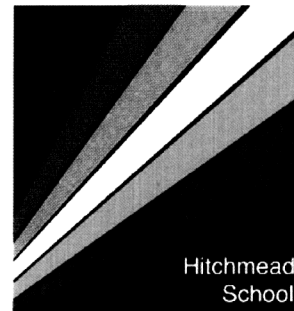


Hitchmead School

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



Head Teacher: Tim Walker

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

Dear Edwina

Re: Proposal to Merge Hitchmead and Sunnyside Schools.

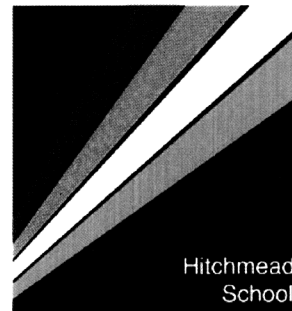
I write on behalf of the Governing Body of Hitchmead School. At a meeting of the Governing Body on Tuesday I was asked to write and set out a number of objections that we wish you to include in your report to the Council Executive.

- 1) The Governing body, staff and parents of Hitchmead pupils all relied totally on assurances that you and your staff gave regarding the Merger process. Regardless of whether advice was given in good faith or not, these assurances have turned out to be incorrect in law; a point that you and your officers have now accepted. We are now all totally reliant upon the goodwill of the Sunnyside Governing body and although we have no reason to doubt this there is no requirement that the wishes of Hitchmead stakeholders are taken into account.
- 2) The Governing Body of Hitchmead School now ask for detailed information regarding the Policy of Central Bedfordshire Council regarding the merger of two schools. Subsequently they also ask that the Council demonstrates that the Policy established by Members or that delegated to Officers has been fully followed. Recent email exchanges with [redacted] show that she was 'told operate from the position of a merger'. Then she states that she was 'informed that we are working towards closing one school and expanding the other'. This suggests to me that either there is no policy in place and Officers are working on an ad hoc basis without the formal approval of Members.



Hitchmead School

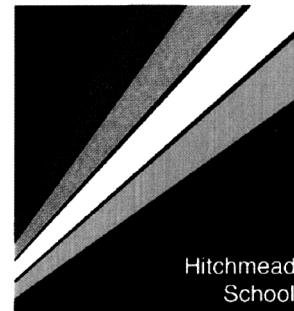
Hitchmead School
Hitchmead Road
Biggleswade
Beds SG18 0NL
Tel: 01767 601010 Fax: 01767 600229
Email: hitchmeadspecial@schools.bedfordshire.gov.uk



Head Teacher: Tim Walker

- 3) Supplementary questions are:
 - a) Who advised to work in this way?
 - b) Who told her to change the approach?
 - c) And what basis in law underpins this change?
 - d) What was the involvement of Members in this process?
- 4) The closure of Hitchmead and enlargement of Sunnyside has still not been costed, despite the requirement of the Scrutiny Committee. It is quite evident from our own analysis that significant investment will be needed to enable Sunnyside pupils to properly access the Hitchmead site yet no funds have been made available. It is now appropriate to ask for a clear indication of where in the capital programme the development of a new Area Special School now lies.
- 5) The initial Public Consultation was advised that this was a merger process and that both schools would have equal involvement in the process to create a 'new' school. This was the deal to which Hitchmead stakeholders signed up. We now find this not be the case. It is clear that the Public Consultation was flawed and information given to stakeholders was misleading.
- 6) During discussions with you and your officers the services of a Project Manager were offered. To date this offer has not been fulfilled. We are concerned at the additional pressure that the requirements of creating a new school are placing upon both Head Teachers, who already have full time commitments within their own respective schools.
- 7) We believe that the intention of Elected Members was for the merger to be achieved through both Governing Bodies being equally involved in the process of creating a 'new' or enlarged school. The current process is clearly not what was intended and as such does not follow the wishes of Elected Members.
- 8) Hitchmead Governors are extremely concerned by the suggestion that any challenge to this process would result in a suspension and regard this threat made by Officers of Central Bedfordshire Council as an attempt to subvert the consultation procedure and prejudice its outcome. We are mindful that it is Members who make decisions for implementation by Officers.
- 9) To date we have not submitted Freedom of Information requests but do feel that we have not been fully briefed about discussions, meetings, papers and decisions regarding the future of Hitchmead School.





The outcome of this process will be that the ethos of Hitchmead School whereby children with Moderate Learning Difficulties are educated in a way that closely resembles mainstream schools will be lost. This environment in which children clearly flourish was fully recognised by OFSTED during its most recent inspection of the school. It must be noted that Hitchmead School is the only Special School in the authority to hold Outstanding status. In addition Hitchmead's closure removes from BEST a facility to offer revolving door support to over 6500 children in the locality.

We would urge you to re-visit this process, close both schools and look to establish a new school with an Interim Governing Body. It will be possible for you to make an application to the Secretary of State to have the requirement to go to competitive tender set aside.

The Governing Body are expecting a fully considered response to all points raised in this letter and that detailed explanations are contained in the report that you submit to the Council Executive to enable them to make a decision.

Yours sincerely

Tim Ilett
Chair of Governors

cc.

Cllr Anita Lewis

Cllr Tricia Turner

Cllr John Street

And all other members of Central Bedfordshire Council

Mr Richard Carr – Chief Executive

Alistair Burt MP

Nadine Dorries MP

Miss Julie Mudd – Head Teacher, Sunnyside School

Mr Andrew Rutt – Chair of Governors, Sunnyside School

Mrs Sheila Grayston – Chair of Joint Working Group

