupil numbers reduced](#)

Lead petitioner Karen Meeres

We the undersigned petition Brighton & Hove Council to reject the proposal to reduce the number of pupils joining Woodingdean Primary School each year from 60 to 45, with effect from 2023.

Justification:

Woodingdean Primary School is a thriving, popular, oversubscribed, two-form entry school situated to the east of the city in Woodingdean. The school has been at the heart of the village in its current building since 1948. We are proud to boast that multi-generations of families have enjoyed their school years with us.

We are a good school (according to Ofsted), but our community know that we are a fantastic school, committed to nurturing and developing all our pupils in partnership with our local community. Due to our robust financial management, our strong and positive budget will enable us to make our plans a reality over the next year: a new science lab, new library, Forest School, and many other exciting initiatives.

To reduce our pupil numbers would have a considerable impact on our school and our local community. We, therefore, oppose the proposed reduction for the following reasons:

Parents have the right to choose

Woodingdean Primary is a very popular, inclusive school. For September 2021, we were oversubscribed with 69 first choices for our 60 places. Reducing our pupil numbers from 60 to 45 would impact parental preference when the Council has an overriding responsibility to seek to increase opportunities for parental choice, not reduce them. Local parents wishing to send their children to their local school would be less likely to get a place.

Our location in the east of the city means our families do not have the same number of school choices available as in many other parts of the city. Any school outside of Woodingdean village would mean families travelling by bus or car, therefore going against the Council's stated aim to become carbon neutral. It also goes against the messages we share with the children, encouraging them to look after the environment by walking or scootering and will hit hardest, those who can least afford it.

Mixed-age classes

Reducing our numbers by half a class from 60 to 45 would not mean smaller classes but would result in a different structure to the classes. This is called mixed-age teaching, where children of different ages are taught together. There are currently no other schools in Brighton and Hove with this structure, and the local authority has told us this is a trial to see what parents and the local community think. Research into mixed-age teaching provided by the Council says that 'parent views tend to be negative as do teachers' and 'mixed-age students in one study were found to have more negative views of their own behaviour and believe themselves to be less popular'.

We are naturally very concerned about the impact on our children and the wider school community if we are to trial something this new and unknown. Covid has put enormous demands on schools as they try to support children to make up for all the time lost over the last 18 months. The proposed change

would mean our whole curriculum would need redesigning and staff restructuring, and retraining. Most importantly, our staff are not experienced with this approach to teaching and would not choose to teach in this environment. We could lose our fantastic staff team. Our school would be at a disadvantage when recruiting new staff, compared to other Brighton and Hove schools who are not being forced down the mixed-age route. Our children deserve the excellent teachers and support staff they currently have. We do not want them to be part of a costly and potentially damaging experiment that would be equally costly and problematic to reverse.

It is proposed that both Woodingdean schools should face mixed-age classes, which further reduces the choice for our local parents who may prefer a two-form entry school and one without mixed-age classes.

Why Woodingdean Primary School?

The Council's proposal states that it will focus pupil number reductions on schools that get fewer applications than their published admission numbers. This is the case with other schools whose pupil numbers will be reduced in 2021, 2022 and 2023... except for Woodingdean Primary.

We are an oversubscribed school, and the Council's own proposal states, "It is therefore not a realistic strategy for the Council to look to the larger popular schools, which are oversubscribed or admit enough pupils to be close to their PAN as a way of reducing the number of surplus primary school places." Therefore, the inclusion of Woodingdean Primary School goes against the Council's own proposal, and we believe we are being unfairly targeted for a reduction when other, undersubscribed central schools are not being included.

To summarise, we are against the reduction in pupil numbers from 60 to 45 and urge the Council to reverse its proposal and leave Woodingdean Primary School as the thriving, vibrant two-form entry school it is today.

4. PROCEDURE:

4.1 The petitions will be debated at the Council meeting in accordance with the agreed protocol:

- (i) The Lead petitioners will be invited by the Mayor to present the petitions and will have up to 3 minutes in which to outline the prayer of the petitions and confirm the number of signatures;
- (ii) The Mayor will then open the matter up for debate by councillors for period of 15 minutes and will first call on the relevant Committee Chair to respond to the petitions and move a proposed response. The Mayor will then call on those councillors who have indicated a desire to speak in the matter, before calling on the relevant Committee Chair to respond to the debate;
- (iii) An amendment to the recommendation in paragraph 2.1 of the report or to add additional recommendations should be submitted by 10.00am on the day of the meeting; otherwise it will be subject to the Mayor's discretion as

to being appropriate. Any such amendment will need to be formally moved and seconded at the meeting;

(iv) After the 15 minutes set aside for the debate, the Mayor will then formally put:

(a) Any amendments in the order in which they are moved, and

(b) The substantive recommendation(s) as amended (if amended).

