

Review of primary school provision in Torquay:

Consultation on options involving Upton St James Primary School

1. Introduction

The demand for primary school places in Torbay is falling and by January 2010 there could be up to 1000 empty places in Torquay. The Council must manage the supply of school places so that there are not too many empty places, because empty places waste money.

We can reduce the number of empty places by making changes to schools. In Torquay we are consulting over changes to Upton St James, Ellacombe, St Margaret's and Watcombe.

We are consulting with school governors at Ellacombe, St Margaret's and Watcombe about changing the size of these schools.

We are consulting with parents, staff and governors at Upton St James because one of the options for change would involve closing Upton St James and transferring children to other schools.

This paper sets out the background to the fall in pupil numbers, explains the options for change and how these could affect Upton St James in particular.

No decisions have been made and we are holding this consultation to hear the views of parents, staff and governors.

2. Why are pupil numbers falling?

There are several large year groups in Torbay with around 1400 pupils at the older end of the primary school age range and these will move on to secondary school in the next few years.

At the same time, the numbers of 5-year-olds joining school will be much smaller (around 1200 or even less).

This means that in each of the next four years there will be a loss of around 200 pupils each year from primary schools across the Bay. By January 2010 there could be about 1000 empty places in Torquay primary schools.

The smaller year groups are mainly the result of a fall in birth rates.

We use information from the health authority about birth rates to forecast how many school places we will need. We also take into account new housing to work out how many families with children are likely to move into the area. Generally, the number of children joining school at age 5 is higher than the number of births, five years previously.

Forecasting is not easy and things can change from one year to the next, but over the past few years, the Council has been very good at forecasting the overall number of pupils in Torbay primary schools.

Year	Projection	Actual	% Accuracy
2000	9753	9726	99.72%
2001	9768	9740	99.71%
2002	9709	9675	99.65%
2003	9550	9612	99.35%
2004	9343	9516	98.20%

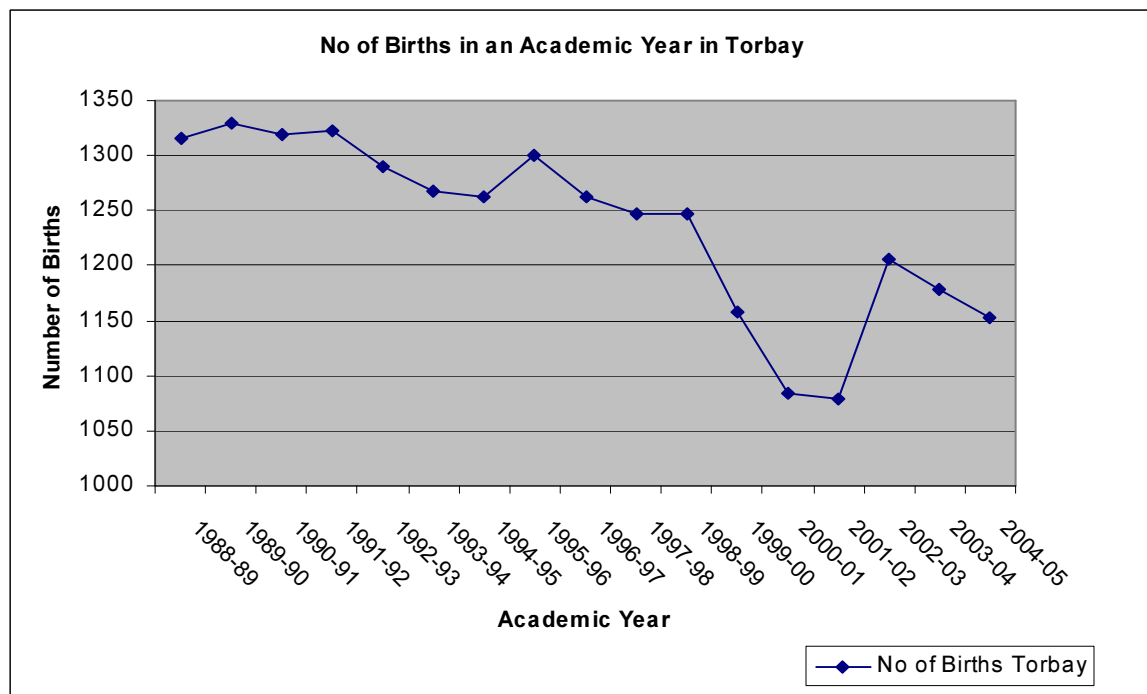
Table 2.1 Accuracy of Pupil Forecasts for Torbay 2000 - 2004

The birth data shows a steady decline in the last few years

Academic Year	No of Births Torbay	No of Births Torquay
1988-89	1315	726
1989-90	1329	714
1990-91	1319	722
1991-92	1323	693
1992-93	1290	688
1993-94	1268	693
1994-95	1263	689
1995-96	1300	698
1996-97	1262	657
1997-98	1246	662
1998-99	1248	665
1999-00	1158	598
2000-01	1085	564
2001-02	1079	570
2002-03	1206	633
2003-04	1179	617
2004-05	1153	605

Table 2.2 (above) Live Births by academic year in Torbay and Torquay.

Graph 2.3 (below) Live Births by academic year in Torbay.



We do not know whether this fall will continue and it is possible that numbers may climb again in a few years. The Torbay trend reflects the national trend of steady decline.

The next table shows the history of primary school numbers in Torquay and how the fall in birth rates will affect the situation in the future.

Year of Births	No. of Births	Year of Entry	Reception Joining	Year 6 Leaving	Gain/ Loss	Total Number of Primary Pupils
1988-89	726	1993-94	762	589	173	4725
1989-90	714	1994-95	741	639	102	4894
1990-91	722	1995-96	724	674	50	4968
1991-92	693	1996-97	764	651	113	5112
1992-93	688	1997-98	718	711	7	4938
1993-94	693	1998-99	695	650	45	5014
1994-95	689	1999-00	704	753	-49	5046
1995-96	698	2000-01	726	739	-13	5074
1996-97	657	2001-02	693	720	-27	5048
1997-98	662	2002-03	671	771	-100	5027
1998-99	665	2003-04	690	746	-56	4963
1999-00	598	2004-05	696	743	-47	4935
2000-01	564	2005-06	575	746	-171	4688
2001-02	570	2006-07	580	761	-181	4588
2002-03	633	2007-08	645	720	-75	4514
2003-04	617	2008-09	629	683	-54	4464
2004-05	605	2009-10	616	710	-94	4401

Table 2.4 Trends in primary school numbers 1988 to 2004 and forecasts to 2005.

If no changes are made to the supply of school places, it will lead to a large increase in surplus places.

Year	Places	Pupils	Surplus Places	% Empty
2004	5464	4963	501	9.2%
2005	5464	4935	529	9.7%
2006	5464	4688	776	14.2%
2007	5464	4588	876	16.0%
2008	5464	4514	950	17.4%
2009	5464	4464	1000	18.3%
2010	5464	4401	1063	19.5%

Table 2.5 Forecast growth in surplus places in Torquay

Some people have highlighted that the Council is forecasting the Bay's population to increase in the next 10 years. This is mainly because older people are expected to live longer.

3. What is the impact of empty places?

As the number of pupils falls, the Council will receive less money from government. Funding for schools is based on a head count of pupils, so with fewer pupils in the Bay, schools will have less funding available.

By the time we have 800 fewer pupils in Torbay primary schools, we will have around £2 million less to spend on education.

This is why a fall in the number of pupils won't mean smaller class sizes. There will not be enough money coming into the Bay to pay for the same number of teachers as we have now. Schools will need to merge classes in order to balance their budgets.

As a result, there will be a smaller number of classes in schools and some classrooms will become empty. These classrooms will still need to be maintained, repaired, cleaned and heated. This is a waste of resources that could be better spent on education.

4. What will happen if no changes are made?

The Council would need to change the way it funds schools to help cope with empty places. There are three options: either money would need to be taken from other areas of education (e.g. secondary schools) to prop up primary schools; the Council could spend less on other services and transfer the funding to education; or the Council could increase the Council Tax to generate extra money.

5. How can empty places be reduced?

There are several ways to do this.

- We could get rid of poor classrooms and make some schools smaller.
- We could convert empty classrooms to be used for other things.
- We could reduce the number of schools and invest the savings in other schools.

Whatever options are followed, reducing the number of empty places is the best solution for schools and pupils because there is more chance that schools will then be able to fill most of their places. This will help them plan the number of teachers they need with more certainty. This will help them to recruit the best teachers if there is job security.

The Council is using all of these ideas to manage surplus places across Torbay:

- Primary School Re-organisation in Brixham from September 2005 to remove 72 places.
- Suggested reduction in Planned Admission Number at Curledge Street so we can remove poor accommodation and reduce overcrowding.

- Suggested reduction in the Planned Admission Number at Watcombe so the spare classrooms can be converted for community use and specialist teaching spaces – a library and an ICT room.
- Suggested closure of Foxhole Infants and Junior Schools to be replaced by a new, smaller primary school.

6. What options are being considered for Torquay?

In addition to the change to Watcombe (see above), we are considering changes to Ellacombe, Upton and St Margaret's.

The Council is putting forward two options for changes in Torquay. One of which involves the closure of Upton, whilst the other protects Upton from change and suggests changes should be made instead at other nearby schools.

Option One

- Closure of Upton St James CE Primary School in July 2006.
- Reduction in PAN at Ellacombe from 60 to 45 with effect from September 2006.
- No change at St Margaret's Primary School.

Option Two

- No change at Upton St James CE Primary School.
- Reduction in PAN at Ellacombe from 60 to 30 with effect from September 2006.
- Reduction in PAN at St Margaret's Primary School from 60 to 45 with effect from September 2006.

But because we are consulting, there may be a third option that emerges as a result of the consultation responses.

Some arguments in favour of Option One

- It will remove 315 school places.
- With 17% surplus places, Torquay does not need 17 primary schools.
- A 210 place primary school costs around £85,000 each year in fixed costs and, by closing Upton, this sort of sum would be paid back into the "schools' block" budget and boost other school budgets. The Council cannot spend the money saved on anything other than education.
- The Council would not need to carry out around £250,000 of Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) works at Upton. If this money did not need to be spent, the DDA work at the remaining schools can go ahead more quickly.
- Reducing the PAN at Ellacombe will enable classrooms to be converted into specialist teaching spaces – a library and an ICT room.

- Making no change at St Margaret's would recognise that when its mobile classroom replacement building is complete later this term, it will be a 2-form entry school in good accommodation.
- The Council could benefit from a small capital receipt.

Some Arguments against Option One

- Pupils at Upton would need to move to new schools.
- There would be sudden job losses at Upton.
- There would be one school fewer for parents to choose from in future years.
- Closure would mean the loss of a community facility.
- Upton is being unfairly "singled out" for closure. Other schools also need DDA work and have some difficulties with accommodation.
- Upton is a popular and successful school.

Some Arguments in favour of Option Two

- It will remove 315 places.
- The current range of choice for parents is maintained.
- By maintaining the same number of schools, the Council may have more flexibility if pupil numbers rise again.
- Pupils at Upton would not need to move to other schools.
- Reducing the PAN at Ellacombe will enable classrooms to be converted into specialist teaching spaces.

Some Arguments against Option Two

- It will be difficult to improve the accommodation at Upton to carry out the improvements that will happen at other schools (e.g. creation of specialist teaching rooms). A gap in quality of facilities may develop and Upton may become a "poor relation" to other schools.
- The Council would not be achieving best return on its investment in new classrooms at St Margaret's and fewer pupils would benefit from the new classrooms.
- The Council would be maintaining the same number of schools, but with less funding to meet costs.

There may be other arguments for and against the scenarios.

How would these options change the number of surplus places?

Both options would remove 315 places. With other changes suggested at Watcombe the figures for Torquay would be:

Year	Places	Pupils	Empty Places	% Empty
2004	5464	4963	501	9.3%
2005	5464	4935	529	9.7%
2006	5079	4688	391	7.7%
2007	5079	4588	491	9.7%
2008	5079	4514	565	11.1%
2009	5079	4464	615	12.1%
2010	5079	4401	678	13.4%

Table 6.1 Changes to surplus places from making changes to schools

Even the changes suggested may not be enough to solve the problem of empty places and we may have to look at the problem again in a few years.

7. Is there an option to keep Upton open, but reduce it in size?

Currently Upton is a 7 class school, so there are single age teaching groups. This is the easiest way to teach children, though many schools already deliver very good mixed age teaching. That said, it is difficult to mix the key stages and the law requiring no infant class to be more than 30 pupils can complicate things.

It would be possible to reduce Upton so that it admits 20 pupils per year. This would mean that the school would have two Infant classes of 30 pupils, but would then need to spread 80 junior children across 3 classes. This could be difficult because 80 children will barely generate enough funding to employ a teacher for each class. The Council might need to offer a special subsidy, which would take money away from other schools. And this assumes, of course, that the school could recruit 20 pupils in each year group.

A smaller school would also have the same fixed costs and so the cost per pupil would rise. The Council would still need to carry out DDA improvements and maintain the buildings. It would offer an opportunity to convert empty classrooms for other uses, but we know that we will have reduced resources when pupil numbers fall and there may not be enough funding to carry out the work.

8. What would happen to pupils if Upton closes?

If Upton closes there will, of course, be an impact on pupils.

The earliest date that Upton could close would be July 2006. So this means that any pupils in the current Reception class and Years 1, 2, 3 and 4 would need to move to new schools.

If the decision is taken to close Upton, parents would be asked in September 2005 to tell us which school they would like their child(ren) to attend. We would write to parents with details of all the vacant places in Torquay and try to arrange for pupils to join their parents' first choice school.

There are enough places for children at other local schools, but most of the vacant places are at Ellacombe and St Margaret's. Some other schools will also have places.

The table below is an illustration of how pupils could join St Margaret's and Ellacombe. We are suggesting that the Year 6 class (the current Year 4 class) could transfer to Ellacombe and the Year 5 class (the current Year 3 class) could transfer to St Margaret's. Other year groups could not transfer as a group and would be shared among schools according to parental preference (subject to availability of places).

There will be a small number of families with more than one child and in matching pupils to vacancies, we will try to find places for these pupils to join the same school.

Year Group	Pupils	Comments
Reception	15	sufficient spaces predicted at St Margaret's and Ellacombe
Year One	21	17 spaces at St Margaret's, 24 spaces at Ellacombe
Year Two	28	7 spaces available at St Margaret's 25 spaces at Ellacombe
Year Three	20	17 spaces available at St Margaret's 19 spaces at Ellacombe
Year Four	28	transfer as single class to St Margaret's
Year Five	29	transfer as a single class to Ellacombe
Year Six	31	transfer to secondary education as normal

Table 8.1 Availability of Places for Pupils from Upton

The Council would need to offer special support to Upton to ensure that the quality of education is maintained in the lead up to closure.

How will this affect the standards of teaching and learning?

The Council is keen to provide the best buildings for children. In order to do this, the Council must take strategic decisions that will have an impact for the next 20 or 30 years. For example, when the Council decides to invest in new school buildings it must balance some short-term disruption during construction against long term benefits of better buildings.

In the case of Upton St James, it is time to ask a serious question about whether this school can continue to provide a quality learning environment for the rest of this century. In a time of falling rolls, we need to consider whether pupils would be better served if the Council invested in other nearby schools which offer better long-term prospects because of better facilities.

In the short term, there is a risk of disruption and the Council will need to work closely with Upton to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is maintained. Also there would need to be an induction process set up to help pupils who are joining new schools after closure.

9. What would happen to staff if Upton closes?

Staff would be redundant because the school will close. In the lead up to closure the Council would help staff to find other jobs and would try to secure an agreement with Torbay schools that Upton staff would be given “priority interviews” for any suitable vacancies. There is, however, no guarantee that staff will find alternative employment.

10. What about new housing at the old South Devon College site?

Our forecasts take account of new housing planned in the area and our forecasts are very accurate taking the Bay as a whole (see above). It is much more difficult to forecast for neighbourhoods. It can depend on the type of housing and, of course, not all of the families moving into the development will be new to Torbay. Some may already be in Torquay and not want their children to transfer to a different school.

If we assume for a moment that the College site produces 330 houses that are all family sized dwellings (an unlikely outcome), then this is likely to give rise to 8 pupils per year group.

11. What would happen to the school site if Upton closes?

The main school building is owned by the C of E Exeter Diocese. The Echo Building is owned by the Council. It would be up to the Diocese to decide what to do with the main school building if the school closes.

It is possible that the sites could be sold for housing development, or perhaps the buildings could be converted to offer other community facilities, though there would still be issues about making the building comply with the DDA.

The Council is not expecting to benefit from a large capital receipt. The Echo Building is of relatively low value.

12. How does the Upton School site compare with other schools?

The table on the next page shows how schools in Torquay compare over 4 factors. The Council uses a national framework to compare schools as part of its Asset Management Plan. All schools are judged against the same criteria.

- The number of places at each school (based on floor area).
- The **condition** of the buildings (i.e. how much money needs to be spent to deal with the condition of the buildings).
- The **suitability** for teaching (i.e. the number of difficulties with buildings that impact on learning) .
- We have also included the amount of work needed to make sure that each school complies with the **Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)**. These figures come from experts who we hired to tell us how much work we need to do at our schools to meet the requirements of the DDA.

Table 12.1 How schools compare in Torquay

School Name	Maximum number of places	Pupils on Roll Spring 2005	Shortfall/ (Surplus Places)	Cost of Works to improve Condition of school	Cost of Condition works per pupil	DDA WorksTotal	DDA Works Total per Pupil	Number of Suitability problems affecting learning	Number of Suitability problems per Pupil	% Floor Area in Mobile classrooms
Cockington Primary	420	398	(22)	£ 185,318	£ 465.62	£ 192,053	£ 482.54	147	0.37	11%
Ellacombe	420	317	(103)	£ 332,865	£ 1,050.05	£ 165,474	£ 522.00	107	0.34	16%
Homelands Primary School	210	210	0	£ -	£ -	£ 73,290	£ 349.00	-	-	0%
St Margaret's	419	373	(46)	£ 371,950	£ 997.18	£ 351,422	£ 942.15	154	0.41	10%
Watcombe Primary	267	220	(47)	£ 352,140	£ 1,600.64	£ 268,795	£ 1,221.80	109	0.50	0%
Preston Primary School	306	320	14	£ 117,400	£ 366.88	£ 215,161	£ 672.38	89	0.28	0%
Shiphay Primary	405	413	8	£ 224,000	£ 542.37	£ 217,848	£ 527.48	89	0.22	4%
Sherwell Valley	666	506	(160)	£ 331,600	£ 655.33	£ 238,474	£ 471.29	72	0.14	7%
Barton Primary	627	570	(57)	£ 893,400	£ 1,567.37	£ 412,751	£ 724.12	170	0.30	4%
Ilsham Primary	149	174	25	£ 59,200	£ 340.23	£ 48,467	£ 278.55	71	0.41	0%
Upton St James	200	170	(30)	£ 22,800	£ 134.12	£ 208,097	£ 1,224.10	92	0.54	0%
Warberry Primary	316	334	18	£ 166,200	£ 497.60	£ 253,787	£ 759.84	72	0.22	12%
Queensway RC	210	203	(7)	£ 78,900	£ 388.67	£ 253,787	£ 1,250.18	37	0.18	7%
All Saints Babbacombe	210	206	(4)	£ 5,500	£ 26.70	£ 163,945	£ 795.85	42	0.20	0%
St Marychurch CofE	315	293	(22)	£ 177,158	£ 604.63	£ 298,560	£ 1,018.98	63	0.22	0%
Priory RC	147	179	32	£ 78,910	£ 440.84	£ 118,524	£ 662.15	79	0.44	0%
Torre	210	207	(3)	£ 118,350	£ 571.74	£ 142,178	£ 686.85	88	0.43	0%

13. When will a decision be made?

- (i) This consultation ends on 31 March. Responses must reach us by this date.
- (ii) The responses to consultation will be reported to a meeting of the Council's Executive Committee, probably in May 2005.

The Executive has the power to make some changes (such as changes to Planned Admission Numbers at Ellacombe and at St Margaret's) but for other changes, including school closure it must ask the independent School Organisation Committee to make a decision.

- (iii) If the Executive Committee decides that Upton should close, the Council will need to issue Public Notices confirming its proposal.

Then there will be a 6-week period for objections. Anyone can write an objection, which are all seen by the School Organisation Committee.

- (iv) At the end of the 6 weeks, the School Organisation Committee must meet within 2 weeks to make a decision.

If the School Organisation Committee does not reach a unanimous decision on the proposal then an Adjudicator would decide.

- (v) This all means that, if Upton is to close, this decision will be taken by the School Organisation Committee before the end of July. If an Adjudication is needed, the decision may not take place until September.

Questionnaire

CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRE ON THE FUTURE OF UPTON ST JAMES PRIMARY SCHOOL

1. **Are you:** (please tick)

- ☐ Parent of Pupil at Upton
- ☐ Member of Staff at Upton
- ☐ Governor at Upton
- ☐ Other (please specify)

2. **Which option are you in favour of (please tick)?**

- ☐ **Option One**
- Closure of Upton St James CE Primary School in July 2006
 - Reduction in PAN at Ellacombe from 60 to 45 with effect from September 2006
 - No change at St Margaret's Primary School
- ☐ **Option Two**
- No change at Upton St James CE Primary School
 - Reduction in PAN at Ellacombe from 60 to 30 with effect from September 2006
 - Reduction in PAN at St Margaret's Primary School from 60 to 45 with effect from September 2006
- ☐ **Option Three:** Make no change to any school

3. **Or do you have a suggestion of your own?** (please give details below)

4. **If you have any comments please write comments below** (continue on separate sheet if you like)

Please return this questionnaire by 24th March 2005 to Samantha Poston, Policy & Planning Team, Childrens Services, Oldway Mansion, Paignton, TQ3 2TE.