

## Statement regarding The Heights Primary School application to admit 60 pupils per year group

### UPDATE

16 December 2024

On the 4th December 2024, the Reading Borough Council planning applications committee met and voted against our expansion. We are currently considering our next steps.

22 November 2024

The Heights Primary School was opened with two reception classes in September 2014 to meet the shortage of primary school places in the Caversham Heights area of Reading. The school moved into its current new building during the summer 2021.

Whilst the building was built to accommodate 60 pupils per year group, the description of development limited the school to a capacity of 50 children per year group. On 23 July 2023, a planning application was submitted with the intention to amend the description of development to admit the full 60 pupils per year group - as is the standard entry number for a state-funded two-form entry primary school.

In this statement, we restate our rationale for this application, in order to admit 10 more children per year group.

### Expanding an excellent school, serving the local community

The Heights Primary School is a high achieving school in educational performance and has been repeatedly judged Outstanding by Ofsted.

Ofsted judged the school to be “outstanding” in 2017 and again in Oct 2024, mentioning the word “exceptional” four times in their last report. The Heights is a highly performing school, with 81% of pupils achieving the expected standards in reading, writing and maths combined at the end of Year 6. This is 20% above the national average (2024).

### By expanding, more parents will be offered their first choice of school for their child

The Heights Primary School is a popular school with local parents, and this planning application is to expand a good and popular school. Every year group at the school is full and there is a waiting list for every class. At the last round of admissions (Sept 2024) the school received 142 preferences, of which 60 were first choices. The school received similar preference rates in 2023 and the year before.

The Local Authority has a statutory duty to provide a sufficient number of school places, coupled with offering first choices to as many parents as possible. In Sept 2024, 93.3% of parents received their first choice; our planning application would increase this percentage, providing more good and popular school places, which is what the local parent community is clearly requesting.

### **No adjustments required to the building**

The Heights Primary School building has been built to accommodate 30 pupils in each classroom. Our proposal requires no capital investment or changes to the building. The school, with its building, facilities and staffing structure, can accommodate 70 more children immediately, and with no adjustments.

### **The school meets all the planning conditions set out and required.**

Prior to the current application being submitted, the school sought pre-application advice from the Local Planning Authority. The advice reiterated the guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework that strongly supports school proposals that widen parental choice, while also seeking to address potential planning impacts around transport and noise.

Accordingly, the application was accompanied by detailed transport and noise impact statements. An updated school travel plan was subsequently submitted, and additional cycle/scooter racks were installed to ensure full compliance with RBC's parking standards. The tight catchment area and the high level of walking and scooting/cycling to school mean that there is minimal adverse impact on local highways and the playing fields car park at school arrival and departure times. Minor adjustments to the footway in the access road from Upper Woodcote Road have been agreed to avoid conflict between pedestrians and vehicle turning movements.

Further information was also provided in relation to noise, resulting in agreement to install an acoustic fence along the western boundary of the school adjoining 28 and 29 Hewett Avenue - to be secured by planning condition.

Information on the geographical distribution of school places has been provided to demonstrate that *not* meeting the need for primary school places in NW Caversham would serve only to increase adverse planning impacts, as families would otherwise have to travel out of catchment to/from school, adding to existing highway congestion in this part of North Reading.

Alongside the application, adjustments have also been made to the MUGA lighting to ensure full compliance with the terms of the original planning permission in this regard, and to avoid light spillage to neighbouring gardens.

### **Conclusion**

To be clear, we wish to expand The Heights Primary School to 420 pupils overall - taking 60 pupils each year - in order to expand an exceptional and popular school, providing the local community with the places they request.

We believe the parents and wider community will welcome the additional high quality primary school places in their area.

Mrs Hayley Harrison, Headteacher, The Heights Primary School

Anne Bajorek, Chair of Local Governing Board, The Heights Primary School

Mark Greatrex, Chief Executive, BPET

