

Expanding the Best: The Process

Creating additional places through multi campus schools

Background

In June 2011 the Children and Young People's Select Committee considered a report which outlined the need for Milton Keynes Council to commission new secondary school places in order to continue to meet the council's statutory duty to provide sufficient school places. The report proposed a new local process to secure sufficient high quality provision to meet the growing demand.

It was agreed by the Select Committee that a Review Group should be formed to consider the local need for secondary school places and determine whether a new policy position should be recommended. The establishment of this Review Group was approved by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee in July 2011.

The Review Group consisted of:

- Cllr Robin Bradburn (Chair): Liberal Democrat Group
- Cllr Jan Lloyd: Labour Group
- Cllr John Hawthorn: Conservative Group
- Dr Sanhita Chakrabarti: Co-opted Member

The group met three times during August and September 2011. The majority of the first meeting of the Review Group was spent considering evidence presented in the Milton Keynes School Organisation Framework.

Following a thorough examination of the data, members of the group agreed that forecasts clearly demonstrated the need for additional secondary school places. In particular the group considered the pressure on existing school places to serve the development of the western and eastern flanks of the city and a need for additional provision to be commissioned in central Milton Keynes.

The Review Group explored the ways in which new places could be commissioned, which would include the creation of additional places within existing schools as well as opening brand new provision. They noted that under the legislation in place at the time the Review Group were considering this issue, (the Education and Inspections Act 2006), Milton Keynes Council would be required to run a competition to open a new school.

The group also considered an alternative approach, which would be to expand an existing school onto another site – creating a larger school with a second campus. Under current legislation this involves a four week statutory consultation for maintained schools, followed by the publication of a statutory notice should the proposal proceed. A final decision is then made by the Milton Keynes Council Cabinet. The expansion of an academy would involve consultation and approval by the Department for Education.

To enable the Review Group to explore the advantages and disadvantages of a multiple campus model, representatives from high quality secondary schools were invited to provide evidence to the Review Group. The Lead Member for Children and Young People attended for part of the third and final meeting of the Review Group and outlined what he considered to be some key benefits and possible disadvantages to the proposed approach.

The Review Group considered all of the evidence before it, and came to the following conclusions:

- a) There is clear evidence of need which will inevitably lead to the commissioning of additional secondary school places across Milton Keynes.
- b) The advantages of the presumption to expand existing high quality provision onto another campus outweigh the disadvantages.
- c) It is critical that any expansion is underpinned by a strong governance model that ensures sustainability beyond individual leaders and is in balance, in terms of size and location, with the original school site.
- d) The risks highlighted by the education leaders and the Lead Member for Children and Young People should be managed and mitigated through a robust selection process.
- e) The process should also allow for input from local community leaders regarding the school's record of working in partnership with the council and others in order to achieve improvement for the local community.
- f) Should the decision maker be unable to determine a suitable school with which to enter a partnership then a competition should take place.

The Review Group's recommendations were then approved by Children and Young People's Select Committee on 15 November 2011 and subsequently by the council's Cabinet on 20 December 2011, which formally agreed that the approach should be adopted subject to the view of the Department for Education (DfE). The DfE responded in a broadly positive way on 24 February 2012, stating that "it is entirely possible for a single school to operate from more than one site. But to be regarded as an expansion of an existing school, rather than a 'new school', **there needs to be sufficient similarity to the existing school in terms of the community being served, staff, pupils, governance and ethos to demonstrate that this is an expansion rather than a new establishment**".

The DfE also confirmed that if the school selected locally for expansion was an academy school then the organisation concerned would need to present a business case to the Young People's Learning Agency (YPLA). The YPLA would then make a recommendation to the Secretary of State who would make a final decision. The YPLA became the Education Funding Agency on 1 April 2012.

At the recommendation of Cabinet, the Review Group met again on 22 March 2012 to discuss the need for additional primary school places and to then consider whether this approach should also be taken to commission additional primary place provision. The Review Group concluded that there was a sustained need for additional places, and that the process should also be used for primary school places where it could be evidenced that the DfE's above conditions could be met. A Delegated Decision was therefore taken by the Lead Member for Children and Young People on 2 May 2012 to commence immediate use of the local process for all secondary school places and to implement for new primary places where appropriate.

The process

Once a site has been identified as suitable for the provision of additional school places the Milton Keynes Council will draft a **scoping document** setting out opportunity and the **eligibility conditions**.

The process will then be as follows:

Week 1	Expressions of interest invited from eligible organisations
Week 2	
Week 3	Initial evaluation against the eligibility conditions to create shortlist <i>or exit process to commission new school if no eligible expressions of interest</i>
Week 4	Shortlisted organisations invited to provide a business case to include consultation with stakeholders (6 weeks)
Week 5	
Week 6	
Week 7	
Week 8	
Week 9	
Week 10	Professional assessment of business cases (4 weeks)
Week 11	
Week 12	
Week 13	
Week 14	Final assessment by a panel of elected members <i>or exit process to commission new school if professional assessment demonstrates need</i>
Week 15	
Week 16	Cabinet decision to determine whether an organisation should expand or a new school should be opened (4 weeks)
Week 17	
Week 18	
Week 19	
Week 20	Final decision – Cabinet if maintained school or Secretary of State if academy (Secretary of State aims to make decisions within 2 months)
Week 21	
Week 22	
Week 23	
Week 24	
Week 25	
Week 26	
Week 27	

The process will therefore take approximately 6 months from initial invitation to final decision. Each of the highlighted parts of the process is defined below.

Definitions

Scoping document

The scoping document will outline the following:

- The location, size and features of the proposed new site
- The area and community to be served, including any required community use
- The future demand for places to serve the area
- The opening date
- The proposed admission number and the total number of places to be provided
- The way in which the new site might be expected to grow its numbers over time
- The age range, including sixth form or early years
- Provision for children with special educational needs
- The estimated capital budget and funding sources, the lead role of the LA in the capital commissioning and build process and any clarification of revenue funding
- Any preferred specialism

Eligibility conditions

In order to be an eligible organisation the following criteria must be met:

- An 'outstanding' judgement from OfSTED at last inspection
- Existing school site is no further than three miles (secondary) or two miles (primary) as the crow flies from the proposed new site in order that both sites are reasonably accessible to staff and pupils and is in the borough of Milton Keynes
- Sufficient similarity to the existing school in terms of the community being served, staff, pupils, governance and ethos to demonstrate that this is an expansion rather than a new establishment
- Current organisation is broadly in balance, in terms of size, with the proposed school site and is able to offer balance of opportunity to the curriculum to all children across both school sites

Expressions of interest

Expressions of interest should be in the form of a formal letter to the relevant Corporate Director outlining in principle interest in expanding onto the proposed new site, and providing evidence of how each of the eligibility conditions can be met. It is assumed that expressions of interest will have the support of the school's governance at an appropriate level and in the case of voluntary aided schools, the appropriate diocesan support.

Initial evaluation

The initial evaluation will comprise an officer assessment of the expression of interest against the eligibility criteria. This will result in a short list of proposals. Proposers will then be invited to submit a business case.

Business case

The business case will need to outline the following:

- Name of proposer or proposers and contact address
- Confirmation of the area that the expanded school would intend to serve
- Confirmation that the size, age-range and pupil numbers at the proposed site would be as outlined in the scoping document and clarification of the way in which the expanded site would grow its pupil numbers
- The proposed admissions arrangements and oversubscription criteria that would apply to the expanded school
- Clarification of any early years provision on offer, if appropriate
- Clarification of any post 16 provision on offer, if appropriate
- The ethos of the current school, including educational philosophy, and clarity about how that ethos will be enhanced to include provision on the proposed site
- Proposed model of governance evidencing sustainability of high quality outcomes within the expanded school beyond individual leaders
- Educational benefits, including:
 - How the expanded school will raise the standard of education in the area and contribute towards school improvement
 - How the school will ensure that parity of opportunity to the curriculum is provided to all children within the provision, irrespective of the site upon which the child is generally educated or where the child lives

- Any proposed specialism
- Provision for children with special educational needs
- The way in which the expanded organisation will promote community cohesion across its wider community
- Confirmation that the capital and revenue resources outlined in the scoping document and the role of the LA in the capital build process have been accepted
- Views of interested parties, to include the results of all consultation and the proposer's response to any concerns raised by stakeholders.

Professional assessment

The professional assessment will be carried out by a school improvement professional who will carry out a school visit, scrutinise the relevant evidence, assess the ability of the business case to meet the needs outlined in the scoping document, assess the likely impact of the proposed expansion on the quality of provision and consider the views of stakeholders. Proposals will then be ranked alongside a transparent rationale.

Final assessment

The final assessment will involve a panel of elected members considering the results of the professional assessment. The panel will comprise two members from each of the three main parties plus independent representation. Political parties may wish to consider the involvement of ward members for those areas where new sites are situated. At this stage there will be an opportunity for proposers to make presentations to the panel and for local community representatives to talk to the panel about the proposers' record of working in partnership. The panel will then arrive at a recommendation for Cabinet.

Cabinet decision

The Cabinet will consider the recommendation of the panel of members and determine whether to proceed with an expansion or instead to move to opening a new school. If the Cabinet arrives at a decision to expand a maintained school then this will result in the publication of a statutory proposal and a 4 week representation period before a final decision can be made. If the Cabinet arrives at a decision to expand an academy then the business case will be sent to the Education Funding Agency along with LA support for the proposal and the Education Funding Agency will make a recommendation to the Secretary of State.

Final decision

In the case of a maintained school the Cabinet will make the final decision following completion of the 4 week representation period. In the case of an academy the final decision will be made by the Secretary of State.