



SOUTH BELFAST PARTNERSHIP BOARD

Belfast Education and Library Board
Planning and Development Section
40 Academy Street
Belfast
BT1 2NQ

25 June 2013

Dear Sir/Madam

Please find attached our response to the **Draft BELB Area Plan for Primary Education**. This response has been prepared by the South Belfast Partnership Board in consultation with a number of local community groups in South Belfast. In particular, views have been captured and input into the response from a number of local community structures, including:

- **South Belfast Partnership Board** – A Board which brings together all sectors – community, statutory, political and private – to strengthen and better target the efforts being made by the community, the private sector and the Government to tackle in partnership the economic, social and environmental problems which affect people in the most disadvantaged areas of South Belfast;
- **Inner South Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership** – A Partnership that brings together all sectors to oversee the implementation of the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Programme in the three inner city communities of Donegall Pass, Lower Ormeau and the Markets; and
- **South West Belfast Neighbourhood Partnership** – A Partnership that brings together all sectors to facilitate the implementation of the Government's Neighbourhood Renewal Programme in the South West Belfast area, which covers Sandy Row, the Village, the mid-Donagall Road and Roden Street.

Broadly speaking we are supportive of the proposals contained within the draft Area Plan. From a South Belfast perspective, we are pleased to note that the preferred option for the South West Belfast area is to amalgamate all three schools – Donegall Road, Fane Street and Blythefield – onto a single site at the City Hospital. While there is broad community and political support to see an improved primary school facility serving one of the most deprived areas of Northern Ireland, the SBPB seeks reassurance that the site is sufficient to design a primary school that which more than adequately meets the recognised needs of the area.

Related to this, some of the community representatives within the South West area have expressed concerns that the uncertainty surrounding the future of the existing schools is causing additional problems, such as parents choosing to send their children to schools outside of the area rather than to a school that may close in the next couple of years. We would therefore urge the Department and BELB to make a decision as early as possible in this regard and are content to lead on discussions if an alternative site is required.

South Belfast Partnership

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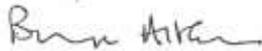
In the light of the comments above, whilst we recognise that there is a pressing need to provide Stranmillis Primary School with larger and improved accommodation through a new-build school on YMCA lands at Knightsbridge Park, we would be concerned that there is a close correlation between the current oversubscription at Stranmillis and the current uncertainty at the South West area. The logical conclusion is that if the Primary School provision is addressed effectively within the South West area, the demand for Stranmillis, and other schools within South Belfast. We would suggest that this will need to be taken into account when considering the details of the new school to be constructed in Stranmillis.

Within the Inner South area, we welcome the recognition that Botanic Primary School is in need of additional support. The demographics of South Belfast are unique in the fact that there are large proportions of ethnic minorities living within this area of the City. Nowhere is this more true than within the Holylands. There is therefore likely to be an on-going need to provide additional educational support for schools, including both Botanic and St Malachy's, within the area in relation to teaching for pupils with English as an additional language. The same consideration should also be taken into account when planning for the primary education provision within the South West area, given a growing migrant population within the Village and lower Lisburn Road areas.

We recognise that the Irish Medium Sector generally has unfilled spaces, necessitating closures/amalgamations. Within South Belfast, Scoil An Droichead is the only Irish Medium school serving most of South and East Belfast, which will continue to be viable and sustainable given the growing demand it is currently seeing. We would therefore expect that this School would not be one at risk of closure.

We trust that you find these comments useful and look forward to seeing how they help shape the final Area Plan in due course. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the matters raised within this response with the Board or Department, so please don't hesitate to contact me on 02890 244 070 or briege.arthurs@southbelfast.org if you would like any further information or clarity in relation to any of our comments.

Yours sincerely



Briege Arthurs
Chief Executive Officer, South Belfast Partnership Board