

The article below summarises the activities of the Parish Council in 2017 and 2018 associated with ensuring that Moulsoford parents would be able to get their children into the catchment school in Cholsey. These activities followed on from earlier representation from the Parish Council in 2011 with the Fairmile housing development expected to have an impact on school places. The material is extracted from the "From Your Parish Council" articles published in the March 2017, November 2017, February 2018 and May 2018 editions of Moulsoford News. *Miles Powell*

Moulsoford and Primary Schooling

Background

The original church school in Moulsoford closed when pupil numbers dipped around 1970 and at this time Moulsoford was in Berkshire. Our catchment state primary school then became Streatley C of E school, partly because funding from the sale of the original Moulsoford Church school had been used to build the Streatley school. In 1974 the county boundaries changed and Moulsoford was transferred to Oxfordshire.

Streatley C of E remained as the acknowledged catchment school however this understanding effectively ceased about 12 years ago when Moulsoford children lost out to West Berkshire based children. Parish Council action at the time, including petitions and representation at the West Berkshire Council offices was to no avail. Cholsey primary school then became the de facto catchment primary school for Moulsoford.

Over the last few years there have been some Moulsoford children who have attended Streatley C of E school but this has usually been where there have been insufficient numbers of applications within West Berkshire. It is important to note that the admissions to Streatley C of E school are determined by West Berkshire Council so it will only ever be discretionary whether children from Moulsoford will be accepted. This discretionary aspect does mean that there is no obligation for West Berkshire Council to fund school transportation for Oxfordshire based children.

2017 Catchment Primary School

As highlighted in the March 2017 Moulsoford News, the state catchment (or designated area) school for Moulsoford at that time was Cholsey primary school. Checking the OCC website in October 2017, the catchment area map for Cholsey primary school (<https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/school/2596>) clearly shows that Moulsoford is part of the catchment area.

Back in 2011, the Fairmile development resulted in action by the Parish Council to seek assurances that Moulsoford children would not lose access to their catchment primary school; we were assured that any Moulsoford parent who selected Cholsey as the **first** choice primary school for their child would get a place at the school.

If Cholsey was not the first choice there was a risk that another school in South Oxfordshire could be offered and this could be Wallingford or even further away. As the alternate school offered would most likely be further away than Cholsey, i.e. greater than two miles, then current OCC policy is that children below 8 years old are eligible for free home to school transport.

The advice then to parents with pre-school children applying for the first time for a primary school place is as follows:

- If you want your child to attend Streatley C of E school then apply to West Berkshire Council noting the comments above about home to school transportation. It is strongly recommended that you also submit an application to Oxfordshire County Council as the West Berkshire Council decision will be discretionary.
- If you want your child to attend Cholsey primary school then put it as your **first** choice on your Oxfordshire County Council application. Key Oxfordshire County Council dates are as follows: 25 October 2017 - parents can start to apply; 15 January 2018 - closing date for on-time applications – more details at <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/admissions-infant-and-primary-schools>.

Although there is no absolute guarantee, putting Cholsey as your second or even third choice has the much higher potential for your child to be allocated an alternate school in South Oxfordshire should Cholsey be oversubscribed

by first choice applicants. Selecting South Stoke as the second choice may also be a prudent option as highlighted below.

Disclaimer! - This advice is based upon the Parish Council understanding of the current primary school admissions procedures in West Berkshire and Oxfordshire and is provided in good faith. Parents with pre-school children applying for the first time are urged to ensure that they are following the very latest advice either by checking direct with the respective Councils and by seeking advice from the primary schools being considered

Looking Ahead

The Parish Council is aware that with further housing development in Cholsey there is the possibility that over time that Cholsey primary school is populated in the first year only by Cholsey based children purely because of the way catchment rules work today i.e. home address to school distances. It is not difficult to imagine such a situation arising even if the school is physically able to expand a little more but the result could be that Moulsoford always loses out by being “outside Cholsey”.

As can be seen on the OCC website, <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/admissions-infant-and-primary-schools> and selecting “Find the nearest” schools option and using the Pavilion post code of OX10 9JD, the nearest primary school for Moulsoford is actually South Stoke at 1.17km, followed by Goring C of E at 4.21km, Cholsey at 5.06km and then South Moreton at 8.97km. From local knowledge, Goring C of E school is invariably populated by its catchment area however according to the South Stoke Village Plan Refresh, South Stoke sometimes does not have sufficient children.

While South Stoke may indeed be the “closest” primary school to Moulsoford as the crow flies, the reality is that the journey by road is about 4 miles each way as the river Thames is an obstacle today. If ever a foot bridge was funded between South Stoke and Moulsoford - and this idea has had more interest over the past few years in South Stoke than Moulsoford - then South Stoke primary school could conceivably become the catchment school for Moulsoford.

For now, the Parish Council will be investigating options with OCC such that Moulsoford does not get squeezed out from its current catchment primary school in the event of more housing development in Cholsey. To support our discussions with OCC with factual information we would welcome parents of children who have yet to start primary school to contact any Councillor or Parish Clerk to let us know child age and expected year of entry into state primary school.

Follow Up

In May (and February 2018) editions of Moulsoford News it was highlighted that in the primary schooling article in the October 2017 Moulsoford News there was an invitation to parents of children who have yet to start primary school to contact any Councillor or Parish Clerk to let us know child age and expected year of entry into state primary school. This was to support our potential discussions with OCC with factual information.

As there was no follow up then the reasonable conclusion was that there was no especial issue in Moulsoford with primary schooling however the Parish Council will be seeking OCC confirmation that its understanding as per the article was correct and to seek any further insight. We’ve now had the OCC response to this enquiry and the response is published in this Moulsoford News.

Miles Powell, MPC Chair, 2011 -2019

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Cabinet Member for Education
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11 April 2018

Mr Miles Powell
Chair
Moulsford Parish Council

Dear Mr Powell

Moulsford & Primary School Education

Thank you for your email of the 19 March 2018.

The village of Moulsford is within the catchment area of Cholsey Primary School but is no longer within that of Streatley CE(Controlled) School in West Berkshire. West Berkshire has similar admissions rules to Oxfordshire which give priority to children living within defined catchment areas over those living outside. It is not “discretionary” whether Moulsford children are admitted to Streatley CE(Controlled) School as West Berkshire is legally obliged to apply the school’s admission rules to all applications irrespective of where children live. However, as Moulsford is without Streatley CE(Controlled) School’s catchment area, in years when this school is over-subscribed, they are unlikely to secure places there.

In most years Cholsey Primary School is over-subscribed from within its catchment area as the table below shows:

Year	Cut-off distance	
2017	1.016 miles	5 in-catchment refusals
2016	1.122 miles	11 in-catchment refusals
2-15	1.116 miles	5 in-catchment refusals
2014	4.729 miles	2 out of catchment children admitted
2013	1.169 miles	3 in-catchment refusals

The Council has secured contributions from the developer building additional housing in Cholsey and is using this to fund an expansion of Cholsey School so that from this September it will be able to admit 60 children into Reception compared with the 45 places which were available from 2013 – 2017 inclusive. It remains to be seen whether this will enable the school to accommodate all in-catchment children whose parents request a place at the school – allocation day is the 16th April. Once allocations have been made and notified to parents I will have look at the figures for Cholsey.

It is good advice to Moulsford parents to list Cholsey School as one of their three preferences although it isn’t essential that this be listed first. This is because preferences for each school are ranked according to the over-subscription criteria, not according to whether they are a first,

second or third preference. So, if a Moulsoford parent puts Streatley CE (Controlled) School first and Cholsey second, and they aren't offered a place at Streatley, their application for Cholsey will be considered alongside all other in-catchment applications, including those where the school is listed as a first preference by other parents. **Please note that all applications for the Reception year should be made via Oxfordshire County Council, not West Berkshire.**

It would not have been possible back in 2011 for anyone to give Moulsoford parents a guarantee that if they put Cholsey School as their first preference their children would be offered a place there. The statutory admissions code does not allow the Council (or any other admissions authority for that matter) to reserve places and, in the case of over-subscription, it must rank all applications according to the published admission rules. What is lawful though, is to prioritise defined areas within an overall catchment area. However, if the village of Moulsoford were given top priority within Cholsey's catchment area, this could result in children living within Cholsey itself being refused places at the school. I hope that with the expansion of Cholsey School it will be possible for all in-catchment children to be accommodated but, given that the expansion is being funded from housing development within Cholsey itself, it would be difficult to justify changes to the admissions rules which might run the risk of children from new housing not securing places when it is 'their' housing which has funded the additional places.

Where none of the three preferences can be met the Council will offer a place at the nearest school that has a spare place ('nearest available'). Where the home to 'nearest available' school distance is over the statutory walking distance (2 miles for children aged under 8 years) or there isn't a safe walking distance, the Council will provide free transport for Oxfordshire children; West Berkshire will do likewise for its children.

With regards to alternative schools, over the past five years Goring has admitted out of catchment children on four occasions (2016 being the exception) whilst South Stoke has admitted out of catchment children every year. Therefore, if either of these schools, particularly South Stoke, were to be listed by Moulsoford parents as one of their three preferences, if they couldn't secure a place at either Streatley or Cholsey, these would most likely offer a good 'safety net' to avoid being offered a more distant school as the 'nearest available'.

Yours faithfully



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