

Maidstone Primary Free School - Urgent Need

Background

- Kent Commissioning Plan for Education Provision 2017-2021 forecasts considerable pressure for Primary age provision, predominately within Maidstone Town. These pressures have been highlighted in successive iterations of the Kent Commissioning Plan.
- The LA held a seminar (July 2016) in conjunction with DfE to encourage potential sponsors of Free Schools in West Kent, including the Maidstone North primary provision. Information packs evidencing demand were produced and Kent Sponsors were invited. It was clear to all parties, including the DfE and potential sponsors that the new Free School provision was required for September 2018.
- A Wave 12 application has been approved for the 'Maidstone Primary Academy' to open in September 2018, operated by Leigh Academies Trust. Due to delays acquiring the site, this can now only be achieved with the provision of temporary accommodation. Our discussions with the Trust indicate their openness to opening the school in temporary accommodation, although their preference would be for this to be accommodated within the eventual school site.

Primary

The significant deficit in places in the Maidstone North planning group of schools compared to the number of pupils in the area is not visible in the current forecasts. This is because the long running pressure has been accommodated within the Maidstone Central and South planning groups of schools over the last two years. However, the travel to school pattern now shows a deficit of up to -74 places by 2020-21. If the Maidstone North Free School is not operational by September 2018, primary aged children will have to travel long distances, creating unsustainable travel routes.

The Jubilee Primary School (PS) was proposed to open as a two form entry (60 pupils per year group) Free School within the Maidstone North planning group, serving Vinters Park and surrounding areas. However, in September 2014 Jubilee PS was established in Gatland Lane - Maidstone West planning group of schools. Whilst the Free School provided additional capacity to Maidstone it did not resolve the pressures within the planning group.

A reduction of 30 Year R places at Jubilee PS for September 2016 was imposed by Maidstone Borough Council as a result of a planning condition. KCC was not officially notified until February 2016.

Migration into Maidstone from London Boroughs is high and generally unplanned. According to UK migration statistics, 2015¹ 134 families moved into Maidstone from London, 36 into London from Maidstone (net 98 into Maidstone from London). However, since September 2016 a large concentration of families have moved into central Maidstone from London Boroughs at short notice. Together these factors exacerbated the demand for Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 places in central Maidstone. To date more than 90 applications (i.e. 3 forms of entry) for casual admissions in Year R and Key Stage 1 have been received since September 2016.

To meet the shortfall in places, we have undertaken various permanent and temporary expansions of existing schools, including South Borough Primary (Academy) increasing permanently to 2FE and additionally taking a bulge to 3FE in successive years. All of these options have now been exhausted.

As at 23 May 2017, Maidstone Primary Schools cumulatively exceed their Published Admissions Numbers by 155 pupils. This excludes circa 50 additional pupils that schools have elected to admit over-PAN into junior classes. **Simply put there is no capacity for existing schools to expand further or to admit additional pupils over-PAN to meet a delay in the 2FE urgently required at the Maidstone North Free School provision.**

If the Maidstone Primary Academy is delayed beyond September 2018, there is a very real prospect of KCC being unable to offer children a local school place in the next admissions round.

¹ UK migration statistics - this is the latest available data, the next release will be August 2017 for year to 30th June 2016.