

Responses from Governing Bodies and other organisations

East (Bury, Fittleworth and St James', Coldwaltham)

Bury CE (Aided) First

The governing body: -

- supports the proposal and is keen to work with the Diocese to extend the school and include a Year 6 cohort from September 2009, if at all possible, as this will address uncertainty amongst current Year 4 pupils and parents;
- is keen to promote links with neighbouring schools and continue to seek opportunities to share expertise, resources and develop innovative partnerships.

Fittleworth CE First

The governing body: -

- supports the move to a two tier education system;
- seeks reassurances about the process of change on the following issues;
 - the need for full and proper resourcing at all levels;
 - Fittleworth parents' priorities for September 2008 transfer;
 - the desire to keep current Year 4 as Year 6 in September 2009
 - the desire to retain potential for modest growth unrestricted by Published Admission Numbers;
 - freedom of choice for parents in a rural area;
 - improved school transport;
 - the desire to offer a greater range of extended services.

St James' CE Primary, Coldwaltham

The governing body: -

- supports the proposals as set out in the consultation document;
- welcomes the suggestion of the need to develop links with neighbouring schools;
- supports the continuation of the existing collaboration with Amberley CE First School;
- seeks future discussion on arrangements for current Year 4 and 5 pupils;
- seeks a reassurance that capital works at the school would be fit for purpose and completed in agreed timescales;
- welcomes further information about geographical issues that could affect a future review of any provision, including a deterioration of 'viable' provision.

The Diocesan Board of Education supports the proposals for all the schools and recognises that the complex issues caused by interaction with neighbouring areas will need to be monitored.

Commentary

The proposals for the schools in this area are widely supported. There has been further discussion with all headteachers and chairs of governors about

interim arrangements for September 2009, including the need for a pragmatic approach to provide satisfactory accommodation in primary schools for Year 6 children within the resources available. Future detailed school-by-school discussions will now take place. The decision to change the Age of Transfer in September 2009 is likely to be welcomed by parents of Year 4 children in this area. Concerns in relation to the September 2008 cohort may have been alleviated for some parents by the decision of the Herbert Shiner governing body to work with Midhurst Intermediate School and offer provision for Year 6, 7 and 8 students at the Easebourne site following the difficulties that the intermediate school has faced in recruiting staff. Work is already underway to identify improved transport arrangements for secondary age pupils, including the possibilities of shorter travel times for children in this area. The wish for modest growth by Fittleworth CE First is not something that can be supported at a time when there is sufficient space for local children and sufficient surplus capacity to allow a reasonable element of parental preference.

Petworth Area (Graffham, Duncton, Petworth and Northchapel Schools)

Graffham and Duncton

The governing body (Lavington Park Federation) of Graffham Infant and Duncton Junior Schools: -

- supports the proposal to retain Year 6 in the school and have CE (Controlled) status for both schools;
- wishes to keep its name for purposes of continuity;
- prefers the Published Admission Number (PAN) to remain at 20 to recognise patterns of parental preference.
- recognises that the federation was generously funded but points out that a single school needs additional funding above that available in the current split-site formula.
- identifies the need for careful transition for children in current Years 4 and 5.

Duncton and Graffham Parish Councils supports the points in the governing body's response and expresses concern that parents living in rural areas (such as Tillington, Sutton and Barlavington) may not be able to send their children to their nearest rural school if the PAN is set too low.

The Diocesan Board of Education supports the amalgamation.

Commentary

The positive experience of these two schools working together as a Federation under the leadership of a single headteacher and a single governing body is something that the County Council should build on to model innovative ways of working. The funding is an important issue, and there is now an opportunity to work with the school to develop an approach within the funding formula for schools that will support this and other schools moving to the next stage of taking forward this more sustainable model of school leadership in a rural area. The County Council will work with the governing body to retain the identity of the two villages in the new school name and to take a pragmatic approach to the need for a temporary governing body to achieve statutory changes. Our analysis of pupil address

data shows that a Published Admission Number of 15 should allow all children within the catchment area to be admitted to the school from September 2009.

Northchapel

The governing body: -

- Supports the proposed change from a three to a two-tier system;
- Rejects the County Council for the Northchapel site to become a 4-7 base of an all through primary school amalgamated with Petworth CE Primary because;
 - a) Northchapel area children would not gain the benefits of a two-tier system;
 - b) longer travel distances for younger children;
 - c) a survey of parents suggests that they would place children elsewhere;
 - d) impact on the local community of the loss of a facility serving the full primary age range.
- Puts forward an alternative proposal that Northchapel First School becomes a 4-11 primary school, arguing that there are sufficient pupils to sustain a school and that parents are more concerned about a high standard of teaching and learning rather than replacing poor accommodation. Indeed, the governing body has set out a plan to refurbish its SCOLA block classrooms.

Lurgashall and Northchapel Parish Councils support the points made by the school governing body, whilst recognising the need to reduce education costs.

Petworth

The Federated Governing Body of Herbert Shiner and Petworth Primary Schools: -

- supports proposals for fewer and larger primary schools if good provision is to be made for Year 6 pupils;
- supports the amalgamation of Petworth and Northchapel primary schools but with nursery facilities at both Petworth and Northchapel. It argues that this would be the most inclusive model, offer the best learning environment and provide the most efficient and effective primary education.

Petworth Parish Council accepts the principle of a federated leadership, embracing Northchapel and Petworth, but feels that the transfer of children from Northchapel to Petworth at Key Stage 2 was undesirable, as it replicates a three tier schooling model.

The Diocesan Board of Education does not support the published proposal and would support either a single school on the Petworth site or an amalgamated school with two 4-11 sites.

Commentary

The County Council's proposal for this area was never intended to replicate the three tier system. The purpose of the proposal was to test a model of a

single school on two sites, led by a single headteacher and a single governing body. The retention of a village setting at Northchapel for a Foundation and Key Stage 1 pupils would not involve transfer at age 7 from one school to another but rather transition from one class to another within a single school and has been successful in rural areas in other parts of the country. Pupils would benefit from the better quality learning environment and the greater economies of scale which would stem from all Key Stage 2 pupils being co-located. This would involve greater flexibility for ability groupings or specialist teaching. The County Council has not disputed that there are sufficient pupils in Northchapel for a viable 4-11 school or school site. It is however true that 4-11 schooling could be provided at Northchapel without additional accommodation requirements and would avoid the need to transfer 7 to 11 year olds to Petworth. At a public meeting officers tested the concern that there is no realistic opportunity in the near to medium term to replace the lower quality SCOLA-type building that forms part of the accommodation at Northchapel. The governing body and the wider community recognised that this additional investment would not be available and has already committed to prioritise funds from its own resources to refurbishment and redecoration.

It will be important for officers to work with the Federated Herbert Shiner and Petworth Governing Body to consider how the good quality accommodation at Herbert Shiner no longer required for school use could be best utilised in the future.

The concept of schools working together under single leadership was accepted by many consultees. It is recommended that the County Council and the Diocese work with the governing bodies to consider the potential benefits of collaboration and / or federation for September 2009 and into the future.

North West (Camelsdale and Fernhurst Schools)

Camelsdale

The governing body: -

- supports the school becoming a 4-11 primary;
- emphasises the need for suitable capital investment;
- asks for priority to be given for improved transport, including access to transport to Midhurst for secondary education for out County pupils;
- asks for consideration for current Year 4 to remain in primary schools.

Fernhurst

The governing body: -

- supports the school becoming a 4-11 primary;
- wishes to retain a room currently being used for a range of extended school activities, meetings, medical visits etc;
- would prefer not to retain Year 6 pupils until September 2010 to allow the provision of an additional permanent classroom;
- urges the Published Admission Number (PAN) to be raised from 20 to 25 in the light of anticipated forecast patterns of intake from the pre-school;

- supports the exploration of ways to retain specialist teaching for Year 6 pupils currently available in the intermediate system.

Fernhurst Parish Council does not see the need to change from the current system and does not like to see small primary schools closing.

The Diocesan Board of Education supports the proposals for both schools.

Commentary

There is support for the County Council's proposals from the two schools. Further work will be required with each school to ensure that permanent building adaptations can be made to admit Year 6 pupils in the longer term with any necessary interim arrangements for September 2009. The County Council will need to continue to monitor patterns of admission to ensure that there are sufficient places for local children.

Midhurst Area (Easbourne, Midhurst and Stedham Schools, Easebourne)

Easebourne CE First

The governing body indicated at the consultation meeting its support for the proposed changes to the school. The governing body has its own proposals for improving accommodation with funding identified within the school budget. The County Council will work closely with the governing body to ensure that this scheme is linked to any adaptations for Year 6, thereby maximising the funding available and ensuring greater value for money.

Stedham Primary

The governing body has indicated that its preferred option would be for the school to be a "stand alone" all through 4-11 primary, with approximately 85 pupils on roll by September 2009 (assuming the retention of Year 6 pupils). It also questioned the proposed amalgamation with Midhurst CE Primary, as there might be limited opportunities for shared curriculum planning between a site with single age classes and a site with mixed age classes. The governing body questioned whether a link with a large school on a town site is the most suitable choice, other than on a geographical basis. The governing body's response also indicates a preference to consider federations or close collaboration with another school when there is a vacancy of headteacher rather than at the present time.

Midhurst CE Primary

The governing body has, like that of Stedham Primary, stated that it is unable to support the proposal for amalgamation. It states that it believes that the proposal would not benefit pupils' learning because the two schools serve very different communities and would only be able to provide a whole school curriculum with difficulty. The governing body raises concern about the practicalities of split-site working and concerns about how the budget might operate. The governing body has also queried the proposed Published Admission Number (PAN) as unrealistic on the basis that 33 children have registered for Midhurst, 22 for Stedham and 30 for Easebourne (i.e. 10 children higher than the proposed PAN).

The Diocesan Board of Education has supported the proposals for all schools in this area.

Commentary

We recognise that governing bodies have given these proposals measured consideration. However, it is disappointing that officers have not generally been able to engage school communities with the potential for the "amalgamation model" to create real benefits for pupils' learning. There are certainly more and more situations elsewhere nationally and in West Sussex where governing bodies and indeed headteachers are seeing the benefits of strategic leadership across schools or school sites, including some larger schools. It is, however, true that the consultation process has paused some of the thinking on federations and collaborations in professional discussions and that federations and collaborations have been most successful when governing bodies have entered into those arrangements as willing partners. It is also correct that the funding formula for amalgamated schools would need to be finalised, although the principle of developing a formula to reflect the 'small school site' elements of amalgamated schools does seem achievable in consultation with the Schools Forum. The establishment of two 4-11 primary schools would allow both schools to focus on the progress of pupils who will be in Year 6 in 2009-10 and allow further discussion of federation in a more measured manner.

The concerns about the proposed Published Admission Number are based on admissions for September 2008, which our projections show is the largest Rother Valley cohort since 2003. The 2008 forecast is for 285 pupils with numbers expected to drop to 235 in 2009, 246 in 2010 and 239 in 2011. An analysis of the in area versus out area pupils for Stedham, Midhurst and Easebourne allocations for September 2008 reveals 9, 24 and 19 in area pupils at each school respectively. This would suggest that there is sufficient space for local pupils and sufficient room for a reasonable allocation of places according to parental preference within the proposed Published Admission Numbers for the schools in the area.

Rother Valley (Rake, Hollycombe, Rogate and South Harting)

Rake CE First

The governing body: -

- argues that the school would be viable as a 4-11 primary school with Year 6 pupils (claiming that the school would have had an average of 13 in each year group and a roll of around 78 if Year 6 had been in place);
- questions the County Council's planning assumption that only 45 places are needed across the area. The reason for this is concern that WSCC's projections might not take account of children registered at more accessible Hampshire surgeries;
- submits a response from parents who argue that 'a merger with Hollycombe is premature' as it would dilute the school's church ethos, reduce access to the headteacher and undermine the benefits of the small school system. This submission suggests that the effects of moving to a two-tier system before any further consideration of a merger.

Rogate with Rake Parish Council is strongly in favour of a two tier system but is concerned about the distance (6 kms) between the sites of Rake and Hollycombe and is concerned that in due course classes would be physically co-located on one site.

Hollycombe

The governing body: -

- supports the proposed change in the Age of Transfer but opposes an amalgamation with Rake CE First;
- believes that Hollycombe is viable and sustainable to stay as a school in its own right and that the County Council's proposal is based on flawed data;
- believes that educational standards will be compromised by excessive change, a part time headteacher and inappropriate amalgamation with Rake;
- any financial savings on a headteacher are eroded by the cost of managing a split site.

Commentary

The same comments as those made for the proposed Stedham and Midhurst amalgamation apply. It is difficult to accept that an amalgamation would damage the church ethos of a school or indeed its distinct rural nature, especially as the proposal was to establish a CE Controlled school, which is served by a common ecclesiastical parish. There was an error in the consultation document in the description of the number of unfilled places at Hollycombe. However, the data relating to the school was not flawed. The County Council has recognised that the school would probably recruit more than 10 pupils per year group as it does in its younger year groups. Both schools would, however, continue to be small rural schools, even if all places were occupied. It was in the context of schools of this size that a potential amalgamation was proposed.

It is true that there is some mistrust of the County Council's projections data in this part of the county that adjoins the Hampshire border. The raw data that the County Council uses is drawn from West Sussex Primary Care Trust, includes those children who have been born in West Sussex, and those who have moved in and been immunised or received a visit from a health visitor. Notification of a new address to a West Sussex or Hampshire surgery would not be picked up by this system. This raw data has proved reliable in the past, is revised on an annual basis and is adjusted to reflect historic take-up and known patterns of parental preference.

The recommendations in this report would allow both schools to prioritise Year 6 retention and progress for 2009/10. The County Council would work with both governing bodies to monitor progress, both in terms of educational achievement and take-up of places in planning for the future.

Rogate CE Primary School

The Governing Body of Rogate CE Primary School has submitted a substantial response which challenged the legality of consulting on the closure of a rural school, the County Council's basis of projecting forecast

numbers on roll, and the interpretation of current patterns of parental preference. It also raises concerns about transporting younger children and the potential sale of land. The governing body sets out an alternative approach to forecasting pupil numbers, based on what it terms as "PAN drivers".

It is clear that the governing body has galvanised community energy and commitment in a campaign to retain schooling in Rogate. Its full response is publicly available on its website. The governing body states its own "self-governed success criteria" to measure the school's progress against its own strategy. "The school will increase overall roll numbers year on year to restore a roll of minimum 81 on Rogate site." The governing body is also actively prepared to explore amalgamation with neighbouring schools.

Rogate with Rake Parish Council argues for the retention of Rogate Primary School, referring in particular to the investment of £100,000 for disabled facilities in recent years.

Commentary

It is certainly not illegal for the County Council to consult on the closure of a rural school. The recent letter from Secretary of State clarified this. Indeed the governing body of West Lavington CE (Aided) First School has just had to go through the same difficult process of closure. The potential sale of part of the school has also never been a financial factor in the Council's proposals.

In the case of Rogate CE Primary, the governing body has also galvanised a high level of community support for the school. It has argued that numbers are now recovering after a period of uncertainty and projects, that with the certainty of Year 6 provision, pupil numbers will rise in the foreseeable future. The Cabinet Member has expressed a desire to do all that the County Council can to maintain schooling in village communities and it is now for the community of Rogate to demonstrate its commitment to its local school by supporting it as the preferred school for children in the catchment area. Whilst numbers of local children opting for a place at the school for September 2008 are still low (the figure of four in-area children has remained constant since applications were made prior to the current consultation), there is uncertainty about the additional pupil numbers that can be drawn in by the new school system for the Rother Valley. It would then be a reasonable course of action to support the governing body's desire to develop the school as a 4-11 primary school and review whether the community does in fact support the school and that the governing body's projection of at least 71 pupils (at least 10 pupils per year group) is achieved after a reasonable period of time to allow the new system to settle. It is suggested that officers undertake this review with the Diocese and the governing body three years after the Age of Transfer change. Whilst the governing body's preferred option would be an amalgamation with St Mary and St Paul CE First School at South Harting, it is felt that further discussion should take place on the development of federations and amalgamations across the areas rather than impose such new arrangements at this stage.

St Mary and St Paul CE First School, Harting

The governing body welcomes the opportunity to serve the children of the local community and the proposal to add Year 6 to the school. The governing body was alarmed about a mismatch between the proposed catchment area and the proposed Published Admission Number (PAN). It concluded that the retention of a PAN of 20 for Harting School was realistic and desirable. The governing body also commented on the detail of any proposed change to the catchment area to maintain as far as possible the integrity of the Rogate community. The governing body did not support suggestions that the school might become federated with Rogate School.

The Elsted and Treyford Parish Council support this response.

Commentary

Officers support the school's assessment that five further places would be required if the proposal for consultation had proceeded. The retention of Rogate Primary School would however suggest that a Published Admission Number of 15 places per year group will meet need for the current school catchment area. Officers will however monitor this situation carefully with the governing body.

General

Chichester District Council was supportive of the reorganisation of schools but remained concerned about the proposals for Northchapel and Rogate Schools.

The Diocesan Board of Education hoped that the specialist facilities in Herbert Shiner will continue to be available to the primary sector and emphasised the importance of appropriate transport arrangements.

Commentary

The County Council recognises the time and contribution that school governing bodies and other organisations have given to this process. Particular mention should be given to the support from officers of Chichester District Council and the Diocesan Board of Education for the consultation process.

Colin James
22nd May 2008