

FLDRA Briefing July 2019

Primary school places: Confusion and disaster

Parents in the FLDRA have had difficulties accessing a local primary school for thirty years. However we are now in a new situation of further population growth and even more difficulties, made worse by actions from those tasked with making sure provision is available. It has been announced that the provision of places at Bowes Southgate Green will be ended completely from the next (2020) admissions round.

How does it all work? Pupil numbers

Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to provide sufficient pupil places. They collect data from various sources covering live births, population projections, any major new housing developments, etc and hold an ongoing plan to meet need. If the projected numbers do not fit the number of places available, it is their responsibility to act. Falling rolls can mean school closures; rising numbers can mean expanding existing schools or opening a new school.

Rising numbers

Every school has a Pupil Admission Number (PAN), almost always a multiple of 30 representing 1 reception class. This is called Form of Entry (FE). 1FE = 30, 2FE = 60. etc. The school can be forced to take more pupils up to that number, and can refuse to take any more than that number. If an area is short of places or expected to need more places in the future, the local authority has to act. A short-term bulge, just for a year or two, is often managed by approaching local schools to ask if they are able and willing to take on an extra class just for one year, a 'bulge class'. The LA will look at the schools and agree the one best placed to take the extra class (because of their location, the extra space they can use, etc). With a 'bulge class' the LA agree to fund the 30 places created however many children actually enroll, so if 20 turn up they are funded through the normal per head route and the other 10 places are funded by the LA directly. Each primary pupil is worth perhaps £3500 so funding those 10 empty places would cost the LA £35,000 p.a. as the bulge class moves up through the school.

A long-term increase means either extending a school to increase its PAN permanently – eg. Garfield has been rebuilt as a larger 3FE school, using DfE capital funding channeled through LB Enfield– or proposing a completely new additional school. Under current legislation the local authority is not allowed to open a new school itself. There are 2 possible routes:

1. The local authority announce that a new school is needed and run a public competition inviting anyone out there, usually in reality existing academy trusts, to submit proposals against a brief. The LA choose their favourite and submit that recommendation to the DfE, for approval and then the necessary capital funding
2. Anyone out there can submit a detailed Free School application to the DfE but this will only succeed if there really is an agreed Basic Need case and it is a deprived area; very very few now go through

Different local authorities have taken different approaches, so for example in Barnet the LA has worked in partnership with its secondary schools to support them in bidding to open the necessary extra schools.

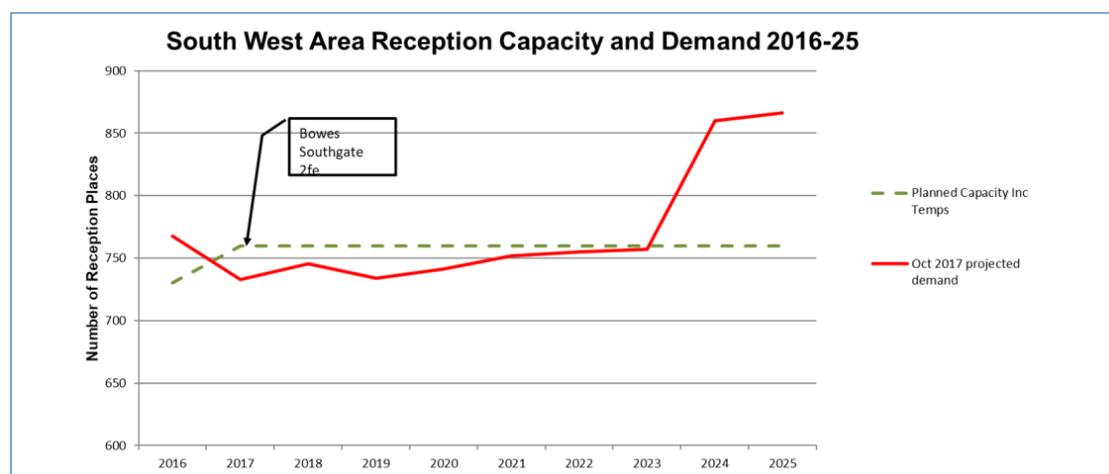
How many children? How much demand?

FLDRA are very confident that all our local primary schools are full to bursting and that at the very least the current Southgate Green provision is essential, in fact we are confident that in 2020 a 2FE provision is essential. Then Cabinet Member for Childrens Services Cllr Achilleas Georgiou and local officer Keith Rowley both wrote in February 2019: "locally we are in discussion with one of the schools in the area if it is necessary to open an additional class for 2020" which with Southgate Green would add up to 2FE.

Council Pupil Planning papers (Strategy and Approach to delivering pupil places, March 2018) continue to include a graph for SW Enfield showing demand only being met by a 2FE provision at Southgate Green (or somewhere else):

The SW area shows demand beyond capacity, rising to a predicted need of around 2FE by 2022. The current planned capacity includes a temporary 2FE at Bowes Southgate Green (at Broomfield Secondary) but complications on agreeing the lease between Broomfield and ELT bring into doubt whether this provision can be sustained as a long term solution.

Without Southgate Green the provision, green dotted line, is well below the demand, straight red line. NB the rapid rise in the graph from 2023 was a calculation error, it should be much flatter.



The case of Southgate Green

This provision was set up before Bowes decided to academise as from 1 September 2016 (it's now called Enfield Learning Trust). Bowes school leaders seem to have worked closely with the LA and in particular the then Cabinet Member Cllr Ayfer Orhan, to fill gaps in provision as they also opened Bowes Edmonton on the same basis. (Bowes Edmonton is now a full school as Delta Academy, after negotiations with the DfE). The stated plan was that Southgate Green would be temporarily housed on the Broomfield School site until its new permanent site was ready, and then it would move in. There is no doubt that the permanent site intended was the space adjoining Grovelands Park. LB Enfield promoted Southgate Green as a separate 'school' with its own school number and admissions. However this plan was never legal (see above); the Southgate Green pupils were and remain a 'bulge class' located in an annexe to the main Bowes building, which is on a site too tight to be extended. When Ofsted inspected in 2013 they used the expression 'bulge classes'.

In 2018 Southgate Green parents were told that a deal had been agreed with Broomfield School to continue to lease space there with everyone keeping an eye on pupil numbers – Broomfield could point out that rising primary numbers lead to rising secondary numbers, and they might need the space back. Parents were also told that DfE had agreed to make Bowes into a 3FE school, across the two sites. That would make future intakes no longer 'bulge' classes with any shortfall made up by the LA, and perhaps turn existing classes from bulge to mainstream from a funding point of view.

Now, Southgate Green parents have been told:

As you know, the additional Reception class that we admit every September at Southgate Green is known as a 'bulge class'. For 6 years, Enfield have agreed to fund these extra places to meet local demand. We have recently been informed by Enfield that they will not require places in September 2020. For this reason, we will

not be admitting any further reception pupils to the site, following the cohort that will be admitted in September 2019

The Academy Trust says that it is Enfield Council that is closing down this provision. They also say that no new lease has been signed with Broomfield School, which would mean that in theory Bowes would need to vacate the site completely almost immediately, although parents have been told that "Broomfield have verbally confirmed that we will be able to remain on their site going forward".

FLDRA have made enquiries of the Council's Pupil Place Planning officer, of local councilors and of Enfield Learning Trust (Bowes school) but with no definitive information at time of writing.

A new school: Grovelands

LB Enfield have been looking at providing a new school close to Grovelands Park for at least five years. They own part of the site, the derelict tennis courts and surrounds accessed through the Priory drive entrance, and a further large piece of land is owned by the water board who are happy to sell. This would be perfectly big enough for a 2FE or 3FE primary school. The site has drawbacks, for example its entrance would need to come directly off The Bourne. The main problem is that much of the site is a Grade 2 listed 'at risk' landscape for which Historic England has responsibility, and negotiations came to nothing. The council officer dealing with pupil places has told FLDRA that LB Enfield are not looking at Grovelands to house an extra primary school and neither are the DfE, who would need to progress the matter as the site for an academy.

The council has at no stage attempted to use the public competition route to secure an extra school in South West Enfield. An existing academy trust, Lime Trust, ran a consultation about setting up a new school in the area but there was no outcome in the form of a free school. Lime Trust does, we believe, hold an agreed free school application from 2016 which was intended for a different site in the borough, eventually taken up by another Trust's own free school agreement, but the agreement with DfE is still in place.

If there were no barriers to a new school on this site, it would not actually be ready to admit children for some time, perhaps September 2021 in temporary accommodation.