

## **Appendix E – Response from Ashton Schools Foundation Middle School to business case published by Ashton Middle School.**

### *Association of Dunstable Charities*

- *Ashton Almshouse Charity*
- *Ashton Schools Foundation*
- *Blandina Marshe Charity*
- *Chew's Foundation*
- *Dunstable Poor's Land Charity*
- *Mary Lockington Charity*

24<sup>th</sup> April, 2014

Sue Barrow  
Information Manager  
School Organisation, Admissions and Capital Planning, Children's Services  
**Central Bedfordshire Council**  
Watling House, High Street North,  
Dunstable, Bedfordshire. LU6 1LF

Dear Ms Barrow,

#### **Re: Ashton Middle School – School proposal to change age range**

Further to your e-mail, I am now sending you the Ashton Foundation's response for submission to the Council's Executive meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> May.

While wishing to maintain its formal position of 'neither agree nor disagree' with the proposal, the Trustees wish to make the following factual observations:

#### **Finances**

The school's budget forecast from 2015-2016 onwards assumes a 'fresh start' in that financial year. Hence the £211,000 surplus which is anticipated in that year takes no account of any deficit carried forward from the current year 2014-2015.

The year on year rise in expenditure on Learning Resources (E19-21) seems very modest as new GCSE courses come on-stream, some of which are presumably quite resource-intensive especially in the set up stage. The Trustees have not seen the 2014-15 budget, but in 2013-14 the actual expenditure on Learning Resources (E19-21) and other costs (E22-25&E27-30) was very substantially higher than the projected expenditure in the Business Plan from 2015-16 onwards.

#### **Faith School Provision**

The school refers to the need for further 'faith school' places in the secondary sector in Dunstable and includes a statement of support from the local M.P. Andrew Selous concerning popular and over-subscribed church schools. In fact, as the only Church Middle School in the area, none of the year groups currently in Ashton Middle School is full. The school claims that there is local demand for further secondary faith provision, citing the fact that Manshead School is over-subscribed as evidence to support this. Manshead is also an Ashton Foundation School. While it would be true to say that Manshead School is regularly over-subscribed, Manshead has always been able to provide sufficient 'faith places' to meet the number of applications that are made on those grounds. Manshead is currently adjusting its admissions policy to reflect the reduction in its PAN from 270 to 210 to ensure that, based on previous experience of the level of demand, it will continue to be able to offer a place to all those who legitimately apply on faith grounds.

### **Religious Education in the Key Stage 4 Curriculum**

Many Church of England Secondary Schools teach a GCSE course in Religious Education as part of its (compulsory) core curriculum. This is the case at Manshead School where its GCSE course in Ethics, Philosophy and Religion is studied by all students with equal lesson time to other GCSE subjects offered as options (4 one hour lessons per two week cycle). In addition, all students at Manshead have one lesson per week in Personal Development Education as a separate subject on the timetable. In the KS4 curriculum proposed at Frances Ashton Secondary School, there is only one lesson per week of *combined* Religious and Social Education. The school claims this one lesson per week will lead to a GCSE but the lesson time allowed seems unrealistically low for this to be a possibility. Arguably the proposed curriculum time does not meet the legal minimum requirement for RE and it is certainly less than might be expected in a school which is promoting itself as an alternative 'faith' secondary school in the area.

### **Staffing Provision**

The school does not give any breakdown of the subject specialisms of the 25/33 teaching staff which the proposal document indicates will be required. The Trustees are not able to judge whether this is indeed the case, but think that the following points need to be considered. Will the same specialist staff needed to deliver the full Key Stage 3 curriculum also be able to deliver the specialist teaching required in all the GCSE/BTEC courses offered as options in Key Stage 4? On a maximum pupil number base of 90 per year, given the range of GCSE/BTEC options on offer has the likelihood of some very small 'option group' classes been budgeted for in the projection of 25/33 specialist teaching staff? In financial and staffing terms, has the school allowed for all of these courses to run concurrently, or will a number of these 'option groups' in fact be numerically unviable, meaning that pupils will actually have a much narrower range of options to choose from?

### **Breadth of Curriculum at Key Stage 4**

In its previous comments, the Trustees have stated that the school *'must demonstrate in its business plan how such a small school will have the necessary resources to enable all students to access a sufficiently broad and appropriate choice of courses leading to GCSE and other more practical and vocational qualifications at the end of Key Stage 4'*.

Comparing the Frances Ashton proposal with the Foundation's existing secondary school (Manshead), it is recognised that the difference in size between the two schools will mean that the smaller school will offer a more restricted range of subjects. The Frances Ashton proposal offers 12 option subjects against Manshead's 20. There are some notable absences in the provision. For example, there is no provision of a second modern language, or of catering/food technology.

A more important issue, however, may be the number of choices each student can make. The core curriculum in the Frances Ashton proposal takes up more of the timetable than at Manshead and pupils would not make as many option choices. Like the Frances Ashton proposal, Manshead works on a two-week cycle of 50 one hour lessons. At Manshead, the

core curriculum which all students follow consists of 34/50 lessons. The other 16/50 are apportioned to four option choices each consisting of 4/50 lessons. At Frances Ashton, the proposal is for a core curriculum of 42/50 lessons. This includes more lesson time in English, Maths and Science and includes all pupils studying French to GCSE. The number of option choices is not stated but the assumption is that this will consist of two choices (ie 2 x 4/50). A smaller school with fewer segments in the timetable for option choices will mean that the timetable will be less flexible. Choice will be further curtailed by the fact that there will be a much greater chance of a student's two preferred options being timetabled against each other. The result of all this would appear to be that less academically able students would study a modern language to GCSE alongside the core subjects, while their scope to choose a range of more practical, creative and vocational courses would be quite limited.

### **Land and Buildings**

The school contends that it will have the financial capacity to upgrade its science laboratories. There is no specific reference to the specialist facilities which would be necessary for subjects such as Drama, Media Studies, Textiles and Resistant Materials. Neither is there any reference to upgrading the library facilities. The business plan states that upgrading and refurbishments will be managed through the school's projected normal income and expenditure budget. However, in recent years the school has needed to apply for, and has received, substantial sums from LCVAP (Locally Co-ordinated Voluntary Aided Programme) to fund its refurbishments. The Trustees are aware that LCVAP funding in Central Bedfordshire VA schools this year has only been available for essential repairs and that there can be no expectation in the immediate future of any LCVAP funding for development projects. The Ashton Foundation has only a very small annual income and cannot itself be regarded as a potential source of capital funding.

The proposal document states (section 16) that the school has a playing field at West Parade. In fact, the Ashton Foundation itself owns this land (Mill Field) independently of the land and buildings which constitute AshtonMiddle School. The Foundation allows Mill Field to be used as a school playing field, currently in a shared arrangement between Ashton St Peter's Lower/Primary School and Ashton Middle School. As the school 'on-site', Ashton St Peter's School currently has day to day control over the running and maintenance of the field on the understanding that Ashton Middle School has equal shared use. The two schools have used the field at different times. Mill Field is quite small and what is now being proposed would entail sharing it between a Primary School and a Secondary School, which would increase its use to include years 9-11 in addition to its current use by years R-8.

With best wishes,

Yvonne Beaumont  
Clerk to the Association of Dunstable Charities

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