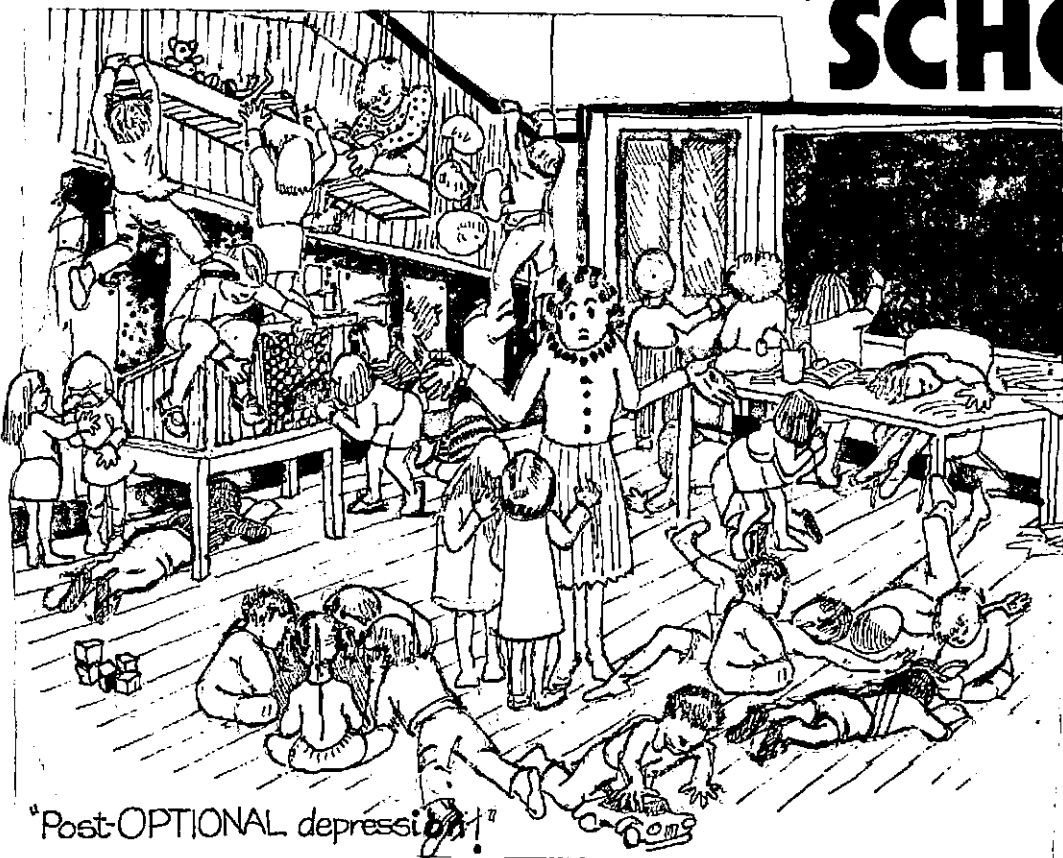


SCHOOLS IN BRIGHTON



"Post-OPTIONAL depression!"

The Council's Three Options

Option One
Remove temporary buildings, close 3 pairs of First and Middle schools and 1 High School.

Option Two
Close 6 Middle Schools and an unspecified number of First Schools, plus 1 High School.

Option Three
Revert back to children moving into secondary education at the age of 11, totally reorganise the First and Middle Schools which would destroy the morale of teachers still putting effort into making the recent changeover work.

KEEPING OUR OPTIONS OPEN

Like Topsy, this Education Special just grew. Originally, we had a short item by a school governor about the new education proposals. But then, as parents, we received the leaflet called 'Schools in Brighton Hove & Portslade' which asks us to take part in a consultation exercise with the Chief Education Officer and the Chairwoman of the Education Committee. They invite us to consider their 3 alternative ways of tackling what they call 'the problem' of falling pupil numbers. The first two options each involve closing some 7 schools and the third a return to the old pattern of starting secondary school at age 11.

We read and talked about the leaflet and decided that it was not good enough. It did not give some important information which would open up room for manoeuvre beyond the 3 County options. If parental choice and consultation are to be anything more than choosing among options proposed by someone else, then we need the facts to enable us to make up our own minds and produce our own options. There are important issues about our children and our community at stake. We thought it might be useful to react to sections of the leaflet, to give some of the missing information and, in this way, begin working towards a community response to a County report.

A Declining School Population - which will stop declining

The first section of the leaflet gives the indisputable fact that the number of school pupils has been falling "rapidly" in recent years". By 1986, numbers will be 30% less than in 1976. The leaflet talks of a declining school population, of numbers going down and down (making a later remark about the need for flexibility "to meet a possible increase in numbers in the 1990's

seem a bit puzzling). But a fuller report to the Schools Sub-Committee is entitled "Fluctuating Pupil Numbers" - numbers which go up and down and up.

If you look at the graph you will see that there was one unbroken 10 year period, 1966-76 when fewer children were born in each successive year. But since 1976 the birth-rate has been rising. True, it's well below the 1966 level but the trend is upward. The fuller report recognizes this and says that the intake to First Schools this year is "probably the smallest to be expected" and will "probably rise over the next ten years". Forecasts beyond 1990 are more speculative, yet the County forecasters suggest 'the numbers of children will be rising'.

With short-term fluctuations in the past and with numbers now going up, there certainly is a need for flexibility in any plans for "surplus" places. Good advice is don't do anything which cannot be reversed. How do school closures look in the light of this advice?

A Problem which Need Not be a Problem

Finance

The leaflet states that a declining school population is a problem because Government support for education is related to the number of pupils: when numbers fall, money from the Government is also expected to fall, so there is less money for teachers, books and buildings. This way of putting it is misleading and hides the room for manoeuvre.

Money comes from 2 sources, central Government's Block Grant and local rates. Pupil numbers are just 1 of the factors on which the Block Grant is based and the County is not bound to spend a certain part of the

Grant on education compared with other services. The size of the Grant is much more determined by the present Government's assault on public spending than by falling rolls. E. Sussex is making education cuts of £5½ million over this and the next financial year to comply with Government orders.

Quite apart from this, East Sussex still has the power to levy the rates. The central Government is trying to pass a law requiring a referendum of rate-payers before Councils can raise rates in order to exceed Government spending limits. But this proposal has met with fierce opposition from all sides and not least from E. Sussex Chief Executive Robin Beechey who asked "how can you reconcile total central Government control with the very idea of local Government."

The fuller report talks of £350,000 a year as the possible cost of maintaining "surplus" places in schools which are well below capacity in Brighton, Hove and Portslade. We must ask for a clear statement of the savings which are expected from closing schools, but let us take £350,000 for the moment as a possible maximum figure (out of a total County education budget of £100 million). £350,000 is equivalent to an E. Sussex rate levy of slightly more than 1/3 penny in the pound. This works out to 57p. a year on a typical terraced house in our neighbourhood with a rateable value of £150. So closing some 7 schools in Brighton and 2 in Hove would save many of us 57p. a year. What doth it profit?

the disposition of space was good now and would be badly affected by having more forms. These schools may not be threatened - no schools have been named. But if other nearby schools are closed, their children will be decanted into these schools. So we are really all affected. It is important for parents to go into their children's schools and find out for themselves whether there are surplus places in any sense that they or the teachers would accept. We would be pleased to hear about what you find.

Effect on Schools and Education

The leaflet talks of a "loss of educational benefit" since "the number of pupils and therefore the number of teachers are reduced". But there is no necessity about this. A school loses teachers only because the County sets staffing ratios at a certain level. The ratio for primary schools is usually stated as 22.5 pupils to 1 teacher - but this includes headteachers. The actual classroom ratio is 30 to 1 in First Schools and about 33 to 1 in Middle. Much of the loss of teachers, particularly remedial teachers, in our area is due to falling rolls. But if the County lowered its staffing ratio, the number of teachers would not be reduced.

Talking to parents and teachers in this area, it is clear that they see a proper relationship between teacher and pupil as absolutely central to real education. This relationship in turn depends upon a small enough number of children in each class to allow for individual attention and also sufficient space to allow for a good range of activities. (It is worth remembering that the libraries and remedial rooms at St. Luke's and Queens Park First School did not result from any official notion of educational benefit but from the efforts of parents to raise money and even their direct labour to convert cloakrooms into teaching rooms).

Without prompting, parents and teachers from First and Middle Schools alike, gave figures of 15 to 25 pupils as the best size of class (see overleaf). If E. Sussex reduced the staffing ratio to allow for classes of 20 or 25 (National Union of Teachers policy), then much of the "problem" of falling rolls would disappear. With 20 in a class even the lowest expected Middle School intake, 960 in 1984, would divide into more than the present 42 forms. The real problem would be to build new schools in time for the children of our teenagers born in the last baby boom of the 1960's.

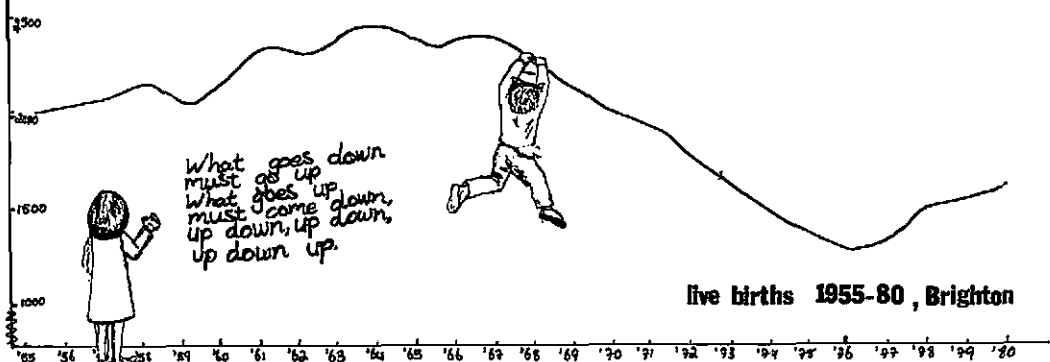
NO SALE!

The fuller report mentions the possibility of selling school sites to produce capital receipt for the Council and possibly "significant benefit to the community by unlocking scarce land resources for housing or commercial use". What, in our experience, do such words actually mean? What kind of housing would result? Since public spending cuts have already put a stop to Council building, it is unlikely that any new housing would help those of us with the most pressing need for accommodation. What kinds of businesses can afford to buy large inner-urban sites? American Express has already acquired St. John's School for its social club (which the community does not use) and stands perilously close to Carlton Hill First School and Tarnerland nursery school. Selling is the most short-sighted and anti-social of moves - sacrificing our scarce assets and community needs at the altar of quick cash and private profit. There are many community activities which require space if they are to happen at all: see overleaf for mothers and toddlers groups, older people's clubs and local organisations all needing premises. Really spare rooms during and after school hours would just fit the bill.

Guidelines for a 4th Option are emerging.

Our 4th Option

1. See falling rolls not as a problem but as a unique opportunity to improve the quality of education by having smaller classes and more teaching space.
2. Use the situation of declining numbers to change the staffing ratio to give fewer pupils to each teacher.
3. Use really spare rooms in schools for community purposes and for Council-financed activities.
4. No sale of school sites to private developers or corporations.



live births 1955-80, Brighton

Thanks to everyone who helped make this 'Special

"NEW MATHS"

£350,000 = 57p. per annum

9 schools

cost LESS per year than

one pint of beer

four pints of milk

twenty cigarettes

or

one packet of washing powder

Surplus Places

The crux of the matter is about "surplus" places. A cuts-conscious Ministry, the Dept. of Education and Science (DES) has recently advised local authorities to cut 2/5ths of surplus places by 1986. Now what do you think a surplus place is? What do you think full capacity is? E. Sussex uses many factors to calculate a school's capacity. Among them are DES rules about space per child, its limit of 35 to a classroom and the County's staffing ratios as reflected in class sizes of 30 in First Schools and about 33 in Middle Schools with space too allowed for specialist activity. But this capacity is the maximum the school can take, and not the desired or intended level. The problem is that the capacity figure, however undesired, leads to calculations of what is surplus.

One parent, puzzled that the talk about surplus places did not match up with her experience, visited her son's Middle School to find out for herself. On paper there were supposed to be 60 surplus places, but she found that every room was fully used for excellent activity: there was a music hut and separate science and French rooms. Further she found that the number of this year's intake was the maximum 35 per form and that 18 children had been turned away. In another neighbourhood Middle School, a similar situation exists. There is a paper surplus of 63 pupils but all the spaces are being well-used. If another 33 pupils were to be admitted, the special music and remedial room (soon to become a science lab.) would have to become a form room. In both schools there was the message that

LOCAL PEOPLE HAVE A SAY

The local authority are talking negatively about closing some local schools. We have been asking local people what positive things could happen in schools with smaller classes and more space. Here are some of their thoughts.

Some elderly people thought it ridiculous that schools should close. They thought schools should be used more often and for more things. One lady from Windmill St. remembered returning to Park St. school in the evening from 6-7 for dancing. She learned maypole, folk, Highland and Russian dancing, and especially "used to love the dance with bells on my feet". She feels dancing should be taught now. She deplores the fact that knitting, sewing and crochet have been dropped in many schools. Some parents agreed, saying that there were few places in the area where children can dance and also a noticeable decline in craft skills.



Joe Townsend, aged 77, remembers the Botanical outings from Park Street School—"Oh how we used to wait for that afternoon". Children were taught to recognize poisonous berries, mushrooms & toadstools. He was taught to swim at North Rd baths by the beach policeman, P.C. King (does anyone remember him?) and hopes that school swimming will continue. I think, he said, "that every boy should learn to cook. Where would I be (he's a widower) if my wife hadn't taught me to cook?" A middle school teacher also thinks nature trips a good idea, but stressed that outings are difficult with large classes.

Parents and teachers agreed that smaller classes and more space were essential. The best size of class was thought to be around 20, where numbers were mentioned.

TEACHERS SAID

"An ideal number in the first school would be 20...there would be more time for the child with problems to have them concentrated upon. You could hear them read more frequently and have time for individual help with writing practice."

"15 - 25 enables children to receive and teachers to give plenty of individual and group attention...Less children means more time for each child. Not only with reading and number work. Science could be taught in a more enjoyable way. All teaching to do with starting science needs to be talked through with small groups of children. They need to find out answers themselves rather than just being told and this takes time."

A middle school teacher gave 20 as an ideal class number. "This year our remedial teacher had to reduce her hours. She is the ONLY chance SOME children have of receiving individual help."

"Education is about training people to be human beings. My job is educating the whole personality of the child - as a complete individual - it is difficult to do this with large classes."

"One is always aware of the safety factors in lessons using woodwork tools, craft knives etc. At present we can only use these by allowing 2 teachers to a group or parental help. Coach trips often get no further than enquiries about the cost of a 52 seater coach."

PARENTS SAID

"Slow ones wouldn't get so left behind. How can she be expected to teach over 30 children at once?"

"Smaller classes would get rid of the pretence that teachers are giving our children individual attention. Mind you classes would need to be down to about 20 to make any real difference".

"My child never gets to read, his teacher's too busy. More remedial teachers or a special class for those getting behind" is needed.

"I'd like to see children in small groups for music, science, environmental studies etc., extra help for slow learners and the gifted".

PARENTAL CHOICE ?

Did you know that First & Middle Schools will have a completely new admissions policy from Sept. '82?

Although your child may still visit a prospective school s/he can no longer be assured of a place by the Head Teacher (no matter how early you make the visit) as all new admissions will be dealt with at County level. All schools are being told the number of children to admit next Sept. and I understand that in the case of one neighbourhood first school this number is LESS than the number already provisionally accepted for Sept. '81. There are going to be some very disappointed parents and children and yet there is nothing the Headteacher can do. In theory we will all be entitled to visit and collect details of lots of schools, but in practice we will end up with much less PARENTAL CHOICE than at present.

Sue Baker, 11 Walpole Terr.

TODDLERS!

You Need Your Nurseries



Recently I collected my daughter from nursery school - and was delighted by the peaceful sight awaiting me. She and two other children were engrossed in a game, totally concentrated, apparently unsupervised. Around the room small groups of children were absorbed in working, reading, making things together. This carefully organized environment was enabling these children to develop skills and co-operate in a way which is impossible in the atmosphere of the average home where play space duplicates with living space, materials are limited, work is going on, and where other family members have needs of their own.

Yet my child receives this education by chance. As a new mother I luckily met someone who already sent their child to nursery school. Until then I had had only a hazy idea that such places existed - I did not know whether they were public or private, whether you had to pay, whether they were educational establishments or daycare facilities. My friend persuaded me that I should go to the school and put my child's name on a waiting list. Two years later she was offered a place. In that time I had been given no official information at all.

Parents have fought for nursery education for many years, recognizing how much their children can gain from it at this early age. Brighton still has only ten nursery classes and three nursery schools. Some of these are threatened and none are being made equally available to us all. Parents have a right to be informed about their existence - we all pay for these schools they belong to us. If you have young children write to the Education Officer, County Hall, St. Anne's Cres, Lewes, ask to be informed about preschool education opportunities in your area, get down on the waiting list. Let the authorities see the huge demand there is for these facilities.

Joanna Street, 113 Freshfield Rd.

FACTORY SCHOOLS — NO THANKS!



A Monitorial school in the 1830s. On this system up to 1,000 children could be controlled by one teacher, the monitors doing the teaching

Mother of middle-school pupil in class of 31: "I have not yet seen any benefits of falling rolls. I personally teach a class of 19 adults and have my time cut out with this group. It's a maximum and I'm talking about highly motivated adults."

"15 would be the best size. My child could receive, for the 1st time in his school career, at the age of 11, individual attention. He is a quiet child who is left to his own devices. His confidence has been destroyed and he has been bunking off."

FDEAS for using rooms which are spare

- for Mother and toddler groups. Premises like church halls are hard to find and often cold. Middle St. School already has a group meeting happily three times a week.

- Classes for parents, e.g. on health or literature while children are at school.

- Games or club room for older people with snooker table, draughts, chess, etc. There is not much within walking distance around here.

- Rent space to local tradesmen on condition that they train a number of unemployed youngsters in their trade.

- Nursery facilities for handicapped children and nursery classes where they don't exist. Space for children with special needs - already the case at Carlton Hill.

- Meeting and working rooms for local groups in and outside school hours. Very much needed.

"Schools are not only for kids. They're important centres especially for women who spend a lot of time alone at home."

"I like the idea very much of making the school part of the community with the doors open at weekends so that people can use the facilities that are locked up."

All the people we contacted were full of positive ideas for using schools. What do you think of their suggestions and opinions? What are your own? E. Yeo, M. Devoy, & Others, 48 Albion Hill.

Mrs. Thatcher on Nursery Education

"The primary school must be able to build on the achievement made at nursery schools: that is why we have embarked on a 10 year programme for nursery education." (Mrs. Thatcher, Minister of Education, 1973)

"By 1981, 50% of all three-year-olds and 90% of all four-year-olds will be receiving such education, mostly on a part time basis" (Her White Paper, which also promised full-time nursery schooling for 15% of both age groups).

SAVE OUR SCHOOLS ACTION!

Brighton's latest Save Our Schools campaign calls on East Sussex County Council to choose a fourth option - keep open the schools our community has bought and built, and take this unique opportunity of reducing class sizes. For the benefit of the children, and for the benefit of us all, since we would then have a better educated population.

Save Our Schools, which welcomes all supporters, irrespective of party politics, is now distributing 10,000 leaflets in Brighton, Hove and Portslade. It plans a big public meeting in January, before the Council makes its final decisions.

YOU can help, too. Contact Save Our Schools chairman, Paul Reading (11 Queen's Park Terrace), or secretary, Carole Fitch (47 Hartington Road). Or send a cheque, payable to "Save Our Schools Campaign", to the treasurer, Bob Davies, at 13 St. Helen's Road, Brighton BN2 3EE. Peter Avis 46 Devonshire Pl.

nursery news

Any decision on Nursery Schools will depend on the options taken up for Primary Schools. There is no immediate threat to Nursery Schools. The Report does recognise that because of the substantial support for Nursery Schools it proved "unacceptable" to cut provision in 1980.

According to the Report on Nursery Education, at present being considered by the Council, there are places for a maximum of 855 children in Nursery Schools and classes. To fulfil the target set by Plowden when Margaret Thatcher was Minister of Education, an extra 1,000 children should be receiving nursery education!

The Report mentions that some areas are "over-provided" e.g. Queens Park, which has 2 nursery schools (with long waiting lists) and 2 nursery classes. It hints at a possible reorganisation to provide a more even geographical distribution, which could mean closure of schools/classes in the Queens Park area.

It is important to sustain the campaign against closures. PROTESTS DO HAVE AN EFFECT!

For details of Nursery Schools Joint Action Committee, see nursery school notice boards.



Park Street Morris Dancers, circa 1920. Louisa Dunk (far left, standing) kindly lent us the photograph. Does anyone recognise themselves?