

**CABINET**

**24 SEPTEMBER 2008**

**EDUCATION, LEISURE & LIFELONG LEARNING SERVICES**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, LEISURE AND  
LIFELONG LEARNING – K A NAPIERALLA**

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## ITEM 1

### A STRATEGIC SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME PRINCIPLES TO UNDERPIN CHANGE

#### **1. Purpose of Report**

To recommend to Council to approve an approach to strategic school improvement based on a programme for change underpinned by the principles set out in this report.

#### **2. Background**

School reorganisation is an evolving process, driven by events both locally and nationally. It is the means by which a local education authority responds to changing circumstances that impact upon its ability to meet its duty to secure efficient primary and secondary education in its area and to promote high standards and the fulfillment of every child's potential (Education Act 1996).

This paper sets out the principles underpinning the process of school reorganisation in Neath Port Talbot County Borough. The principles have been developed to support an overarching strategy for school improvement that aims to provide 'fit for purpose' schools capable of delivering high quality educational experiences for all pupils. It is in this context that the principles are to be applied. They provide clarity of purpose and transparency of approach, and determine the main factors that will be taken into account in considering all proposals for change, including, where necessary, school closures. Full and effective implementation of a school improvement programme will need a long term strategy for delivery, one that maps out proposals for change over an elongated period, delivered by means of a rolling programme reviewed annually.

To ensure a coherent and integrated County Borough wide approach to the strategic school improvement programme, there is a strong and explicit relationship between the principles articulated in this document and corporate policies and priorities. The principles reflect the priorities of the Community Plan 2005 - 2015, the Unitary Development Plan 2001 – 2016, the Western Valleys Strategy, the Children and Young People's Plan 2008 – 2011, the Single Education Plan, the ELLLS statement document – One Direction and One Wales, a progressive agenda for the government of Wales. They also draw upon the Welsh Assembly Government guidance document 'School Organisation Proposals' (Circular No: 23/02) which requires prime

consideration be given to the effect of any proposed change on the standards of teaching and attainment in schools.

Embodied in the principles is the vision for education articulated in the Community Plan; a vision that enhances achievement through continued school improvement and places education at the centre of community development. Delivering change that will allow all the citizens of Neath Port Talbot the opportunity to access services of the highest standard is an aim of the Community Plan that is supported by the principles. Similarly, the principles, guided by a sustainable development theme that is central to the Unitary Development Plan, promote a long term perspective in planning for future interests, whilst recognising the demands of today's needs.

Within this context, the Education, Leisure and Lifelong Learning Service (ELLS) is well placed to take forward a strategic school improvement programme. It already has school improvement as the cornerstone of its delivery and making a positive difference to the lives of children and young people within Neath Port Talbot, both now and in the years ahead, is a core function of the Service.

The Service holds detailed information on educational performance, pupil numbers, school organisation and capacities, and the suitability and sufficiency of building stock. This combined with contextual information from other services enables the ELLS to develop plans for the future of education within the County Borough from an informed base.

### **3. Contextual Information**

#### **i) General**

Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council is a unitary authority sharing borders with 5 other authorities. The County Borough covers an area of about 44,217 hectares and is economically and linguistically diverse. The proportion of the working population that is unemployed is about 4.4%, which is above the national average. Neath Port Talbot has the fourth highest percentage of communities in the most deprived ten percent in Wales, for overall deprivation.

The County Borough has a population of around 135,000, 22% of which is Welsh speaking. The highest concentration of Welsh speakers is located mainly in the northern rim of the local authority area. Significantly, an analysis of Welsh speakers by age groups shows that the highest percentage, 36%, is attributed to 10-15 year olds compared to the

traditionally higher 75+ year old category which is only 25%. This data clearly shows that Welsh language learning is already successful in the authority.

## **ii) Schools**

Currently, Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council, the local education authority, maintains 86 schools: 72 primary schools, 11 secondary schools, three special schools and three pupil referral units. Within this structure the authority also supports 21 learning support centres located within our mainstream schools and 1 within a special school.

Currently 98% of three-year-olds and 98.7% of four-year-olds access the authority's early years' provision. The school population is around 21,500 pupils.

The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is 21.1%, which is above the Wales average of 17.4% and the fifth highest in Wales. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds (non-white British) is 4.8% in comparison with the Wales average of 7.7%.

## **iii) Surplus Places**

The Welsh Assembly Government defines significant surplus capacity as 25% or more of a school's capacity and at least 30 unfilled places.

It is generally accepted that the term 'small school', in relation to primary schools, is applied to schools with fewer than 90 pupils and, in relation to secondary schools, is applied to schools with fewer than 600 pupils (700 pupils for schools with a 6<sup>th</sup> Form).

- **NPT Primary Schools**

There are 2190 surplus places within the primary school sector. Currently, 20 of the 72 primary schools have significant surplus capacity.

18 primary schools fall into the category of being 'small schools' and half of these have significant surplus capacity.

- NPT Secondary Schools

There are 1726 surplus places within the secondary school sector.  
3 of the 11 secondary schools have significant surplus capacity.

2 secondary schools fall into the category of being ‘small schools’,  
1 of which has significant surplus capacity.

Pupil population predictions indicate that, for the period April 2008 to April 2013, primary school pupil numbers will fall by 702 and secondary school pupil numbers by 824. However, these (which exclude 6<sup>th</sup> form pupils) are subject to change and will, therefore, need to be reviewed annually.

In the financial year 2008/09, the impact of falling rolls on schools should have amounted to a reduction in schools’ budget of £1,540,000. However, the effect of this was mitigated by the action of the Authority which bore 50% (£770,000) of the cost of the loss of revenue.

#### **4. The Principles**

The principles underpinning the process of developing and implementing school improvement proposals are set out below.

##### **i) Standard of educational provision**

School improvement proposals will have a positive impact upon:

- the standard of education provision in schools within the County Borough
- the continued development in curricular provision and delivery
- the outcomes for children and young people

##### **ii) Need for places and the accessibility of schools**

School improvement proposals will have a positive impact upon:

- reducing surplus provision in the County Borough

- addressing current or future need for additional places
- addressing demand for particular provision, such as Welsh medium education and faith school provision
- addressing demand for specialist provision, for example additional learning needs, inclusive education provision
- access for disabled pupils in accordance with statutory disability discrimination and SEN requirements
- the length and nature of school journeys

**iii) Standard and suitability of school accommodation**

School improvement proposals will have a positive impact upon:

- the standard of school accommodation
- the condition and suitability of school places in the County Borough

**iv) Finance**

School improvement proposals will have a positive impact upon:

- the cost-effective use of public funds
- reducing the budgetary impact of falling school rolls
- the effective management of school budgets

**5. Applying the principles**

In determining school improvement proposals the following factors will be taken into account.

**i) Standard of provision**

Consideration will be given to:

- whether the proposals are likely to improve the standard of education provision in schools within the County Borough
- whether the proposals will ensure delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum, including all the required elements of the curriculum for all affected age groups
- the standard of education currently provided and the continuing ability of schools to maintain satisfactory standards. When deciding on proposals, Monitoring School Performance (MSP) and ESTYN inspection reports will be taken into account
- the effect of the proposals on other schools

**ii) Need for places and the accessibility of schools**

Consideration will be given to:

- whether there is surplus provision in the area and the effect of the proposal on that surplus. When deciding on proposals to resolve a problem of surplus capacity, Monitoring School Performance (MSP) and ESTYN inspection reports will be taken into account
- whether there is a current or future need for additional places in the area or demand for a particular type of provision, for example Welsh medium provision or provision for particular faiths or denominations
- the need to integrate separate infant and junior school provision
- whether the length and nature of journeys to alternative provision are appropriate; in particular whether primary school pupils will have journeys one-way in excess of 45 minutes or, in the case of secondary school pupils, journeys of over an hour (Welsh Assembly Government guidance: 23/02)

- whether there are safe walking, cycling and bus routes to the proposed site
- whether the proposal will improve access for disabled pupils in accordance with statutory disability discrimination and SEN requirements

**iii) Standard and suitability of school accommodation**

Consideration will be given to:

- whether provision is ‘fit for purpose’ and appropriately located
- the improvements needed to bring to the standard of school accommodation to an appropriate level
- the suitability and sufficiency of school places in the County Borough

**iv) Finance**

The Authority accepts that the proceeds from sales of redundant sites should be made available to offset the cost of implementing a proposal and savings in revenue costs should be retained in the authority's local schools' budget.

Consideration will be given to:

- the financial implications for both revenue and capital costs
- whether the proposals represent a cost-effective use of public funds, including consideration of long term transport needs
- environmental factors, and building maintenance and repair costs
- whether capital funding needed for the project will be available at the level required and at the right time
- whether the necessary revenue funding is available, including consideration of whether, without the proposals, the school(s) would face budget deficits

- the scale of any projected net savings over a period of at least three years

v) **Other considerations**

In applying the principles, consideration will also be given to alternatives to school closure and community impact, in particular to:

- whether alternatives to closure have been actively considered, in particular, whether revised catchment areas and amalgamation options have been looked at (taking account of the scope for use of ICT links between school sites) and the reasons for not pursuing these as an alternative to closure
- whether the possibilities of making fuller use of the existing buildings as an educational/community resource within the locality have been explored
- emerging priorities of the Children Act 2004 as articulated in the NPT Children and Young People's Plan 2008 – 2011

In addition, the views of interested parties will be sought, in particular:

- the views of parents and other local residents, including those relating to parental choice and the impact on the local community
- the concerns of other LEAs affected by the proposals
- the concerns of any diocese affected by the proposals
- the views of other schools, playgroups or other providers in the area
- other interested parties

**6. Developing a Strategic School Improvement Programme**

This principles paper is the first stage in the development of a comprehensive improvement programme for Neath Port Talbot schools. It forms the basis of a structured approach to the rationalisation of educational provision in the County Borough, an approach that will be evidenced based and one that will draw upon

data and information from a variety of sources in order to reach informed conclusions about the nature of provision and the need to add, remove or relocate school places. As necessary, school improvement proposals will use the Authority's statutory powers to establish, transfer, alter the character of and discontinue schools.

Legislative processes apply to the significant alteration or closure of a school which includes statutory consultation periods. Even without allowing for planning, development and building construction work it is advisable to allow 18 to 24 months in which to undertake the necessary statutory processes.

The purpose of the strategic school improvement programme is to set out the context in which decisions on the organisation of school places in Neath Port Talbot are made and to plan the delivery of a managed programme for change. The nature of change in school organisation will mean that some schemes can be effected within a short timescale whilst others will only be achieved over an extended period.

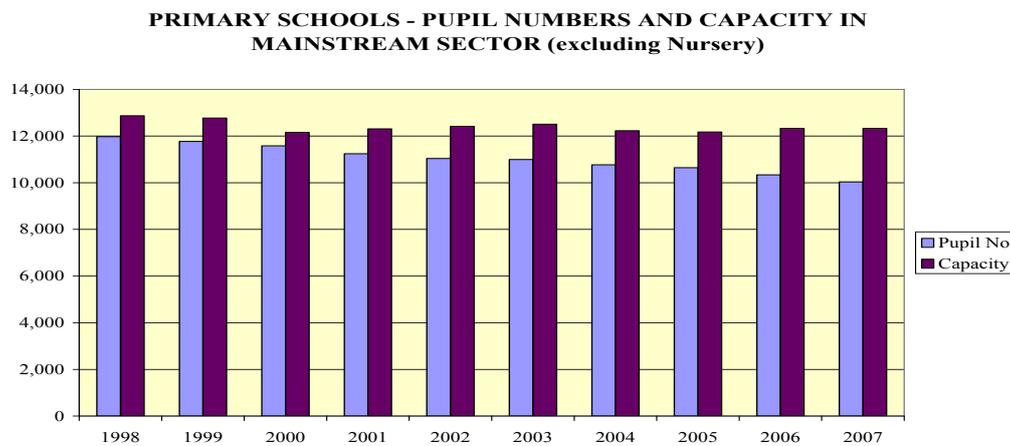
Proposals will be clearly linked to corporate priorities articulated in the Authority's plans and policies. They will focus upon making the most effective, efficient and flexible use of finite resources in order to raise educational standards and support continuous improvement. In developing proposals for 'fit for purpose' schools that will meet the educational demands of a modern society, consideration will need to be given to both the rationalisation and development of provision across the County Borough. Whereas reducing surplus places and managing building stock more efficiently will feature prominently in a strategic school improvement programme, in meeting the twin aspirations of raising educational standards and supporting continuous improvement an essential requirement is the provision of suitable and sufficient schools; that is - right school in the right place. A strategic school improvement programme will, therefore, need to address key issues at both primary and secondary levels in areas such as: Welsh medium provision, faith education, additional learning needs, curriculum developments, teaching and learning initiatives and a community focus for schools.

The successful development and implementation of the strategic school improvement programme will require a programme and project management approach. Under the direction of the Head of Support Services and Commissioning Development, the programme will be developed and overseen by a project manager supported by an internal specialist team.

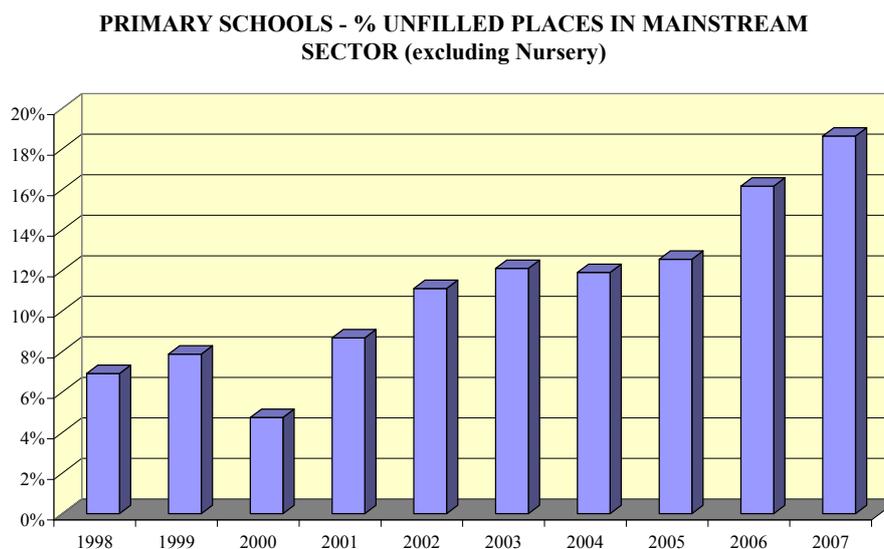
## 7. Evidence for change – Surplus Places

The following charts illustrate the relationship between capacity and pupil numbers and the increase in the extent of surplus capacity across NPT schools in the primary and secondary sectors. Also illustrated is the downward trend in pupil numbers projected over time. It should be noted that the following information is accurate at the date of print and will need to be updated continually.

- Primary Sector



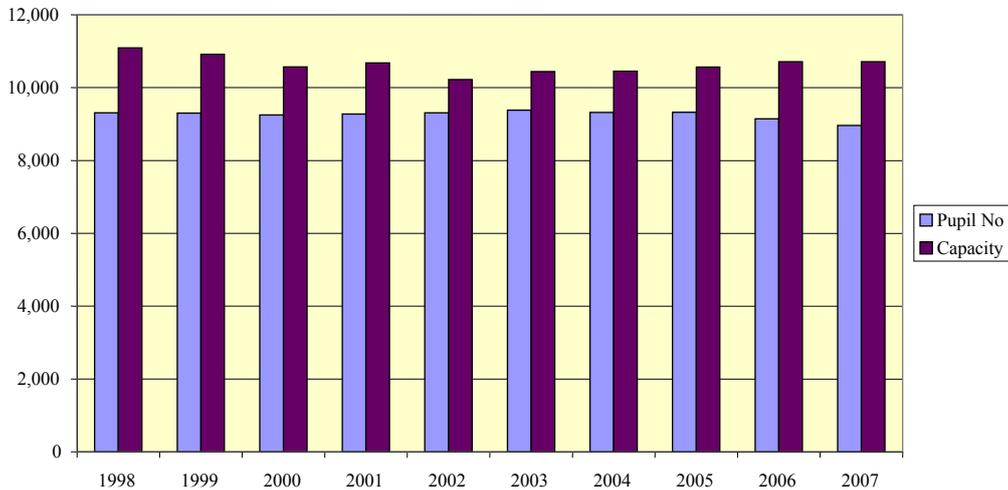
*The above chart illustrates a steady decline in primary sector pupil numbers over a 10 year period whilst capacity has remained relatively constant.*



*Further evidence of the disparity between pupil numbers and capacity can be seen in this chart which sets out the percentage increase of unfilled pupil places over a 10 year period.*

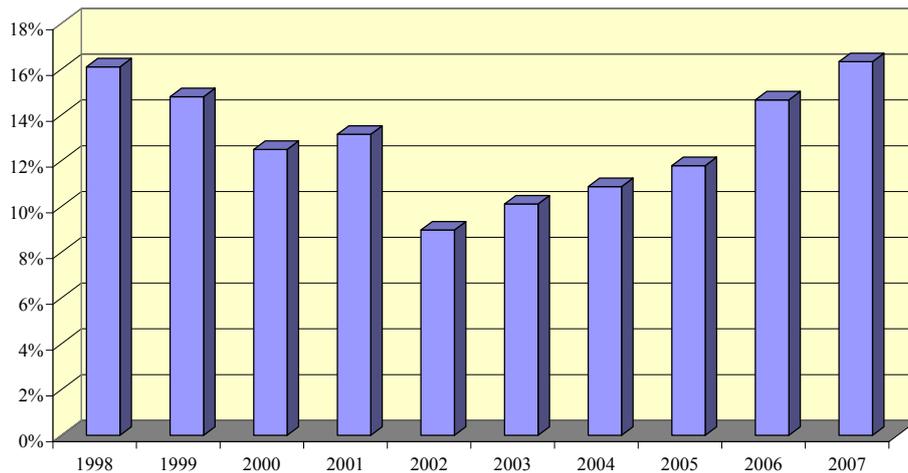
- Secondary sector

**SECONDARY SCHOOLS - PUPIL NUMBERS AND CAPACITY IN MAINSTREAM SECTOR**



*The effect of a 10 year period of over capacity in secondary schools, exacerbated in recent years by a fall in pupil numbers occurring alongside a slight rise in capacity is demonstrated by this chart. The recent decline pupil numbers is the effect of low primary school numbers over previous years impacting on the secondary sector.*

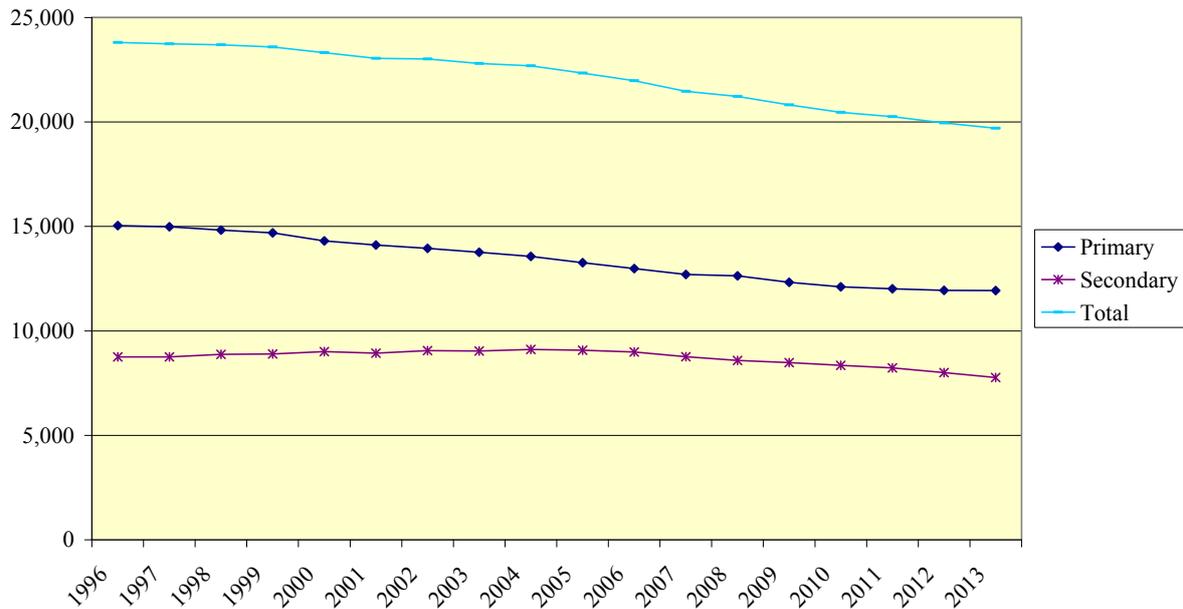
**SECONDARY SCHOOLS - % UNFILLED PLACES IN MAINSTREAM SECTOR**



*Illustrating percentage unfilled places, the effect of increased capacity and falling numbers over recent years is highlighted by this chart.*

- Pupil trends (April 1996 – April 2013)

## PUPIL NUMBER TRENDS



*Clearly illustrated in the above chart is the decline in pupil numbers at primary level (inc. nursery) and secondary level (excl 6<sup>th</sup> Form). Although projected figures for the next five years suggest the decline in the primary sector is levelling out, the continued fall at secondary level means that overall pupil numbers will continue to drop.*

## **8. Recommendations**

- That Council approve the following:
- The principles for change set out above be adopted
- Approval be given to develop a programme for strategic school improvement based on the principles set out above
- Approval be given to instigate programme management arrangements in order to facilitate the effective and efficient delivery of the programme for strategic school improvement. The arrangements to include the development of a cross-directorate programme management team and the appointment (by internal secondment) of a project manager. The project manager, working under the direction of the Head of Support Services and Commissioning Development, to be supported by an internal

specialist team with ‘back-filling’ arrangements for officers assigned to that team.

- Revenue costs associated with the management of the strategic school improvement programme, in particular back filling arrangements, will be offset by savings secured from the implementation of the programme.

## **9. Reason for the Proposed Decision**

To enable the Authority to respond to changing circumstances that impact upon its ability to meet its duty to secure efficient primary and secondary education in its area and to promote high standards and the fulfillment of every child’s potential.

## **10. List of Background Papers**

Education Act 1996  
School Standards and Framework Act 1998  
Education Act 2002  
Education and Inspections Act 2006  
NPT Community Plan 2005 – 2015  
NPT Unitary Development Plan 2001 - 2016  
NPT Western Valleys Strategy  
Single Education Plan  
One Direction – a statement document  
School Organisation Proposals, NAFW Circular No: 23/02  
Children Act 2004  
Children and Young People’s Plan 2008 – 2011  
One Wales, a progressive agenda for the government of Wales, WAG  
Excellent Schools: A vision for schools in Wales in the 21st century, ESTYN  
Welsh Education Scheme 2008 – 2013  
Trading Places: A review of progress on the supply and allocation of school places, Audit Commission 2002  
Planning School Places, WLGA – Jan 2008

## **11. Ward Affected**

All

**12. Officer Contact**

Mr Karl Napieralla, Director of Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning.

## COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

### A STRATEGIC SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME(PRINCIPLES)

**(a) Implementation of Decision:**

The decision is proposed for implementation immediately after consultation with the relevant Scrutiny Committee and determination by Council.

**(b) Sustainability Appraisal:**

**Community Plan Impacts**

Economic Prosperity	-	positive
Education, Leisure & Lifelong Learning	-	positive
Better Health & Well Being	-	positive
Environment & Transport	-	positive
Crime & Disorder	-	positive

**Other Impacts**

Welsh Language	-	positive
Sustainable Development	-	positive
Equalities	-	positive
Social Inclusion	-	positive

**(C) Consultation**

There has been no requirement under the constitution for external consultation of this item.