

department for

education and skills

creating opportunity, releasing potential, achieving excellence

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Dear Mr Mullee

Thank you for your letter of 12 December, addressed to the Prime Minister, about Stockton Heath County Primary School. As I am sure you can appreciate, the Prime Minister receives a large volume of correspondence and is unable to reply personally in all cases. I have therefore been asked to reply on Mr Blair's behalf.

Firstly, I should explain that it is the legal duty of each local authority (LA) to make sure that sufficient school places exist to meet the needs of the population and to review the position regularly, taking action where a significant imbalance is identified.

Decisions on proposals to make changes to existing maintained school provision are handled under local decision making arrangements and the Secretary of State has no role in these matters. The process involves four statutory stages: consultation (with all interested parties), publication (in a local newspaper, at entrance to the school and in a conspicuous place in the area served by the school), representation (allowing for comments and objections to be submitted) and decision (normally by the local School Organisation Committee (SOC) or schools adjudicator if the SOC cannot reach a unanimous decision.)

The consultation period is your opportunity to make your concerns known to the LA. Before deciding to publish the proposals the proposer must then consider the views expressed and must be able to demonstrate how they have taken those views into account before they made their final decision on whether to publish.

If the proposals are published there is a further opportunity for those who remain unhappy to register their concerns during the representation period following publication. Comments and objections should be submitted to the LA by the deadline noted in the published notice. If the proposals are published by the LA, and there are no objections, the LA may decide the proposals. In all other cases the proposals must be passed to the SOC. If the SOC cannot reach a unanimous decision, the proposals must be passed to the Schools Adjudicator for a final decision.

Both the SOC and Schools Adjudicator are required to have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State when making a final decision on the proposals. The guidance details a range of factors which must be considered including: the impact on standards of provision, overall supply and future demand for places, the length and nature of journeys to alternative provision, the overall effect of closure on the community, cost effectiveness, the impact on the local community and also the views of interested parties.



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You may wish to note that more detailed information on the arrangements for deciding proposals may be found via the Department's website: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolorg/>.

I appreciate that proposals such as this can be very sensitive and upsetting for those involved and you clearly feel very strongly. Whilst Ministers cannot intervene I hope this letter reassures you that there are sufficient opportunities to make your views known during the process and that these will be taken into account.

Yours sincerely



Lisa Ward
On behalf of the Head of the Public Communications Unit