

## **Response to the Statutory Proposal to Expand Farley Hill Primary School through use of additional premises on the Arborfield Green development from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021.**

Wokingham Borough Council have issued a statutory proposal to expand Farley Hill Primary School through use of additional premises on the Arborfield Green development from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2021. The Keys Academy Trust's response is attached as an appendix.

### **The proposed alterations are:**

- The opening of a second site within the Arborfield Green housing development (accompanied by the temporary closure of the current Farley Hill site) in September 2021.
- The phased expansion of Farley Hill Primary School from 210 places (Reception to Year 6) to 420 places (with the Admission Number increasing to 60 from September 2024) and 630 statutory primary school places (with the Admission Number increasing to 90 from September 2026).
- The opening of a new nursery class from September 2021.

### **Our response is as follows:**

1. There is capacity within the existing schools
2. The impact on neighbouring vulnerable schools such as The Coombes, Finchampstead CE Primary and Gorse Ride Infant and Junior Schools and St Sebastian's CE Primary School is understated in the proposal
3. The reliability of the forecast numbers given earlier expansion in schools across WBC

### **Capacity within existing schools**

The proposal states that the expansion from 210 to 420 will be phased from September 2024. However, we consider there is a threat that parental demand for additional places within an established and oversubscribed school rated good by OFSTED will lobby for early opening of additional classes prior to September 2024. This will have a detrimental impact to neighbouring schools as there is already capacity within them to meet the predicted numbers.

## Neighbouring Vulnerable Schools

The proposal in Appendix A page 7 states that only small proportions of Finchampstead CE Primary and Gorse Ride Schools live in Arborfield and does not acknowledge Arborfield residents attending other schools. From discussions, we understand that the impact in the proposal document is understated due to the small size of these schools. Therefore, the financial impact on these schools will cause significant disruption to the quality of education provided.

The capacity in neighbouring schools is:

School	School Capacity	NOR October 2019	Surplus capacity
The Coombes Primary School	525	418	107
St Sebastian's Primary School	182	141	41
Gorse Ride Infant School	180	142	38
Lambs Lane Primary School	210	200	10
Finchampstead CE Primary School	119	111	8
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>204</b>

## Reliability of the forecast numbers

Whilst we appreciate the challenge of producing reliable predictions of the demand for spaces in schools, consideration should be given to the impact of over expansion in an area where there are a significant number of surplus places within existing schools. There are an increasing number of Headteachers struggling to manage balanced budgets due to falling pupil numbers across Wokingham. By way of example, allocations for school places in September 2019 demonstrate over expansion in existing schools and the impact to neighbouring schools.

School	Planned Admission Number	Places Allocated
Loddon Primary	90	55
Hawkedon Primary	90	75
Beechwood Primary	60	34
Highwood Primary	60	31
Radstock Primary	60	40

For these four schools where additional places were created, the places allocated present extreme challenge financially due to infant class size prejudice legislation i.e. not to exceed class sizes of 30 pupils.

### **Conclusion**

Whilst we recognise the need for additional places in the area and the rationale for the expansion of Farley Hill Primary School on the Arborfield Green site, we strongly believe that it will be to the detriment of existing pupils and their families within Wokingham. We believe it is the Council's responsibility to review the timeframes and support the existing schools within Wokingham, their staff and communities.