

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR SCHOOLS & EDUCATION

COUNCILLOR DAVE HARLING

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: LINDA CLEGG
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OFSTED SCHOOL INSPECTIONS

Six inspection reports have been published for schools within the Authority so far in the academic year 2014/15. These are Crosshill Special School, St Francis CE Primary School, St Bede's RC High School, The Heights Free School, Longshaw Infants and Audley Infants. All six schools were judged to be 'good'. This was the first inspection for The Heights and the other 5 schools maintained their current judgement. St Bedes was rated 'outstanding' in the category for Behaviour & Safety of Pupils.

ONLINE SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

The Council for a number of years have had the facility for parents to apply on-line for their child's primary school place at aged 4 and a secondary school place at aged 11. Previously the uptake of this facility had been low, approximately 25% of all preferences were submitted on-line.

For the 2015 September intake, the Council advertised the on-line facility widely, produced flyers which were sent to parents and reduced the amount of hard copy admission booklets that are usually printed.

Each year the Council administers approximately 4,000 admission requests for children aged 4 and 11. As at mid-October, 51% of parents had submitted their school preference on-line. The closing date for secondary applications is October 31 and for primary applications January 15, 2015.

HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT CONSULTATION

A consultation on a number of proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy will open before Christmas 2014. The council currently offers support at a higher level than the legal requirement and it is this *discretionary transport* that will be consulted on.

Discretionary School Transport was previously provided to eligible children attending their nearest faith school. However, following a review and public consultation in 2011, the Council took the decision that all new applications from the academic year 2012 will only be eligible for a free bus pass if they meet the statutory qualifying distance requirements (3 miles for children over the age of 8) and are attending their nearest suitable school. This means a school with places available that provides education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child.

The consultation will be open for a minimum of 28 working days through a combination of paper based and online questionnaires.

CAPITAL PROJECTS OVER SUMMER 2014

Over the summer holiday period 36 individual capital projects were commenced and completed for community and controlled schools in the Borough. The works ranged from minor refurbishment of toilet facilities and decoration through to the complete refurbishment and internal redesign of Lower Darwen Primary School's existing building.

Works were also undertaken in a large number of school kitchens to ensure the Council's compliance with the Universal Infants Free School Meals programme.

ONGOING CAPITAL PROJECTS

Nine large scale capital projects commenced in July and August and are progressing to programme. These include the second phase of Lower Darwen Primary School's expansion to 2 form entry, the replacement of roof timbers at Ashleigh Primary (on-site half term) and the commencement of the over roofing project at Holy Trinity Controlled Primary School.

Officers are now working on the design and procurement of a major works project at Roe Lee Primary, which is programmed to commence in January plus short duration projects such as the minor repointing at Avondale Primary, which can be completed over the half term period in October.

ACADEMIES UPDATE

The Borough currently hosts seven Academies; Darwen Aldridge Community Academy (and Studio School); St Wilfrid's CE High School; Wensley Fold Primary; Witton Park High School, St Lukes and St Phillips CE Primary; Darwen St James CE Primary and St Barnabas CE Primary.

There are four more schools in the formal process of conversion and it is expected that these will convert during the latter part of 2014 and early part of 2015. These are Darwen Vale High School, Tauheedul Islam Girls High School, St Aidens CE Primary and Sudell Primary. It is also expected that Pleckgate High School will commence the process of conversion early in 2015.

There are negative aspects of schools converting to academies not least the forced academisation of schools receiving an Inadequate Rating from an Ofsted inspection. There is clearly a reduction in funding for the LA's school support services, but not a corresponding reduction in LA responsibilities. However, the Council is committed to continue to work with all schools in BwD to improve outcomes for our local children. We aim to continue to build and maintain positive relationships with all our schools.