

Hitchmead School

Hitchmead School
Hitchmead Road
Biggleswade
Beds SG18 0NL
Tel: 01767 601010 Fax: 01767 600229
Email: hitchmeadspecial@schools.bedfordshire.gov.uk



Head Teacher: Tim Walker

25TH February 2010

Dear Edwina Grant,

You will be aware that under the leadership of Tim Walker and the governance of Tim Illet Hitchmead Special School, in Biggleswade was deemed outstanding in its Ofsted report of 2008.

Sadly, and without exaggeration, less than two years later, I truly believe that the morale of the staff of Hitchmead is at the lowest I have ever known it. I am amazed that the staff have not voted with their feet and sought to find employment elsewhere. It is their unfailing dedication and commitment to the pupils of the school that means that they have, in the face of demoralising circumstances, remained true to the vision of Hitchmead: to give all pupils the best possible educational experience. I believe we are still delivering an outstanding education to our pupils in spite of staff redundancies, falling roles and confused, at best, direction about our future from Central Bedfordshire.

As far back as 2006 I was involved in meetings with staff at Sunnyside School where issues of 'partnership' were discussed. Also that year I met with Nicky Pace and Helen Redding and raised the issue of staff morale during the uncertainty about the future of Hitchmead School.

Four years later, when it became obvious that Hitchmead was not going to continue as a school in its own right, it was with conviction that we agreed to move forward to create a new Area Special school by merging with Sunnyside School. Our hopes were temporarily lifted at the thought of a new purpose built school that would cater for the wide range of needs that the young people of the new school would have. The staff groups from both schools met to discuss, with enthusiasm, what we would want in our new school.

Following the adoption of Option A from the Future of Special Schooling Consultation Document, staff and parents were assured that a merger of both schools would take place and that both schools would have equal, joint governance arrangements. However, this is not the case and there now exists a working party with no power that can only make recommendations to the

Sunnyside Governing Body. This means that the Hitchmead community has no voice in its future.

Central Bedfordshire is not only going to lose an outstanding special school but its credibility in the eyes of many staff and people associated with Hitchmead Special School.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sheila B', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Sheila Berry, Hitchmead School

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Head Teacher: Tim Walker

25th February 2010

Mrs Edwina Grant
Director of Children, Families & Learning
Deputy Chief Executive
Central Bedfordshire Council
Room 118
High Street, North
Dunstable
Bedfordshire
LU6 1LF

Dear Mrs Grant

We the staff of Hitchmead School wish to draw your attention to the Document "The Future of Special Schooling " – Consultation Document.

Whilst we are in no disagreement that the merger will take place – Option A "The Merger" was voted for. However Section E states "the governors and staff of Sunnyside and Hitchmead would have equal responsibility for ensuring the success of the School".

We feel this has not happened. What was designated a Temporary Governing Body where both schools had equal joint governance arrangements, has now become a working party with no power and it can only make recommendations to the Sunnyside Governing Body. Delegation of status in the working party has disempowered us and we no longer have equal representation. We have lost an equal voice and we feel the structure that was promised to us has not happened.

Furthermore, the lack of a planned substantial financial investment will result in inadequate facilities for all pupils.



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We look forward to a prompt response in what is an urgent situation.

Yours sincerely

Brian Gillett

*M.E.P.
K. Humphreys*

A. Webb

*Sheela Berry
Veronica Jurek*

A. Smith

J. Young

K. Masson. L. Robinson.

P. Newman

Colleen Young

N. A. Hudson

Liz Evans

Judith Wakeling

S. Handley

Luan Whede

R. Gray

Janette Gillan

C. Chapman

Maxine Jordan

The Staff of Hitchmead

- cc Richard Carr, Chief Executive
- Cllr Patrica E Turner, Leader of the Council
- Cllr John Street, Chairman of the Children & Families Services Scrutiny Committee
- Cllr Anita Lewis, Education Portfolio Holder
- Nadine Dorries, MP
- Alistair Burt, MP



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Mrs Edwina Grant
Director of Children, Families & Learning
Deputy Chief Executive
Central Bedfordshire Council
Room 118
High Street, North
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LU6 1LF

Dear Mrs Grant

As a long serving member of Hitchmead School staff I am writing to reinforce my disappointment of the way the outcome of the consultation process and the subsequent merger of Sunnyside and Hitchmead Schools.

Staff and parents were assured that both schools would have equal joint governance arrangements however this is not the case.

It is a miracle that our level of care and attention has not altered during this time. All our pupils are receiving first class education as has always been the case.

Central Bedfordshire is not only going to lose an outstanding special school but its credibility in the eyes of many staff and people associated with Hitchmead Special School.

Yours sincerely

Colleen Young



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Head Teacher: Tim Walker

Thursday 25th February 2010

Dear Mrs Grant

Proposed merger of Hitchmead and Sunnyside Schools

Although I recognise that the merger of the two schools into an area special school, leading to a new purpose built school in the near future, is the best way forward for both schools I have always had concerns about how this could be achieved. I felt the difference in size could result in Hitchmead merely being subsumed by Sunnyside. At the meeting between staff and Mr Pratt on 14th September 2009 I expressed these concerns and was assured it would be a merger of equals.

During the consultation period 14th September to 23rd October staff at Hitchmead School were assured that although one school would have to close to bring about a merger both schools would be treated as equal partners in the process to achieve the merger.

This was made clear in Section 7 of The Future of special schooling consultation document

Option A Merger

Advantages

e. the governors and staff of Sunnyside and Hitchmead would have equal responsibility for ensuring the success of the school.

We were told that in order to achieve this a temporary joint governing body with equal representation from both schools would be formed and they would plan the future of the new school.

These assurances were a major factor in my decision and that of colleagues at Hitchmead to regard the proposed merger positively.

We now learn that there was no legal basis for these assurances, we were in fact misled.

I find it difficult to understand how a major enterprise can be entered into without first ensuring that the legal implications were known.

The result is not a merger of equals but a takeover with no guarantee that Hitchmead's voice; pupils, staff, parents and governors, will be listened to or acted on.

Had all those involved with Hitchmead been aware that this would be the situation the result of the consultation may have been very different.



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Head Teacher: Tim Walker

I also have concerns about the financial implications of the merger. From the start it has been claimed that the merger " would release £111,000 of revenue funding and have the potential to save Central Bedfordshire costs of up to £300,000 per year per pupil". At other times it has been claimed that the capital expenditure required to make Hitchmead accessible and appropriate for Sunnyside pupils would be relatively minor.

The scrutiny committee commented on the lack of any detail regarding the cost of the adaptation works required at Hitchmead to accommodate the merger.

However it is unlikely that the adaptation works will be 'minor'. Along with access for wheel chairs, improved toilet and changing facilities would also be necessary. A new fence, costing about £20,000, would be necessary in order to ensure the safety of Sunnyside pupils and changes to the current sensory room may also be necessary. When Hitchmead's deficit budget of approximately £200,000 is added it is difficult to see how any savings can be made. In fact the formula capital of both schools is unlikely to be enough to cover the expenditure necessary.

Surely it must have been possible to cost out the financial consequences of the merger in some detail in order to allow the committee to make an informed decision?

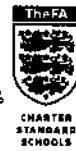
I would be interested to hear your comments on the concerns I have.

Yours sincerely,

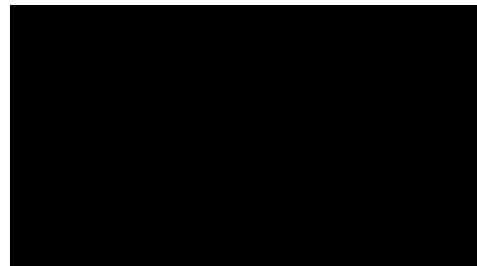
Liz Evans

Acting Deputy Head Teacher

Cc Richard Carr, Chief Executive
Cllr Patricia Turner, Leader of the Council
Cllr John Street, Chairman of the Children & Families Services Scrutiny Committee
Cllr Anita Lewis, Education Portfolio Holder
Nadine Norris, MP
Alistair Burt, MP



Stephen J Court



Edwina Grant
Director of Children, Families & Learning
Central Bedfordshire Council
Room 118
High Street North
Dunstable
Bedfordshire
LU6 1LF

Dear Mrs Grant

Public Consultation – Proposal to Close Hitchmead Foundation Special School

As the parent of a child at Hitchmead School, I wish to voice my objections to proposals to discontinue the school from 31 August 2010, as detailed in the Council's statutory notification of 15 January 2010.

Hitchmead School is the only Ofsted recognised outstanding special school in Central Bedfordshire and, rather than discontinuing the school, the Council should be looking to expand Hitchmead and spread its ethos and success.

Notwithstanding the present financial difficulties that Hitchmead faces, most of which seem to have been generated by a total lack of foresight on the part of successive local administrations, it strikes me that any proposal to close a successful school is an illogical and retrograde step which flies in the face of Government expectations to create a schools system shaped by parents and which delivers excellence.

The proposals currently before the Council talk of merger between Hitchmead and Sunnyside Schools, but the reality of the situation is far removed from this. Contrary to the very public assurances given by Council Officers during the first stage of the consultation process, there can be no joint governance arrangements of the type that has been suggested and promised – legislation and regulation simply do not permit such sharing of responsibility under the organisational arrangements put forward by the Council. The upshot of the current proposals is that Hitchmead will close and Sunnyside will continue; thus the Governing Body of Sunnyside will continue to have sole lawful responsibility, and accountability, for the future direction of the school. It is wholly wrong and misleading to suggest that this is merely an administrative process which the Council has to follow to achieve merger – there are other fairer and more equitable routes which the Council could have adopted. The present proposal is neither fair nor equitable to both parties and in my opinion will inevitably result in the Hitchmead ethos – the basis of the school's success – being lost.

I am not, per se, opposed to the creation of an area special school of the type envisaged in the Bedfordshire County Council Special Educational Needs Review Report, but this proposal is far removed from what was originally recommended.

Merger between Hitchmead and Sunnyside could work; provided the arrangements were both fair and equitable to both schools and provided adequate funding and realistic timescales were put in place to enable delivery of a new 'merged' school (albeit utilising existing facilities). As I see it, none of these provisos pertain to the current proposals which, in my opinion, are aimed more at making budgetary savings than delivering excellence in special schools provision.

Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Perry', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

25 FEB 2010

Edwina Grant
Director of Children, Families & Learning
Central Bedfordshire Council
Room 118
High Street North
Dunstable
Bedfordshire
LU6 1LF

Dear Edwina Grant

Proposal to merge Hitchmead Foundation Special School and Sunnyside Community Special School, to create a single area Special School for pupils with complex educational needs aged 3-19

I am writing to express my concerns and to object to the merger of Sunnyside and Hitchmead schools.

I have a strong impression that the merger, originally backed by stage one consultation, is being implemented not as a merger but a takeover by Sunnyside, which was not supported at that time.

I am particularly concerned that, in future, if the schools merge and should pupil numbers decrease with reduced budgets, our children with MLD will be taught in mixed ability groups. This would be very detrimental to our daughter's development and potential achievement - she has made fantastic progress since moving from mainstream schooling, working at last at the same speed as the rest of the class and no longer needing one to one support. The peer support, friendship and understanding are a major factor in this.

Finally the closure of only Hitchmead School gives the lead to Sunnyside totally for future planning which is of concern to me, having chosen Hitchmead as the school best suited to my daughter's needs.

Yours sincerely,

Fiona Court

Director of Children,
Families & Learning,
Central Bedfordshire Council,
Room 118,
High Street North,
Dunstable,
Beds,
LU6 1LF


23 Feb 10

Dear Edwina Grant,

As a parent of a child currently at Hitchmead I feel there will be a sad loss to closure of a 'superb' MLD school. This will result in the loss of highly qualified and caring staff with specialised knowledge in an area of SEN.

Aware of the lack of financial support I am writing to oppose the merger of Sunnyside Community Special School and closure of Hitchmead Foundation Special School. I am very angry and disappointed in those in authority who hold the key to providing the education for SEN children across the east C-Beds region. Having witnessed your decision at the executive meeting on the 8th of December 2009, I am horrified that you did not foresee this dilemma coming and make adequate financial provision for it when the county split from Bedford borough.

I understand in the north of the county money has been provided and their consultation process for the provision of SEN is being conducted in a wholly different manner. (That would leave a less bitter taste in my mouth.)

I also heard at the Executive Meeting from yourself and Anita Lewis that there was a legacy of money being put forward to develop an autistic unit at Holmemead School. Can you explain what benefit this will have and for how many children when there is a greater need to ensure adequate provision for all children who need SEN?

With no money forthcoming how do you expect SEN provision to exist or even maintain itself. Both Hitchmead and Sunnyside are in desperate need of upgrading and are both very different schools with different needs. Hitchmead, where on a sliding scale the children's abilities reach Mainstream (which you chose to ignore), and secondly those with the more specific and complex needs but require individual provision would incur a greater expense; Sunnyside children. I've visited both schools and am shocked by what is happening.

I wish at this stage of the proceedings for the whole process to cease until someone rationally looks at the situation and has the foresight to create a school for the future that is fit for purpose for this and many generations to come. I don't want a school that is put together for just short term measures.

Yours sincerely

Julia Cross

Julia Cross

Director of Children,
Families & Learning,
Central Bedfordshire Council,
Room 118,
High Street North,
Dunstable,
Beds,
LU6 1LF

23 Feb 10

Dear Edwina Grant,

I am writing to you to express my concern and object to the proposed merger of Sunnyside Community Special School and closure of Hitchmead Foundation Special School. After attending the Executive Meeting and reading articles in the press I am aware that inadequate funding has been allocated to this project. I am a parent of a child at Hitchmead, an outstanding school that is in this situation due to the deliberate withholding of children who should be there.

I find it difficult to believe that my daughter going an area special school which in all likelihood will be an SLD school will improve her education. The proposed changes will detrimentally affect her education and her chances for a future. She has attended a mixed SLD/MLD school in the past; it was inadequately funded and organised. Not only did she not receive the education to which she was entitled, but the school went into special measures, I don't want history to repeat itself.

Fund the scheme adequately or better still put the project on hold until a purpose built area special school can be built. Insufficient funding has been allocated and this project will not work.

Yours sincerely



Paul Cross

Sunnyside School



Where everyone is valued
Headteacher: Julie Mudd

Edwina Grant
Director of Children, Families & Learning
Central Bedfordshire Council
Room 118
High street North
Dunstable
Beds, LU6 1LF

26 February 2010

Dear Edwina

Re: Consultation – Sunnyside and Hitchmead Schools

I write on behalf of the Governors of Sunnyside School with regard to Stage 2 of the consultation process that Hitchmead School should close at 31 August, and that from 1 September Sunnyside School should be extended.

During Stage 1 of the consultation process Sunnyside School Governing Body took a very positive decision not to enter into correspondence via the local press, but expressed their united views about the future education and care of the young people currently at both schools and the desire to create one area special needs school via the formal channels of Central Bedfordshire Council.

The Governors, staff and many parents/carers at Sunnyside are mindful of the views of everyone at Hitchmead School as it was not too many years ago when a similar situation arose when Sunnyside and Rainbow Schools were "merged". It is easy to understand that emotions run high and people's instinct is to be "protective and territorial". What has to be paramount for everyone in this decision process are the young people who need education and care and the staff who provide that service. Governors at Sunnyside School believe that governors come way down the list of priorities in this situation.

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Sunnyside School



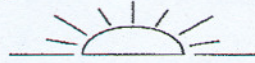
Where everyone is valued
Headteacher: Julie Mudd

Ideally everyone would like a brand new - purpose build school but at Sunnyside that is accepted as the "ideal". In the real world we believe that the best decision, until there can be such a brand new - purpose built school, is for the two schools to "merge" and operate as one school but on a "split site". To this end Sunnyside Governors have agreed, via the Temporary Joint Working Group, to a new name for the school - this has been advised to and suggestions sought from parents/carers and staff. Sunnyside Governors have already agreed "in principal" to extend their Instrument of Governance in order that current Governors of Hitchmead School could, via "ring-fenced positions", become governors at Sunnyside/new name with effect from 1 September 2010. It has also been agreed to review school uniform and when the new name of school is agreed then a new logo. Sunnyside Governors have been more than happy to agree to all these suggestions and truly believe this is the right way forward to be working in unison. All these suggestions have been discussed at the Temporary Joint Working Group.

The Governors of Sunnyside School are disappointed to learn that Governors at Hitchmead School have decided to make a number of objections to you, albeit we accept their right to do so. Our major concern is that they are requesting that Central Bedfordshire Council now change the decision made at Stage 1 of the consultation process and now should decide to close both schools. Whilst we accept that Central Bedfordshire Council could, we sincerely hope, in the interest of the young people we teach and care for, that they will not take this course of action.

The Governors of Hitchmead School state at Point 7 of their undated letter to you (copied to myself, Julie Mudd - Head Teacher, and Sheila Grayston - Chair of Temp. Joint Working Group, "...merger to be achieved through both Governing Bodies being equally involved in the process of creating a "new" or enlarged school...". This is in fact happening via the Temporary Joint Working Group. The one decision not referred back to this group is in regard to the Headship. The Head Teacher at Hitchmead advised he was not interested in the post but was requesting redundancy, and hence the Head Teacher currently in post at Sunnyside has automatically been "slotted in". In view of the short time-scale for consultation with unions and staff members Julie Mudd, Head Teacher, was asked by the Officers in Human Resources to produce a proposed staffing structure - this she has done with input by current Head Teacher at Hitchmead, Tim Walker. This proposed staffing structure, which ensures jobs for all staff currently employed at both schools, has been shared, "in confidence", with respective governors of both schools.

Sunnyside School



Where everyone is valued
Headteacher: Julie Mudd

Governors at Sunnyside School are, like the Governors of Hitchmead School, very concerned about the financing of vital necessary works, both internal and external, to make the Hitchmead site accessible and safe for the students who will, hopefully, be transferring there in September 2010. Members of the Temporary Joint Working Group have made tours of both school sites, the two Head Teachers and Officers of Central Bedfordshire Council have also made site visits in order to assess and cost such works. It is the main agenda item for the next meeting of the Temporary Joint Working Group on 4 March 2010.

On behalf of Sunnyside Governors I ask that you do not recommend that both schools be closed as we do not believe such a decision would be in the best interest of the children. There has been, and will continue to be, equal involvement from current governors of both schools to ensure smooth transition of a "new" school on 1 September 2010.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Rutt
Chair of Governors
Sunnyside School

Cc
Cllr Anita Lewis
Alistair Burt MP
Martin Pratt
Helen Redding
Ms Julie Mudd – Head Teacher, Sunnyside School
Mrs Sheila Grayston – Chair of Joint Working Group

Dear Mrs Grant,

I feel compeled to write to you with my concerns about the proposed merger of Hitchmead and Sunnyside. I have attended all meetings and consultation meetings that have taken place including publicly speaking at the last meeting at chicksands where I voiced my concerns about the Councils policy on SEN needs and future provision for MLD children in East Beds.

I still feel that the merger has not been thought through properly. My [REDACTED] has ASD. He was in mainstream school until it was time to go to middle school. The fight we had to get him into Hitchmead was unbelievable. The point is I speak to many parents who go through the same thing. Why is the Council still making it so hard to get their children into such a outstanding school? We are told that we don't have enough pupils. Who is to blame for that? Let them in and we wouldn't now be in this position.

The feeling amongst parents is total fear that the wonderful education our children receive from the dedicated staff at this school will change once the takeover (sorry, merger) takes place . What about the governing body ? Will it be equal amounts of both schools? Will we still have a voice and a say in major decisions that affect our childrens education ?

To be honest I am surprised that a conservative council are even contemplating closing down such an asset as Hitchmead. (OFSTED OUTSTANDING) Many more children in this County are missing out on a first class special needs education and it all boils down to money. Oh yes money, how are all the changes to our building going to be done with no money? Why throw £100,000 at Holmemead for a 8 place unit when those 8 children could of come to our school? The promise of an Area Special School when you finally do get the funds seems a very, very distant dream .

Yours Sincerely
Yvonne Talbot