

Executive Determination meeting 17th December 2012

Proposal to change age range of St Marys Catholic VA Lower School

Index to Appendix C

Responses received within the representation period

Cllr Roger Pepworth, Chair of Board of Directors, St Augustine's Academy – Pages 1 to 2

Mr Des Tinch, Deputy Head Teacher, Streetfield Middle School - Pages 3 to 11

Mrs Joanne Hoy, Finance Manager, Streetfield Middle School – Page 12

Mrs W. Wilkins, Community Governor, Streetfield Middle School – Pages 13 to 16

Mr Donald Brown, Chair of Governors, Streetfield Middle School – Pages 17 to 24

Mrs A.M. Phillips, Headteacher, Streetfield Middle School – Pages 25 to 27

Statement towards the consultation process on the proposal to extend the upper age range of St. Mary's Catholic Lower School Dunstable.

This statement is jointly from the Board of Directors of St. Augustine's Academy, Dunstable and personally from Cllr. Roger Pepworth.

We are strongly opposed to the suggested alteration in the age range for pupils attending St. Mary's Lower School.

Before setting out our grounds for this opposition it should be noted how surprised we – and other local schools - were by the suggestion. The proposals were received at the beginning of this academic year. The timing indicates that a decision had been reached to go out to consultation in June and July. When Heads of local schools in the Learning Partnership met near the end of the July term no mention was made of any suggested age changes. Transparency and a commitment to being totally open with partner schools is a key value of learning partnerships. The suggestion to make such a change – which will of course affect every local school came then as a shock rather than a surprise.

It is this effect on other local schools which lies at the heart of our opposition to any age range change by one school on its own. If St. Augustine's were to effect a change what impact would that have on Streetfield Middle School? Were Manshead to accept pupils at eleven... The whole system would cease to be a system but would become anarchic. Instead of schools cooperating they would compete. The arguments have been well rehearsed and have been published in the local press at some length.

There is a case to be made for both a two and a three tier system. There is no case for a mixture of the two. St. Augustine's Directors feel that if there is a strong local demand for a change to be made to the three tier system then that change should be made simultaneously by all the schools serving a particular area or the town as a whole.

We have looked carefully at the list of extended services that the proposal suggests would be available if the suggested age range change occurs. We cannot see a single one that could not be achieved within the existing age structure. Indeed most seem essential to any well run school and with the exception of holiday activities Ofsted would be unimpressed were these services not to feature in any school it was inspecting.

St. Augustine's Academy is a church school with Diocesan links but these co-exist with our partnership with local schools not at the expense of that partnership which is a feature not mentioned in the section of your document headed 'Working with other schools'.

We have studied carefully the list of objectives of extending the age range. We cannot comment on the specifically Catholic objectives but note that the quoted objectives are already being achieved by the partner middle schools that pupils from St. Mary's feed into. A quick survey of recent Ofsted reports confirms this (The single exception is Aston Middle School for which Ofsted has now unreservedly apologised.)

We recognise that these views may be unpalatable but they must be viewed as part of the debate which you requested.



Cllr. Roger Pepworth

Chair of the Board of Directors, St Augustine's Academy,
Councillor, Manshead Ward, Central Bedfordshire Council, Dunstable Town Council.

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DUNSTABLE

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6th November
2013

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Children's Services

RE Consultation regarding proposed age range change for St Mary's

I am writing to contribute to the debate regarding the provision of St Mary's Lower School.

Before I go in to detail as to the inaccuracies that pervade the submission made by St Mary's I would like to offer a positive alternative proposal that could satisfy all parties involved. It may seem extreme at first but when one considers the educational, political, social and economical ramifications of the proposed expansion of housing in Houghton Regis it becomes that clear that careful strategic planning that is inclusive of all sections of the community is required.

St Mary's proposal reflects the Roman Catholic Church's needs and anxieties and as such are worthy of consideration.

This proposal is not attempting to denigrate St Mary's proposal instead it is focused on the needs of the local community and to offer an alternative strategic forward plan for education that Central Bedfordshire Council may wish to consider. It is also an attempt to help co-ordinate and consolidate provision in the south of the town. I hope that you will feel able to consider it seriously.

Here is an alternative to the St Mary's Proposal to become a primary school with age range 4 -11:

- The St Mary's site could be de-commissioned by the Church by being sold to, leased to or swapped for another site with the LA.

This would enable Streetfield Middle School to expand to form a 3 -13 provision similar to that of Caddington Village School.

This would make long-term strategic sense for the Local Authority, Dunstable Council, Downside Estate and its families.

The local non-Catholic population is growing and there will come a time when both this site and St Augustine's, both on Downside, will be filled to capacity.

- The new hybrid lower-middle provision would be non-denominational and would work, as it currently does, in close liaison with Manshead – (this potential has not yet been fully realised because of the unintended, but non-the-less real, tension caused by the religious designation of each of the Lower and Upper Schools).
- This would create a unique 3 -19 campus in Dunstable with a complete learning pathway of shared and joint services.
- The new school will serve a disadvantaged area that will greatly benefit from the continuity of provision and the possibility of central locality of multi-agency provision for the local community similar to that enjoyed on Parkside in Houghton Regis – housed perhaps in the Dunstable Community Centre.

To focus on the religious element for a moment, we have to take note that currently:

- St Mary's school attracts a minority of Roman Catholics and is populated mostly by non denominational families the majority of whose learning pathway is in to Streetfield and then to Manshead. Currently up to 40% of the pupil population is Catholic (this is not the same as practising Catholics though).
- As St Mary's documentation hints, there does not appear to be the capacity to increase the % of Catholics in the school – even if actual pupil numbers increase. The Catholic population is not growing faster than the non Catholic - proportionally it will remain the same.
- St Mary's is a Catholic School with a minority of Catholics in it. There is not the demand for a larger Catholic School in the south of the town

So, with these facts in mind it makes more strategic sense to either

- Expand St Vincent's (currently 80% Catholic families) thus allowing it to absorb and accommodate the 40% from St Mary's should they wish it– this in turn will enable the other local Houghton Regis Primary Schools to fill to capacity and, in anticipation of the new build, give the LA a clearer view of future school needs in the new build area, or,
- Alternatively, the Parish could be offered a site for a new Catholic School in the new build in North Houghton Regis as compensation for the site in Downside (basically a swap) – where the proximity to a larger Catholic population in Luton and the possibility of Catholic families moving into the area is greater than that currently enjoyed in Downside. This would also allow for easier liaison and transfer to secondary Catholic Education in Luton (Cardinal Newman).

With this proposal everyone wins - the children and their families, the Local Community, the Catholic Church, the other local schools and the LA.

Central Bedfordshire would be adopting an imaginative sustainable solution that will actually save money in the long run.

With regards to the submission made by St Mary's:

It feels as though this submission is a 'hotch potch' of ideas and stuff bought off the shelf or borrowed from other schools- it seems as though St Mary's nomenclature has just been placed in appropriate spaces on a generic form.

Appendix C

Page 4 of 27

Clearly in order to defend its decision St Marys has had to imply that it can do better job than the schools currently taking their children – that’s all part of the game. The fact remains though that it cannot successfully demonstrate nor prove it’s case. This is because at the heart of this submission is not a debate about standards of achievement or children’s best interests. This is really about the diocese tidying up an anomaly in Catholic provision. To make this clear I have replied to each section of the proposal in the same detail as it was written (the dark type is my response or objection)

To provide stability, consistency and continuity for children in their primary years, through our ethos, curriculum, teaching and learning organization

Shouldn’t this be happening anyway? It is in every other school in the Learning Partnership.

To facilitate the continuity of Catholic education by fulfilling qualification criteria for admissions to Catholic secondary schools. (JFK in Hemel, and Cardinal Newman in Luton)

In fact we have parents placing their children from Cardinal Newman into Streetfield because they cannot afford the fare to the school and the journey time of 1 hour or more is deemed excessive.

Freedom of Information facts provided by both Cardinal Newman and JFK show quite clearly that there is no demand for Catholic Education in the secondary age range that requires such travel arrangements e.g. from lower schools or middle schools in Dunstable one child has moved to JFK in the last 3 years (this because family moved into the area) The 42 children who went to either Cardinal Newman (14) and JFK (28) in 2012 did so from outside St Mary’s.

This proposal is not about continuity - it is about creating sustainable demand for JFK and Cardinal Newman.

To provide a smoother transition to secondary schools with admissions from year 7

In fact this proposal does exactly the opposite – it presumes that parents will want to send their child to a secondary school 11-18. That is not the case. It presumes that most parents want to send their child on a long trek to secondary school in pursuit of Catholic education. This is not the case.

These are presumptions not facts.

In fact St Mary’s pupils would be seriously disadvantaged by these proposals.

To raise standards and improve outcomes for young people particularly at age 11

This is absolutely true.

The fact is that if St Mary’s do not improve their standards and their teaching and learning in years 3 and 4 and continue that trend into year 5 and 6 then they will be placed into Special Measures.

There is a significant issue here:

**Either the Key Stage 1 results are accurate and the teaching at Key Stage 2 (years 3 and 4) is poor
Or**

Key Stage 1 results are inaccurate and Key Stage 2 year 3 and 4 is fantastic.

The fact remains however that some children are leaving St Mary’s appearing to have made good progress and achieving level 3 yet in reality are barely functioning at Level 2. One pupil this year was recorded as a Level 3 in maths but in reality is Level 1.

Something is very wrong.

This is not to do with transition – this is to do with good teaching and learning.

To ensure that particular attention is paid to groups of children who are either

Appendix C

underperforming or exceeding in years 5 and 6

This is what every school should do – the fact that St Mary’s identifies it as an implies that it is not current practice in the school or that they think current destination schools fail to do so. If it is the latter then it is a false assertion.

- To provide equal access for all pupils to primary school education regardless of faith.

The fact remains that St Mary’s is Catholic School but it’s Catholic population is in the minority. With expansion this will remain broadly the same proportion. St Mary’s cannot exist solely as a Catholic School the Catholic population is too small.

- To ensure our school is based around communities and their needs

What communities? Just the Catholic community it seems. Here are the actual facts>

St Mary’s serves an area that has high deprivation yet it does not engage with that community other than accept pupils.

St Mary’s already belongs to a Learning Partnership to which it has made little or no positive contribution.

St Mary’s has accepted the help and assistance of its closest school with no reciprocation

St Mary’s has unilaterally taken a decision that has already caused dismay and engendered a lack of trust between schools.

This is not a school reaching out to communities it is insular, self serving and self interested the exact opposite of what one would expect from a Catholic School.

- To bring St. Mary’s in line with St. Vincent’s Primary School (the only other Catholic school for this age range in the local Authority)

Yes, true - this is entirely about Catholic self interest it is not about what is good for children

- To make working at St. Mary’s more attractive and help us recruit and retain good quality staff to improve the standard of education for our children

This is what every school wants.

Every experienced leader knows that it will take more than having year 5 and 6 to make St Mary’s an attractive career opportunity – it depends more on leadership, good pedagogy and ethos.

Principles

The need to raise standards and improve outcomes for young people.

- Local data shows that children achieve well in lower schools from a starting point which is below national levels

Local data also shows that KS1 results are either clearly inflated and shrink back to the true position in year 3 and 4. Local data also shows that year 4 data is inaccurate when compared to KS 2 outcomes because it does not compare like with like. The needs of Key Stage 2 Testing are not the same as end of year 4. They are measuring different things and the way these things are measured is different.

- Local data indicates that the number of students achieving 5+ GCSEs A* - C is below national average

This is now an inaccurate assertion. What is important is what progress children make. The situation is improving rapidly especially in the Learning Partnership.

- Increasingly, as professionals, we believe our children would benefit from the stability of a primary school environment, its organisation and its ethos

Of course but the implication is that this is not already happening – this is untrue.

Appendix C

We believe that primary schools will also improve behaviour, supporting pupils for whom coping in Years 5 & 6 with the changes associated with transition, may put them at risk of exclusion. To ensure there is continuity of provision across the 0 – 19 age range so there is a 'one phase' approach to learning.

This is a false assertion designed to generate anxiety – a simple look at the data regarding inclusion will show this to be false.

Current key stage planning is geared around the structure used by the majority of schools in the UK. This means that the key stage boundaries align with the two tier system

The rest of Central Bedfordshire is remaining 3 tier. St Mary's has a minority of pupils that are Catholic who is it to decide which system the rest of the town should adopt?

The need for transition between each tier, particularly in the middle of Key Stages can result in lack of curriculum understanding, continuity, assessment agreement and ownership of Key Stages

This is true BUT within a year of changing to Primary will be forced to adopt the same methodologies as Middles or it will fail children at Key Stage 2 this is because it has singularly failed to liaise effectively – it does not understand what happens in years 5 and 6 – if did it would not make such spurious and false assertions.

Continuity of provision will provide curriculum continuity avoiding repetition and curriculum conflict

There has been no break in curriculum continuity or 'curriculum conflict' whatever that means.

Primary / secondary provision will reduce the number of times a child needs to move schools, it also makes transition and curriculum continuity easier because it sits at the end of a key stage, the natural transition for the vast majority of schools in the Country
Schools should be based around communities and their needs

Yet St Mary's proposals will do the opposite. It will divide its local community.

The proposal ignores the fact that most parents will want to send their children to Manshead CoE school and will therefore transfer at year 7 for 2 years into a middle school.

Any thoughts being entertained that Streetfield will become part of Manshead are false. Streetfield is non denominational there is no protocol for this and Streetfield remains firmly committed to being a Middle School because it is best for children as people and young adults.

As shown in Appendix B, our parents are overwhelmingly supportive of this proposal, therefore we are meeting their needs

How many parents responded as Appendix B appears not to be available?

How many parents were asked to blindly sign the form on the playground by the Headteacher in order to get to the minimum number of replies?

Granted it is likely that the majority of parents who heard the speech at church signed up but they still represent an minority of families.

The Catholic community needs provision of Catholic primary education to yr 6 to qualify for admission to Catholic secondary schools

These rules are easily amended if there is a will but in fact they are already aren't they? This is at best a red herring and at worst an attempt to scaremonger Catholic parents.

This proposal specifically meets the needs of local parents who prefer that their children stay in a smaller year group setting until age eleven

Really? Properly and fully informed parents prefer their child to move from a year group of 26 to one of between 180 and 320 having just travelled for some 45 mins to an hour with older children on a bus to a different town? Really? Do the parents really know that this is the choice that they are making?

We have been made aware that Catholic families are choosing not to send their children to St. Mary's because we don't currently provide Yrs 5 and 6. They are therefore choosing to send their

Appendix C

children to other local Catholic schools and on occasion travelling further.
New models of leadership and governance for schools should be considered

Interestingly, if this proves to be true then it would presumably result in fewer children attending ST Vincents as this is the other local Catholic school!

- Work collectively in partnership between primary and secondary phases enabling staffing flexibility across schools
- Address shortages of Governors and explore the sharing of expertise and resources in this field
- Secure “Best Value” by sharing suppliers, engaging in joint training and identifying shared priorities for school improvement
That vision should reflect recent current reform

St Mary’s was supposed to be doing these things within its current partnership with local schools

- The curriculum is based on a primary / secondary model in line with the rest of the country
- Current primary and secondary curriculum and assessment initiative can be addressed effectively

This serves to prove that St Mary’s does understand the curriculum at all. There is no difference between 2 tier and 3 tier Key Stage 2 curriculum nor in assessment procedures- this is just another piece of obfuscation. The difference is the testing requirements, arrangements and conduct in Year 6

- The 2006 EIA amendment to the education act places duties on local authorities to secure diversity in the provision of schools, and increase opportunities for parental choice. This proposal supports this amendment by increasing parental choice, and diversity of educational provision

BUT parents did not seek/request this choice did they? It was foisted upon them as a take it or leave it option in September by a Governing Body that recognized the weakness of the current situation – namely how can St Mary’s consider itself to be a truly Catholic school when a minority of its pupils are Catholic?

The Governing Body has worked hard to persuade parents through the church to agree to the proposal but is still faced with the fact that those parents are not the majority population in the school.

It mistakenly believes that that by increasing the number of classes it will increase the PROPORTION of Catholics but this is an error – there just aren’t enough Catholics in the town for 2 Catholic Primary schools.

Effect on school standards and school improvements Leadership and Management

St Mary’s has strong and confident leadership and the professional capacity and skills to drive forward the proposed changes, through:

- Working closely with local schools in the Learning Partnership and Catholic schools in Luton and Houghton Regis
- Shared governor meetings that focus more strongly on strategic direction and to set high expectations for our schools
- Exploring more flexible approaches to school governance through sharing expertise
- Shared senior leadership that allows us to work together to agree a vision for our schools, raise standards and share targets for school and community improvement
- Collaborative work on curriculum initiatives for upper KS2, building on the good practice that already exists in years 3 and 4
- Sharing the expertise and experience of upper key stage 2 that already exists within our schools
- Working in partnership with St Vincent’s and other local schools, who have already extended their age range to 11
- Sharing a range of bought in services

We also believe that a full primary school provides greater career development opportunities for new and

Appendix C

existing staff than lower schools, and may be more attractive to new applicants.

The fact is that all of these things should be happening anyway – this proposal doesn't change anything in this respect. However, if it is not already happening and the school needs a change of age range to implement these aspects of everyday life then it is a tacit admission of failure.

Curriculum

We believe that curriculum delivery is paramount to enable all pupils to have opportunities to become successful learners, confident individuals and responsible citizens. This will be achieved through an engaging, challenging and purposeful primary curriculum that better meets the learning styles and needs of our pupils and we will address this in the following ways: We acknowledge there will be a significant impact on our school in the delivery, resourcing and teaching of some specialist subject areas, and we appreciate that the curriculum for Years 5 and 6 will need careful planning. We will do this by:

- A current member of staff will be appointed as the Year 5 teacher and will prepare in the Spring and Summer terms with the full support of the senior leadership team
- Following the national curriculum that sets out clearly the core knowledge and understanding that all children should be expected to acquire in their later primary years
- Visits to other good/outstanding primary provision to see good practice, planning, teaching, learning and pastoral care
- Joint training and curriculum planning for Key Stage 2
- Working with local Primary Schools
- Curriculum leaders working together
- Sharing good practice, resources, facilities and expertise with partnership feeder Schools

Teaching styles within upper Key Stage 2 will promote opportunities to further develop learning & thinking skills and independence through an enquiry based and reflective teaching style which will meet the needs of a range of learners. CPD will focus on innovative teaching, learning and in giving teachers the confidence to support all children to progress.

We will continue to update our own knowledge and understanding of assessment in line with new government legislation. We already benefit from the expertise of two members of staff who have experience of teaching and assessing upper Key Stage 2.

Target setting and monitoring will continue, as a whole school approach, as this has already proved successful. We will moderate with other providers of Year 5 and 6. We will continue to build upon high standards of APP to assess learning and meet individual needs through successful interventions. Pupils will be involved in their own self-assessment of progress and setting learning goals for the future. Our school has a strong commitment to PSHCE within a Catholic environment and keeping children safe. We recognise the different challenges faced by upper KS 2 pupils and have strong links to local initiatives which will support their PSHE development e.g. SRE, Mental health.

Again all of this is currently true BUT what is not mentioned is that which St Mary's pupils will be denied by these proposals:

Specialist Teaching in core and foundation subjects – state of the art facilities for sport, ICT, food, design, art, modern foreign languages and science. None of these facilities are available at St Mary's – perhaps they do not matter!

Parents and community

Ensuring that this school system works for our families by promoting the confidence of our parents and fully engaging with them and the community through:

- Making ourselves accountable to our stakeholders Knowledge of families and the community, meaning our school is well placed to address parental concerns
- Continuing to seek views and acting on this feedback at a wider community level Continuing the current very good practice that exists within our school
e.g. Parent/carer workshops on curriculum matters, open door policy which encourages good communication and supporting children at home
Our initial research shows that parents are in favour of primary schooling which will promote increased confidence within the local community that the education system is geared to local need and reflects parental wishes.

'Our initial research shows that...' then the initial research is flawed – probably because of the way the closed questions were set and asked ...initial research of this nature in middle schools would show the opposite.

Behaviour

Evidence from Ofsted reports, SIP reports and LA exclusion data show that behaviour is very well managed in our school. This is due to established behaviour management strategies that are successful for the following reasons:

- We have in depth knowledge of our children and families and we make it a priority to build excellent relationships, especially with our more vulnerable families
- We use a wide range of support mechanisms (including external agencies and small group work)
- We have a consistent approach to behaviour management that is known and understood by all
- We have positive effects on groups that tend to underperform; vulnerable learners, low achievers etc. because the school knows these children well.
- A familiar environment and favourable staffing ratio means that the school can continue to meet the needs of children, able to address behaviour management

None of the above is changed by this proposal – this is and should be true of all schools – it is a fact that St Mary's do not have the capacity, facilities or expertise to deal with these issues any more effectively than currently happens in the destination schools – indeed they face a very steep learning curve.

Transition

Transition is a major key to successful lifelong learning. In order to achieve successful transition for all, there needs to be effective communication between different settings.

Good transition is fundamental to the success of this proposal; we are fully committed to work with all future providers having agreed processes for transfer at age 11 so that the school journey becomes seamless. In order to achieve this seamless transition we will ensure that there is :

- A shared curriculum, teaching, support, expertise and delivery as a two way process
- The sharing of data, target setting and assessments where there is a mutual trust of judgements and information
- A commitment to joint working over transition periods including post transition
- Leadership of transition
- Pupil involvement in their planned transition
- Pupils whose parents choose to transition at the end of year 6 to a secondary school, may only experience one transition event before the age of 19

Well anything that finally helps St Mary's to become accountable for its own performance has to be a good thing. These things are supposed to be happening now – if they are not then St Mary's needs to be held to account now. If it can't achieve this now then why should parents trust it to do so in year 6? The fact is that under proposals the number of transition points will stay the same because the vast majority will choose to go to Middle then Upper rather than Catholic 11-18. What does the proposal really do in this respect?

SEND

We feel that changing age range will have a positive impact for pupils with SEND and for vulnerable learners e.g. LAC, building on from the current good practice already established in our school.

- We believe that our professional knowledge of how children learn will enable us to provide effective intervention
- Our school benefits from a highly skilled, experienced SENCo, we will continue with the good and supportive SEND provision already in place and pupils will benefit from this for a further two years
- Excellent work with families is already established to support all vulnerable children, SEND and LAC
- Over the years, we have established excellent relationships with other professionals in order to support pupils with SEND and their families and will continue this for upper Key Stage 2 pupils
- We aim to maintain and share specialist staff already employed by our schools to support SEND
- We aim to support Gifted & Talented pupils within our schools and to consider the role played by feeder settings and transition schools
- The two way sharing of information at transition will support positive outcomes for pupils with SEND and vulnerable learners

Again, the proposal does not enhance this provision they actually diminish it. The failure to

Appendix C

investigate or follow up case histories of ex pupils has left the school ignorant of current provision in middle school for these learners. In practice St Mary's has transferred children with minimal, incomplete and inaccurate information regarding needs,

Extended Services

This proposal will provide the opportunity to develop extended school provision reflecting the needs of the community. We will work to provide a range of extended services

- Transition support for pupils and families
- Shared training for parents and staff
- Clubs and a range of after school activities
- Promotion of inter school sports and other activities for the community
- Commitment to "wraparound care" (breakfast and after school clubs)
- Workshops to support adult learning and encourage family learning
- Support for vulnerable families and pupils
- Support for families in areas such as relationships and health and safety

Once again, these aspects are not contingent upon becoming a primary – they should be happening already – if not why not?

Thank you for taking the time to get this far in the document – I hope that it will have made you see that I am not a crank and do care about this local learning community and its needs.

Yours sincerely,

D Tinch

For the purposes of transparency:

I am a parent, a resident of Dunstable and I am one of the Deputy Heads and a Governor at Streetfield Middle School.

Dear Ms Grant

I would like to register my disagreement with the proposed change which would not benefit the majority of children in the South Dunstable area.

The proposed model presented to Councillor Versallion recently would allow the current system of children being on one campus for their statutory education to continue without the upset and disruption that could be caused by a change in age-range.

I feel it would be more beneficial for parents choosing to send their children to a "Roman Catholic" school, to have the option to send them to a larger school, i.e. St Vincent's in Houghton Regis, where they can learn more about their faith. This option would be less costly than making changes to St Mary's to accommodate a further 2 academic years.

I am a parent that has seen two children go through the current system here in South Dunstable, successfully and would like other parents to experience the same positive effect.

Yours sincerely

MRS. JOANNE HOY
Finance Manager
Streetfield Middle School

Mrs W Wilkins
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30th November 2012

Edwina Grant
Central Bedfordshire Council

Sent by email: Edwina.grant@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

To Whom It May Concern

Consultation on St Mary's Lower School, Dunstable

I write in response to the consultation to extend the upper age range of St Mary's Catholic Lower School.

I am parent of two children who attended schools in the town and both have now left the education system in Bedfordshire. One of my children is now at University. In addition to this I am currently a Community Governor. I have been a school governor since 1994 and have also been involved in PTA's at all three of my children's' schools. I first became a governor when my children attended a school in Houghton Regis, again when they attended a lower school in Dunstable and then at Streetfield Middle. Since 1994 I have seen the many changes in the education system and I fully support the three tier system which our Local Authority voted to retain.

Questions relating to the proposal:

Appendix C

Page 13 of 27

1. I strongly disagree with the proposed changes to the age range at St Mary's Catholic Lower School.
2. I strongly disagree with the timescale plan of the age change. By seeking approval before the end of December you are asking current parents at St Mary's to jeopardise a place at a middle school as they cannot be sure if St Mary's will be able to offer a place to their child beyond year four and the option of transferring to middle school will not be available to them if they do not complete the required transfer form for year 5. This will also be unsettling to current pupils at St Mary's as friendship groups could be compromised.

In the information provided in the Consultation document various statements are made which I would like to respond to.

Transferring in the middle of KS2 can affect curriculum understanding, continuity and educational assessment.

Can you please advise what facts support these claims? It is my understanding that middle schools take into account KS1 results, but that transfer data is also provided from lower schools to middle schools on pupils attainment and progress in years 3 and 4 before they transfer. This also applies when children transfer from middle to upper school.

Our children would benefit from the stability of a primary school setting that is organised to meet the specific learning needs of the upper KS2 child.

By transferring to a middle school the children would benefit from specialist teaching in many different subjects. Teaching is not purely aimed at the children of year 6 who are taking SATs, progress is monitored across all four years. Links with St Vincent's and those catholic schools in neighbouring local authorities could continue in addition to children from St Mary's continue to visit Streetfield and Manshead, who share the campus with St Mary's.

The vast majority of Local Authorities have converted to a primary / secondary model.

This is not the case. In the Isle of Wight the decision to change from three tier to two tier was not upheld. In addition the situation in Northamptonshire has led to many children being failed. Many schools have been affected by cuts in funding and the option to become Academies has been considered by some schools to be the only option as initial funding to become an Academy would appear to ease the shortfalls in their school budgets. This has been the primary reason why so many lower schools have become Academies and then sought to extend their age ranges.

The expansion of 3 lower schools in the local area becoming primary schools and some local upper schools investigating converting to secondary schools.

Appendix C

If other lower schools are becoming primary schools what bearing does this have on St Mary's who have advised they wish to extend their age range due to religious reasons primarily. Manshead Upper is a Church of England school who have not expressed any interest in changing to a secondary school. Queensbury Upper is rumoured to be considering changing its age range and is currently an Academy but has no religious background. I understand that some parents at St Mary's are under the impression that places will be guaranteed to their children at John F Kennedy in Hemel Hempstead or Cardinal Newman in Luton. Both of these schools are outside of the Local Authority remit and they have their own admission requirements.

Objectives of Proposal

To facilitate the continuity of Catholic education ... and a smoother transition to secondary schools.

It is not clear which secondary schools children from St Mary's would transfer to. In addition there is no provision for a Catholic secondary school in the local Authority.

To raise standards and improve outcomes particularly at age 11.

All schools, despite their background or local authority, strive to ensure that children reach their full potential at all ages. To imply that extending the age range to age 11 at St Mary's will improve outcomes cannot be proven. At Streetfield Middle our recent OFSTED inspection has reported that children which attend for the four years from year 5 to year 8 exceed the National average for those aged 13. This is despite some of the children being below the National average when they join us in year 5.

To ensure particular attention is given to groups of children who are either under performing or exceeding in years 5 & 6.

SEN encompasses both children who are struggling and those who are considered gifted and able. All schools provide support to these pupils, irrespective of their age or which school they attend.

To provide specialist primary education for children in years 5 and 6.

Can you please explain how this differs from the National Curriculum that is offered in lower and middle schools at present.

To bring St Mary's in line with St Vincent's Primary.

If you wish to be "in line" with St Vincent's Primary, what can you offer parents and children which will differentiate you from St Vincent's. Links can still be made with St Vincents and other schools in the Local Authority irrespective of a change in age-range.

To make working at St Mary's more attractive and help us recruit and retain good quality staff to improve the standard of education for our children.

I cannot understand how changing the age range would make St Mary's a more attractive place to work. You advise that you wish to retain pupils currently attending St Mary's with an

intention for more Catholic children to join the school. Recruiting good quality staff should not be solely based on having potentially more Catholic children in the school.

Working together with other schools.

You state that St Mary's is fully committed to working together with the school's of the local Learning Partnership and other Catholic schools. When St Mary's joined the local Learning Partnership it was agreed that all schools would liaise with each other by sharing good practice, identifying areas which the Learning Partnership could assist with and most importantly by being open with proposals which may affect other schools in the Learning Partnership. It was a great shock to find from other parties the proposals of St Mary's to extend their age range without this being shared at recent Learning Partnership meetings. This was felt more keenly not only as St Mary's were in the Learning Partnership but also because the staff and governors at both schools had always worked so closely for the benefit of the children at St Mary's. Can you therefore be sure that other Catholic schools would not act in the same way as St Mary's have on this occasion to preserve their own pupil numbers and not consider St Mary's who are not even in the same Local Authority when looking at Secondary school intake. Other schools in the Learning Partnership may also feel uneasy working with St Mary's in the future if such far-reaching proposals had not been shared prior to St Mary's entering the consultation process. You also state that you would secure value for money by sharing suppliers, arranging joint training and identifying shared priorities for school improvement; all of these proposals are already in place within the local Learning Partnership and extending your age-range would not have any bearing on these areas.

Extended Services

Can you advise with whom St Mary's propose joining with to offer extended school provision.

Finally, I would like to add that there is a huge amount of uncertainty in Dunstable at present with regard to proposed changes at many schools. My own children are now aged 22 and 19 years respectively and therefore no longer in the education system in Dunstable. Throughout my time as a both a parent and a governor I have never doubted the middle school system and always felt that the schools in our area worked well together to ensure that all children reached their full potential. My hope would be that in the near future all schools will once again, with the support of our Local Authority, refocus their efforts on ensuring that all children are able to reach their full potential and parents once again see all schools working together.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Wilkins

Mrs W J Wilkin

30th November 2013

Deputy Chief Executive / Director of Children's Services,
Central Bedfordshire Council,
Priory House,
Chicksands,
Shefford,
Beds SG17 5TQ
Sent by email: Edwina.Grant@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Dear Sirs

Consultation on a proposal to extend the upper age range

It is incumbent on the authority to assess the impact of any change on all of the pupils in this area of Dunstable. Schools are here to serve all of the community not just a minority.

Proposal

To provide stability, consistency and continuity for children in their primary years.

Do the year 3 and 4 results show that this is in place now? Shouldn't this be happening now? It is in other partnership schools. It is a myth that Key Stage 1 and Key stage 2 have the same educational requirements.

To facilitate the continuity of Catholic education and provide access and smoother transition to secondary schools

I assume by this you mean Catholic secondary schools. My understanding is that St Mary's have stated that Catholic pupils attending your school will be guaranteed a place at either JFK or Cardinal

Appendix C

Page 17 of 27

Newman, both schools outside the local authority and servicing only 40% of the school pupil population. These pupils will have to fund their own way there. Freedoms of information act requests have shown that there is no demand from children in the school currently to go to either of the named schools. Of the 42 children who went to the named schools last year none came from St Mary's catchment. The other 60% will transfer for year 5, or year 7 but on what pathway? As part of the learning partnership St Mary's focus ought to be on those pupils who go on to authority schools via the existing pathway. These pupils if they stay on at St Mary's will have a change at year 7 to where? What is the pathway? And then again at year 9! How does this help transition? At present Manshead cannot take these pupils at year 7 and are unlikely to be able to do so in the foreseeable future. The Queensbury proposal that was alluded to in the "public" meeting has a reduced capacity on pupil numbers, and cannot take place until they qualify under ofsted. Are 60% of the pupils being disenfranchised by your proposal? How many pupils as a percentage have actually gone to these Catholic secondary schools?

To raise standards and improve outcomes for young people particularly at age 11

& to ensure that particular attention is paid to groups of children who are either underperforming or exceeding in years 5 & 6

At the risk of repeating myself. Do the year 3 and 4 results show that this is the case now? How insulting is this statement to the Middle Schools who take the pupils?

Every school is doing this. Does this consultation document really suggest that this doesn't happen?

Perhaps St Mary's should check with the authority how good your nearest Middle School is with SEN.

What would St Mary's now do differently? Perhaps it is something that should have been shared in the Learning Partnership?

Raising standards is about the quality of teaching and learning, the quality of leadership, but not the buildings or the age range.

To provide equal access for all pupils to primary school education regardless of faith.

Surely the Lower and Middle School set up does this already? The curriculum for the latter part of KS2 is still the same but in Middle Schools it is taught in a specialist environment combining the strength of Primary and Secondary practice. Middle schools enable pupils to access the skills they need to be independent learners.

To ensure our school is based around communities and its needs

How can this be true when only 60% of your current intake, a figure that is unlikely to reduce significantly, are likely to be educationally disenfranchised? How can this be the case when no child from the catchment went on to either JFK or Cardinal Newman last year? In what way does this

Appendix C

proposal benefit the larger community?

To provide specialist primary education in years 5 and 6

In what way would the delivery of the curriculum differ from what is offered in Middle Schools at the moment? Middle Schools provide a transition from primary to secondary learning. They introduce a much wider curriculum with specialist teaching in the core subjects as well as in other areas that allow pupils to grow and achieve.

To bring St Mary's in line with St Vincent's

Is this proposal about community of catholic need? If it is about Catholic need perhaps the local authority should consider granting St Vincent's the ability to extend and accommodate the catholic population currently attending St Mary's. There is a lot of rumor about "land swaps" being on offer. Is this an opportunity to facilitate this and provide a one campus three tier solution?

To make working at St Mary's more attractive and help us recruit and retain good quality staff to improve the standard of education for our children

How will changing the age range achieve this any better than a wholehearted adoption of the Learning Partnership? The partnership gives opportunity and career progression over a much wider area. The opportunity to experience teaching across the age groups, share best practice, and have a greater understanding of the needs of the children across those age range should be more attractive in teacher recruitment and retention. What evidence is there that recruitment is better in a primary situation? Recruitment is worse in any situation where there is uncertainty, again it is not dependent upon age range or phase, it is dependent upon leadership.

Principles

The need to raise standards and improve outcomes for young people

Local data shows that children achieve well in Lower schools from a starting point that is below national average

This is true and key stage 2 results have also improved dramatically. Local data however also shows that year 3 and 4 data shows that the improvement at key stage 1 does not continue at the same pace. Progress is not in line with expectations. It is also a fact that key stage 2 measures different things in different ways so comparison is not simple. It is far better to measure progress and judged on progress years 3 & 4 are not good.

Local data indicates that the number of students achieving 5+ GCSE's A – C is below national average.

Appendix C

This is now not correct and the outcomes are improving. Local data also shows that the progress in the Middle Schools is above national expectations and that pupils leave the Middle Schools with achievement above the national average at Key stage 3, a year 9 test!

Increasingly as professionals we believe our children would benefit from the stability of a primary school environment, its organization and its ethos

There is no data to support this statement. It is merely a belief; a statement without any basis is fact, similar to creationist belief. As professionals how can you possibly contend that the teaching of subjects but specialist teachers in an environment which is designed to come with the emotional, physical and developmental needs of children? I believe that this is of huge benefit educational, morally and spiritually.

We believe that primary schools will also improve behavior, supporting pupils for whom coping in Years 5 & 6 with the changes associated with transition, may put them at risk of exclusion. To ensure that there is continuity of provision across the 0-19 age range so that there is a one phase approach to learning

Again that word believe. There is no evidence to support this; in fact the data will contradict this point. How will this change assist continuity? There is currently no clear route for children from any change in age range. Do they then come to a Middle and then to an upper? Do they go across town? There is no evidence to support the assertion that the pupils will go on to Catholic secondaries.

Current key stage planning is geared around the structure used by the majority of schools in the UK. This means that the key stage boundaries align with the two tier system

There is no evidence to support that this produced better outcomes for pupils. Isn't that the criteria that should be used in this document? The rest of Central Bedfordshire is remaining three tier. Is it fair that a minority of "faith" parents should be able to dictate to the majority?

The need for transition between each tier, particularly in the middle of Key stages can result in a lack of curriculum understanding, continuity, assessment and ownership of Key stages.

True it can, but it shouldn't. Effective liaison, which St Mary's has failed to engage in would alleviate this. There is a lack of understanding of what happens in the second part of key stage 2. The failure to progress in years 3 & 4 as evidenced by the current data will mean that unless St Mary's addresses this issue it will not be able to adopt the strategies and methodologies required. This is a false statement and singularly shows a failure to understand their own data and what happens in year 5 & 6.

Continuity of provision will provide curriculum continuity avoiding repetition and curriculum conflict

What does this actually mean? There is no break in curriculum continuity, there can be no change to the curriculum taught. It just happens to be a fact that subjects in Middle Schools are taught by

Appendix C

specialist teachers in a specialist environment.

Primary/secondary provision will reduce the number of times a child needs to move schools, it also makes transition and curriculum continuity easier because it sits at the end of a key stage, the natural transition for the vast majority of schools in the Country.

This proposal doesn't do this. There is no clear path. At present there will still be 2 changes. There are no proposals for Steetfield to become part of Manshead. The statement about natural transition is spurious, again I repeat there is no evidence that tiering has any impact. Perhaps the authority should take a close look at Northampton?

Schools should be based around communities and their needs.

Totally agree, but this proposal isn't about the community and its needs. It is about a minority view. Preaching from the pulpit does not reach the majority. Again the evidence that children from this community go on to either JFK or Cardinal Newman is just not there.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive therefore we are meeting their needs.

If the evidence at the "public" meeting is anything to go by the vehemence that was directed at anyone who attempted to ask questions has been applied to the collection of signatures and the preaching from the pulpit then this data is flawed. Aggressive collection of signatures on the playground and car park is not indicative of support merely of bullying.

The Catholic community needs provision of Catholic primary education to year 6 to qualify for admission to Catholic secondary schools

Really? Is it beyond the wit of the catholic secondary schools to alter admission criteria? Again however the evidence for those from the postcode area service by St Mary's going on to Catholic secondary schools is not there.

The proposal specifically meets the needs of local parents who prefer that their children stay in a smaller year group setting until age 11.

Really? Parents are prepared to let their 11 year olds travel by bus for some 45 minutes each way to year groups of over 200 mixing with 19 year olds, from a year group of 26, instead of a short walk to a year group of just over 100 in a specialist school with a maximum age of 13. Have parents really been informed or just told.

We have been informed that Catholic families are choosing not to send their children to St Mary's because there is no year 5, 6 provision. New models of leadership and governance for schools should be considered.

Currently then since there are not sufficient Catholic children for two schools this would impact on St Vincent's should they choose to come to St Mary's. Again a point in favour of expanding St Vincent's. Had St Mary's properly participated in the Learning Partnership it would be aware that the area of governance and leadership is being investigated.

Collective working in partnership

Addressing shortages of governors

Sharing of expertise and resource

Securing "Best value"

These are things that are already being worked on within the Learning Partnership and had St Mary's fully committed to that Partnership it would have understood that this is what it was about and what it should have been doing in the first place. If it is not currently doing this there is no evidence that they will do this in the future.

Curriculum model

Effective assessment

There is a failure to understand the curriculum. There is no difference in the curriculum between 3 and 2 tier systems in delivery or assessment. This is meaningless. It is an attempt to use structure as an excuse for failure. It is not structure it is teaching, learning and leadership.

EIA 2006 duty of local authority.

The act does indeed place a duty on the local authority to act where parents have initiated a measure. This proposal was not initiated by parents but by a small, vocal, self interested minority. The governing body has worked very hard to persuade and cajole parents. It still acknowledges that the proportion of Catholic pupils is unlikely to rise and yet it seeks to disenfranchise from a clear educational path the majority of pupils in its "community".

Effect of school standards and school improvements and Leadership

At last something about improving the outcomes of pupils. The fact is however that all of the things listed should be happening already and it is an indictment of St Mary's that they are not. There is no evidence that this proposal will change anything.

Age range will not make this automatic. If the evidence of Northampton is to be taken on board the reverse will be the case.

Curriculum

Curriculum delivery is paramount. Teaching learning and leadership are the drivers for change and improvement. This proposal will deny the majority of pupils the opportunity of specialist provision and teaching that already exists. Will deny the pupil's access to subjects outside the foundation subjects, sports (already delivered to them by Streetfield), science labs, modern foreign languages, art,

music, the opportunity to excel and aspire to excel is a broad based curriculum. These matter, and the proposal doesn't recognize this.

Parents and community

The research here is fundamentally flawed. The questions are closed. The data collection was aggressive. Middle school data and the earlier 2 tier 3 tier debate showed exactly the opposite.

Behaviour

None of the comments listed here is changed by the proposal. This is and should be true of all schools. It is a fact that ST Mary's does not have capacity and expertise to deal with these issues anymore effectively then the current schools that the pupils currently go to, the proposal offers nothing new in this regard.

Transition & accountability

St Mary's is accountable already. All schools are. Perhaps they should take a good look at their data and explain to the parents of the current cohorts why it is they do not make the progress in year 3 & 4 that is expected. These things should be happening already and if they are not then this proposal is again an indictment of the school.

The proposal doesn't change the number of transitions, it adds confusion.

SEND

The proposal adds nothing to enhance the current provision. The current failure to follow up case histories of pupils who have left is again an indictment of St Mary's. This is not a feature made easier by change of age range.

In fact nothing in the proposal is contingent upon changing age range they are things that should be happening, or are happening already. They are not a consequence of structure but of leadership, teaching and learning.

This is a proposal which is a comment on the schools failure to engage in the community that it purports to serve.

The indecent speed and nature of the proposal will cause undue damage to the education of pupils in the Dunstable community. If the council is committed to improving the outcomes of the young people of Dunstable it should be seeking to support the initiatives already being made in the learning community that are standards focused not focused on self interest.

Thank you for taking the time to read this

Yours faithfully

Donald Brown FCA

Chair Streetfield Middle

Local business owner

Cc: Cllr Mark Versallion., By email only

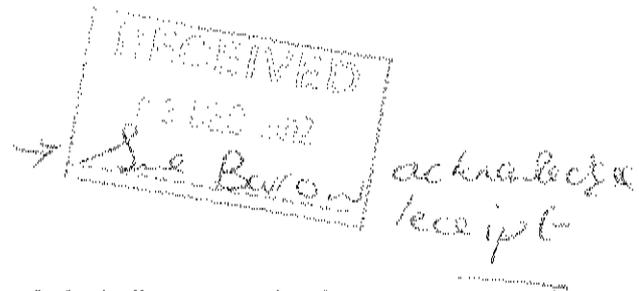
STREETFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Headteacher: Mrs. A. M. Phillips

30th November 2012

Deputy Chief Executive/
Director of Children's Services
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Priory House
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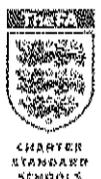
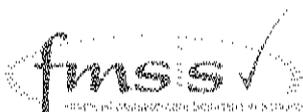
Re: Consultation to change the age range at St. Mary's Catholic Lower School

I am writing to express my dismay, disappointment and concern with regard to the proposal to change the age range at St. Mary's Catholic Lower School. Given the long, close association between our two schools I am saddened by the disruption this proposal will inevitably cause.

- In my initial response to the school I stated that I strongly disagree on both the proposed changes to the age range and the planned timescale. I still feel this way despite a conversation with Mr. Chiswell and listening to the views of others at the public meeting held at 7 p.m. on Friday 5th October 2012.
- The proposed changes are already affecting the good work of the 10 school Learning Partnership centred around Manshead by taking the focus away from the challenge and support programme based on teaching and learning in our schools; which is crucial to the educational journey of all our pupils. Instead the very stability of the Learning Partnership based on trust, co-operation and planning is being compromised to the detriment of our learners. This period of uncertainty will in turn impact on learning pathways in the area through choices that parents may be forced to make and ultimately other structural/phase changes eating up time and money.
- Having signed an agreement, only last year, to work together in the best interests of education for all within the locality, it now appears that a minority will impact detrimentally upon the majority by actively encouraging pupils from within the local community to move away from the partnership to other towns and indeed different local authorities.
- By entering in to a discussion with Queensbury – which may in the future change its age range to 11-18 – pupils from the partnership are again being guided away from the partnership and the locality. This will adversely affect Manshead's numbers as well as Streetfield's in due course. Parents have already been asking if their children can join Streetfield at 11; the answer of course is yes. Why would they do this if – we're told – they want an all through Catholic education? And from a purely financial point of view more unnecessary cost with uniforms etc. and upheaval.



Living the Olympic
and Paralympic Values

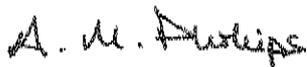


- Given that St. Mary's has only a 40% Catholic population (in a school of 165 pupils), I fail to see why the change to allow them a further two years is so important. Since Integris records began at Streetfield only 3 pupils (from St. Mary's) have left Streetfield to go to John F. Kennedy in Hemel Hempstead, 2 sisters and one who was moving to the town anyway. At the time of writing no pupils have left to go to Cardinal Newman. However, just this month another pupil has joined Streetfield from Cardinal Newman. Her mother stated that the journey took an hour each way and bus fares cost almost £80.00 a month.
- The distance between St. Mary's and Streetfield is a matter of metres; it is 8 miles to Cardinal Newman in Luton and 13.5 miles to John Fitzgerald Kennedy in Hemel Hempstead. How can access and transition be smoother than the existing, extensive liaison, transfer and transition programmes built up over many years between ourselves and other schools in the partnership?
- Pupils travelling out of Dunstable will add to the not inconsiderable traffic congestion in the area, place an additional financial burden upon parents, not to mention the wasted, unnecessary time spent travelling each day by young people.
- Clearly the Learning Partnership agreement was not signed in good faith by the Headteacher because it is obvious that the school must have had other intentions at the time of signing given the lengthy period it takes to prepare and put forward proposals of this nature.
- Given that historically very few pupils have left local middle schools to go to Catholic high schools and that the overwhelming majority have joined Manshead, where is the demand for an all through Catholic education?
- Surely it would be more sensible to consider merging with St. Vincent's as 60% of the pupils are not practising Roman Catholics?
- As to the issue of standards the implication in the proposal casts aspersions upon standards in other schools; also by stating that particular attention is paid to underperforming pupils and those succeeding. As if these needs are not met anywhere else. The same can be said for the list of extended services mentioned – all features of any good school.
- Statistics show, and were verified by Ofsted, that the vast majority of pupils at Streetfield make very good progress; leaving Year 8 having exceeded Year 9 national expectations in externally marked and moderated KS3 tests.
- The proposal states that it seeks to ensure the school is based around communities – but these will be elsewhere, not local. Not my idea of a school community.
- Streetfield, along with other middle schools, combines the best of primary and secondary practice, providing a secure, happy, fulfilling environment to ensure that each pupil is supported through this exciting four year phase to enable them to join upper school fully prepared for the challenges facing them. To imply that St. Mary's alone can do this again infers that children are not well served elsewhere.
- The short notice given and the compressed timescale do not allow other educational establishments in the area, including Streetfield, time to adjust to manage any resulting changes which will inevitably impact both educationally and financially causing unwelcome and unnecessary disruption.

- It should be noted that other schools in the area applying for similar changes have undergone a lengthy consultation period in advance of September 2013. It seems that St. Mary's application has been fast-tracked. By whom and why?
- The date of decision making on the 17th December has been brought forward and is ahead of the closing deadline date of 15th January 2013 for middle school applications. This could clearly adversely affect intake numbers for Streetfield in September 2013 and is clearly at variance from the guidance detailed in Central Bedfordshire Council's School Transfer Information Booklet which sets out very clear time frames.
- Many of the proposals set down by St. Mary's apply to all schools where the education of pupils is at the heart of everything we do - to infer otherwise is misleading and inaccurate.
- To enable St. Mary's to provide space for Year 5 and Year 6 pupils changes are being planned to replace the library, the I.C.T. room and the breakfast club. Is this really necessary?
- Are pupils really being given the opportunity to raise standards and outcomes in all National Curriculum subjects without the specialist areas already provided in middle schools such as design workshops and science laboratories?
- Specialist teachers in all subject areas enable middle schools to build on the good work of lower schools and prepare them for their next step. To imply that this is not the case is disingenuous.

There are many more points which could be raised in this vein. However, I submit my thoughts to you for serious consideration as I do believe that it is only by working together that we can achieve success for all pupils in our care.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs. A.M. Phillips
Headteacher