

Brighton & Hove City Council

Early Years and Childcare

Queen's Park Primary School Nursery Class Closure Consultation Report April 2017

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Introduction

Queen's Park Primary School is a community maintained school with a nursery class which currently offers part-time free early education to three and four year olds (the early years free entitlement, EYFE).

Between 7 March and 7 April 2017, Brighton & Hove City Council ran a public consultation about a proposal to close the school's nursery class with effect from September 2017 and as a result to raise the school's lower age range from three to four years.

Respondents could submit their feedback via a paper or online questionnaire, by email, phone or through a public consultation event. 114 people responded to the questionnaire and seven people sent in feedback by email. The emails reflected comments made in the questionnaires. Some people responded in more than one way.

A consultation event that took place on 22 March 2017 was attended by about 30 parents and children, staff from Queen's Park Primary School and representatives from the NUT and GMB unions.

The Queen's Park School NUT Group also submitted a letter expressing concerns about the proposed closure on behalf of staff reflecting those made by questionnaire respondents.

There was an overwhelmingly negative response with 81 per cent of respondents indicating that they 'strongly disagreed' with the proposed closure of the nursery class.

Main Findings from the Online Questionnaire

The main findings from the online questionnaire submitted are summarised below. Comments also include those made by email.

- The majority, 81%, of respondents strongly disagreed with the proposal to close the nursery class
- 9% agreed (5% of these strongly agreed and 4% tended to agree)
- 45% of respondents were parents
- 17% of respondents were staff at Queen's Park Primary School
- 24% of respondents had children at Queen's Park Primary School nursery class
- 39% of respondents said they were planning to send a child to Queen's Park Primary School nursery class in future

Questionnaire Responses

Q1. Who responded

The table below shows the breakdown by percentage of those who responded. Some respondents responded in more than one way. Four per cent of those who responded said they were responding as a representative of an organisation, including two from Queen's Park Nursery and one from Sunshine Day Nursery.

	%	Number
Parent of a child at Queen's Park Primary School nursery class	24%	27
Parent of a child/children not at Queen's Park Primary School nursery class	22%	25
Staff at Queen's Park Primary School	17%	19
Governor at Queen's Park Primary School	0%	0
Manager/owner/staff person from other local childcare provision	2%	2
Headteacher/staff person/governor at a local maintained primary school	2%	2
Headteacher/staff person/governor at a local independent school	1%	1
Other, please give details below	25%	29
[No Response]	8%	9

Of those respondents who selected other:

- Five said they were parents of a child/children who previously went to Queens Park Primary School,
- Four said they were former staff of the school,
- Four said they were relatives of children at the school,
- Four said they were concerned local residents,

- Three said they were parents who planned to send a child or children to the school in future,
- Two said they were local parents,
- Two said they were formal pupils of the school,
- Two said they were friends of pupils at the school,
- One was a grandparent,
- One was a support worker.

Q2. Respondents who agreed in principle to the proposed closure of the nursery class

Respondents were asked whether they agreed in principle to the closure of the nursery class and the raising of the lower age range from three to four.

The majority, 81 per cent, of all respondents said they 'strongly disagreed' with the proposal to close the nursery school.

Five per cent said they 'strongly agree', four per cent said they 'tend to agree' and eight per cent chose not to respond.

Strongly agree	5%
Tend to agree	4%
Neither agree nor disagree	1%
Tend to disagree	1%
Strongly disagree	81%
Don't know/not sure	1%
No Response	8%

Q3. Respondents' comments

Respondents were asked if there was anything they wanted to tell us about the reason for their answer and 64 per cent (n=71) did so.

Comments can be summarised as follows:

The high quality of nursery education provision at Queen's Park Primary School, particularly regarding additional support for children with special and additional needs and disadvantaged children in the area (n=31)

"The last Ofsted praised the nursery and reception as excellent and 'getting the children off to a flying start'."

"There may well be other places nearby for parents, but Queens Park school has a qualified teacher... Having an experienced and qualified teacher during such formative years is critical to children's future chances."

"The teachers offer amazing support and learning to these children. My youngest child has multiple health conditions that he deals with, yet the staff go out of their way to give him a normal and welcoming environment and a secure education. He has changed completely as a child since being there."

"The staff and nursery ...do a tremendous job with children with speech and language difficulties."

The importance of the nursery class to developing an inclusive local community (n=15)

"The work done by staff members in the nursery to draw in families (not only the families of children in the nursery), making them feel included and bringing them together is exceptional."

"If the nursery is closed, it would be extremely difficult for a lot of families, especially those from under privileged backgrounds."

“Disadvantaged children do better in settings with a mixture of children from different social backgrounds rather than in settings containing largely disadvantaged groups.”

The nursery class has not been publicised enough (n=9)

“It has been let down by poor advertising.”

“One of the reasons that numbers are lower at Queen’s Park this year is probably not helped by the fact the nursery is not advertised on the council website and the school has not done nothing to encourage more parents to place their children there.”

“If more kids are required to keep it open, why not advertise more?? I am sure many parents would help with this.”

“Last year the Nursery received ICAN accreditation. The school has not advertised this, nor has it advertised the Nursery class provision at all.

“Given the level of Speech and Language difficulties presenting in Nurseries across the city, why has the school not chosen to promote the Nursery specifically around this?”

“I did contact Queen’s Park nursery. Communication in response was very slow, and I didn’t get a response back from them until several months later when I had actually received a place from another nursery. The other local nurseries seem to advertise their provision better.”

Lack of suitable alternative provision (n=7).

“There are not sufficient spaces in either of the council maintained nurseries to take the children. Figures available from Turnerland and Royal Spa support this, therefore this proposed closure would force parents who made an informed choice to attend a nursery class attached to a school, to attend day care in the private sector.”

"I don't believe that there is sufficient space locally for children misplaced by a closure, and fear for the early experiences if they are forced into privately run nurseries."

The ease/importance of their child's transition to school if they attend the school's nursery class (n=6)

"I think is very important and much easier for kids to begin education when they know already the environment and feel safe with the grownups they already familiar with."

"This is a great transition for children nearby to QP school, my child used QPN as a interim transition and this made her far more confident and happy at reception."

"Also, although there are other nursery providers in the area, Queen's Park nursery is unique in being part of the school, with minimal disruption in the transition between the nursery and foundation years."

The school has not explored other options to closing the nursery class (n=2)

"I understand the financial concerns but feel one of the other options (seeing if 30 hours free childcare helps boost numbers or moving to morning only provision) should be tried before simply closing it down."

"Surely Queen's Park must look at controlling its spiraling supply teacher costs rather than blaming the shortfall on government funding."

"Figures to support the nursery closure are not accurate!"

Q4a. Who intended to send their child(ren) to the nursery class in future?

Respondents were asked: *“Before you heard about this proposal, were you planning to send a child to the nursery class in future?”*

Thirty-nine per cent (n = 45) said yes they were planning to send their child or children to Queen’s Park School nursery class in future, 32 per cent (n = 37) said no they were not and 19 per cent (n = 22) said they were unsure. Nine per cent chose not to respond to this question.

Q4b. How many children were respondents planning to send to the nursery class?

Parents were asked: *“How many children were you planning to send to the nursery class in future?”*

Thirty-five per cent of parents (n=40) answered this question. Twenty-seven said they would send one child and 13 said they would send two children to the nursery class in future.

Demographics

Age

Thirty-eight per cent (n=43) of respondents gave their age. Of those, 15 were under 30, 22 were between 30 and 40 years, five were between 41 and 50 years. There was one respondent over 50.

Ethnic Origin

Twenty-eight per cent of respondents (n = 32) were from a White UK ethnic background with a further 4 per cent (n = 5) from a White Other background. Four per cent gave their ethnic origin as Indian, 1 per cent as Mixed - Black Caribbean, 1 per cent as Mixed – any other mixed

background and three per cent preferred not to say. Sixty per cent chose not to respond to this question.

Sexual Orientation

Thirty-one per cent of respondents classified themselves as heterosexual/straight, 4 per cent as bisexual and 1 per cent as other. Four per cent chose not to say. Sixty-one per cent did not respond to this question.

Religion

Twenty-two per cent of respondents had no particular religion or belief. Eight per cent defined themselves as Christian, 4 per cent as Hindu, 2 per cent as Pagan, 2 per cent as Atheist and 3 per cent preferred not to say. Sixty-one per cent did not respond to this question.

Gender

Of those who gave their gender, 32 per cent of respondents were female and 4 per cent were male. Thirty-six per cent said they identified with the gender they were assigned at birth and 1 per cent said they did not. Three per cent said they preferred not to say.

Disability

Six per cent of respondents said their day to day activities were limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or expected to last, at least 12 months. Five per cent said they were limited 'a little' and 1 per cent said they were limited 'a lot'. Sixty per cent chose not to respond to this question.

Carers

Four per cent of respondents said they were a carer for either a child with special needs (n=2) or a partner or spouse (n=2). Sixty per cent chose not to respond to this question.

Armed Forces

No respondents said were currently serving in the armed forces, had previously served in the armed forces or had family and friends who were members of the armed forces. Sixty-one per cent of respondents chose not to reply to this question.

Consultation Event

A consultation event took place on 22 March 2017. Around 30 parents and children attended along with staff from Queen's Park Primary School and representatives from the NUT and GMB unions.

Parents were concerned that the school and local authority had not done enough to promote the school's nursery class. The head teacher said that lots had been done to promote the nursery over the years but that had not made a difference.

Parents and union representatives questioned the school's finances and the reason for proposing to close the nursery class. The GMB representative said that numbers of children had increased from 19 to 23 since the consultation paper was published. The head teacher explained that 50 children would be required to register for the nursery class to stay open.

Parents felt that the school should have informed the local community that the nursery class was at risk sooner so that they had time to fundraise and protect it. The head teacher said that the low number of children attending nursery was a trend across the city with a declining birth rate, families moving out of the city and changing work patterns.

Those present questioned the cost of supply teachers saying this was high in the school. The head teacher was clear that supply costs were not higher than at other similar schools but that they were represented in a different way. Parents asked whether the nursery space could be used for wrap around care (reflecting the high demand for after-school clubs) but the head teacher said that the space was unsuitable for this due to concerns about security, lack of facilities for sleep and meals and the higher cost of wraparound care for nursery children because of different child to adult ratios.

Parents with children with health issues were concerned about going to a private provider as they believed they would not take their child. It was explained that Turnerland and Royal Spa could take in more children from September.

The NUT representative was concerned that social inclusion would be threatened and said that more needs to be done to save the nursery class. Representatives from the council said that Royal Spa had changed and was much more socially diverse (30 languages spoken).

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