



Black Firs Primary School

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Teacher: Mr M Casserley

Mr. B. Slater,
Cheshire County Council,
County Hall,
Chester, CH1 1SQ

18th July 2008

Dear Mr. Slater,

TLC review

Position and issues for Black Firs School

The Full Governing Body of Black Firs School met on Wednesday 16th July and wish to raise the following points with regards to TLC review:

1. Reducing the PAN of schools is 'smoke and mirrors' it does not save or recoup any resource in removing surplus places. Aided schools can and do ignore them to suit, therefore disadvantaging LA schools, e.g. Astbury PAN 16 applied to increase it to 18 but have 21 on books for September. If falling rolls will impact our locality then surely every school should slightly reduce its PAN? Otherwise some schools are reduced at the expense of others. Why not reduced all school PANs by 10%?

Net Capacity calculations. Because we are not typical – our mixed team-teaching models, holistic curriculum, use of the School as a whole learning environment - we don't 'fit' LA / DCSF forms and tick sheets. This has led to assumptions being made about our current sufficiency assessment? We challenged your published assumptions when we met at Black Firs. Governors can't understand why the LA wants to reduce our PAN, it will not save any money – nor does it cost the LA any more to leave our PAN at 40. By law all schools have to maintain pupil: teacher ratios in KS1 of 30. A PAN of 34? How can we deliver infant class sizes for 12 extra children, the funding would not cover the cost of a full teacher. We have recently challenged the accuracy of our published net capacity of 240 with Ken White, Planning and Development Officer. He has reviewed our School plans and has re-calculated our net capacity to 270 giving us a PAN of 38.

Governors have agreed that we will compromise with the TLC process, and accept a reduction in PAN to 38.

2. The LA policy has been NOT to replace or repair mobiles, "Natural way of reducing surplus capacity is to remove mobiles". Why should local schools be allowed to maintain or achieve higher Net Capacity if the quality of the mobile accommodation is old and poorly maintained? Black Firs Governors used 3 years of our DFC to build, replacing our mobile classroom. If schools in Congleton are expected to reduce PANs to match their net capacity, Governors believe that mobile classrooms should be removed from a schools net capacity before such reductions are made.

We refurbished the mobile to develop our extended school services to best serve our community. Why should we now lose out because we have tried to address Full Core Offer Extended School and lost capacity to achieve this? Other schools have ignored the requirement, under spent their budgets, and are now being

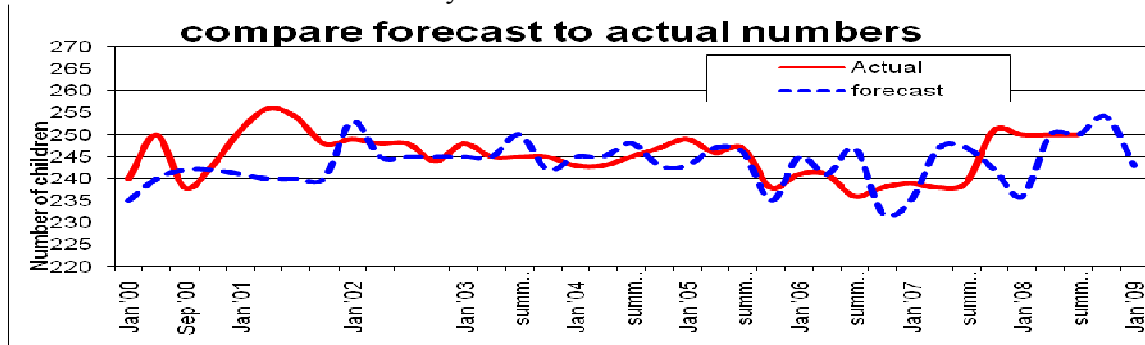
financially rewarded with higher possible PANs & could become eligible for Building Schools for the Future funding?

3. What about equitable access to services and children's centres – why is improved access only for areas of deprivation? We were given data in May 2006 that a 3rd phase universal children's centre would be required in West Heath (this was based on Sure Starts footprint map). Ric Turnock, LA Children's Centre Strategy Manager, now tells us in Jan '08, that the Government had increased the pre-school population totals per footprint, so that a 2nd centre for Congleton was now no longer required. We believe that this creates an unfair system – Congleton EIP has agreed that equity to basic services is the right of *all* children who live in Congleton regardless of their background.

We have plans to expand and extend child / community services; we require a larger more purpose built pre-school facility. Our community are keen to see a NHS dentist and (at least a part-time) doctors consulting room. The Governing Body has discussed the possibility of borrowing monies to build and extend the current facilities.

4. Reducing our PAN will reduce parental choice. We are always being told that successful schools will survive and expand but we seem to be suffering by being successful? Over the last decade we have been a very popular school in Congleton because of our unique child centred, holistic curriculum based around life-long learning & emotional intelligence through Sport & Performance Arts. We are also academically very successful – top 2.5% for CVA. Parents have no choice because we cannot accommodate all the children in our current catchment. Financial break-even is about 250 for our current style of delivery – if we fall below this figure then we cannot maintain staffing levels.

5. The forecast for Black Firs has always been inaccurate



In an More Open Enrolment admissions market, this Governing Body could foresee Black Firs becoming a School of around 260-270; we would not want to grow beyond this figure. This would give BFS the financial viability to maintain our current team-based delivery model without having a detrimental impact on the child-centred 'family feel' we have now.

Unless LA effectively reduces surplus school accommodation, saving money, & can redistribute the saved resources to school budgets they will have to do this exercise all over again at what additional financial cost?

Yours sincerely,

D. Whitewright,
Chair of Governors