

## ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL - REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet</b>
2.	<b>Date:</b>	<b>9<sup>th</sup> March, 2011</b>
3.	<b>Title:</b>	<b>Free School Proposals</b>
4.	<b>Directorate:</b>	<b>Children and Young People's Services</b>

### 5. Summary:

There are currently two proposals for Free Schools within the Rotherham Authority.

#### **Three Valleys Academy**

The Department for Education has recently received a proposal to set up a new school in Rotherham from the Nationwide Independent College of Higher Education (NICHE). The proposal is for an 850 place school for pupils aged 11-18 years in Wath-Upon-Dearne.

The proposal has now been fully assessed by the Department for Education, and the Secretary of State has given approval for it to proceed to the business case stage. **The Authority has until the 11<sup>th</sup> March to submit views to the DfE.**

#### **Rotherham Central Free School**

Mrs Blencowe, Principal Designate, is proposing to establish the 'Rotherham Central Free School'. The School will be located in Rotherham (most probably in central Rotherham) and will provide education for 500 Secondary age pupils. The school will have an open admissions policy and will have a catchment area of around three miles from centre of Rotherham.

We have not yet received any information from the Department of Education on the progress of this proposal.

### 6. Recommendation:

**That the Authority responds to the Department for Education objecting to the Free School proposals and giving full reasons for the impact that 'The Three Valleys Academy' and 'Rotherham Central Free School' will have on the current Secondary School provision and educational standards within the Rotherham Authority.**

## 7. Proposals and Details:

### Three Valleys Academy

#### Background

The Department for Education has recently received a proposal to set up a new school in Rotherham from the Nationwide Independent College of Higher Education (NICHE). The proposal is for an 850 place school for pupils aged 11-18 years in Wath-Upon-Dearne. The school will have an admission limit of 120 pupils and a 6<sup>th</sup> Form of 250 pupils.

The proposal has now been fully assessed by the Department, and the Secretary of State has given approval for it to proceed to the business case stage. The Secretary of State also has a duty to consider carefully the impact that any new school will have on the surrounding community and existing schools and has written to the Authority requesting views on the proposed school. **The establishment of a new school in the Dearne will severely impact on our existing schools and educational standards. The Authority has until the 11<sup>th</sup> March to submit views to the DfE.**

#### Issues:

1. **Catchment Area.** The Three Valleys Academy will be located in the former Nursing School in Manvers. It will draw pupils from Rotherham, Doncaster and Barnsley. The Free School has published an indicative catchment area which includes (in Rotherham) Wath, Swinton, Rawmarsh, Kilnhurst and Parkgate. This will impact on four Rotherham Secondary Schools Wath, St Pius, Rawmarsh and Swinton. The nearest school is Swinton which is about 1.25 miles away and Wath which is less than 1.5 miles away.
2. **Expressions of Interest:** The free school claims to already have had support from over 500 people with expressions of interest in letters and emails.
3. **Timing:** The free school is proposed to open in September 2012. It is already asking for expressions of interest and will take, in September 2012, pupils into both Year 7 and Year 8 and also admissions into the 6<sup>th</sup> Form.
4. **Educational Standards:** All Rotherham Secondary Schools are improving with rising educational standards. The introduction of a new free school could severely impact upon educational standards of Rotherham pupils.

#### Implications for Rotherham Secondary Schools:

1. **St Pius X:** This school has always been oversubscribed with nearly all pupils being of the Catholic Faith or attending a feeder Catholic Primary School. Many pupils travel from the Doncaster and Barnsley Authorities. Pupils are unlikely to be attracted away from this school.
2. **Wath Comprehensive, a Language College:** This school has always been oversubscribed (typically each year 15-50 pupils are unsuccessful in gaining a place). Some pupils who live in Wath and who would have gained a place may be attracted to the Three Valleys Academy, however given the demand for places at Wath, particularly from areas of Barnsley and Doncaster the school will fill up with

these pupils. The mix of pupils in the school may change but numbers are unlikely to change. (the issue here is that Barnsley, particularly with the under popularity of Wombwell School, and Doncaster will be hit with pupils going to both the Three Valleys Academy and taking up more places at Wath Comprehensive). More pupils from Rawmarsh (and possibly Swinton) may also gain places at Wath.

3. **Rawmarsh Comprehensive:** The numbers entering Rawmarsh are falling (due to the falling Secondary birth rate). The school is furthest away from the area and some pupils may be attracted to the school. Any loss will impact on numbers at the school. It is impossible to predict how many pupils will go. (There is a slight drift in numbers to Wath.) The LA has produced pupil forecast for the school based on the loss of 20 pupils per year from 2012 onwards. A 20 pupil loss would reduce numbers on roll to 741 by 2015/16. (A 40 pupil loss would reduce numbers on roll to 641 by 2015/16). This also has financial implications for the school budget. A loss of 20 pupils equates to a funding loss of around £100,000. If this continued through all year groups after five years the budget could be reduced by around £500,000. **A loss of 40 pupils per year group would threaten the whole viability of the school.**
  
4. **Swinton Comprehensive:** Swinton is likely to be hit the hardest. It is closest to the Three Valleys. Any loss would impact on numbers at the school. It is impossible to predict how many pupils may be attracted to the school. The LA has produced pupil forecast for the school based on the loss of 20 pupils per year from 2012 onwards. A 20 pupil loss would reduce numbers on roll to 723 by 2015/16. (A 40 pupil loss would reduce numbers on roll to 623 by 2015/16. The 623 assumes no loss to the 6<sup>th</sup> Form. The numbers, excluding 6<sup>th</sup> Form, would only be 480 with just 109 in Y11 which would probably be too small to run a 6<sup>TH</sup> Form – dire consequences for the school.). This also has financial implications for the school budget. A loss of 20 pupils equates to a funding loss of around £100,000. If this continued through all year groups after five years the budget could be reduced by around £500,000. **The loss of 40 pupils per year group would lead to the definite closure of the school 6<sup>th</sup> form and threaten the whole viability of the school.**

### Summary:

The falling birth rate and the numbers on roll indicates that there is sufficient capacity in all current Secondary Schools and no expansion of school places is required in the Dearne Valley area. To provide a new school would impact severely on Swinton Comprehensive to such an extent that the viability of the school is compromised. There is likely to be an impact on Rawmarsh which is less but again compromises numbers at the school. **There is no doubt that educational standards would fall due to the loss of pupils. Teaching staff and other school staff will have to be made redundant.**

### Rotherham Central Free School

#### Background

Mrs Blencowe, Principal Designate, is proposing to establish the Rotherham Central Free School. The School will be located in Rotherham (most probably in central Rotherham) and will provide education for 500 Secondary age pupils. The school will have an open admissions policy and will have a catchment area of around three miles from centre of Rotherham.

## Progress

We have had no formal notification from Mrs Blencowe (a requirement of the first stage of the completion of the Free School proposal form). The DFE will advise the Local Authority once approval to move to business case is given and we will then be given the opportunity to submit concerns. Mrs Blencowe is currently seeking support for her proposals and her supporters have been lobbying parents outside a number of local primary schools.

## Implications for Rotherham Central Schools

1. A new central school will Impact on **Brinsworth Academy, Clifton, Oakwood, Rawmarsh, Thrybergh, Wingfield and Winterhill Secondary Schools.**
2. If the Rotherham Central Free School were to open in Sept 2012 and it was fully subscribed 100 pupils would be lost from the above Rotherham Schools. It is difficult to judge where the pupils will come from and some schools may lose more than others.
3. **This represents a loss of approximately £500,000 to Rotherham Schools in just the first year of operation.**
4. If the school were to fill up each year for the following 4 years around 500 pupils would have been lost and this equates to **an Annual Loss of around £2.5 Million** from Rotherham schools.
5. The loss of 500 school places tied in with the falling secondary school rolls (due to the falling birth rate) jeopardises the future of at least one central Rotherham School.
6. The loss of numbers will impact not only on the school budget but will also impact on school standards. **Schools will find it increasingly more difficult to provide a balanced curriculum and the inevitable effect of a school with falling numbers is reduced educational attainment.**
7. **Teaching Staff and other school based staff will have to be made redundant.**

## Summary

The proposal to open the Rotherham Central Free School should be opposed as it will have a dramatic impact on current Rotherham schools reflected in: falling rolls, loss of school funding, teacher and other staff redundancies and falling educational standards.

## 8. Finance:

The local authority will receive reduced funding as any pupil who attends a Free School will withdraw the allocation of funding the LA receives to give to schools under the dedicated schools grant.

## **9. Risks and Uncertainties:**

The Authority will have an increasing number of surplus places and the viability of a number of Secondary schools will be jeopardised along with a detrimental impact on educational standards.

## **10. Background Papers and Consultation:**

The LA has provided to NICHE copies of our pupils projections which show the extent of surplus places in the area. The LA has also written to the Local MP to express concern and also provided information for the local press and also a briefing note to Headteachers and the Cabinet Member for Safeguarding and Developing Learning Opportunities.

### **Contact Names:**

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