

Appendix F – Response from Ashton Middle School to letter from Ashton Schools Foundation (in bold beneath each paragraph in original letter) received by Central Bedfordshire from Ashton Middle School on 25 April 2014.

Association of Dunstable Charities

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

24th 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 27th 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.

The figures for the budget forecast for 2015/16 are based on best guess figures as every budget is each year. I am sure you are aware pupil numbers and funding are unknown each year to every education establishment not solely to Ashton. The £211,000 surplus does not take account any deficit/surplus carried forward. It will be a best guess based on the change in funding for “specific schools” (refer to the CBC Consultation Document, Proposed School Funding for 2014/15). Francis Ashton would take effect from Sept 2015 and thus a 7/12ths budget would then be required by the LA.

Year on year rise in expenditure on E19 may seem modest, however, it is not best practice for Learning Resources to increase year on year. I feel our budget reflects we are seeking “best value”

E19-21 Learning Resources also includes the following:-

Purchase, lease, hire or maintenance contracts of audio-visual or other equipment used for teaching.

Curriculum transport, including minibus expenses such as maintenance, tax, fuel

Reprographic resources and equipment used specifically for teaching purposes.

School trips and educational visits

Plus many others – please refer to DFE Consistent financial reporting framework: 2013-2014

The above also applies to the other cost centres.

FaithSchool 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 ChurchMiddle School in the area, none of the year groups currently in AshtonMiddle School is full.

The school claims that there is local demand for further secondary faith provision, citing the fact thatMansheadSchool is over-subscribed as evidence to support this. Manshead is also an AshtonFoundationSchool. 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.

Several parents commented on their desire for a faith school in the centre of Dunstable negating the need to travel from one end of Dunstable to the other (See P21 of business plan).

Whilst it is true that Manshead will ‘...provide sufficient “faith places”’ there are a number of parents who wish their children to be educated in a faith school but who do not meet the criteria for a “faith place”. If Manshead is regularly oversubscribed it is these parents who will miss out on their choice of a faith school for their child. Surely a reduction in the PAN from 270 -210 will only exacerbate this problem within a given year group. Manshead has already stated that yr7 for next year is oversubscribed, there are still pupils in middle schools next year in year 7, if we did not exist then parents would not have the choice of a faith education for their child.

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 MansheadSchool 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 FrancesAshtonSecondary 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.

We recognise that we are the early stages of planning, this is definitely an area we will look at and amend, should it become obvious that we have underestimated the number of lessons required. We are currently creative in how we deliver the PSHCE POS, ie by a rolling programme, as stated in our document we will be looking into innovative ways of fulfilling all requirements e.g. adapting school day, rolling programme, form time etc.

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?

All our HODs have experience of teaching at KS4, some very recently. We will be reappointing our Head of Maths, as she is retiring, and our new Head of English has come from a secondary school where she achieved an outstanding grading for her department. As appointments are made we will address any spaces in our staffing which become obvious. With regards to limited options, nearly all year 9 options booklets which we considered, from secondary schools across the country, had a catch all statement saying that it may not be possible to run all options offered, so, although some schools may initially offer more options, it is apparent from our research that in reality not all these options are available in any particular year. Any newly appointed staff will have secondary experience and we will seek to enhance our already extensive skills base, giving us more options in the future.

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.

Our business plan states quite clearly that the proposed curriculum is only a starting point. We do not wish to be a clone of any other school, locally or otherwise, we wish to offer something which is different, giving a genuine choice for parents. As a new secondary school we would initially consult with all stakeholders, in particular parents and pupils, to find out what they would like us to offer, we will put forward suggestions and together we will produce a broad and balanced curriculum. Our language teachers are easily able to offer another language to GCSE level, indeed one is a German specialist, and our DT department have staff which are able to offer food technology, if that is required. A recent skills survey amongst staff indicated that we have many other options also available to us. As part of the consultation process we will consider further the time allocation of the core subjects and amend accordingly. Whilst it appears that all will study GCSE French it would be our intention to adapt the curriculum to suit e.g. some pupils may require additional literacy support as we currently have in our dedicated, highly successful SAS group. Whilst some schools offer 4 options our research indicated that there was a variation between secondary schools of between 2 and 6 options. Our vocational/creative courses will be delivered differently, we are already exploring links with local universities and will also look at links with colleges and places of work, we think that this will give students more choices, we will be a new school with no existing routes so we can be innovative and different, it is very exciting!

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 Ashton Middle 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.

We have made use of LCVAP, we would be foolish not to have done, all schools offered this funding have done so, and this does not mean that it has been used to plug a financial hole. If this funding is not available in the future we will find alternative sources of revenue. With this in mind we have appointed a business manager who is already accessing external grants and she is currently looking into funding for the upgrade of our drama and music facilities. With regards to textiles and resistant materials, working alongside Develop EBP as the designated training centre for digital technology for SE England, we have already been provided with facilities which we have been told are the envy of some upper schools e.g. we have a 3D printer and laser cutter in our DT department. Mill field used to be managed by ourselves but this was transferred to Ashton St Peters by the Foundation, not at our request. Yes, we would need to use it more, why is this a problem? As mentioned previously where there is a need for further facilities we will think creatively and find a solution to meet the needs of our pupils.

With best wishes,

Yvonne Beaumont
Clerk to the Association of Dunstable Charities

Please be aware that we are a new secondary school, we will have a full, overall, long term plan in place by this Autumn, which will provide us with the skeleton on which to build a unique and innovative school for our pupils. As we increase our age range we will adapt and amend. We will be different, we recognize that we will need to be creative and we will meet the needs of our pupils as we go forward.

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