

Kent Primary Strategy 2006

recommendations

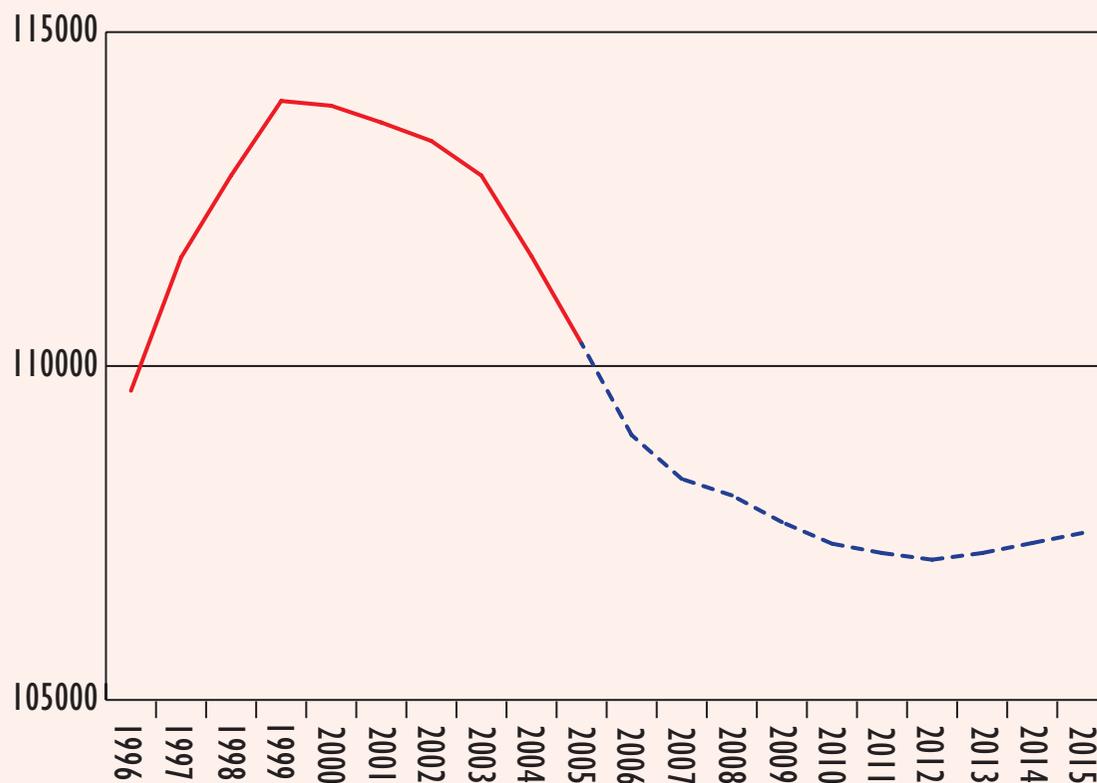


the challenge



Birth rates in England and Wales have been falling steadily since the early 1990s and Kent County Council, along with other local authorities has become increasingly aware of the effect this has had on primary school rolls. The increasing number of surplus school places is already having major implications for funding and consequently the viability of some schools.

Actual and projected primary pupil roll 1996 onwards



In 2004, the County Council decided that it would take steps to deal not just with this issue but with other opportunities in primary education. A clear strategy was needed for raising primary school standards, maximising the opportunities offered by new technology and building on the Government's Community and Extended Schools programmes.





the remit and the consultation



the remit

Reviewing the way our primary schools work was clearly an area which needed close consultation with the County's headteachers and it was decided that a group of 23, one from each cluster area, should drive forward this process. The Strategy Group met throughout the academic year 2004-05 to discuss not just the issue of falling rolls but also:

- Schools' educational and economic viability overall;
- Raising standards in the primary phase;
- The 'shape' of primary schools for the future in the light of modern requirements of the curriculum, especially in terms of ICT;
- The Government's Community, and Extended Schools proposals;
- A possible future primary 'Building Schools for the Future' programme;
- The 'shape' of new schools in the new Kent growth areas.

Supported by officers, and with full access to the data and information they needed, a detailed report containing 56 strategic recommendations was produced. This provided the basis for a wide consultation exercise that ran for six weeks from 21 November 2005.

the consultation

The full consultation document was available to the public on the Council's KNet intranet system, the ClusterWeb education site and the main Kent County Council website at www.kent.gov.uk.

Headteachers, county councillors and major partners such as the Dioceses and Kent Governors' Association were also invited to comment on the consultation document, while extensive media coverage helped to publicise the issues.

The consultation document was a main agenda item at all the termly headteacher meetings during the autumn. It was the single agenda item for the Education and Libraries Policy Overview Committee and the Kent School Organisation Committee, as well as being debated by councillors at full County Council in December 2005.

In all, the consultation document probably had more exposure than any previous document of its kind. As a result of the consultation, six of the original recommendations were deleted and six were changed, leaving 44 in their original form.

The remaining 50 recommendations were approved by Cabinet on 6 February 2006 and now form Kent County Council's Primary Strategy 2006. They will form the basis for an action plan designed to move primary schools in Kent towards the vision set out in the Strategy.



Kent Primary Strategy 2006

recommendations



Respect and equality is at the heart of the Kent Primary Strategy. Kent's pupils should experience an education that meets their increasingly diverse needs and which gives every child the best possible learning opportunities, irrespective of their background or beliefs.

It is no accident that the following list is dominated by structural recommendations. The Primary Strategy Group was initially set up to devise a strategy to guide school organisation proposals at a time of falling rolls and surplus capacity. Teaching and learning was discussed at every meeting and some classroom related recommendations have been included. However, most of these issues are already well addressed in policy and guidance at both local and national levels. This document focuses on those areas where previous guidance was weak, lacking or in need of an update.

The recommendations form the Kent County Council Primary Strategy, providing a basis for decision making until they are replaced or amended formally by the County Council. They will be applied in partnership with the Church Authorities (who are statutory partners in the planning and organisation of school places) and within the legislative framework.



Local Authority

1. The core local authority should develop as a small, and essentially a strategic, commissioning, monitoring, evaluating and (if necessary) an intervention service to ensure that children's and families' rights are protected.



Clusters

2. The cluster model is now integral to the way we organise and support education in Kent. Clusters should now move to becoming more autonomous Education Improvement Partnerships (EIPs) responsible for the collaborative delivery of all education services locally.
3. The local authority should examine models of collaborative management used in other countries in order to see what elements may be useful in the development of clusters.
4. The appointment of serving primary headteachers for limited periods to strategic management roles within clusters and to posts within the core local authority officer group should be encouraged to strengthen the partnership approach.
5. Clusters should develop and grow alongside multi-agency Children's Consortia arrangements, structures being coterminous or jointly managed.
6. Cluster Action Plans should be further developed to become Service Level Agreements (SLAs) for the devolution of staff and other resources, and to provide a consistent basis from which they can be negotiated.
7. More devolution/delegation of resources should take place, particularly those related directly to school improvement.
8. Clusters should be encouraged to create 'local partnership funds' (where appropriate) to fund collaborative projects and staffing. Contributions from each school within the cluster could be related to individual budget size.
9. Paediatric services (for example CAMHS, school nurses and speech therapy) currently within the health service, should be integrated with other children, families and education services currently managed within the local authority. All these services should be linked into clusters at local level.
10. Cluster Boards should take a lead in monitoring the quality of Children's Centres and ensuring that there is an appropriate distribution of services locally.
11. In order to improve standards in pre-school provision, voluntary and private providers should be affiliated to local schools and supported by local cluster arrangements.
12. Headteachers must develop their role as 'leaders of learning' within their communities, and using the cluster model they must embrace the concept of 'distributive leadership' in order to ensure that all aspects of this increasingly broad role are delivered effectively.
13. Primary schools and clusters must develop stronger links with Higher Education to ensure that Initial Teacher Education supports the Kent Primary Strategy.



School organisation

14. All-through primary schools, rather than separate infant and junior schools, are generally preferred, as they help to eliminate barriers to children's learning by providing continuity of experiences, which in turn leads to an overall higher quality of educational achievement.
15. Amalgamation of separate infant and junior schools should be considered when it becomes known that a headteacher is about to leave.
16. The three-tier system of education (first, middle and upper school) is both incompatible with current national strategies, and impedes continuity.
17. All children should be educated, wherever possible, in schools of a sufficient size to ensure appropriate staffing levels for effective curriculum delivery.
18. Wherever possible schools should be helped to organise in whole year groups (i.e. 1 FE with seven classes, 2 FE with fourteen classes). Wherever possible 2 FE is preferable in terms of effective deployment of resources.
19. New schools should be planned to have either seven or fourteen classes. Any school built as 1 FE should if possible have a site capable of development to 2 FE, and be built with infrastructure (e.g. hall size) that can be added to easily.
20. Only in exceptional circumstances should primary schools be built or developed to have more than 420 pupils.
21. Primary schools that do exceed 420 pupils currently, or in exceptional circumstances grow beyond that size, should not be 'de-merged', as they are preferable to separate infant and junior schools.
22. Schools that are forced by pupil numbers to operate mixed-age classes should only do so if they can have no more than two year-groups within any class, and do not bridge key stages.
23. Primary schools should not generally fall below 100 pupils, beyond which it would become difficult to sustain four classes without significant additional funding.
24. Four classes is the lower size limit for an effective school, below which point some classes would need to contain children from three or more year groups.
25. The local authority should explore the concept of all-through, cross-phase schools.
26. Within an overall policy of inclusion, special schools and units need to be retained for a small minority of children who cannot realise their full potential within mainstream classes.



Falling rolls and surplus capacity

27. Wherever surplus primary capacity is projected to rise above 7% in any cluster area, proposals should be brought forward to reduce it to 5%.
28. In making any proposal for closure, the capacity of a school to provide effective educational and social provision for each child should be the prime consideration.
29. When considering proposals to reduce numbers of schools in any area, whether they really do serve the community in which they are sited, whether that community can sustain them, their physical condition, and their ability to deliver a full range of curriculum and social experiences should be examined.
30. Where excess space is generated by falling rolls, provision of extended schools, community and/or early years and childcare facilities should be given priority consideration.
31. Multi-agency provision should be provided, wherever possible, on school sites.
32. Capital receipts generated from redundant school sites should be re-invested into other education or community facilities locally.



Federations

33. Federations of schools should be supported, particularly schools in need of support being federated with strong schools.
34. Federations should not be used as a way of stopping amalgamations or closures if this course of action is a more effective way of dealing with surplus capacity.
35. When Federations lead to a reduction of fixed costs, the schools involved should be able to retain any savings.



School leadership

36. In order to attract more experienced candidates for headships, governors should be encouraged to consider appointing single headteachers to two or more schools.
37. The role of the 'extended school' leader should be explored as a separate function from that of the 'traditional' headteacher.
38. Succession planning for school leaders of the future must become a major emphasis for the local authority. A new profession-wide continuing professional development (CPD) strategy needs to be developed for all staff.
39. Opportunities must be provided for professionals in schools other than headteachers, especially senior staff, to be provided with organisational development opportunities.
40. In order to support retention, and to bring staff to Kent, a programme of sabbaticals for headteachers, teachers and other staff should be developed.
41. A minimum of 0.5 release time (or an alternative arrangement that equates to this) needs to be provided for all headteachers to enable them to undertake their school management roles.



Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

42. Every primary child should have access to a personal, preferably portable, computer.
43. All primary schools should be connected to the internet, with wireless networks in place to enable electronic learning everywhere on the school's site. This requirement should be built into new school building briefs.
44. All primary teachers should have their own portable personal computers, and whiteboards should be available in every classroom.
45. In order to make full use of changes to education being brought about by information technology, the local authority should review the way in which learning, teaching and the curriculum are currently delivered in our primary schools.
46. Schools should consider how they can help their children in the achievements of economic well-being by building aspects of vocational education into the curriculum.



General

47. Children should be encouraged to evaluate their own performance.
48. A passion for learning, aesthetics, ethics and spiritual values should be part of every child's experience of learning.
49. School Councils should be encouraged for pupils in every primary school, but with real responsibility.
50. We must do all we can to cut bureaucracy to allow teachers and schools to increase their effectiveness.



The Kent Primary Strategy Group



The Kent Primary Strategy Group comprised the following headteachers:

Name	School	Cluster
Sarah Beale	Westmeads Community Infant School	Canterbury Coastal
John Bird	St. Mary's CE Primary School, Folkestone	Shepway I
Ruth Bowers	St. Botolph's CE Primary School, Chevening	Sevenoaks South
Dot Bromley	Murston Infant School	Swale Urban
Paul Chandler	St. James' CE Junior School	Tunbridge Wells
Andrew Crossley-Holland	Meopham Community Primary School	Gravesham
Terri Davies*	Christ Church CE Junior School	Thanet 2
Ian Fidge*	Selling CE Primary School	Swale Rural
Sharon Irvine**	St. Peter-in-Thanet CE Junior School	Thanet 2
Jane Macey	Hamstreet Primary School	Ashford Rural
Hilary MacDonald	Salmestone Primary School	Thanet 1
Norman Moore	Sutton Valence Primary School	Maidstone I
Leigh Mortimer	Greatstone Primary School	Shepway Rural
Anna Newton	Bridge & Patixbourne CE Primary School	Canterbury City & Country
Mike Olley	Paddock Wood Primary School	Cranbrook & Paddock Wood
Jay Pye	Loose Junior School	Maidstone (MC2)
Andy Sparks***	Cecil Road Primary School	Gravesham
Gail Spragg	St. Mary's CE Primary School, Chilham	Ashford (A.S. One)
Graham Stabbs	Warden House Primary School	Deal & Sandwich
Sue Tunnicliffe	Kings Hill School	Malling
Liz Waller	St. Mary's CE Primary School, Dover	Dover
Bill Watson	Temple Hill Community Primary School	Dartford (East & West)
Judith Webster	Hextable Infant School	Swanley & District
Brenda Windsor**	Hernhill CE Primary School	Swale Rural
Annemarie Whittle	St. Margaret Clitherow Catholic Primary School	Tonbridge

* These headteachers attended in the initial stages

** These headteachers replaced others part-way through

*** As chairman of Primary Forum