

In response to the question asked relating to pupil numbers and the view held by governors that the LA had and have blocked admissions to the school over the past two years, this can best be answered as follows;

Part 1 - statutory responsibilities of the LA in relation to special educational needs

The Head of Special Needs and Inclusion Service has provided the following statement:

The Special Needs service has not restricted in any way the placement of CYP into Queens Park School, or any other special school (the moratorium placed on admissions in April 2010 in response to concerns regarding Health and safety at the school was lifted in November 2010 given the delay in undertaking the Health and Safety Review). Further the LA does and will continue to consult with the school in regards to admissions.

The LA must abide by the regulations enshrined in the 1996 Education Act Part iv and in the Code of Practice for SEN, 2001, and its amendments.

Within the context of the above regulations and guidance the LA must comply with parental preference where ever possible and pay due regard to the contents determined in the nature of a section 323 assessment and take into account schedule 27 of the Education Act 1996.

That is:

Parents may express a preference for the maintained school they wish their child to attend, or make representations for a placement in another school. LA's must comply with parental preference unless the school is unsuitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude or special educational needs, or the placement would be incompatible with the efficient education of the other children with whom the child would be educated, or with the efficient use of resources.

The LA must comply with those requests from parents. This is re-enforced by section 9 of the 1996 Education Act which states that the LA must have regard to the parents wishes, so far as that is compatible with the efficient instruction and training of the child and the avoidance of unreasonable public expenditure.

The LA follows this procedure when placing all children and young people. This means that if a parent expressed a preference to have their child educated at Queens Park School and that there were no issues of concern then the child would be placed there within the context of the guidance. This is also the case for any other special school - however designated.

If there are unresolved difficulties a SEN and disabilities tribunal (first tier court) will determine the outcome.

Part 2 - Health and Safety Review/pupil numbers

Following concerns expressed by the governing body regarding the suitability of the building and potential health and safety matters a review of the school was undertaken by the School Improvement Service, this report was sent to the school on the 27th March 2010. Following a meeting with the CofG on the 26th April a letter was written confirming that a specialist Health and Safety Review would take place and pending the outcome there would be a moratorium on admissions. The review took place on the 1st April 2011 following a protracted correspondence between the LA and the governing body, there were no issues identified that would compromise the health and safety of the children and young people and it recognised that progress had been made by the school in the intervening period in addressing Health and safety matters, in part by the use of additional funding provided to the school by the LA for this purpose. As stated above the moratorium was lifted in November 2010.

Part – 3 Concern expressed by the governors in relation to the low level of admissions to the school over the past two years were discussed and the following factors were identified:

1. Changes in leadership and practice at The Sandon School has resulted in a greater take up of places than was the case, with parents in that area now expressing a preference for this school. this has resulted in a decline in admissions to QP from south Kesteven
2. The creation of two new schools with additional places in Gainsborough has addressed the gap in provision and has reduced the need for CYP to travel to QP to access appropriate educational provision
3. A change in the management of The Beacon Centre in Grantham has enabled one QP pupil to have their needs met at Sandon School and so reduce the need for excessive travel
4. Discussion around budget pressures as a result of reduced numbers identified that the school will be facing a growing deficit over the next three years as the school's budget will be determined on actual pupil numbers and not historic figures. This will require a radical solution aka staff redundancy for the school to be able to set a budget based on income.
5. A comparison of QP admission figures with St Christopher's School (30 in Sept 2011) and St Francis School (17) is not appropriate as at present these schools (St Christopher's) accommodate a much larger range of need than QP or they are a county resource (St Francis) and as a consequence is the only school of its type in the county. Furthermore as the county has 8 other special schools catering for CYP with more SLD and PMLD there is no lack of provision and so the significant majority of CYP with such needs can now have their needs met in their locality. (It needs to be noted that given the low incidence of these types of need the sizes of schools catering for them are for the most part relatively small 45 - 81 pupils - with QP currently having 81 pupils on role, a decline of 10 pupils on 2010/11 with a further predicted decline of 12 pupils by the end of the 2012 academic year).

Further to the meeting with QP governors on the 12th October I write as requested by the chair to provide you with information regarding the application of Building Bulletin 102 and the practices undertaken by LCC officers in costing projects.

Governors were right to point out that BB 102 is guidance only and has no statutory basis. This is not disputed and references to BB102 in the letter sent to Chief Executive of the City Council on the 20th July do not seek to suggest that BB102 is statutory; they do however confirm that the council applies the regulations and complies with them when considering and or undertaking new projects. This has been practice by LCC for a number of years as evidenced by the building of two new special schools in Gainsborough, the application of the previous BB when significant rebuilding took place at The Willoughby School Bourne (resulting in a larger school with better resources but not admitting more pupils as a result) and the building of the four new BESD schools through PFI. Variation from BB102 occurred on the Warren Wood site in Gainsborough, this variation was a result of the Warren Wood and Aegir Schools forming a hard federation which resulted in the need for only one hydrotherapy pool rather than one on each site, as you may remember the space freed up by not having the hydrotherapy pool was used to create a performing arts venue for both schools and community use. There were also a reduced number of hygiene suites (three instead of five) included on the Warren Wood site in response to the predicted demand for PMLD places both now and in the future, again the space freed up was used for other purposes and remains available if the need for additional hygiene suites should arise. It is evident from practice that the county council does not seek to compromise on the expectations of BB102 as it (the council) recognises the value in providing the best possible facilities for children and young people in its schools.

Governors remained concerned about the estimated cost cited for bringing the Myle Cross site up to a standard in 2006/7, following it's closure as a primary school. As you are aware when officers are required to provide costings on such a major project, this is a desk top exercise where all the necessary standards and requirements are taken into account and the appropriate Building Bulletin is applied (in this case 102). Similarly when costing a new school where the site is available headline figures are provided with respect to site clearance and overall building costs. It is not good practice to provide detailed costings when it is evident that a) the overall cost makes it non viable b) where a new build could not be supported through the capital programme. As you are aware the Myle Cross site has been converted for office use (resulting in the closure of 7 regional offices) and as a training centre venue to reduce the county's reliance on expensive commercial venues.