

Children & Young People's Services

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Ref: SOPD/DRH Tel: 01709 822536 Contact: Mr D R Hill Date: 13th May 2008

John Healey MP
House of Commons
LONDON
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Healey

Amalgamation of Rawmarsh Monkwood Junior and Infant Schools

Thank you for your letter of 28th April 2008 in which you advise me of the concerns of some of your constituents who have pupils at the above schools.

The Authority has provided additional information to parents following the consultation meetings and this has included information on Key Stage results and evidence to support the proposed amalgamation.

In reply to your specific questions:

1) The educational case for the amalgamation of Junior and Infant Schools was supplied to parents along with the invitation to the consultation meeting. This was attached as 'Appendix A' to the invitation and I enclose a copy of the appendix. (Your letter did not enclose a copy of the table of information produced by the parents and we would be grateful to receive a copy).

Following the consultation meeting we supplied parents with a copy of the Key Stage results for all the schools in Rotherham amalgamated since 2001. In addition the Monkwood Action Group asked for further evidence to support the amalgamation and a detailed reply on the benefits of amalgamation was sent by Helen Rogers, Assistant Head of School Effectiveness to the group (sent on the 8th April) and I attach a copy of her reply. Her reply detailed the Key benefits of amalgamation which I have listed below, along with information on a 'through School' and also Key Stage results from all Rotherham Schools which show that Primary Schools consistently perform better than separate Junior and Infant Schools

The key benefits can be summarised as:

- A single vision and consistent ethos to benefit pupils, staff and parents/carers
- Continuity, and progression of learning between 5 and 11 (3 and 11 in Rotherham schools)
- Unified leadership and management of curriculum, teaching and learning
- Enhanced range of staff expertise
- Consistency of approaches to inclusion and well being

- Effective relationships with children and parents/carers over the full primary phase
- Efficient use of resources - human and educational

A "through school" structure allows children:

- a longer period of time in which to develop closer contact with the staff & head teacher
- to benefit from all teachers and other staff having a good understanding of the child's whole experience
- increased stability; security and confidence can be built more easily when children have minimal transition
- continuity, especially for the most vulnerable children and those with special needs
- access to a curriculum planned and assessed across the full primary range
- opportunities for increased educational contact with younger and older children and the chance to share the outcomes of learning across the key stages
- opportunities for increased social development - older pupils having some appropriate pastoral responsibility for younger children
- access to a greater range of staff talent and expertise with a larger staff
- access to a wider enrichment opportunities across the curriculum and beyond

2) Your constituents have incorrectly read the OFSTED inspection reports. The Infant School was last inspected in July 2006 and was judged to be a 'Good School'. The Junior School was last Inspected in June 2005 and was also judged to be a 'Good School which was improving fast with rising standards'.

The Junior School was assessed by OFSTED under the Inspection procedures set out in the School Inspection Act 1996 and received grades of mainly 3's which is good with some Grade 2's which is very good. (The scale used by the inspectors then was: Grade 1 is excellent, Grade 2 is very good, Grade 3 is good, Grade 4 is satisfactory, Grade 5 is unsatisfactory, Grade 6 is poor and Grade 7 is very poor.)

The Infant School was assessed by OFSTED under the revised inspection procedures set out in the Education Act 2005 and received grades of 2 which is good. (The scale now used by the inspectors is: Grade 1 is outstanding, Grade 2 is good, Grade 3 is satisfactory and Grade 4 is inadequate.) It is not possible to compare the grades in the two inspections; it is the comments that needed to be compared.

As you can see what is proposed is the amalgamation of two equally good schools and one which we believe will perform even better following amalgamation. (I enclose a copy of the two inspection reports)

3(a) The Authority has not drawn up any plans for an extension to the Junior School to accommodate the Infant pupils and would not do without full consultation with the School Governors, the School Staff, pupils, parents and representatives from the local community. The design of a building/location of a school extension is not imposed on the school/parents by the Authority it is a joint process and we need everybody who is involved in the process to have an input. The Authority uses guidance produced by CAFE and the Design, Quality Indicator process to ensure that the school meets the needs of the end user. These procedures are part of our 'Primary Capital Strategy' which is currently out for consultation with schools.

3 (b&c) Both of the school sites (Infant and Junior school playing fields) are still needed to provide sufficient hard and soft play space for the amalgamated school. The Authority needs to comply with the DCSF guidance on the amount of space required for playgrounds, hard and soft play, sports pitches and other recreational areas and our calculations show that both schools sites are required. This was reported to Members at the Lifelong Learning, Cabinet Member Meeting held on the 15th April 2008 when approval for the Statutory Consultation was made.

The council minute states:

(2) That, in view of a concern expressed at all meetings with staff, parents and Governors that the land the infant School was built on and the infant playing fields would be disposed of for housing, a suitable press release be issued clearly stating the LEA's view on this matter. Having investigated further, both of the junior and infant school sites would be needed to deliver sufficient playing field site for the amalgamated school.'

The above confirms that the whole site will be needed for the amalgamated school.

3(d) The building of an extension onto the Junior School would not impact on the operation of the school. The Infant pupils would remain in the existing Infant school and transfer into the new extension when it is complete. There would be no disruption to their education and they would stay in situ until the new building is complete. The only likely disruption to the Junior School would be occasional noise from the building site which would be screened off from the school. The authority has vast experience of building on school sites and building developments often become an exciting part of the school curriculum.

4) The woodland area is 'Ancient Woodland' and remains part of the school site. Wildlife would not be affected and would continue to be protected in the same way as it is now.

5) There are no plans to move the Sure Start unit. Parts of the Social Care Teams across the authority are being centralised in the new Locality Team bases and some of the Social Care provision at this unit will transfer to the new locality base in the former Rawmarsh St Mary's School.

We would be able to send representatives to any further meetings arranged to consider the amalgamation.

Yours sincerely

David Hill
Manager – School Organisation, Planning and Development