

Early Years, Children and Education Provision in Woughton – July 2021

Introduction

Woughton comprises of seven residential estates (plus two industrial estates) in South Central Milton Keynes. It is an area of deprivation, if measured by government indices, but also has numerous strengths. With around 8,000 properties and a population of approximately 14,000, Woughton is home to a diverse community with differing and changing needs.

Woughton has the highest number of children of any ward in Milton Keynes. It also has the highest number of older people and members of BAME communities.

Contained within the parish are a number of schools, including primary (Langlands, New Chapter, Moorland and Falconhurst), secondary (MK Academy and St Pauls), MK College and a number of 'early years' providers, including Coffee Tots (charity) and nurseries based within Family Centres and schools. There are also specialist providers, such as Bridge Academy and Redway School. Local children also attend neighbouring parishes, in particular Charles Warren School on Groveway.

The parish is currently well represented for formal education providers but there have been concerns expressed about the lack of affordable, local early years provision. Whilst there are other providers based with large local employers (e.g. MK College, MK Hospital), this provision is mainly used by employees, rather than local people. There is also a significant lack of after school provision, with the exception of that provided via the Play Ranger service, which is more suitable for families and older children (mainly accessed by families and children over 7).

Since the first iteration of this paper, a new pre-school provision has opened at the Eaglestone Activity Centre and another was planned for Tinkers Bridge which, due to issues relating to the pandemic, has yet to start.

Woughton Community Council is committed to support the provision of local early years provision, high quality schools and colleges and the provision of 'lifelong' learning opportunities.

Primary Schools

As mentioned above, there are four primary schools within the parish boundaries, with a further school just outside the parish that is well used by Woughton residents. At time of writing (December 2018), two of the schools within the parish have been assessed by OFSTED as 'inadequate', meaning that there is a significant risk that one or both schools have action taken. These schools are Moorland on Beanhill and Langlands on Netherfield. Potential action could include:

- 'Academising' the schools, passing them to an academy trust to manage and, as a consequence, passing the buildings and land to a private organisation with the loss of that land to the local authority / local community
- Merger with another local school (may or may not be an academy trust)
- 'Break up' of the schools to maintain the early years / nursery provision (currently both assessed as 'good')
- Closure of one or both schools, with the long term loss of places for local people, at a time where there is significant potential for an increase in population, with Regeneration in the offing.

Woughton Community Council is committed to making representations to the local authority and education board to maintain local provision and improve performance to ensure high quality, locally based primary education across the parish.

The remaining schools (Falconhurst and New Chapter) are performing to a satisfactory level, but in the event that local schools face closure, are likely to face significant increases in demand for places, placing significant additional resource needs within those schools.

Since the first report was written, Falconhurst has undertaken significant redundancies, with key positions being reduced and a view that there has been a loss of expertise within the setting, alongside additional pressures on the remaining team.

Woughton Community Council is committed to working with ALL local schools to support their aims and objectives, ensure sufficient local places are available and maintain locally accessible primary education for all local people.

Secondary Schools

Woughton is home to MK Academy (the local secondary school for the catchments area) and St Pauls Catholic School, who offer a faith based education to both local and city wide (and beyond) children. Woughton Community Council has a good relationship with both these schools, but there is always more that can be done to improve these further.

Our Youth service works closely with secondary providers locally and, as a council, we offer opportunities for students of both schools to take part in community activities, bringing additional learning opportunities outside the formal educational settings. This includes the annual 'St Paul's Day' community events, involvement in our festival, music groups, access to our youth sessions, etc.

Both secondary schools are currently assessed as 'Good' by OFSTED, with the Academy in particular showing improvement.

Woughton Community Council is committed to continue to develop the relationships between the council and local secondary schools and will focus on this within the annual service plans each year. This will include development of a 'youth council', providing opportunities for local young people within the secondary provision to have direct influence on the activities, spending and priorities for the council.

Woughton Community Council is committed to support governing bodies, where appropriate, by providing a representative to sit as part of a governing body for any local school.

In addition to the secondary providers, MK College is also a significant player locally. The relationship with the college is excellent, with mutually beneficial activities happening, including placements for students within the services we deliver (e.g. community fridge) and delivery of specialist services by our youth team within the college setting (e.g. sexual health, LGBTQ+ peer support, music club).

Specialist Education

There are two specific providers of specialist education with the parish; The Bridge Academy and Redway School.

The Bridge Academy, based adjacent to our offices and youth building, provides education for young people who don't find mainstream secondary education suitable. Labelled as an 'Alternative Education Provider', the school works with young people who have, or are at risk of permanent exclusion from other schools. Working with smaller classes and focusing on a more personalised approach, the aims are to reduce the number of young people classes as NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). Assessed as 'Good' by OFSTED, Woughton Community Council works very closely with the school, offering a number of additional sessions (including street art, music and film making). Our Youth Manager sits on the board of governors.

The Redway School offers education to young people who have learning disabilities, including those on the autistic spectrum. Students at the school often have profound and multiple difficulties and the school provides a personalised approach to supporting students. Assessed by OFSTED as 'Good', the school works with students from across the city.

Our links to the Redway School are limited, but we are able to offer support when asked.

Woughton Community Council is committed to work with ALL educational providers within the parish, through provision of services, financial support (where appropriate) and by working to include all students within our services and activities. We will continue to build upon these strong relationships and

develop collective approaches to continue the valuable work undertaken by the specialist providers.

Early Years Providers

As mentioned in the introduction, there are a number of early years providers within the parish, including nurseries attached to schools and family centres, providers based within local employers and independent providers, including both private companies and charities.

Busy Bees, a private nursery company, have provision on Eaglestone, near the Saxon Clinic. This provision offers places for children aged 3 months to 5 years, with weekly costs of around £280 (10 hours per day, 5 days per week) or sessional costs (minimum 2 per week) of around £35.

Coffee Tots, a local charity, have provision next door to our Youth building on Coffee Hall. They open fewer hours (between 8.30am – 3.15pm, term time only, with a break at lunchtime) but are considerably cheaper (at £12 per session). They cater for 2 – 4 year olds.

The Early Years Nursery at MK College offers spaces for children aged 0 – 5 years. They offer sessional places or weekly 'school hours' options, with charges ranging from £25.20 per session through to £205 per week (for 5 days 'school hours' provision).

Milton Keynes Council offer nursery provision at both Hedgerows and Moorlands Family Centres, with provision being offered for children aged 0 – 5. The costs are around £1000 per month for full time provision, with costs of around £25 per session for part time needs.

All providers can offer some subsidised places through government funding, with the college also supporting people who are studying. Despite this, costs for many of our local residents are prohibitively expensive, meaning access to quality childcare, at the hours that are needed, is limited at best.

Woughton Community Council are pleased that there is now a provider in Eaglestone and will continue to look at ways of supporting other providers locally including one at Tinkers Bridge Meeting Place who was negatively impacted by the pandemic. Our aim is to provide other options for early years provision, encouraging providers to offer affordable sessions and times that support people to be able to maintain / take employment. This may include working to support existing providers or new providers coming into the parish.

Woughton Community Council are committed to supporting the delivery of early years provision through enabling access to our community buildings, supporting the publicising and marketing of said provision and, where appropriate, by working with providers to source additional funding and grants

to improve both the fabric of the buildings (where necessary) and the delivery of services.

Childminders

This is an area which is less well documented, due to the independent nature of the work. However, we know that there are many childminders, both registered and informal, who support suitable support for children. It is hard to find specific numbers, but <https://childcare.milton-keynes.gov.uk/> suggests that there are fewer than 10 registered within the parish.

There are also large numbers of ‘family carers’ – grandparents, uncles, aunts and others who are there when needed to enable parents to have support.

This is an area which might benefit from additional support and development – childminders can provide a flexible and affordable approach that sits well within the wider early years and childcare provision.

Other Children’s Provision

Woughton Community Council provides a wide range of activities that are aimed at children and young people, including those sessions noted above where we work in partnership with local providers.

Our services include open access sessions on a number of estates, which compliment sessions run by the MKC Youth Team (currently on hold or unclear about the future), Play Ranger sessions throughout the year, specialist sessions for young people with specific needs and focused work around music, dance and the creative arts. Woughton Community Council provides significant funding towards this provision each year and continues to build upon what is an exceptional service locally. This includes investment in our Youth building (known as Number 95), continuing development of the Play Ranger service and a flexible approach to working in partnership with other agencies to bring much needed support to the parish. This includes the provision of some services that are ‘whole city’ support, enabling local young people easier access to these sessions (e.g. the Q Alliance youth group is supported and provided within the No 95 provision).

In addition to Woughton Community Council, there are also sessions provided by other organisations, such as the Milton Keynes Council Youth Team, Service Six, Children in Care Team, Children’s Centres, Sports Network, Faith Groups and via the college and local secondary schools. Where possible, Woughton Community Council works alongside other agencies to reduce duplication, maximise resources and provide an integrated, targeted and focused approach to meet the wide and varied needs of local young people.

Woughton Community Council is committed to working in partnership with other local providers, bringing additional resources onto the parish and

working in a collaborative and positive way to maintain and increase opportunities for young people across the area.

Lifelong Learning

Whilst slightly outside the remit of ‘children’, lifelong learning opportunities should be considered when looking at education in its widest sense.

Previously, the Woughton Skills Ladder provided good local access to adult learning opportunities, focusing on basic skills, ESOL and similar. In addition, Adult Continuing Education, MK College and other organisations provided a range of both vocational and leisure education options. Whilst some of these remain in place, costs can be prohibitively high.

Woughton Community Council provides some opportunities, but these are mainly focused on local groups and individuals developing skills around their communities – managing meetings, food hygiene, first aid, etc. as opposed to ‘open access’ learning, focusing on personal development.

Woughton Community Council is committed to developing opportunities for local residents to be involved in lifelong learning, through direct provision, funding and support to other organisations and working to bring existing provision within the city to the parish, making access as easy as possible.

Conclusion

Woughton Community Council understands the importance and value of high quality, local and accessible education and early years provision. Additionally, offering opportunities for people to continue to learn and develop skills, employability skills and knowledge throughout their lives has clear social value. As such, Woughton Community Council is committed to supporting the provision of educational opportunities for all residents of the parish.

Early Years

As a local council, we will use all applicable powers to promote positive interventions within the parish but feel that directly providing early years provision (which we could provide using the General Power of Competency) is unlikely to be an appropriate route for the council to take. However, we will work with other providers to enable access to our community venues for the provision of this type of service and support providers, where appropriate, through use of council communications and similar, and do not exclude the possibility of direct provision if this is the only suitable option.

Primary, secondary and specialist education

As a local council, we have no powers around provision of schools as this sits with the principal authority, Milton Keynes Council. However, we are, as a council, committed to the provision of high quality, local schools for our residents. As such,

we will work in partnership with local schools, campaign, and support others to campaign for improvements to local schools, funding and other elements that benefit local residents. We will also, where appropriate, support local schools in providing resources (both financial and in terms of officer / member support) to increase opportunities and activities for students.

Lifelong Learning

As a local council, we can provide funding and support to enable access to education in its widest sense to our residents. To this end, we are committed to both supporting other agencies to provide opportunities and to provide direct provision, where appropriate, to increase the range and scope of options for local residents. This will include options for personal and professional development, provide additional support for people with specific needs (e.g. English as a second language, disabilities, etc) and include 'add on' support to assist people into employment, to improve their employment opportunities and to access further training, apprenticeships and similar.

Overarching Policy Statement

Woughton Community Council is committed to supporting the provision of early years, primary, secondary and lifelong educational opportunities across the parish. We will support this through campaigning and lobbying, through partnership and collaborative approaches and through direct support, either financial or through use of our other resources, to appropriate organisations and agencies.

Please note that this paper does not include information about youth services, but any approaches should work alongside and in collaboration with the Youth Service aims, making use of the skills and knowledge of that team where appropriate.

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