

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE 17 JUNE 1998

NOTE: A full copy of the report mentioned below has been sent to members of the Education Committee and other members who have requested it. Further copies are, however, available from Janet Purcell, Room 222, County Secretary's Department, County Hall, Hertford. (Telephone: 01992 555562)

KEY STAGE 1 CLASS SIZES

1.1 DfEE Consultation on Reducing Infant Class Sizes

The Government's pledge within the School Standards and Framework Bill is to reduce class sizes to 30 or below at Key Stage 1 (i. e. for children aged 5, 6 and 7 - or for reception to year 2).

The DfEE's consultation on this has been in the form of draft outline regulations and guidance. The regulations will allow the Secretary of State to impose a maximum limit of 30 pupils for all infant classes by 1 September 2001 and oblige each education authority to produce a statement to demonstrate how they will achieve this objective.

The guidance document proposes how the statements should be prepared. On the basis of the statement, and on the provision of such information as may be requested annually by the Secretary of State, local education authorities will be invited to apply for funds to support the arrangements they have set out to limit class sizes.

It may also be possible to adjust the standard number applicable to admissions to an infant class if this helps to reduce class sizes.

1.2 Issues for Hertfordshire

Particular issues for Hertfordshire are:

- (i) the number of schools with perceived irregular standard numbers. There are 191 out of 352 schools with Key Stage 1 pupils which have a standard number other than 30, 60 or 45.
- (ii) there will be some areas where additional accommodation is needed, although it is also important not to create additional surplus places.
- (iii) schools are concerned about funding/staffing issues. Where a school has to reorganise to reduce class sizes an extra teacher may be needed and this will most likely be at the expense of classroom assistants throughout the school.
- (iv) village schools will have little flexibility to cope with fluctuating numbers from year to year particularly where class sizes are usually around 30 each year. There may also be home to school transport implications.
- (v) the fact that a reception place is linked to a nursery place means that effectively our admissions are sorted out 12 months ahead of other authorities. Any changes in legislation will therefore have an impact on the 2000/2001 intake but not on the 1999/2000 intake which is already being finalised with appeals being heard this term.
- (vi) officers presenting the case for the LEA at appeal panel hearings have all been fully briefed on the Government objective but there is a concern that this summer appeals will be lost and this will create some reception classes of over 30 pupils. These pupils will still be in Year 2 when the Government pledge must be met i.e. 2001. It is expected that regulations impacting on the way Key Stage 1 appeals are handled will come into force in 1999. These will have an impact on the 2000/2001 admissions in Hertfordshire because of our “nursery for all at four” policy.
- (vii) for some schools, particularly in the Voluntary Aided sector, the standard number for the 1999/2000 year group cannot be altered in time to achieve an admission number of 30, 60 or 45. The resulting intake is likely to lead to classes in excess of 30.

1.3 **Development of an approach**

The following mix of solutions is, therefore, proposed:-

Revising Standard Numbers

- to aim for standard numbers of 30, or multiples of 30, but if that is not possible to create 45 as the standard number
- in consultation with schools, to review and change the standard numbers that do not conform with the above, while ensuring that the necessary number of places are available
- to maintain most village school standard numbers unless there is a particular problem of either over or under capacity from within the locality.
- to work with the Diocesan Authorities on appropriate solutions for voluntary aided schools

Accommodation

Following the standard number review:-

- to provide additional accommodation that is necessary to meet the objective
- to provide additional places where they are most needed
- to provide permanent accommodation to replace temporary where there is a permanent need
- to ensure accommodation is available to meet local demand

School Organisation

- to accept mixed age classes and vertical grouping as potential solutions to reducing class sizes in KS1
- to support schools that find it necessary to change their pattern of organisation in order to keep classes below 30 in KS1

Appeals

- to use the class size pledge when defending the Authority's position on appeals

- if additional accommodation is added to keep KS1 classes below 30, to resist pressure at appeals to “fill up” those classes thereby creating problems at KS2

Funding

- to consider the KS1 pledge in the forthcoming LMS Review.

1.4 **Consultation with Schools**

The development of this approach has been discussed with schools and officers are now systematically visiting schools to discuss possible changes to standard numbers where these are currently not 30, 60 or 45. Schools are being considered in local groups because of the impact on other schools.

In order to develop the KS1 plan there will be consultation with all primary Heads and Governing Bodies in early September 1998. This will be based upon the outcome of the individual schools’ consideration that is going on at present. Parents’ views will be sought from parent governors.

A finalised plan will then be brought to the Education Committee on 14 October 1998 for approval before it is sent to the DfEE on 16 October 1998. In the meantime the Education Operations Sub-Committee will consider any proposed changes to standard numbers and submit them to the DfEE.

1.5 **Financial implications**

Hertfordshire has already been awarded £510,000 grant from the Standards Fund to provide additional teachers at Key Stage 1 in 1998/99. This has now been allocated to 35 schools and they will each be able to employ an extra teacher at Key Stage 1 for the academic year 1998/99. This will reduce the number of pupils taught in classes of over 30 by over 3,000 for that year.

The County Council has also submitted a bid for a share of the £40m which has been made available for providing additional permanent accommodation in the current financial year. Hertfordshire’s bid is for an additional classroom at each of 10 primary schools across the County and for the refurbishment of a two classroom block at one other school.

There will be an opportunity to bid for a grant to support the Key Stage 1 Plan but, if it is not sufficient, there may be demands to be considered when the 1999/2000 budget is being prepared.

Bob Mays
Chairman

17 June 1998