

### **Appendix 3: Sufficiency of childcare provision & diversity and parental choice**

In order to meet the requirements of The Childcare Act 2006, during 2007/08 Children's Services will be conducting a 'Childcare Sufficiency Assessment' which must be carried out every three years and reviewed annually. We have already started this childcare assessment by commissioning a research company called RSUK Ltd to conduct a large consultation exercise with prospective parents and existing parents of children aged 0 to 15 years (17 years for children with special needs), to find out what parents think of their current childcare arrangements, what their future childcare requirements will be, what they have found to be barriers to accessing childcare, etc. We are also consulting with children and some particular groups, such as teenage parents and parents of children with special needs to gather their opinions.

The second part of the assessment is an exercise to map the supply of childcare places, which is really a large childcare census. Darlington Borough Council's Children's Information Service will start to gather this information from formally registered childcare providers and the more informal groups during May, June and July 2007.

The exercise comparing demand with supply should take place during August to September 2007 and it is hoped that an action plan will show how the 'gaps will be bridged' by November 2007 – we then need to ensure that the originally consulted groups have access to this plan and can comment. It is anticipated that implementation of the action plan will begin in the January 2008.

#### **Diversity of School provision /parental choice**

Darlington as an authority actively promotes diversity in education and supports and encourages denominational provision.

Within Darlington there is currently: -

- 1 Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Comprehensive School
- 5 Community Comprehensive Schools
- 1 Foundation Secondary School
- 4 Roman Catholic Voluntary Aided Primary Schools
- 3 Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary Schools
- 3 Church of England Voluntary Controlled Primary Schools
- 3 Community Infant Schools
- 3 Community Junior Schools
- 14 Community Primary Schools
- 1 Community Special School

Plans are now well underway to replace Eastbourne Comprehensive School with Eastbourne Church of England Academy with effect from September 2007, which will further increase the diversity of school provision in Darlington.

The Authority enjoys excellent working relationships with the schools, Diocesan representatives in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle and the

Anglican Diocese of Durham respectively, welcoming their valuable input and support in the continuing development of education within the Borough.

Darlington has also ensured that it is fully aware of, and has been proactive in responding to, recent and significant changes to the way in which Voluntary Aided schools' building works are funded and is supporting the Dioceses in the smooth implementation of these changes across our Voluntary Aided schools. The Authority supported the Church of England in its bid to change the status of Middleton St George Primary School.

We will continue to consult with the Dioceses and other faith groups, where there is a clear local demand, on the organisation and planning of school places in the Borough taking full account of all views and opinions expressed.

### **School Admissions /Parental Choice**

Darlington as an authority does not use a system of catchment areas for the allocation of school places. Parental preference is complied with wherever space is available in the requested school. For admission to secondary schools, parents express their preferences for particular schools in the authority and preference is given to pupils who have expressed a first preference for the school. Admissions criteria apply to schools that are over-subscribed.

Every child and young person up to the age of nineteen resident in the Borough has access to appropriate educational provision.

The Authority monitors trends in pupil numbers against the capacity of schools in each part of the Borough and will publish its findings for the information of parents, schools and local communities.

Where any significant deficit or surplus of school places is identified, the Authority will involve its partners in considering what action might be appropriate. These partners will include:

- school governing bodies and headteachers
- children and young people, parents and carers
- the Anglican and Roman Catholic dioceses (where denominational schools are involved)
- further education colleges and the local Learning and Skills Council (in the case of provision for pupils aged 14-19)
- the Children's Trust.

When considering any action to change school provision, the Authority and its partners will take account of:

- the likely impact on standards of education
- the provision of integrated services to meet the needs of local communities
- securing value for money
- promoting sustainable means of home to school travel.

The Authority supports these principles in school organisation:

- primary schools in preference to separate infant and junior schools

- the inclusion of the majority of pupils with special educational needs within mainstream schools
- a range of provision for pupils with more complex special needs, where such needs cannot be met within a mainstream school
- diversity of provision, including denominational schools and specialist secondary schools.

The Authority does not support the selection of pupils by academic ability.

The Authority will support the governing bodies of schools wishing to form federations where this is clearly in the interest of pupils, parents, and school staff.

The Authority aims to support schools in making cost-effective education provision, by ensuring that no school should have 25% or more surplus places, and that the overall level of surplus places should not exceed 10% in either the primary or secondary phase.

School buildings are a valuable community resource that can offer services in addition to education during and outside the school day. The planning of school places will be set in the context of providing integrated services for children, young people and families.