

department for  
**children, schools and families**

Extract of

Decision Makers' Guidance for:

## Closing a Maintained Mainstream School

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# CLOSING A MAINTAINED MAINSTREAM SCHOOL - A GUIDE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND GOVERNING BODIES

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This guidance is extracted, for ease of reference by decision makers, from the full version of the “Closing a Maintained Mainstream School” guide - [www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg/guidance.cfm?id=3](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg/guidance.cfm?id=3). The statutory guidance sections are indicated by shading, the word **must** in bold refers to a requirement in legislation, whilst the word **should** in bold is a recommendation.

### CLOSING A MAINTAINED MAINSTREAM SCHOOL - A GUIDE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND GOVERNING BODIES

#### Stage 4 – Decision (Paragraphs 4.1-4.70)

##### Who Will Decide the Proposals? (Paragraphs 4.1-4.4)

4.1 Decisions on school organisation proposals are taken by the LA or by the schools adjudicator. In this chapter both are covered by the form of words “Decision Maker” which applies equally to both. Paragraphs 7-8 and 19 of Schedule 2 to EIA 2006 set out who **must** decide proposals for school closures. Decisions on closure proposals will be taken by the LA with some rights of appeal to the schools adjudicator. Only if the closure proposals are “related” to other proposals that fall to be decided by the schools adjudicator, will the LA not be the decision maker in the first instance.

4.2 The Department does not prescribe the process by which an LA carries out their decision-making function (e.g. full Cabinet or delegation to Cabinet member or officials). This is a matter for the LA to determine but the requirement to have regard to statutory guidance (see paragraph 4.15 below) applies equally to the body or individual that takes the decision.

4.3 Where proposals are published by the LA and there are no objections and the proposals are not “related” to other proposals, the proposals **must** be determined by the LA under Paragraph 19 of Schedule 2 to EIA 2006. The proposals **should** then be decided within 2 months (and if not, the proposals **must** be referred to the schools adjudicator) and there is no provision for an appeal against the LA’s decision. A conditional approval cannot be given where proposals are decided under the paragraph.

4.4 If there are objections to the proposals, or there are no objections but the proposals are “related” to other proposals, the proposals **must** be decided under Paragraph 8 of Schedule 2 to EIA 2006. The LA will normally be the decision maker (i.e. except where the proposals are related to proposals for the establishment of a new school and the schools adjudicator is required to decide the new school proposals – see paragraph 5.6 of Part A, and paragraph 4.6 of Part B, of “Establishing a New Maintained Mainstream School” - [www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg/guidance.cfm?id=2](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg/guidance.cfm?id=2)). If the LA fail to decide proposals within 2 months of the end of the representation period the LA **must** forward proposals, and any received representations (i.e. not withdrawn in writing), to the schools adjudicator for decision. They **must** forward the proposals within one week from the end of the 2 month period.

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### **Who Can Appeal Against an LA Decision?** (Paragraphs 4.5-4.6)

4.5 There is no right of appeal where proposals are decided under Paragraph 19 of Schedule 2 to EIA 2006. In all other cases the following bodies may appeal against an LA decision on school closure proposals:

- the local Church of England diocese;
- the Bishop of the local Roman Catholic diocese;
- the LSC where the school provides education for pupils aged 14 and over; and
- the governors and trustees of a foundation (including Trust) or voluntary school that is subject to the closure proposals.

4.6 Any appeals **must** be submitted to the LA within 4 weeks of the notification of the LA's decision. On receipt of an appeal the LA **must** then send the proposals, and the representations received (together with any comments made on these representations by the proposers), to the schools adjudicator within 1 week of the receipt of the appeal. The LA **should** also send a copy of the minutes of the LA's meeting or other record of the decision and any relevant papers. Where the proposals are "related" to other proposals, all the "related" proposals **must** also be sent to the schools adjudicator.

### **Checks on Receipt of Statutory Proposals** (Paragraph 4.7)

4.7 There are 4 key issues which the Decision Maker **should** consider before judging the respective factors and merits of the statutory proposals:

- Is any information missing? If so, the Decision Maker **should** write immediately to the proposer specifying a date by which the information **should** be provided;
- Does the published notice comply with statutory requirements? (see paragraph 4.8 below);
- Has the statutory consultation been carried out prior to the publication of the notice? (see paragraph 4.9 below); and
- Are the proposals "related" to other published proposals? (see paragraphs 4.10 - 4.14 below).

### **Does the Published Notice Comply with Statutory Requirements?** (Paragraph 4.8)

4.8 The Decision Maker **should** consider whether the notice is valid as soon as a copy is received. Where a published notice does not comply with statutory requirements - as set out in the Regulations - it may be judged invalid and the Decision Maker **should** consider whether they can decide the

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proposals.

### **Has the Statutory Consultation Been Carried Out Prior to the Publication of the Notice?** (Paragraph 4.9)

4.9 Details of the consultation **must** be included in the proposals. The Decision Maker **should** be satisfied that the consultation meets statutory requirements (see [Stage 1](#) paragraphs 1.2–1.5). If some parties submit objections on the basis that consultation was not adequate, the Decision Maker may wish to take legal advice on the points raised. If the requirements have not been met, the Decision Maker may judge the proposals to be invalid and needs to consider whether they can decide the proposals. Alternatively the Decision Maker may take into account the sufficiency and quality of the consultation as part of their overall judgement of the proposals as a whole.

### **Are the Proposals Related to Other Published Proposals?** (Paragraphs 4.10-4.14)

4.10 Paragraphs 9 and 19 of Schedule 2 to the EIA 2006 provide that any proposals that are “related to” particular proposals (e.g. for a new school, or prescribed alterations to existing schools i.e. change of age range, enlargement, transfer of site) **must** be considered together. This does not include proposals that fall outside of the Regulations e.g. removal of a Trust, opening of an Academy, federation proposals. Paragraphs 4.11 – 4.14 provide statutory guidance on whether proposals **should** be regarded as “related”.

4.11 Generally, proposals **should** be regarded as “related” if they are included on the same notice (unless the notice makes it clear that the proposals are not “related”). Proposals **should** be regarded as “related” if the notice makes a reference to a link to other proposals (published under School Organisation and Trust regulations). If the statutory notices do not confirm a link, but it is clear that a decision on one of the proposals would be likely to directly affect the outcome or consideration of the other, the proposals **should** be regarded as “related”. Proposals for a school competition **should** be considered together with proposals for any school closure where there is a clear link.

4.12 Where proposals are “related”, the decisions **should** be compatible e.g. if one set of proposals is for the removal of provision, and another is for the establishment or enlargement of provision for displaced pupils, both **should** be approved or rejected.

4.13 Where proposals for a closing school are “related” to proposals published by the local LSC<sup>1</sup>, which are to be decided by the Secretary of State, the Decision Maker **must** defer taking a decision until the Secretary of

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<sup>1</sup> References throughout this document to the LSC only apply up to April 2010. The Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act (ASCL) Act 2009 will transfer the responsibilities of the LSC in respect of 16-19 education and training to LAs, supported by the Young People's Learning Agency. This guidance will be revised by April 2010 to take account of these changes.

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State has taken a decision on the LSC proposals. This applies where the proposals before the Decision Maker concern:

- the school that is the subject of the LSC proposals;
- any other secondary school, maintained by the same LA that maintains a school that is the subject of the LSC proposals; or
- any other secondary school in the same LA area as any FE college which is the subject of the LSC proposals.

4.14 The proposals will be regarded as “related” if their implementation would prevent or undermine effective implementation of the LSC proposals.

### **Statutory Guidance – Factors to be Considered by Decision Makers** (Paragraphs 4.15-4.16)

4.15 Paragraphs 8(6) and 17 of Schedule 2 to the EIA 2006 provides that both the LA and schools adjudicator **must** have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State when they take a decision on closure proposals. Paragraphs 4.16 to 4.63 below contain the statutory guidance.

4.16 The following factors **should not** be taken to be exhaustive. Their importance will vary, depending on the type and circumstances of the proposals. All proposals **should** be considered on their individual merits.

### **EFFECT ON STANDARDS AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT**

#### **A System Shaped by Parents** (Paragraphs 4.17-4.18)

4.17 The Government's aim, as set out in the Five Year Strategy for Education and Learners and the Schools White Paper Higher Standards, Better Schools For All, is to create a schools system shaped by parents which delivers excellence and equity. In particular, the Government wishes to see a dynamic system in which:

- weak schools that need to be closed are closed quickly and replaced by new ones where necessary; and
- the best schools are able to expand and spread their ethos and success.

4.18 The EIA 2006 amends the Education Act 1996 to place duties on LAs to secure diversity in the provision of schools and to increase opportunities for parental choice when planning the provision of schools in their areas. In addition, LAs are under a specific duty to respond to representations from parents about the provision of schools, including requests to establish new schools or make changes to existing schools. The Government's aim is to secure a more diverse and dynamic schools system which is shaped by parents. The Decision Maker **should** take into account the extent to which the proposals are consistent with the new duties on LAs.

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### **Standards** (Paragraphs 4.19-4.21)

4.19 The Government wishes to encourage changes to local school provision where it will boost standards and opportunities for young people, while matching school place supply as closely as possible to pupils' and parents' needs and wishes.

4.20 Decision Makers **should** be satisfied that proposals for a school closure will contribute to raising local standards of provision, and will lead to improved attainment for children and young people. They **should** pay particular attention to the effects on groups that tend to under-perform including children from certain ethnic groups, children from deprived backgrounds and children in care, with the aim of narrowing attainment gaps.

4.21 Where a school is to be closed so that it may be amalgamated with a more successful and/or popular school, the Decision Maker **should** again normally approve these proposals, subject to evidence being provided by the LA and other interested parties, that the development will have a positive impact on standards.

### **Schools Causing Concern** (Paragraphs 4.22-4.23)

4.22 When considering the closure of any school causing concern and, where relevant, the expansion of other schools, the Decision Maker **should** take into account the popularity with parents of alternative schools.

4.23 For all closure proposals involving schools causing concern, copies of the Ofsted monitoring letters for the relevant schools **should** be made available. The Decision Maker **should** have regard to the length of time the school has been in special measures, needing significant improvement or otherwise causing concern, the progress it has made, the prognosis for improvement, and the availability of places at other existing or proposed schools within a reasonable travelling distance. There **should** be a presumption that these proposals **should** be approved, subject only to checking that there will be sufficient accessible places of an acceptable standard available in the area to meet foreseeable demand and to accommodate the displaced pupils.

### **National Challenge Trust Schools** (Paragraph 4.24)

4.24 Where a school is proposed to close and re-open as a brokered National Challenge Trust school, the new school will have clear and specific plans for raising attainment which have been agreed by the Department (specified in the Statement of Intent agreed by Ministers). There **should** be a presumption to approve proposals where funding has been agreed by the Department, but the Decision Maker **should** be satisfied that the places the new school will provide are needed.

### **Academies** (Paragraphs 4.25-4.27)

4.25 Academies are publicly-funded independent schools established in

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partnership with business and voluntary sector sponsors. They will normally replace one or more poorly-performing schools or will meet demand for new school places in diverse communities where there is only limited access to free high quality school places. Academies may be established in rural as well as urban areas. All Academies **should** contribute to a strategic approach to diversity in their area. The involvement of business and other non-Government partners will enable Academies to develop and implement new approaches to governance, teaching and learning in order to raise standards. All Academies will be required to share their facilities and expertise with other local schools and the wider community.

4.26 Where an Academy is to replace an existing school or schools, the proposals for the closure of those schools **should** indicate whether pupils currently attending the schools will transfer to the Academy and, if appropriate, what arrangements will be made for pupils who are not expected to transfer.

4.27 If provision for pupils at a school proposed for closure is dependent on the establishment of an Academy, or the extension or enlargement of an existing Academy, any approval of the closure proposals **should** be conditional on the Secretary of State making an agreement for a new Academy, or agreeing to the extension or enlargement of an existing one (see paragraph 4.65), but there **should** be a general presumption in favour of approval.

### **Diversity** (Paragraphs 4.28-4.30)

4.28 Decision Makers **should** be satisfied that when proposals lead to children (who attend provision recognised by the LA as being reserved for pupils with special educational needs) being displaced, any alternative provision will meet the statutory SEN improvement test (see paragraphs 4.58 to 4.62).

4.29 The Government's aim is to transform our school system so that every child receives an excellent education – whatever their background and wherever they live. A vital part of the Government's vision is to create a more diverse school system offering excellence and choice, where each school has a strong ethos and sense of mission and acts as a centre of excellence or specialist provision.

4.30 Decision Makers **should** consider how proposals will impact on local diversity. They **should** consider the range of schools in the relevant area of the LA and how the closure of the school will ultimately impact on the aspirations of parents, help raise local standards and narrow attainment gaps.

### **Balance of Denominational Provision** (Paragraphs 4.31-4.32)

4.31 In deciding proposals to close a school with a religious character, the Decision Maker **should** consider the effect that this will have on the balance of denominational provision in the area.

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4.32 The Decision Maker **should not** normally approve the closure of a school with a religious character where the proposal would result in a reduction in the proportion of denominational places in the area. This guidance does not however apply in cases where the school concerned is severely under-subscribed, standards have been consistently low or where an infant and junior school (at least one of which has a religious character) are to be replaced by a new all-through primary school with the same religious character on the site of one or both of the predecessor schools.

### **Every Child Matters** (Paragraph 4.33)

4.33 The Decision Maker **should** consider how proposals will help every child and young person achieve their potential in accordance with “Every Child Matters” principles which are: to be healthy; stay safe; enjoy and achieve; make a positive contribution to the community and society; and achieve economic well-being. This **should** include considering how displaced pupils will continue to have access to extended services, opportunities for personal development, access to academic and applied learning training, measures to address barriers to participation and support for children and young people with particular needs, e.g. looked after children or children with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities.

### **NEED FOR PLACES**

#### **Provision for Displaced Pupils** (Paragraph 4.34)

4.34 Where proposals will remove provision, the Decision Maker **should** be satisfied that there is sufficient capacity to accommodate displaced pupils in the area, taking into account the overall supply and likely future demand for places. The Decision Maker **should** consider the quality and popularity with parents of the schools in which spare capacity exists and evidence of parents' aspirations for those schools.

#### **Surplus Places** (Paragraphs 4.35-4.36)

4.35 It is important that education is provided as cost-effectively as possible. Empty places can represent a poor use of resources - resources that can often be used more effectively to support schools in raising standards. The Secretary of State wishes to encourage LAs to organise provision in order to ensure that places are located where parents want them. LAs **should** take action to remove empty places at schools that are unpopular with parents and which do little to raise standards or improve choice. The removal of surplus places **should** always support the core agenda of raising standards and respect parents' wishes by seeking to match school places with parental choices.

4.36 The Decision Maker **should** normally approve proposals to close schools in order to remove surplus places where the school proposed for closure has a quarter or more places unfilled, and at least 30 surplus places, and where standards are low compared to standards across the LA. The Decision Maker **should** consider all other proposals to close schools in order

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to remove surplus places carefully. Where the rationale for the closure of a school is based on the removal of surplus places, standards at the school(s) in question **should** be taken into account, as well as geographical and social factors, such as population sparsity in rural areas, and the effect on any community use of the premises.

### **IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY AND TRAVEL**

#### **Impact on Community** (Paragraphs 4.37-4.38)

4.37 Some schools may already be a focal point for family and community activity, providing extended services for a range of users, and its closure may have wider social ramifications. In considering proposals for the closure of such schools, the effect on families and the community **should** be considered. Where the school was providing access to extended services, some provision **should** be made for the pupils and their families to access similar services through their new schools or other means.

4.38 The information presented by those bringing forward proposals to close such schools, particularly when they are in receipt of funding as part of regeneration activity, **should** therefore include evidence that options for maintaining access to extended services in the area have been addressed. The views of other relevant agencies and partnerships with responsibility for community and family services **should** be taken into account, alongside those of the local police, Government Offices and Regional Development Agencies having responsibility for the New Deal for Communities.

#### **Community Cohesion and Race Equality** (Paragraph 4.39)

4.39 When considering proposals to close a school the Decision Maker **should** consider the impact of the proposals on community cohesion. This will need to be considered on a case by case basis, taking account of the community served by the school and the views of different sections within the community. In considering the impact of the proposals on community cohesion the Decision Maker will need to take account of the nature of the alternative provision to be made for pupils displaced by the closure and the effects of any other changes to the provision of schools in the area.

#### **Travel and Accessibility for All** (Paragraphs 4.40-4.41)

4.40 In considering proposals for the reorganisation of schools, Decision Makers **should** satisfy themselves that accessibility planning has been properly taken into account. Facilities are to be accessible by those concerned, by being located close to those who will use them, and the proposed changes **should not** adversely impact on disadvantaged groups.

4.41 In deciding statutory proposals, the Decision Maker **should** bear in mind that proposals **should not** have the effect of unreasonably extending journey times or increasing transport costs, or result in too many children being prevented from travelling sustainably due to unsuitable routes e.g. for walking, cycling etc. The EIA 2006 provides extended

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free transport rights for low income groups – see Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance ref 00373 – 2007BKT-EN at [www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications). Proposals **should** also be considered on the basis of how they will support and contribute to the LA's duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to school.

### **Rural Schools and Sites** (Paragraphs 4.42-4.44)

4.42 In considering statutory proposals to close a rural school, the Decision Maker **should** have regard to the need to preserve access to a local school for rural communities. There is therefore a presumption against the closure of rural schools. This does not mean that a rural school will never close, but the case for closure **should** be strong and the proposals clearly in the best interests of educational provision in the area. The presumption will not apply in cases where a rural infant and junior school on the same site are being closed to establish a new primary school. In order to assist the Decision Maker, those proposing closure **should** provide evidence to the Decision Maker to show that they have carefully considered:

- a. Alternatives to closure including the potential for federation with another local school to increase the school's viability; the scope for an extended school or children's centre to provide local community services and facilities e.g. child care facilities, family and adult learning, healthcare, community internet access etc;
- b. The transport implications as mentioned in paragraphs 4.40 to 4.41; and
- c. The overall and long term impact on local people and the community of closure of the village school and of the loss of the building as a community facility.

4.43 When deciding proposals for the closure of a rural primary school, the Decision Maker **should** refer to the Designation of Rural Primary Schools (England) 2007 to confirm that the school is a rural school. The list of rural primary schools can be viewed on line at: [www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg/useful-links.cfm](http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/schoolorg/useful-links.cfm).

4.44 In the case of secondary schools, it is the responsibility of the Decision Maker to decide whether a school is to be regarded as rural for the purpose of considering proposals for closure under this guidance and in particular the presumption against closure. The Department's register of schools – Edubase (<http://www.edubase.gov.uk>) - includes a rural/urban indicator for each school in England based on an assessment by the Office for National Statistics. The Decision Maker **should** have regard to this indicator. Where a school is not recorded as rural on Edubase, the Decision Maker may nonetheless wish to consider evidence provided by interested parties that a particular school **should** be regarded as rural.

NOTE: On Edubase, any school classed as urban will have a rural/urban indicator of either 'Urban>10K – less sparse' or 'Urban>10K – sparse' – all

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other descriptions refer to rural schools.

### **SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS**

#### **Boarding Provision** (Paragraph 4.45)

4.45 In making a decision on proposals to close a school that includes boarding provision, the Decision Maker **should** consider whether there is a state maintained boarding school within one hour's travelling distance from the school. The Decision Maker **should** consider whether there are satisfactory alternative boarding arrangements for those currently in the school and those who may need boarding places in the foreseeable future, including the children of service families.

#### **Equal Opportunity Issues** (Paragraph 4.46)

4.46 The Decision Maker **should** consider whether there are any sex, race or disability discrimination issues that arise from the changes being proposed, for example that where there is a proposed change to single sex provision in an area, there is equal access to single sex provision for the other sex to meet parental demand. Similarly there needs to be a commitment to provide access to a range of opportunities which reflect the ethnic and cultural mix of the area, while ensuring that such opportunities are open to all.

### **SPECIFIC AGE PROVISION ISSUES**

#### **Early Years Provision** (Paragraphs 4.47-4.48)

4.47 In considering proposals to close a school which currently includes early years provision, the Decision Maker **should** consider whether the alternative provision will integrate pre-school education with childcare services and/or with other services for young children and their families; and **should** have particular regard to the views of the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership.

4.48 The Decision Maker **should** also consider whether the alternative early years provision will maintain or enhance the standard of educational provision and flexibility of access for parents. Alternative provision could be with providers in the private, voluntary or independent sector.

#### **Nursery School Closures** (Paragraph 4.49)

4.49 In deciding whether to approve any proposals to close a nursery school, the Decision Maker **should** be aware that nursery schools generally offer high quality provision, and have considerable potential as the basis for developing integrated services for young children and families. There **should** be a presumption against the closure of a nursery school unless the case for closure can demonstrate that:

- a. the LA is consistently funding numbers of empty places;
- b. full consideration has been given to developing the school into a Sure

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Start Children's Centre, and there are clear, justifiable grounds for not doing so, for example: unsuitable accommodation, poor quality provision and low demand for places;

c. plans to develop alternative provision clearly demonstrate that it will be at least as equal in terms of the quantity and quality of early years provision provided by the nursery school with no loss of expertise and specialism; and that

d. replacement provision is more accessible and more convenient for local parents.

### **14-19 Curriculum and Collaboration** (Paragraph 4.50)

4.50 The Government has ambitious plans to increase post-16 participation rates and improve the skills of learners. The foundation for making progress is a transformed, coherent 14-19 phase offering a rich mix of learning opportunities from which young people can choose tailored programmes and gain qualifications appropriate to their aptitudes, needs and aspirations. This will be achieved by better collaboration between local providers, including schools, colleges, training providers and employers. Decision Makers **should** therefore consider what measures are being proposed to ensure that opportunities available to students in this age group are not reduced by the school closure, although the absence of such measures **should not** prevent the closure of a poorly-performing school.

### **16-19 Provision – General** (Paragraphs 4.51-4.53)

4.51 The pattern of 16-19 provision differs across the country. Many different configurations of school and college provision deliver effective 14-19 education and training. An effective 14-19 organisation has a number of key features:

- standards and quality: the provision available **should** be of a high standard – as demonstrated by high levels of achievement and good completion rates;
- progression: there **should** be good progression routes for all learners in the area, so that every young person has a choice of the full range of options within the 14-19 entitlement, with institutions collaborating as necessary to make this offer. All routes **should** make provision for the pastoral, management and learning needs of the 14-19 age group;
- participation: there are high levels of participation in the local area; and,
- learner satisfaction: young people consider that there is provision for their varied needs, aspirations and aptitudes in a range of settings across the area.

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4.52 Where standards and participation rates are variable, or where there is little choice, meaning that opportunity at 16 relies on where a young person went to school, the case for reorganisation, or allowing high quality providers to expand, is strong.

4.53 Where standards and participation rates are consistently high, collaboration is strong and learners express satisfaction that they have sufficient choice, the case for a different pattern of provision is less strong. The Decision Maker therefore will need to take account of the pattern of 16-19 provision in the area and the implications of approving new provision.

### **LSC Proposals to Close Inadequate 16-19 Provision (Paragraph 4.54)**

4.54 The Learning and Skills Act 2000 (as amended by the Education Act 2005) gives the LSC<sup>2</sup> powers to propose the closure of 16-19 schools judged to require Significant Improvement in two consecutive Ofsted inspections. Where a 16-19 school is proposed for closure in such circumstances there **should** be a presumption to approve the proposals, subject to evidence being provided that the development will have a positive impact on standards.

### **Conflicting Sixth Form Reorganisation Proposals (Paragraph 4.55)**

4.55 Where the implementation of reorganisation proposals by the LSC conflict with other published proposals put to the Decision Maker for decision, the Decision Maker is prevented (by the School Organisation Proposals by the LSC for England Regulations 2003) from making a decision on the “related” proposals until the Secretary of State has decided the LSC proposals (see paragraphs 4.13 to 4.14 above).

## **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS (SEN) PROVISION**

### **Initial Considerations (Paragraphs 4.56-4.57)**

4.56 SEN provision, in the context of School Organisation legislation and this guidance, is provision recognised by the LA as specifically reserved for pupils with special educational needs. When reviewing SEN provision, planning or commissioning alternative types of SEN provision or considering proposals for change, LAs **should** aim for a flexible range of provision and support that can respond to the special educational needs of individual pupils and parental preferences, rather than necessarily establishing broad categories of provision according to special educational need or disability. There are a number of initial considerations for LAs to take account of in relation to proposals for change. They **should** ensure that local proposals:

- a. take account of parental preferences for particular styles of provision or education settings;

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<sup>2</sup> References throughout this document to the LSC only apply up to April 2010. The ASCL Act 2009 will transfer the responsibilities of the LSC in respect of 16-19 education and training to LAs, supported by the Young People's Learning Agency. This guidance will be revised by April 2010 to take account of these changes.

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- b. offer a range of provision to respond to the needs of individual children and young people, taking account of collaborative arrangements (including between special and mainstream), extended school and Children's Centre provision; regional centres (of expertise ) and regional and sub-regional provision; out of LA day and residential special provision;
- c. are consistent with the LA's Children and Young People's Plan;
- d. take full account of educational considerations, in particular the need to ensure a broad and balanced curriculum, including the National Curriculum, within a learning environment in which children can be healthy and stay safe;
- e. support the LA's strategy for making schools and settings more accessible to disabled children and young people and their scheme for promoting equality of opportunity for disabled people;
- f. provide access to appropriately trained staff and access to specialist support and advice, so that individual pupils can have the fullest possible opportunities to make progress in their learning and participate in their school and community;
- g. ensure appropriate provision for 14-19 year-olds, taking account of the role of local LSC funded institutions and their admissions policies; and
- h. ensure that appropriate full-time education will be available to all displaced pupils. Their statements of special educational needs will require amendment and all parental rights **must** be ensured. Other interested partners, such as the Health Authority **should** be involved.

4.57 Taking account of the considerations, as set out above, will provide assurance to local communities, children and parents that any reorganisation of SEN provision in their area is designed to improve on existing arrangements and enable all children to achieve the five Every Child Matters outcomes.

### **The Special Educational Needs Improvement Test (Paragraph 4.58)**

4.58 When considering any reorganisation of provision that would be recognised by the LA as reserved for pupils with special educational needs, including that which might lead to some children being displaced through closures or alterations, LAs, and all other proposers for new schools or new provision, will need to demonstrate to parents, the local community and Decision Makers how the proposed alternative arrangements are likely to lead to improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of educational provision for children with special educational needs. All consultation documents and reorganisation plans that LAs publish and all relevant documentation LAs and other proposers submit to Decision Makers **should** show how the key factors set out in paragraphs 4.59 to 4.62 below have been taken into account by applying the SEN improvement test. Proposals which do not credibly meet these requirements **should not** be approved and Decision Makers **should** take proper account of parental or independent representations which

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question the LA's own assessment in this regard.

### **Key Factors** (Paragraphs 4.59-4.62)

4.59 When LAs are planning changes to their existing SEN provision, and in order to meet the requirement to demonstrate likely improvements in provision, they **should**:

a. identify the details of the specific educational benefits that will flow from the proposals in terms of:

- i. improved access to education and associated services including the curriculum, wider school activities, facilities and equipment, with reference to the LA's Accessibility Strategy;
- ii. improved access to specialist staff, both education and other professionals, including any external support and/or outreach services;
- iii. improved access to suitable accommodation; and
- iv. improved supply of suitable places.

b. LAs **should** also:

- i. obtain a written statement that offers the opportunity for all providers of existing and proposed provision to set out their views on the changing pattern of provision seeking agreement where possible;
- ii. clearly state arrangements for alternative provision. A 'hope' or 'intention' to find places elsewhere is not acceptable. Wherever possible, the host or alternative schools **should** confirm in writing that they are willing to receive pupils, and have or will have all the facilities necessary to provide an appropriate curriculum;
- iii. specify the transport arrangements that will support appropriate access to the premises by reference to the LA's transport policy for SEN and disabled children; and
- iv. specify how the proposals will be funded and the planned staffing arrangements that will be put in place.

4.60 It is to be noted that any pupils displaced as a result of the closure of a BESD school (difficulties with behavioural, emotional and social development) **should not** be placed long-term or permanently in a Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) if a special school place is what they need. PRUs are intended primarily for pupils who have been excluded, although LAs can and do use PRU provision for pupils out of school for other reasons such as illness and teenage pregnancies. There may of course be pupils who have statements identifying that they have BESD

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who have been placed appropriately in a PRU because they have been excluded; in such cases the statement **must** be amended to name the PRU, but PRUs **should not** be seen as an alternative long-term provision to special schools.

4.61 The requirement to demonstrate improvements and identify the specific educational benefits that flow from proposals for new or altered provision as set out in the key factors are for all those who bring forward proposals for new special schools or for special provision in mainstream schools including governors of foundation schools and foundation special schools. The proposer needs to consider all the factors listed above.

4.62 Decision Makers will need to be satisfied that the evidence with which they are provided shows that LAs and/or other proposers have taken account of the initial considerations and all the key factors in their planning and commissioning in order to meet the requirement to demonstrate that the reorganisation or new provision is likely to result in improvements to SEN provision.

### **OTHER ISSUES**

#### **Views of interested parties** (Paragraph 4.63)

4.63 The Decision Maker **should** consider the views of all those affected by the proposals or who have an interest in them including: pupils; families of pupils; staff; other schools and colleges; local residents; diocesan bodies and other providers; LAs; the LSC (where proposals affect 14-19 provision) and the Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership if one exists, or any local partnership or group that exists in place of an EYDCP (where proposals affect early years and/or childcare provision). This includes statutory objections and comments submitted during the representation period. The Decision Maker **should not** simply take account of the numbers of people expressing a particular view when considering representations made on proposals. Instead the Decision Maker **should** give the greatest weight to representations from those stakeholders likely to be most directly affected by the proposals.

#### **Types of Decision** (Paragraph 4.64)

4.64 In considering proposals for a school closure, the Decision Maker can decide to:

- reject the proposals;
- approve the proposals;
- approve the proposals with a modification (e.g. the school closure date); or
- approve the proposals subject to them meeting a specific condition (see paragraph 4.65), unless the decision is being

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made under paragraph 19 of Schedule 2 of the EIA 2006 – see 4.3 above.

### **Conditional Approval** (Paragraphs 4.65-4.66)

4.65 The regulations provide for a conditional approval to be given where the Decision Maker is otherwise satisfied that the proposals can be approved, and approval can automatically follow an outstanding event. Conditional approval can only be granted in the limited circumstances specified in the Regulations i.e. as follows:

- a. the making of any agreement under section 482(1) of the 1996 Education Act for the establishment of an Academy, where the proposals in question provide for some or all of the pupils currently at the school which is the subject of the proposals to transfer to the Academy;
- b. the agreement of the Secretary of State to the extension or enlargement of an existing Academy;
- c. the decision of the Secretary of State to establish a new FE college under section 16 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992;
- d. the agreement to any change to admission arrangements of any other school or schools specified in the approval;
- e. where the proposals depend upon conditions being met, by a specified date, for any other school or proposed school, the occurrence of such an event.

4.66 The Decision Maker **must** set a date by which the condition **must** be met but will be able to modify the date if the proposers confirm (preferably before the date expires), that the condition will be met later than originally thought. The condition-to-be-met-by date **must** be before the proposed implementation date of the proposal (which can also be modified if necessary). Therefore care **should** be taken when setting condition-to-be-met-by dates, particularly if proposals are “related” e.g. if a school is proposed to add a sixth form on 1<sup>st</sup> September one year, and enlarge on 1<sup>st</sup> September the following year, and the enlargement requires planning permission, the condition set **must** be met before the addition of a sixth form can be implemented (the earlier proposal), because as “related” proposals, they **should** both have the same decision, which in this case, would have been approval conditional upon planning permission being met. The proposer **should** inform the Decision Maker and the Department (SOCU, DCSF, Mowden Hall, Darlington DL3 9BG or by email to [school.organisation@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:school.organisation@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk)) of the date when a condition is modified or met in order for the Department’s records, and those of Edubase to be kept up to date. If a condition is not met by the date specified, the proposals **must** be referred back to the Decision Maker for fresh consideration.

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### **Decisions** (Paragraphs 4.67-4.69)

4.67 All decisions **must** give reasons for the decision, irrespective of whether the proposals were rejected or approved, indicating the main factors/criteria for the decision.

4.68 A copy of the decision **must** be forwarded to:

- the LA or governing body who published the proposals;
- each objector except where a petition has been received. Where a petition is received a decision letter **should** be sent to the person who submitted the petition, or where this is unknown, the signatory whose name appears first on the petition;
- the Secretary of State (via the School Organisation & Competitions Unit, DCSF, Mowden Hall, Darlington DL3 9BG or by email to [school.organisation@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:school.organisation@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk) );
- where the school includes provision for 14-16 education or sixth form education, the LSC;
- the local CofE diocese;
- the Bishop of the local RC diocese.

4.69 In addition, where proposals are decided by the LA a copy of the decision **must** be sent to the Office of the Schools Adjudicator, Mowden Hall, Darlington DL3 9BG. Where proposals are decided by the schools adjudicator, a copy of the decision **must** be sent to the LA who maintain the school.

### **Can proposals be withdrawn?** (Paragraph 4.70)

4.70 Proposals can be withdrawn by the proposer, at any point before a decision is taken by the Decision Maker. Written notice **must** be given to the LA, or governing body, if the proposals were published by the LA. Written notice **must** also be sent to the schools adjudicator (if proposals have been sent to him) and the Secretary of State – i.e. via the School Organisation & Competitions Unit, DCSF, Mowden Hall, Darlington DL3 9BG or by email to [school.organisation@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:school.organisation@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk)

Written notice **must** also be placed at the main entrance to the school, or all the entrances if there are more than one.