

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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COMMITTEE	<b>Education, Culture and Sport</b>
DATE	<b>27 March 2014</b>
DIRECTOR	<b>Gayle Gorman</b>
TITLE OF REPORT	<b>Review of Denominational Primary Schools Interim Report</b>
REPORT NUMBER:	<b>ECS/14/023</b>

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### **1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The report provides Members with an interim position on the review of denominational primary schools in the City.

### **2. RECOMMENDATION(S)**

Members are asked to note:

2.1 The Council's continuing commitment to denominational education and to the securing of an appropriate and sustainable school estate for denominational provision;

2.2 In respect of St Peter's Primary:

- a) To note the constraints of the existing physical accommodation and site of the school;
- b) To note that work will continue to develop a sustainable solution to this situation;
- c) To note that wider discussions between Council Directorates will continue in order to review the medium to long term implications for all Council Services on the existing site;
- d) To note that discussions are continuing regarding suitable long term solutions and that these options will be reported to a future Committee.

2.3 That in respect of St Joseph's Primary:

Officers are requested to:

- a) progress the negotiation of a short term extension to leasing arrangements for the property at Queens Road in order to secure use of the property beyond the end of the current lease in 2015;
- b) explore longer term implications of accessibility issues at the school

- c) explore whole life costs in respect of longer term leasing of the property.

2.4 That in respect of all issues:

- a) Continue to liaise with Parent Councils ;
- b) Continue to consult with the Bishop of Aberdeen on all of the matters outlined in this report.

### **3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no immediate financial implications. However, there will be revenue costs when the lease is renewed.

There will also be capital implications to fulfil the DDA requirements and this will be routed through the Council's Corporate Asset Group.

### **4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

N/A

### **5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

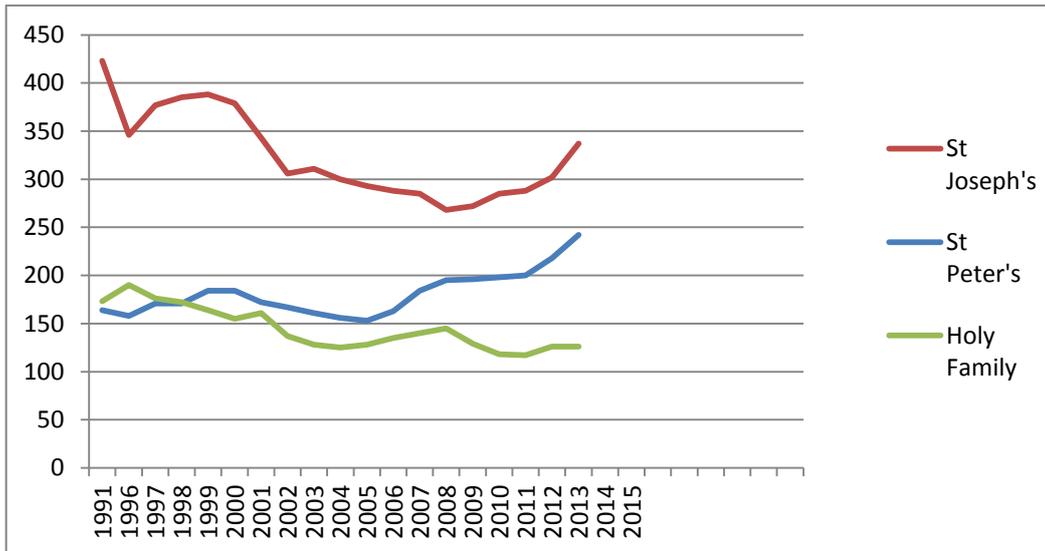
Aberdeen City Council operates three Denominational Primary Schools.

St Peter's Primary is situated in Old Aberdeen (Dunbar Street), St Joseph's Primary is in the "west end" of the City in Queens Road and Holy Family Primary, further west again in the City, is in Summerhill Terrace (Summerhill / Mastrick)

The City is split into three, extensive catchment areas for denominational education and in addition provides places for Aberdeenshire pupils, as historically, denominational provision was always within the City itself. Beyond the three Primary Schools mentioned above and the peripatetic support to pupils in City Academies, there is no other denominational provision in the City or Shire.

#### **5.2 School rolls**

Of the three schools being reviewed, each has seen changes in the trends related to their rolls over the last 5 – 8 years.



5.2.1 Holy Family has seen the downward trend in its roll end over the last 4 years with numbers generally holding steady since then, whilst St Peter's and St Joseph's have seen numbers rise since 2005 and 2008 respectively. A steeper climb in rolls has been seen in the last two years in those two schools.

The suggested reasons behind these changes in rolls have a degree of similarity.

5.2.2 St Peter's Primary, with its proximity to the University of Aberdeen is the school of choice for a number of staff and students seeking denominational education. The school also has a good reputation and undoubtedly there are attractions for some families with regard to a "faith based school" albeit they may not be Catholic, for example. Placing requests have been a feature of past years although more recently pressure on places has meant that fewer of these are able to be supported. Lastly, the immediately adjacent neighbourhoods of the St Peter's catchment area have become home to many migrant families.

With a maximum capacity of 258 and a 2013 role of 242, St Peter's requires 11 class spaces.

5.2.3 St Joseph's similarly has seen a rise in the numbers of children of migrant families. There are a wide range of nationalities represented within the overall school population. In common with Holy Family these families are, in many instances, seeking a faith based environment. In contrast to Holy Family, a number of these families are travelling some distance to access education at St Joseph's. The school is also located on a well used route in and out of the City and it is believed that this is a consideration for families who, as a consequence of its advantageous location, submit placing requests.

With a capacity of 442 and a 2013 role of 337, St Joseph's is at 76% capacity.

5.2.4 In the case of Holy Family, the school has seen a number of families move to the area who have shown an interest in a school that provides a faith based

ethos or atmosphere. A number of these families are Asian in background. In some cases they have moved from other parts of Aberdeen in search of improved housing options. Generally speaking these children live in reasonable proximity to the school.

With a capacity of 145 and a 2013 role of 126, Holy Family is at 87% capacity.

5.2.5 With future population growth in the City being clearly signalled, it may be reasonable to expect that the demand for places at these schools will continue to grow. In the main, current evidence seems to suggest the migration into the city has been the greatest contributory factor. With regard to the three denominational schools in the city, the impacts of the multiple housing developments scheduled across the city have not been factored into the roll forecasts. The School Roll Forecast only forecasts the likely pupil numbers within each non-denominational school zone. There is no accepted methodology which forecasts the potential number of denominational children from housing developments. It would be reasonable to assume though that these developments, matched with the migration patterns into the city, point to a further period of growing demand for places within these schools.

5.3 The approach taken for the review to date and early conclusions.

5.3.1 The Council, in undertaking this review has indicated its commitment to denominational provision.

The review has initially focused on the situation facing St Peter's and St Joseph's Primaries. The pressures on and the challenges facing these two schools are more acute than those being experienced at Holy Family Primary hence the degree of priority being given.

St Peter's School has the greatest pressure on space due to increasing rolls over past years and indications are that this is likely to continue to be the case.

St Joseph's School occupies a building leased from a religious society based in Dublin. The school transferred to local authority control in 1970 and the property has been leased by predecessor authorities since then. The present lease comes to an end in 2015.

In due course greater detailed work will be undertaken with regard to Holy Family School. It is a 1960's designed building with some design and usage limitations and perhaps only a medium term lifespan.

Introductory meetings with Parent Councils at St Peter's and St Joseph's have taken place and these have been positive and well received by those in attendance. Once more detail is available further updates to parent Councils will be given.

An initial meeting has been held with the Bishop of Aberdeen and in line with legislation, he has been advised of the work of the review. He will be kept

advised of progress on the review. The Bishop will require to be consulted further once final proposals/options are developed.

#### 5.3.2 Initial conclusions of the review are as follows:

- The three schools perform well and are popular and well regarded by parents;
- Parents value the opportunity of a “faith based” learning and teaching environment;
- Indications are that demand for places at the schools will continue to grow for the foreseeable future;
- In the short to medium term a more sustainable solution to the St Peter’s accommodation must be found. The current design of the accommodation, its spread across a number of buildings on the site and the relatively poor quality of, and pressure on, outdoor space are all factors that should be addressed;
- That immediate steps are required to address the pressure for places for P1 children at St Peter’s for school session beginning August 2014. Officers are urgently developing a solution, including for example, consideration of accessing additional space within Old Aberdeen House or additional temporary accommodation;
- It may not be possible to deliver a long term future for St Peter’s on the existing site. However evidence would point to an alternative within the same broad vicinity as being the preferred outcome;
- In the case of St Joseph’s more detailed conversations require to be had with the owners and options regarding future arrangements or relationships explored;
- As a minimum, a short term extension to the lease must be negotiated;
- As a teaching and learning environment, the building has both positive and less positive attributes;
- In order to meet the aspirations of the Council in terms of the quality of provision it would wish to see, a number of packages of internal work require to be undertaken in the short to medium term;

## 6. IMPACT

Aberdeen – the Smarter City:

This report contributes to the *Smarter People* outcome through the provision of high quality education that improves the attainment and life chances of children.

Corporate:

This report fits within the second of the six key priorities of the five year business plan:

“Help to ensure that all school children reach their potential”

People:

There are no staffing implications other than those that will flow from the established formula for staffing levels at a particular school.

Systems and Technology:

There are no systems and technology implications.

Property:

The property implications are encapsulated within the earlier sections of this report.

Risk Management:

It is important to reach agreement on the steps to secure the provision of education at these schools and to ensure that the school is able to make all necessary arrangements within an appropriate timescale.

Failure to do so might incur the risk of the school not being able to make decisions regarding the admission of pupils within the statutory requirement and in compliance with the Council’s Policy of Local Schooling for Local Children.

Equal Opportunities:

There are no equal opportunities issues raised by this report.

## **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

School Estates Review  
Education, Culture and Sport Committee – 7 February 2013

## **8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS**

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