

10<sup>th</sup> July 2024

County Hall  
High Street  
Newport  
Isle of Wight  
PO30 1UD  
Tel: (01983) 821000  
E-mail: [naomi.carter@iow.gov.uk](mailto:naomi.carter@iow.gov.uk)  
DX: 56361 Newport (IOW)  
Web: <https://www.iow.gov.uk/>

Dear Parent/Carer/Governor,

On the 18<sup>th</sup> July the Isle of Wight Council's Cabinet will be asked to approve the publication of the draft School Place Planning Strategy, and agree to proceed with reviewing the level of surplus school places on the Island. Within the review it will also make proposals to increase special educational needs provision. This work forms part of our new emerging draft Education Strategy, aimed at supporting the improvement of education provision across the Island.

The draft School Place Planning Strategy identifies the current position on the Island and aims to seek views to help us plan how many school places we need on the Island, so that our resources are used to provide the best possible educational experiences for all of our children and enable them to thrive, both now and in the future.

### **Why do we need to rethink school place planning?**

With a declining birth rate and the financial risks posed by surplus school places, we need to maintain high educational standards and secure the financial future of our schools.

#### **Why change is needed:**

- ◆ The Isle of Wight has consistently underperformed in comparison to national trends and currently sits in the **bottom 10%** of local authorities for key performance indicators. This unchanging picture requires action, to ensure a brighter future for children and young people across the Island.
- ◆ By 2027, we're expecting only **920** children to start reception, a significant drop from the **1,404** in September 2018.
- ◆ With surplus places, schools face challenges in maintaining a broad and high-quality curriculum, which is crucial for upholding educational standards.
- ◆ The ongoing trend indicates that by March 2027, 22 primary schools may face budget deficits, potentially amounting to a cumulative **£7.4** million or more.

#### **The Impacts of surplus places:**

- ◆ Educational standards - the ability to offer diverse and enriching educational experiences is vital for our children's development and future success.
- ◆ Budget deficits pose a substantial financial risk to the Isle of Wight Council and could affect the sustainability of our schools in the future.
- ◆ Staff recruitment - surplus places create hurdles in recruiting staff across the school system.

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- ◆ Increased workload - fewer staff members are stretched thin, managing multiple core functions and curriculum leadership.
- ◆ Governance- the need for strong governance is paramount, yet attracting effective governors is increasingly difficult.
- ◆ Professional development - opportunities for staff development are crucial but can be hard to access due to these challenges.

### Funding Facts:

- ◆ Per empty seat schools lose over £4,520 for each unfilled place.
- ◆ Five empty seats in a class of 30 a school misses out on £22,600.
- ◆ Eight empty seats the loss increases to £36,160.
- ◆ Ten empty seats in a class of 30 means the school would miss out on approximately £45,200 per year.

These numbers are not just statistics; they represent resources, opportunities, and the quality of education that our children receive.

### What happens next?

Subject to review and approval of the Cabinet paper, a detailed review will commence to identify how the IWC propose to address the level of surplus places and identify what this means for the future of schools on the Island.

This work will then be fed into the strategy and a further paper will be presented to Cabinet in September. It is at this stage that if schools are to be named for amendment/expansion or closure they will be identified, and proposals on how this will be managed will be presented for consideration.

The proposed timeframe is to implement any changes by 31<sup>st</sup> August 2025.

### Further Information

The report being presented to Cabinet will be published today (10 July 2024), and papers can be found at: [Browse meetings - Cabinet - Isle of Wight Council \(moderngov.co.uk\)](https://www.moderngov.co.uk/Meetings/Cabinet/Isle%20of%20Wight)

We would welcome you to be part of the conversation to create a thriving educational landscape for our children's future. For more information visit: <https://www.iow.gov.uk/IWSchools>

If you would like to request further information or have a specific query, please email: [strategic.planning@iow.gov.uk](mailto:strategic.planning@iow.gov.uk)

If you are unable to email or visit the above website and wish to make a comment then please write to me, Naomi Carter, Service Director, Children's Services Department, County Hall, High Street, Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 1UD.

Yours sincerely,



Naomi Carter  
Service Director – Education, Inclusion and Access