

Introduction to the 21st Century Commission Report of the Secondary Sector

13 October 2010

The report is a preliminary interim report from an independent group who have been commissioned to analyse future school provision in Salford. The commissioners are Daryl Agnew, Hazel Harding and Mel Woodcock, who provide a wealth of experience across local and regional government, school leadership and political leadership. The report is their work and therefore is not a report of Salford City Council. The proposals in this report therefore are only an indication of the view of the 21st Century Commission and are consequently not set in stone.

Salford City Council Cabinet Statement

The city council Cabinet have made the following first response to the report:

- The city council Cabinet completely reject the preferred options in the commissioners report for the Oasis Academy on page 19 and implications for Buile Hill High School. Therefore the city council Cabinet is clear that the Oasis Academy development will continue to go ahead as planned; and therefore as a consequence this aspect of the report is not being put forward for future comment and response.

The headline reasons for this are:

1. A contract arrangement has already been signed and is in progress to deliver this scheme.
 2. The regeneration of Salford Quays through MediaCity investment requires provision of an outstanding school.
 3. Considerable investment and future committed investment has been made available to the scheme.
 4. Buile Hill High School has the full support of the city council Cabinet.
- The city council Cabinet are clear that no school deficit budget will be 'written off' for individual schools or the school system as a whole.
 - The city council Cabinet welcome feedback on the report within the clear caveat described above for a four week duration (13 October 2010 – 10 November 2010).

The city council Cabinet will then consider any further comments/responses before entering the next phase of strategy planning for secondary education provision.

All feedback should be addressed to Sue Atkinson at the following email address sue.atkinson@salford.gov.uk

Background

- 1.1.** This report addresses some of the matters set out in Section 4 of the Commission's Initial Report as they apply to the secondary sector. The report attempts to:
- a) Investigate and evaluate options to make further reductions in surplus places in the secondary sector, notably in the areas where there are schools which are not financially viable;
 - b) Identify and evaluate opportunities for co-location of provision across Key Stages and the mainstream and special sectors which will ensure that best value is achieved from the council's estate;
 - c) Identify opportunities to work in a radical way with other educational partners and providers in Salford and beyond to ensure that all Salford's young people are equipped to contribute to and benefit from the regeneration of the city's economy.

The opportunities for co-location of provision cannot be fully explored until the Commission's work on the primary sector has been completed and the full report completed towards the end of September.

- 1.2.** The national context in which this report is being prepared is uncertain. The new government has yet to clarify many aspects of its education policy. However, there are some areas where the general direction is already clear. Funding has grown rapidly in the period from 1997 to 2009, rising from £2900 per pupil to £5140.ⁱ This level of spending will not be continued and schools can expect to have to deliver with fewer resources for the foreseeable future. There is likely to be a drive towards the creation different types of schools from a range of providers. This has been seen in government statements about academies and free schools.
- 1.3.** The strategic leadership role of the local authority in relationship to schools is not yet clear. A function in the commissioning of pupil places, in quality control and in Special Educational Needs has been widely predicted. The government has said that it wishes to encourage partnerships between schools. However, the principle of competition to drive up standards remains and may be enhanced. One of the government's first actions was to remove the requirement on local authorities to report on the number and percentage of surplus places in their areas. It may well be that the intent is to leave unsuccessful schools to "wither on the vine". This could mean that the authority has more leeway to consider the relative costs and risks of maintaining surplus places against those of maintaining surplus capacity.
- 1.4.** The local context for this work is complex. Our initial report set out clearly the extent and costs of surplus places in the secondary sector. Surplus capacity in the secondary sector soaked up around £1.65 million in 2009-10. If the situation is left unchecked, this will have taken up some £14 million by 2015-16. Many of

Salford's secondary schools are already struggling to balance their budgets. The detail of this problem is set out in section 3 of the Commission's Initial Report. Some schools are deeply in deficit and unlikely to recover in any reasonable time frame. Neither do some headteachers realise the urgency and seriousness of this issue. There is a risk that, should the wider financial situation demand it, the costs of school deficits would have to be met out by "top slicing" the DSG. This would have a massively negative impact on the financial situation of all the City's schools.

- 1.5. Set against this, Salford's secondary schools as a whole are some of the most rapidly improved and improving in the country. There are four "Outstanding" schools in Ofsted terms and very good results are being delivered in some very challenging contexts. Paradoxically, some of the most indebted schools are also the ones which are most rapidly improving. The drive to raise standards in these schools has been at the cost of creating very significant deficits and has not provided value for money. Despite this overall record of improving outcomes, the city's schools lose a large number of pupils to neighbouring authorities on transfer at 11+. Some of this is to do with geography: some of it to do with the legacy of poor performance in many of the city's schools up to five years ago.
- 1.6. The local authority's BSF programme has been delayed by the successful appeal of one high school against closure and the programme, in its new form, will struggle to deliver the transformation to the city's secondary estate which at one point looked possible. The programme is built on the assumption that at least 50% of those who choose to leave the city at 11+ can be retained.
- 1.7. There is considerable scope for development of productive relationships with very strong partners, particularly the University of Salford and Salford College. Equally, the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist churches have shown they are willing to engage positively in the development of educational opportunities for Salford's young people.
- 1.8. The available demographic predictions show that a growth of the school population is beginning to be seen in the early years of primary schools. It will be at least five years before this increase begins to be felt in the secondary sector. Projections on the likely effect of new residential developments have also been supplied to the commission. This type of data is a notoriously dangerous basis upon which to plan provision. However, we have been mindful of these data in our recommendations.

2. Guiding Principles For The Review

We have identified a number of principles against which we have tested our recommendations. These are:

- The need to continue to raise attainment and achievement across a broad range of competencies. Salford young people must be able to access employment and

training which will enable them to contribute to and benefit from the economic and social regeneration of the city.

- The opportunity for every young person to have reasonably easy access to a high quality learning environment which is fit for the 21st Century. It is felt that in most cases this implies secondary schools of around 900 places.
- Salford should have a range of delivery models which maximise the use of modern technologies and approaches to learning.
- To build on existing strength and expertise within the secondary sector.
- The need to develop effective structures for partnership which harness the expertise and opportunities afforded by key local partners such as the University, the College and major employers notably the large public sector employers and Media City.
- Given the high levels of social disadvantage and exclusion, the need to develop delivery solutions which are inclusive on a broad range of issues e.g. education, health, religion and lifestyle.
- The need to address the challenges presented by surplus places and deficit budgets.
- The need for any solution to represent good value for money.

3. Scope And Methodology

- 3.1.** We have chosen not to comment on those schools where BSF programmes are already underway, i.e. Walkden High School and Irlam and Cadishead High School. We have considered the positions of all the other secondary schools.
- 3.2.** We have considered it a priority to ensure that full use is made of newly built and, particularly, PFI buildings.
- 3.3.** In arriving at our conclusions we have made visits to the following schools:
- All Hallows RC High School
 - St. Ambrose Barlow RC High School
 - St. George's RC High School
 - Buile Hill High School
 - Harrop Fold High School
 - The Swinton High School
 - Moorside High School
 - Oakwood High School
 - Chatsworth High School
 - Wentworth High School

In addition to relying on the interview notes from our initial hearings, we held further meetings with:

- The Anglican Diocese
- The Roman Catholic Diocese
- The Methodist Church Schools representative

- The United Learning Trust
- The Cooperative College
- Greater Manchester Challenge
- Officers of the local authority

We referred to documentation and statistics supplied by the local authority and other bodies.

The pupil numbers used are from the local authority's projection documents and assume 50% retention of pupils currently choosing to be educated outside the city at 11+. They also assume 100% cohort survival. The commission feels that these numbers are highly unlikely to be achieved.

4. Review And Options

4.1. Walkden, Worsley and Boothstown

This area is currently served by three secondary schools: St. George's RC High School, Harrop Fold High School and Walkden High School. These schools currently provide 2649 places. When the wing at Harrop Fold, currently used by the TEN centre is included, together with the planned places at the new Walkden building this figure rises to 3,249. If no action is taken current predictions show that surplus places would be of the order of 794 by 2016/7. These predictions optimistically include the retention of 50 per cent of the pupils who currently are educated outside Salford at the Secondary phase.

4.1.1. Analysis of Individual schools

i. Walkden High School

This school is popular and is close to capacity. Its new building is currently under construction and while the decision to increase capacity at the school was questioned by many stakeholders, the Commission has no recommendations to make on this.

ii. Harrop Fold High School

This recently built PFI (public finance initiative) school grew from the amalgamation of two schools which led to difficulties and a period in "special measures". The new school has now improved and is recruiting more strongly. The Commissioners made the following observations:

- The school has a sharply improving outcomes trajectory with results expected to be above national averages this summer. The standards achieved by young people at this school are now good, given its context.
- The school has also been successful in improving behaviour and attendance. It makes imaginative use of a range of professionals and has developed an excellent multi-agency team to support young people.
- The building and grounds are state of the art and allow the development of transformational practice. One wing of the school is used to house the TEN Centre which helps to offset the building's costs.
- The school has a crippling accumulated deficit of more than £2.4 million which is still accruing. It has made great efforts to balance the budget within year but is still £275,000 short of target. There is no chance of a balanced budget within an acceptable time scale.

- There is a realistic understanding of the financial situation within the school and the Management is open to radical solutions to its predicament.

iii. **St George's RC High School**

This is a small Voluntary Aided Catholic High School which in the original BSF Plan was earmarked for closure. This decision was overturned at Adjudication in summer 2009 and cannot be re-visited without the agreement of Governors for five years. The Commissioners' evidence shows:

- The school has been oversubscribed with some 620 pupils. However, more than 40 per cent are from non – catholic backgrounds.
- The school sees its small size as a positive aspect and would look to build further links with the Walkden Campus of Salford City College. It has facilities for blind and visually impaired pupils.
- In 2007 it was judged by Ofsted to be a good school and the campaign against its closure showed a high level of parental support. It is operating within budget.
- The site and buildings are not fit for purpose. There is no possibility of making it accessible to pupils with mobility issues. Generally, teaching spaces are too small and many have difficult access. Some areas, notably science, are reached by one stairwell creating issues of health and safety. The building is in poor condition and would require in excess of £1m to address the maintenance backlog.
- There is no potential for expansion due to the size and nature of the site which has poor outdoor space for sport and recreation.
- The Governors and management of this school would prefer a complete redesign which could be delivered at between £11 million and £12 million. Plans have been drawn up which show how this could be done. They are open to considering other options.

4.1.2 **Options**

i. **Close Harrop Fold School and transfer the building to the Roman Catholic estate, creating a 900 pupil catholic school. The Commissioners do not favour this option for the following reasons:**

- There is no evidence that there would be sufficient demand for catholic education in the area to justify a school of that size.
- There would be a risk that non-catholic children would find alternative schools outside the City on transfer from primary school.

- Though co-location of a primary school could be an option, there is no evidence that there would be sufficient demand for a Catholic primary school on the site given the recent re-organisation around St Edmund's.
- ii. Re-furbish St George's. The Commissioners do not consider this to be a viable option for several reasons:**
- It would result in a school that is too small to deliver a 21st Century curriculum and would be poor value for money.
 - It would do nothing to address the issues at Harrop Fold.
 - Its ability to maintain current levels of recruitment would be threatened by the increased capacity at Walkden and rapid improvements at Harrop Fold.
- iii. Merge Harrop Fold and St George's into a newly created 900 place Ecumenical Trust School or Academy supported by Roman Catholic and Church of England Dioceses and the Methodist Church.**

This is not an easy option but is favoured by the Commissioners because:

- It would build on the popularity and reputation of St George's and parental preference for faith schools.
- It would preserve the expertise and inclusive practice which has been developed, particularly at Harrop Fold.
- It would provide the opportunity for the development of partnership with NHS Salford around health and emotional well being issues.
- The proximity of the Walkden site of Salford College and the larger size of the new school would facilitate the development of an excellent 14-19 offer.
- The school would be free of debt and, with increased numbers, should be operating within budget.
- It would widen access to the superb facilities at Harrop Fold.
- There would be access for people with disabilities and it would allow the further development of St George's work with blind and visually impaired pupils
- The link with the Church of England and Methodist Churches may well help to retain pupils who currently seek Secondary education in neighbouring authorities.
- Although the proposed capacity of 900 is smaller than the current combined rolls of both schools, there would be the option for a transition period to continue to use some accommodation at St George's. This would allow for the accommodation of the current 1200+ pupils while in the longer term the part of the building occupied by the TEN Centre could be made available should it be proved necessary given the increased capacity at Walkden.
- All of the partners who would be involved in this option have indicated their willingness to discuss it further, should it be adopted by the local authority.

4.2 Swinton

This area is served by three schools, Moorside High School, St Ambrose Barlow RC High and The Swinton High School. In 2006, Swinton and Moorside schools were proposed for closure under BSF to be replaced by a new build school for 1,350 pupils to be built on the current Moorside playing fields. Following the suspension of the consultation process after the Adjudication on St George's, the proposal is now the subject of further consultation by the authority.

4.2.1 Analysis of Individual Schools

i. Moorside High School

- This school has a current capacity of 1,060 with a roll of around 800. Current projections for next year are 773. It is judged by Ofsted to be a good school and is re-establishing its reputation after a difficult period, including time in special measures.
- The headteacher reports increasingly positive feedback from parents and local primary schools though this is not yet reflected in the numbers of pupils choosing the school.
- It has a high profile main road position on the East Lancs. Road.
- The building, though, is not fit to deliver a 21st Century education. Particular problems are low ceilings and changing floor levels making it inaccessible for people with poor mobility.
- The school is managed within budget. However, it would cost more than £1million to address the maintenance backlog.
- The school is separated from much of its catchment area by the East Lancs. Road which pupils and staff have to cross to reach playing fields.
- The school is disappointed that it has not benefited more from hosting the BBC 21st Century Classroom.
- The school's preferred option for the future would be refurbishment of the current buildings and return of the provision currently occupied by the BBC. The head feels that Moorside parents are not supportive of the BSF proposal.

ii. St. Ambrose Barlow RC High School

- This is an excellent school, judged outstanding by Ofsted, popular with parents and generally over-subscribed.
- It has exemplary practice in many curriculum areas and its headteacher is an NLE.
- The school is accommodated in separate blocks of varying age and condition. They have used devolved capital to address health and safety issues, such as the replacement of windows in one block. However, in order to ensure that the school can further develop its excellent practice, it needs new buildings.
- The current plan for this school is a new build on a site at Wardley, with a capacity of 750.
- The school also has a presumption which would allow for the building of a sixth form for 250 pupils, financed outside of the BSF programme.

iii. The Swinton High School

- This is a very strong school. It was named Specialist Arts School of the year in 2009, is a National Support School and its headteacher is an NLE.
- There are 971 pupils on roll and there is a total capacity of 1075. Admissions for 2010/11 are significantly lower than last year.
- The school has high standards. It has operated within budget but will need to take decisive action if it is to avoid going into deficit in the future.
- The School has severe maintenance issues with a backlog of more than £1.3 million.
- It has sprawling buildings and poor playing facilities. The building is not accessible for people with mobility issues.
- The headteacher feels that he would prefer a refurbishment of the existing building rather than the stress of the current uncertainty which has been with them since 2006.

4.2.2 Options

Swinton/Moorside

i. Refurbish both schools on their current site. Given the relative popularity of these schools the Commissioners considered this option but discounted it for the following reasons:

- Given the current condition and configuration of buildings at both schools, it is hard to see how anything short of a re-build could deliver the accommodation needed.
- Refurbishment would not be value for the money spent.
- The disturbance to both schools created by building work on the existing site is much greater than a re-build.
- There is a danger that new-build schools within travelling distance would prove more popular than the re-furbished Swinton and Moorside and lead to reductions in roll.

ii. Rebuild Moorside on a reduced scale on its playing field and refurbish Swinton. This option was considered because the Swinton site does not lend itself to a re-build but would still allow the major problems at Moorside to be tackled.

It is not the favoured option because:

- The new build would not address Moorside's issue with the original proposal i.e. the siting on the opposite side of the East Lancashire Road.
- It raises questions of affordability.
- The proposal would leave Swinton with refurbished accommodation and another new build school within travelling distance.
- The disturbance to Swinton created by building work on the existing site is much greater than a re-build.
- There is a risk that the new Moorside School would not be full and, as a PFI building, it would risk the same budget issues that other PFI schools in the City have experienced.
- It would make a smaller contribution to the City-wide aim of reducing surplus places.

iii. Continue with the Local Authority's original proposal of a new build school on the Moorside playing fields with a roll of 1,350 pupils.

This is the option favoured by the Commission because:

- It will provide a brand new facility which would cater for the predicted numbers living in the "core area" of the school. Currently, because of

surplus capacity in both schools, they provide places for young people from beyond their natural catchment areas.

- It offers the opportunity to build on the current excellent practice in both schools in a purpose built environment.
- The school is likely to be popular with parents and, therefore, full, thus minimising the risk of financial problems arising from the PFI build.
- The incorporation of a Primary school will assist with transition issues as the school reduces to its target size.
- The site could offer opportunities for co-location of health or other services.
- There would still be an issue with outdoor facilities across the busy dual carriageway but none of the options offer a solution to this problem.

St Ambrose Barlow

Build the new school at Wardley in such a way that it would be possible to increase its capacity to 900 should there prove to be demand.

We recommend this because:

- a) There may be increased demand for catholic education arising from our recommendations for Harrop Fold and St George's. Parents who prefer a Roman Catholic education for their children may want the option of this school.
- b) Reduction in capacity at Swinton/Moorside may well generate demand.
- c) In the Guiding Principles, set out earlier in this document, the Commissioners expressed a view that in order to be able to deliver a 21st Century education, schools needed to be of an optimum size of around 900 pupils.
- d) It would be easier for the school to maintain a viable sixth form with a larger 11-16 cohort.

We also recommend that this school seeks to develop a hard or soft federation with one or more of the other Catholic Schools in the City. We do this because:

- In our proposals there is likely to be a small but outstanding Roman Catholic School which could benefit from some of the economies of scale presented by some level of federated or collaborative structure.
- A formal agreement for joint working between the three catholic schools and Salford College could enhance the viability of a Catholic sixth form at St Ambrose Barlow.
- This could allow these excellent schools to explore what lies beyond "outstanding" for the full academic range of Salford's young people, irrespective of socio- economic backgrounds.

4.3 Eccles

This area is served by Salford City Academy, St. Patrick's RC High School and Wentworth High School. There is existing capacity of 2,550 places of which 327 were unfilled this year, the majority of them in the Academy and Wentworth. Next year, St Patrick's will be oversubscribed by 17 pupils and the empty places in the area reduce to 311.

4.3.1 Analysis of Individual schools

i. Salford City Academy

This is a school that is not maintained by the Local Authority. It has a capacity of 750 and there are no planned changes. It is undersubscribed by 155 pupils this year and that is predicted to rise to 170 next year. It is perceived by parents as more inaccessible than some other schools. We have no recommendations involving this school.

ii. St Patrick's RC High School

This is a very successful catholic school, judged outstanding by Ofsted and popular with parents. It was one of the first schools in the country to be awarded Accredited Provider status. Its headteacher is an NLE. The school is to be re-built at its current capacity of 900 on its present site as part of BSF Phase 2.

iii. Wentworth High School

This school is also part of the second phase of BSF, proposed for a partial rebuild on its existing site with a reduction in capacity proposed from 900 to 750. The site is also earmarked for the provision of a Pupil Referral Unit. It is rated "good" by Ofsted and has improving standards. It has good links with Chatsworth Special School and is the local authority's "barrier-free" school. It is looking to develop provision for pupils who are within the Autistic Spectrum. The school provides intensive English language support for newly arrived migrant pupils. However, the building generally is not a good learning environment, science, ICT and sports facilities are all in need of substantial improvement.

The improvements made by the school have been at enormous cost. Over a period of three years the School has turned a £307,000 surplus into a deficit currently more than £2 million and predicted to continue increasing. Commissioners are aware that Ofsted judged the school to be giving "satisfactory value for money" but having reviewed the Ofsted criteria on which the judgement should have been made, we are at a loss to

understand this conclusion. In effect this school has enhanced its budget position by the equivalent of more than £2,600 per pupil.

As a result of its financial difficulties, the Commission feels that its position is unsustainable and, if not addressed urgently, endangers the stability of the Dedicated Schools Grant, putting at risk the financing of all the City's schools. We have seen no evidence that the school is taking the necessary actions to turn this around.

4.3.2 Options

St. Patricks RC High School

Implement the current proposals made by the local authority.

The local authority's proposal meets the criteria set out in the Commission's guiding principles and therefore we support the proposals for this school.

We also recommend that this school, as with St. Ambrose Barlow, seeks to develop a hard or soft federation with one or more of the other Catholic Schools in the City. We do this because:

- In our proposals there is likely to be a small but outstanding Roman Catholic School which could benefit from some of the economies of scale presented by some level of federated or collaborative structure.
- A formal agreement for joint working between the three catholic schools and Salford College could enhance the viability of a Catholic sixth form at St Ambrose Barlow.
- This could allow these excellent schools to explore what lies beyond "outstanding" for the full academic range of Salford's young people, irrespective of socio- economic backgrounds.

Wentworth High School

i. Continue with the local authority's proposal for refurbishment which would provide a 750 place school under the current governance arrangements. This option is not favoured by the Commission for the following reason.

- The refurbished school would move into its new buildings with a crippling debt which has little hope of reducing, even if it were to bring it's in year budget into balance.
- This size of its debt will eventually seriously limit the school's ability to provide an education suitable for the 21st Century.

ii. Close the school and redistribute the pupils to other schools. Though the Commission seriously considered this option, it is discounted for the following reasons.

- The rolls of feeder school in Eccles are set to rise and the school's location and recent improvements in performance are making it popular with parents.
- Unsafe as it is to place too much weight on plans for future dwellings in the area, if these dwellings are built, there will be an increased demand for places by 2016-17.
- In order to absorb the numbers of pupils who would need places in the event of a closure, a large number would have to attend the Oasis Academy. Given the planned move of this school to Ordsall, it is unlikely that this would be acceptable to parents.
- The position of the school in the proximity of the special schools and the Eccles campus of Salford College offers opportunities for collaboration which would be beneficial to young people and which would offset some of the disadvantages of a comparatively small school

iii. Close the school and seek to re-open it as a 900 place new build Academy with the Roman Catholic diocese as a co-sponsor. This school would be an amalgamation of All Hallows and Wentworth. There are advantages to this scenario.

- The good practice developed at both schools would be kept and developed.
- Both schools would have a new building.
- The financial base of the new school would be secure.
- There would be opportunities for the further development of links with the college and the nearby special schools.
- The proposed Oasis academy in Ordsall would have a better chance of success.

However, the Commission felt that there were compelling reasons to discount this option.

- The loss of All Hallows on its current site would leave the centre of the city without a Catholic school.
- It would entail pupils who are currently exceptionally well served at All Hallows having to travel much further to school. There is also strong growth in rolls in primary schools in Weaste and Seedly.
- Although the particular and exceptional strengths and ethos of All Hallows could be transferred to the new setting, there is a risk that they would not be.
- The capital receipts from the closure of All Hallows may not meet the additional costs of the move to Wentworth.

iv. Close the school and re-open it as a 750 place trust school or Academy working under some form of formal partnership, with Salford College and/or

one or both of the adjacent special schools. It is proposed that accommodation for Oakwood Special School is incorporated in the refurbishment.

This option is favoured by the Commission for the following reasons.

- The school will have a secure financial base and benefit from strong governance from its partnership.
- There will be the opportunity to develop strong, inclusive practice and create a permeable boundary between the mainstream and the Special School sectors.
- It builds on Wentworth's current inclusive practice.
- It will release space in the existing Oakwood/Chatsworth building for the expansion of Chatsworth School offering potential to accommodate within the City some of the young people who are currently educated at high cost extra-district.
- A secondary school is retained in Eccles where it will be needed, particularly if students from the area who currently attend Moorside or Swinton can no longer be accommodated in the new, smaller school.
- A seamless progression can be created between the college and the schools which will be to the benefit of both mainstream pupils and those educated in the special schools.
- It removes 250 surplus places.

4.4 Central Salford (South)

4.4.1 This area is currently served by three high schools: Buile Hill High School, Oasis Academy and All Hallows RC High School. There is a total combined capacity of 2400 places across the three schools and 602 surplus places. 150 of these are at Buile Hill and the remainder at the Oasis Academy. Using the most optimistic predictions for pupil numbers and new dwellings, there will still be at least 449 surplus places by 2016.

4.4.2 Analysis of individual schools.

All Hallows RC High School

This is a small school with a capacity of 600. Ofsted has judged it to be outstanding overall. The school is being managed within budget. The school serves some of the most deprived areas of the city. Its young people achieve very good results. The level of care and support it provides for its young people is outstanding. Despite its small size, the Commission considers it important that a faith school option is retained in Central Salford. However, the buildings the school occupies do not equip it to deliver a 21st Century curriculum. There is a range of permanent and temporary buildings in a generally poor state of repair. Although the school makes the best of what it has and makes every effort to provide an attractive learning environment, the issues of age, layout and condition cannot be overcome. The site is adjacent to the former De La Salle campus of Salford College.

Buile Hill High School

This is a 900 place high school housed in a brand new PFI building. There are currently 758 pupils. The school's academic performance has improved rapidly recently and the achievement of its pupils last year was very good. Recruitment is improving and next year's intake of 164 will be the largest year group in the school. The facilities are excellent both in terms of the building, the grounds and the setting. The school's current size means that it has struggled to find the fixed charges associated with the PFI build and has a current budget deficit of £1.2 million. A deficit recovery plan has yet to be agreed with the local authority but the head is confident that this can be achieved without unduly risking the school's impressive progress in raising standards.

Oasis Academy

The Commission acknowledges that the Oasis Academy is not part of the local authority's provision. However, the plans for its future will have repercussions in the area of Salford Central (South) and beyond. We therefore make the following observations.

- a) The school is currently located on a site adjacent to the new Buile Hill building and draws from an identical catchment area. The school was created on the

closure of the former Hope High School. This closure left a deficit of £1.5million which remains in the DSG accounts. There are plans to move the Academy to a site near the Salford Quays in new building which would provide 900 places for 11 to 16 pupils and a 250 place 6th form.

- b) Current numbers at the Academy are 470 in the main school with 40 students in the 6th form. Projections from the local authority are that this number will fall to 329 in the main school by 2016/17. On this basis, even if the projections are very pessimistic, it is difficult to see the 1,150 places being needed in the foreseeable future.
- c) The plan for the Academy assumed an intake from neighbouring authorities of 300 as the new school would become a regional centre of excellence working with the BBC and Media City development on the Quays. However, reported developments with similar aims in neighbouring authorities will provide competition. It may well be useful for the local authority to discuss these developments at sub-regional level. The Commissioners feel that a rigorous analysis of the potential skills requirements of the Media City development is necessary to inform planning for the future. Given the proposed site of the new school, there is a potential opportunity to address the skills gap within the local adult community so that Salford residents could have the opportunity to apply for jobs in and supporting the new development
- d) The site proposed for the development has been chosen because of its proximity to the Quays and because it is felt it will make an iconic statement about the importance of education in the inner city. Although the site is situated close to the tram link between Eccles and Manchester, north south transport links are not good. The site is compact and situated between two busy roads. Outdoor space for recreation and sport would be limited and pupils would have to be transported to playing fields. These issues will be important during the planning process.
- e) The Commission recognises that there has been considerable political support for this project. However, the Commissioners, looking at the needs of the whole of the City, have concerns about the constraints of the proposed site and the impact upon other schools.

4.4.3 Options

Buile Hill and the Oasis Academy

- i. **Continue with Buile Hill at its current size. The Commission would be supportive of this option if the decision to continue with the Academy cannot be changed. We would support the option for the following reasons.**
 - a) The school is in a PFI building and the costs of closure would be prohibitive.

- b) The school is beginning to recover its reputation and its academic record is improving.
- c) The management of the school understands the seriousness of its financial situation and is determined to address the issues in collaboration with the local authority.

However, if the position of the Academy could be reviewed we felt that there would be a better option.

- The Buile Hill budget situation will take 7 years to resolve. During this time, the school's ability to provide high quality education will be limited to the extent that it will be using resources provided to educate current pupils to pay off debt from the past.
- The school's excellent resources could be made available much earlier to a larger number of pupils.

- ii. **Despite the advanced stage of planning, put on hold the building of the new Academy at the Quays and merge the current Oasis Academy with Buile Hill into a new trust school or an Academy on the Buile site.**

The Commission favours this option for the following reasons:

- a) The building at the Quays could be delayed until 2016/17 when there would be a clearer picture of the extent of future demand for places.
- b) The new Academy could start with a new year 7 intake and build its ethos and reputation with no previous history.
- c) There would be the opportunity to explore the nature of the specialism which could be offered. For example, it could be that a Studio School or University Technical School, if these types of school are available at that time, would have a unique angle to offer which would be attractive regionally.
- d) It builds on the improvements being made, particularly at Buile Hill.
- e) The new school would be financially viable immediately.
- f) It would be necessary to increase capacity at the new Wentworth campus and possibly at All Hallows. The position of The Albion High School would also be strengthened.
- g) 600 surplus places will be removed.

All Hallows RC High School

- i. **New build on the Oasis Academy site or one of the other local sites which have been considered. This proposal would be strengthened if recommendations with regard to Walkden, Boothstown and Worsley are accepted.**

The Commission would support this option but is aware that it may well be unaffordable.

ii. Refurbish the current building, retaining its current capacity. This option is not favoured by the Commission for the following reasons.

- The current site is cramped and any redevelopment would be constrained by this.
- There is insufficient space in the current building to allow major works to go ahead within acceptable levels of disruption while they are taking place.
- The resulting building may well not give value for money and be only a temporary solution to the school's accommodation problems.

iii. Seek a joint venture with the Oasis Academy and be part of the new build on the Quays site.

Though the proposal has some obvious attractions, the Commission do not favour this option for the following reasons:

- The faith, particularly the Catholic, ethos of the school is likely to be lost.
- There is a risk that the expertise developed in the current school may not survive amalgamation.
- The proposal may not be acceptable to the Diocese or to the Academy sponsor.

iv. Refurbish or rebuild on current site incorporating part of the adjacent De La Salle building and working in close partnership with Salford College and one or both of the other Catholic secondary schools in the city to form a 600 place school with post 16 provision on the same campus.

The Commission favours this option for the following reasons:

- It will deliver a viable faith school in the Central area with the risks of small size being ameliorated by the association with another Catholic school or schools.
- It builds on the strengths and successes of the current school.
- It provides the opportunity for a link with the College which should assist in the retention of pupils at 16+ and beyond in suitable education or training.
- The size of the De La Salle building should provide the opportunity for expansion should this become necessary at a later date.
- Given the performance of the school, this option would deliver good value for money.

4.5 Central Salford (North)

This area is served by one secondary school, The Albion High School. It is an area of great cultural diversity and has high levels of deprivation.

4.5.1 Analysis of the school

- The Albion School has a capacity of 925 and its current roll is 760. Recruitment for next year is 146 which is roughly the same as in 2009. The intake number has varied considerably over the last 5 years and it is difficult to discern any trend.
- Its catchment area shares a long border with Manchester and there are large numbers of Manchester children in its feeder schools a significant proportion of whom choose to return to Manchester secondary schools at 11+.
- Transport links between the school and some of the feeder schools in the area it serves are not good and the school has made its own arrangements for home to school transport for at least one of its larger feeder schools.
- The building is new and the school shares it with a Youth Centre and library. The building could take up to 1000 pupils should the need arise.
- In terms of raw attainment the school's outcomes are well below national averages. However, the value added score of the school is considerably above national average for similar schools,
- The school's roll is projected to rise to 817 by 2016. If housing proposed for the area is actually built, this could rise to around the 1000 mark. Even so, it would not be necessary to consider new building as the existing building could accommodate the projected numbers.

4.5.2 Recommendation

The commission recommends that no action be taken with regard to capacity at The Albion High School. However, we do feel that there would be benefit in exploring Cooperative Trust status for this school which might later be extended to include some of its feeder primary schools. The Commission's reasons for this recommendation are as follows:

- The area has needs which the community focus of a Cooperative trust would help to address.
- The inclusion of primary schools would allow access to shared expertise, services and economies of scale which would be to the benefit of children, young people and families in the local community.
- A group of schools in the area has already explored these possibilities and may be receptive to the development.
- The enhanced link between the primary and secondary phases would help to improve retention of pupils at 11+.

5. Summary

5.1 The Commission's proposals reflect the guidelines set out at the beginning of the report. If implemented they will deliver, in general schools of sufficient size, financial stability and proven strength to deliver a 21st Century education to the young people

in secondary education in Salford. There is in-built flexibility to deal with the inevitable inaccuracies of projections of pupil populations. We believe they represent good value for money.

5.2 There is considerable cost linked to the suggestions we have made in that by creating new schools, their deficits are written off by the local authority. The cost of doing this would be in the region of £5.7million. There would be some recoupment in that the local authority would cease to maintain some buildings and there would be capital receipts for at least one of the sites. However, at the current rate of accrual, and even taking into account the deficit recovery plans, the cost of deficits could spiral to anywhere between £12 million and £14 million over the 7 year span covered by this report. At some point, the nettle will need to be grasped.

5.3 Our proposals, including those for the Oasis Academy take out 2078 surplus places, almost exactly the same number of places as the predicted surplus capacity of 2033 in 2016/17 when no clawback is applied. Using the most up to date pupil projections with clawback, our proposals, implemented in full would produce a shortage of 467 places. If extra places were to be commissioned in full, there would be a surplus of 208 places, roughly 2% of capacity. There is the flexibility built into our proposals to commission a further 675 places should it be considered necessary in order to provide leeway for parental choice and to provide for any clawback of those currently choosing to be educated extra district.

5.4 The view of the Commissioners is that the current budgetary difficulties of secondary schools, largely, though not solely, arising out of surplus capacity in the system, is putting the stability of education funding in the City at risk. The financial problems, if not addressed will inevitably spread to schools where there is currently no deficit, and the accruing deficits in indebted schools will run out of control. We are acutely aware of the political issues surrounding the building of the Oasis Academy. If the Academy is built, even more rigorous action will have to be taken in other areas, probably resulting in the closure of a larger and more popular school. The risk is that the City will end up with places available in an area unattractive to parents and result in even more parents seeking education outside the city for their children.

5.6 Our final report will revisit these issues and provide more statistical detail.

ⁱ DCSF August 2009