

**BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
SOUTHERN AREA**

**REPORT
OF THE
WYCOMBE
COMMISSION**

NOVEMBER 2000

Introduction and background

The Wycombe Commission was set up by Buckinghamshire County Council Education Committee to consider educational provision in the eastern side of Wycombe town. The area includes Hatters Lane School, a nursery and six primary schools, listed below.

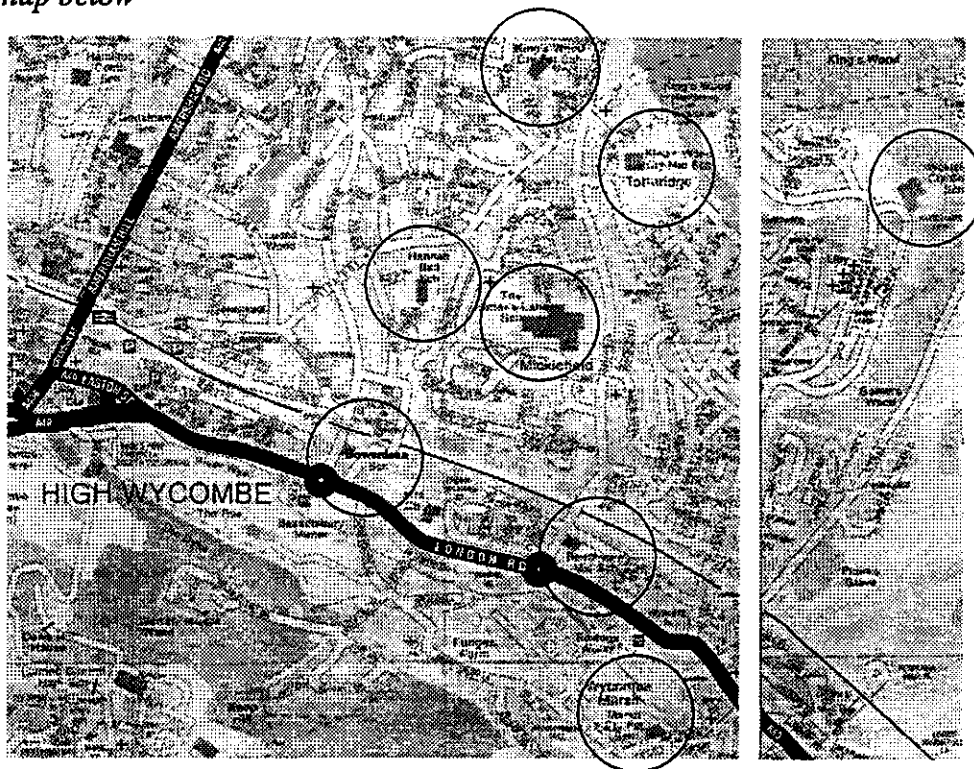
- Ash Hill Combined School
- Kings Wood Infants School
- Kings Wood Junior School
- Hannah Ball Infants School
- Bowerdean Nursery
- Beechview Junior School
- Marsh Infants School
- Hatters Lane Upper School

In terms of the Buckinghamshire LEA School Organisation Plan, the area covered by the Commission falls within Area 13 – High Wycombe and East Wycombe District, for primary schools, and Area 6 – High Wycombe and West Wycombe, for secondary schools.

Other primary provision within the Hatters Lane area

The Commission consulted with the Headteachers and Governors of the three primary schools which are the immediate neighbours of those involved in the area concerned, since they would be affected by any changes which might be made. These schools¹ are not subject to the same problems faced by schools within the area covered by the Commission.

See map below



¹ Hamilton, Highworth and Loudwater

The educational context for the Commission's work was as follows. The Hatters Lane School and Kings Wood Infants School had been judged by Ofsted as requiring *Special Measures*, Ash Hill School (formerly Micklefield) being deemed to have *Serious Weaknesses*. Further, there appeared to be a general view that the problems being faced by the schools were not solely "school" problems and that many outside and community-related issues contributed to the challenges faced by the schools. In addition, with one exception, the schools in the area faced projected falling rolls. (See chart below)

Secondary school pupil data
(Total including sixth form)

Maximum of Enrolled Capacity Number on Roll

Name of school	MOE Capacity	NOR Sept 1999	NOR Sept 2001	NOR Sept 2005	Spare places Sept 2005
Hatters Lane	795	461	477	497	298

Primary school pupil data
(Total including nursery)

Name and type of school	MOE Capacity	NOR April 2000	NOR April 2002	NOR April 2005	Spare places April 2005
Ash Hill C	265	179	178	177	88
Beechview	360	266	296	284	76
Hannah Ball	240	93	93	110	130
Kings Wood Inf	300	162	157	170	130
Kings Wood Jun	240	226	205	182	58
Marsh	120	130	147	167	-47
Bowerdean	80	80	80	80	0

Source: Bucks LEA School Organisation Plan – May 2000

Total number of places required (on present predictions) by phase
(Including nursery and sixth form)

	2000	2002	2005	Tot MOE capacity
Primary	1136	1129	1170	1605
Secondary	461	470	497	795

Source: Bucks LEA School Organisation Plan – May 2000

In view of this context, the Director of Education invited the Commission, comprising local people and representatives of interested groups to:

- *Explore how most appropriately to provide an appropriate and improving level of education for primary and secondary aged children in High Wycombe; particularly in the eastern part of the town*

- *Report to the Education Committee on 19th October on those issues that would need to be addressed in order to improve educational standards and rationalise school provision, where appropriate.*²

The life of the Commission was limited, in order to ensure that it worked quickly within a specified time frame that allowed time for a detailed consultation period. The Commission determined to provide an interim report to the Education Committee meeting of October 19th, with the final report and recommendations being ready for the January 2001, after which the Commission would be wound up.

Mike Harrison (Senior Advisory Officer) set out the challenge of the situation, as follows:

- *The juxtaposition of the two issues (Hatters Lane and the need to rationalise primary places) is one challenge. The solution may be a new combined institution, providing schooling from 5-18 or*
- *On the other hand, it may make better sense to provide a secondary school plus – the plus being some form of external community provision, or educational provision post-16 (or even post-18).*
- *There is a real opportunity for creative thinking, for new ideas and for partnerships.*
- *The Commission, consisting of representatives of the wider community, is invited to reflect on the possibilities afforded by these changes, take evidence from a wide range of sources and make recommendations to the Education Committee in October.*³

Commission Membership

Cllr Margaret Dewar (BCC) [Chairman]	Cllr Mike Appleyard (BCC)
Cllr Trevor Fowler (BCC)	Cllr Chris Oliver (WDC)
Susan Jones (TVE)	Ranjit Dheer (WREC)
Professor Bryan Mogford (BCUC)	
Supported by:	
Mike Harrison (Senior Advisory Officer)	Bob Gibbard (Advisory Officer)
David Ayres (Head of School Organisation)	Alan Mander (Head of Resources)

Declarations of interest

The Commission discussed the issue of relevant interests and agreed that only those directly to do with schools within the Wycombe Area needed to be declared. Legal advice from the County Solicitor supported this view.

Members of the Commission, therefore, declared the following interests:

- Cllr. Appleyard – Governor, Wye Valley School.
- Prof. Mogford – Governor, Wycombe High School.
- Cllr. Fowler – Governor, Marsh Infants School. Family connections with Hatters Lane School, Kings Wood Junior School and Ash Hill School.
- Cllr. Oliver – Governor, Berryfield Infants School.

No other interests were declared.

² Letter from David McGahey to members of the Commission - 12th May 2000.

³ Background paper by Mike Harrison – 13th June 2000.

Method

The Commission set out to consult as widely as possible in order to find out as full a range of views as it could of both the present circumstances of the area and the peoples' views of what they would like to see in the future. In order to achieve this it was decided to contact as many interested parties as possible. This was achieved by sending out approximately 60 letters to local organisations. A further 3000 letters were sent to families in the area covered and to those in three neighbouring primary schools. All Headteachers and Chairmen of Governors in the area and all secondary Headteachers in Wycombe were contacted. Views were sought more widely through articles in the Schools' Management Briefing, the Bucks Free Press and on local radio.

In all, the Commission held two full-day sessions, at which eighteen organisations presented their views; four public meetings, which were attended by over one hundred parents and other members of the local community, and received seventeen written submissions. It also took advice from officers of the Local Education Authority throughout its working life. The two officers from the Wycombe Area Team held several discussions and briefing sessions with individuals and organisations, on behalf of the Commission. They also held discussions with schools' Liaison Groups. All headteachers in the area covered were asked to seek views from the children in their schools but, unfortunately, none were reported to the Commission.

Summary of the evidence

Broadly, most of those who spoke to the Commission recognised the need to overhaul the educational provision in eastern High Wycombe. Although the view was not unanimous, there was a general acceptance that standards of attainment and provision in some of the primary schools were unsatisfactory, as they were judged to be in Hatters Lane School.

Respondents generally accepted that:

- some accommodation was poor or inadequate;
- rolls were predicted to fall in all but one school, and this needed to be addressed, although some challenged the actual projected numbers published in the School Organisation Plan;
- nursery provision in the area was insufficient;
- community facilities were inadequate.

Respondents made a number of specific suggestions for the organisation of premises and facilities, including:

1. Re-build Hatters Lane as a mixed upper school with major community facilities (local Police Office, sports hall, Adult Education Centre &c.) on the same site.
2. Re-build Hatters Lane as a mixed upper school with major community facilities (as above) and with a primary school and nursery on the same site.
3. Re-build Hatters Lane as a pair of single-sex upper schools with major community facilities (as above) on the same site.
4. Re-build Hatters Lane as a single-sex upper school with major community facilities (as above) on the same site.
5. Re-build Hatters Lane as a mixed comprehensive school with major community facilities (as above) on the same site.

6. Amalgamate Kings Wood Infant and Junior schools on the junior school site, with the addition of nursery and community facilities.
7. Close Kings Wood Infant School, Kings Wood Junior School, Bowerdean Nursery and Hannah Ball Infant School and re-open one combined school and nursery with community facilities on the Kings Wood Junior site.
8. Re-furbish Ash Hill School and develop nursery and community use.
9. Close Ash Hill School and re-locate it as a new school, with a nursery and enhanced community provision, elsewhere in the area.
10. Close Beechview Junior School and expand Marsh Infants, to form a combined school and nursery , with enhanced community facilities, in a new building (on the Thames Water site?).
11. Close Marsh Infants School and expand Beechview, to form a combined school and nursery , with enhanced community facilities, on its present site.
12. Develop both Marsh and Beechview Schools as combined schools with nursery provision and enhanced community provision.
13. Combine Bowerdean Nursery and Hannah Ball Infants on the Hannah Ball site.
14. Create a new combined school on the Hannah Ball site, with a nursery and enhanced community provision.

Respondents believed that capital receipts from the sale of some school sites could be used to help pay for some of the proposed rebuilding/refurbishing programmes. However, capital receipts would be unlikely to generate enough income to pay for the building of whole new schools.

Rationale

In considering the evidence and the formulation of its recommendations, the Commission was careful to keep the first point from the Director of Education's letter of 12th May⁴ in mind at all times and to refer to the challenges set out by Mike Harrison⁵. Further, members took as an overarching principle, the necessity to include measures which were likely to result in the raising of educational standards, particularly in those schools which had already been judged to be causing concern⁶. The Commission was also guided by the principle of best value.

Consideration was given to the popularity of each school, its geographical location, proximity, character, size and potential financial viability in the future. The need for Early Years and Adult/Continuing Education provision was recognised, as was that for before and after-school care, very early in the proceedings. Due notice was also taken of relevant County policies, such as the commitment to combined primary schools (5-11), rather than separate infant and junior schools, with a principle that, where possible, nursery provision would be attached to each primary school.

The needs of the community were discussed at length. As a principle, the Commission tried to reflect those needs in its recommendations, both in terms of education and in the need for joint working with other services and agencies, to be developed in the planned development of these schools.

⁴ See pages 3 & 4

⁵ See page 4

⁶ See page 3

Recommendations

1. Build a new mixed upper school on the existing Hatters Lane site with enhanced community facilities, which might include a sports hall, shared computer facility, Police office, District Council office or youth club. Further, to include the SEN Centre and to reinstate the Multi-Cultural Resource Centre in the new school. To investigate the establishment of a combined Education Department resource and training centre on the site. These and other possibilities should be pursued with determination. The Commission feels that a complete re-build is essential for the school's long-term success. The Commission would also recommend that suppliers of Further, Higher and Adult Education should be invited to consider what contributions they might make to the project.
2. The governors and headteacher of the new school, in consultation with the LEA and interested parties, should take into account the specialist status of neighbouring secondary schools and seek to develop the new school's own distinctive strengths or specialism to become a model of future educational provision in the county.
3. Amalgamate Kings Wood Infant and Junior schools to create a two-form entry combined school with nursery provision and community facilities on the junior school site.
4. Amalgamate Hannah Ball Infant and Beechview Junior schools to create a two-form entry combined school with nursery provision and community facilities on the Beechview site.
5. Extend Marsh Infant school to create a one-form entry combined school with nursery provision and community facilities on the present site, if possible, or on a new site, if not.
6. Refurbish Ash Hill as a one-form entry school and add, nursery and community facilities on its present site.
7. Close Bowerdean nursery and re-distribute its places across all the primary schools in the area, as set out above.
8. The LEA should create a steering group, comprising representatives from different professional and community groups, to oversee the different activities recommended in this report. This group should maintain an overview of provision to ensure that the different agencies, organisations and institutions continue to meet the wide range of needs referred to by the Commission in its rationale (see P6).
9. The LEA should undertake a review of all reserved areas of the primary schools in east Wycombe and revise them to reflect the new circumstances which arise as a result of these recommendations.
10. The County Council should evaluate the reallocation of the sites that become available for other educational purposes, such as the relocation of specialist provision and support services to High Wycombe town. Consideration should then be given to the disposal of any sites which are surplus to requirements, in order to allow the capital receipts to help fund the project as a whole.
11. The LEA should explore with the District Council and local housing associations the possibility of building suitable, subsidised accommodation for teachers to enhance their recruitment and retention.
12. To include all of the above in a PFI bid, which is our preferred funding route.
13. To explore the financial implications of the above recommendations, look at the possible capital receipts that might be generated and set those against possible building costs.

Explore the financial feasibility of a PFI bid and put in hand any other work which is necessary to ensure a thorough investigation of financial issues, and the long term viability of these schools, before the recommendations are taken forward.

Fresh Start

Fresh Start is a Government scheme designed to provide LEAs with powers to close under-performing schools and open 'new' ones. The scheme has not been very successful to date. In the few cases where Fresh Start has happened, the tendency has been for the same school population and buildings to become the new school, with a new name, new staff, new Governing Body and new uniform but with the same problems.

However, we have good reasons to believe that, in the case of Hatters Lane, Fresh Start will succeed. This is because the nature of the process itself has developed considerably over the last year. The Government has accepted that such schools require a significant additional resource to redevelop and improve, both in terms of capital and revenue budgets and is now providing these funds. Further, Hatters Lane has shown considerable improvements in almost every area of its work. This enables the new school to start from an improving old school, rather than one which is deteriorating.

Private Finance Initiative (PFI)

As a further line of enquiry, Mike Harrison and Bob Gibbard held exploratory meetings with a PFI consultant, to examine the feasibility of the LEA making a bid to the DfEE for PFI credits to improve Hatters Lane School, and others in the area, if the Commission so recommended and the Education Committee was so minded. This work has involved discussions with the DfEE Fresh Start and PFI teams. Officers also contacted other LEAs and visited other areas, to see how well different types of school improvement schemes had worked.

Possible results of recommendations at September 2005

A – Primary and Nursery provision

Name of proposed Primary School	Capacity (main school) Sept 2005	Capacity (Nursery) Sept 2005	Total MOE Capacity Sept 2005
Kings Wood (2FE)	420	39 (FTE) ⁷	459 (FTE)
Beechview (2FE)	420	39 (FTE)	459 (FTE)
Marsh (1FE)	210	26 (FTE)	236 (FTE)
Ash Hill (1FE)	210	26 (FTE)	236 (FTE)
Tot places provided	1260	130 (FTE)	1390 (FTE)
Tot places required	1090	80* (FTE)	1170 (FTE)
Difference	170	50* (FTE)	220 (FTE)

*N.B.

1. Calculations of capacity are based on equal class sizes of thirty in primary classes and multiples of thirteen in nursery classes.

⁷ FTE - full time equivalent

2. The figure for 'Places Required' in primary schools is based on figures for 2005, as published in the BCC School Organisation Plan⁸, while that for nursery is based on present capacity.
3. Full implementation of this plan would result in the removal of 345 surplus places (Yrs R-6) and leave approximately 170 (or 13.5%) places for movement/growth within the area, to cope with the possible increase in population, especially in the Wycombe Marsh area. There would also be an extra 50 (FTE) nursery places.

B – Secondary provision

	Capacity (Years 7-11)	Capacity (including 6 th form)
Hatters Lane School - 4 (or 5) Form Entry	600 (or 720)	650 (or 800)
Places required	483	497
Difference	117 (or 237)	153 (or 303?)

N.B.

1. Figures in brackets show the effects of the school having a capacity of five, rather than four, forms of entry.
2. Calculations of capacity are based on equal class sizes of thirty for years 7-11, while 6th form capacity is an estimate based on current needs plus an allowance for growth.
3. The figure for 'places required' in secondary schools is based on figures for 2005, as published in the BCC School Organisation Plan⁹.

List of individuals/organisations making representation to the Commission

A - Wycombe Commission Consultation Meetings

Monday 25 th September	Wednesday 11 th October
Mike Ashford – Hamilton School	Barbara Maher & Jeremy Beake - Wycombe DC
Barbara Smith & Sue Horswell – Beechview School	Barbara Maher & Jeremy Beake – Wycombe DC
Kim Hart – Bucks CC - SEN & EYCDP	Katherine Woods – Bucks CC - Continuing Education
Clive Ricks – Gt Marlow School	Bill Richards – Sir William Ramsay School
Sgt Jackie Carter & PC Mike Swan - Police	Maggie Moore & John Preece – Hannah Ball School
Peter Wild – Wycombe Grange PRU	Shirley Louisy & Patricia Lea – Bowerdean Nursery
Maggie Farmer – Woodlands PRU	Linda Melton – Wye Valley School
Anne Smart & Glyn Galbraith – Marsh School	Graeme Kilner & Rafique Raja – Highworth School
Wendy Beaton – Bucks CC – EYCDP	Rick Fletcher – Amersham & Wycombe College
Sue Little – BYPU	Chief Inspector Keith Ringsell – Police
	Kim Hart & Wendy Beaton & Mike Cornfield

⁸ May 2000. See tables on page 3.

⁹ May 2000. See page 3.

B - Wycombe Commission Public Meetings

The Commission held four public meetings, as follows:

1. Monday 25th September - Beechview Junior School, Guinions Road.
2. Tuesday 26th September - Hatters Lane School, Hatters Lane.
3. Wednesday 27th September - Kings Wood Junior School, Hollis Road.
4. Thursday 28th September - Ash Hill Combined School, Herbert Road.

In all about one hundred parents, and other interested parties, attended the meetings.

C - Written Submissions to the Commission

1. Letter from Mr P Basham
2. Letter from Mr G Moore
3. Paper from Wycombe East Labour Party
4. Letter from Mr & Mrs Sn(illegible)
5. Letter from Bowerdean Nursery
6. Letter from Mrs M Fowler
7. Paper from Kim Hart & Wendy Beaton (EYCDP)
8. Presentation notes from Wycombe DC
9. Presentation notes (+ copies of parents' letters) from Hannah Ball School
10. Presentation notes (+ supplement) from Highworth School
11. Paper from The Rye Liaison Group
12. Letter from Mr P Crook
13. Paper from Marsh School
14. Letter from Beechview School
15. Letter from Danny Sullivan (Oxford Diocese)
16. Paper from Buckinghamshire Sure Start Partnership (Deprivation amongst Affluence)
17. Paper from Parkman Associates

D - Other Contacts

The Senior Advisory Officer and Advisory Officer held a series of briefing meetings and discussions on behalf of the Commission. Those people spoken to included elected members of Wycombe District Council and Buckinghamshire County Council, as well as headteachers, governors and schools' medical officers. All information gained in this way was reported back to the Commission. All the above evidence is held at the Southern Area Education Office

Chairman's thanks

Councillor Margaret Dewar wishes to thank the members of the Commission for all their hard work, on behalf of the people of east Wycombe. She also wishes to record her particular thanks to the officers of the LEA for their support.

21st November 2000