

Agenda Item Number 2a

Children and Young People's Services Select Committee

18 April 2016 – At a meeting of the Committee held at 10.30am at County Hall, Chichester.

Present: Mr Cloake (Chairman)

Mrs Bennett	Dr Holt	Mr R Oakley
Mr Blunden	Mrs Jones	Mr Parsons
Mrs Evans	Mrs Jupp	Mr Smith
Mr High	Mrs Le Rossignol	Mr Wickremaratchi

In attendance by invitation: Mr Burrett (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills), Mr Hillier (Cabinet Member for Children – Start of Life), Mrs Arculus (Member for Puborough), Mr Barling (Member for Bramber Castle), Mr Barnard (Member for Henfield) and Mr Circus (Member for Storrington).

Apologies for absence were received from:- Mrs Mullins, Mr Oppler and Mrs Ryan.

Declaration of Interests

1. Dr Holt clarified that she was not a member of the Diocese of Chichester Board of Education but an officer that services it and in this respect had not been involved in writing the response to the consultation regarding the STARS area schools.

Minutes

2. The Committee considered the minutes from the meeting from 9 March 2016 (copy appended to the signed minutes). Mr Parsons asked for an update on the referral to the Education and Skills Forum noted under minute 173 and was advised that no update was currently available but he would be kept informed on progress with this matter.

3. Resolved - That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2016 be approved as a correct record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

Cabinet Member Response

4. The Committee considered and noted the response from the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills in relation to Education and Skills Annual Report 2014 – 15 (copy attached to the signed minutes).

Proposals for the reorganisation of education across the “STARS” Area Schools (Amberley C of E First School, Ashington C of E First School, St Mary’s C of E First School, Washington, Storrington First School , Thakeham First School, West Chiltington Community School and Rydon Community College) and the implications for Steyning Grammar School.

5. The Committee considered a report by the Executive Director Care, Wellbeing and Education and the Interim Director of Education and Skills (copy appended to the signed minutes).

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6. Avril Wilson, Executive Director Care, Wellbeing and Education introduced the report and highlighted that the educational rationale in seeking better outcomes for the children in the area meant there was a strong case for making this very difficult decision. It was appreciated that there was heartfelt opposition to the recommendations set out in the report in some parts of the community and that the proposal to close a school was never taken lightly by the County Council.

7. Graham Olway, Principal Manager, Capital Planning and Projects clarified that the costs for the capital works required to carry out the proposals, contained in Appendix 2, had been independently produced and updated the original estimated figures included in the main report.

8. Jay Mercer, Interim Director of Education and Skills, outlined the proposals in the report, highlighting that:-

- The proposals sought to enable pupils to obtain the best from their education within the funding available
- The case for opening an 11-16 school on the existing Rydon Community College (RCC) site was not justified by the demographics and housing projections, with pupil numbers only anticipated to be in the region of 700 thereby meaning a small school that would be financially vulnerable.
- Creating an annex of Steyning Grammar School (SGS) on the RCC site would mean pupils attended a school with the same support mechanisms, management culture and ethos as the one they would move to at the main SGS site in Year 9, creating a more seamless transition and maintaining the viability of Steyning Grammar.
- He was an experienced teacher and had worked for many years in local authorities with a remit of improving pupil outcomes, thereby providing him with the necessary knowledge and expertise to professionally advise the County Council objectively on the most appropriate solution for education in this part of the County.

9. The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills explained that he was keen to listen to and take on board the comments from the witnesses and Select Committee Members before coming to a final decision and it was a very difficult decision to make.

10. Sam Norton, Headteacher of Thakeham First School, addressed the Committee and highlighted the following points:-

- All schools in the STARS area and the Diocese of Chichester were united in agreement that the First Schools should become Primary Schools
- Outcomes at Key Stage 2 in the STARS area were below average compared to both the rest of West Sussex and nationally and the opportunity should be taken to make the necessary changes to create a Primary and Secondary system of education that was likely to result in improving outcomes for future pupils.
- The existing school site had a number of constraints meaning there was limited scope for expansion, thereby reducing the ability of the school to accommodate the increased pupil numbers that would result from changing from a First School to become a Primary school.
- It was not unusual for a Primary school to be relocated to an alternative site and the County Council had proven experience of managing such moves.

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- There was strong support in the community for the school to move.
- Moving Thakeham school to the RCC site with purpose built classrooms, and more playing field space would be much better suited for the operation of a Primary School.
- Pupils would also start their secondary education at the SGS annex on this site, with the benefit that it would be a familiar environment thereby improving their transition between Primary and Secondary education.

11. Alan Brien, Chair of Governors of Rydon Community College, addressed the Committee and highlighted the following points:-

- He clarified that Rydon Community College had no issues with any of the other schools and that the main outcome should be an outstanding level of education provision for all pupils in the STARS area.
- A range of primary schools, an 11-16 secondary school on the Rydon site, along with a choice of post 16 education was felt to be the best fit option to offer for pupils in the STARS area.
- It was considered that a 2 year annex based at the RCC site was contrary to County Council policy, did not reduce the number of transitions and would still have a consequential negative impact on the pupils – both in terms of their wellbeing and their education.
- The County Council had been consistently reducing the number of split site schools in West Sussex over the years and limiting age of transfer to one change. In this respect these proposals seemed to go against both of these policies.
- Replacing Year 6 with Year 9 at Rydon would provide the additional funding needed to create a financially viable school with a broad breadth of curriculum offer.
- It was expected that the two year annex would mean wasted cost and time in relation to staffing and staff travel.
- It was felt that the figures related to projected numbers of new dwellings had been underestimated and that there was more development proposed than had been accounted for.
- It was considered that the costings quoted for providing a new secondary school on the RCC site were inaccurate; it was thought a new KS4 school could be provided for a figure closer to £5million.
- Rydon was a school rated "Good" by Ofsted and there were no educational grounds for closure.
- It was clear from the consultation results that over 70% of respondents wanted Rydon to remain; this should be taken into account and more consideration be given to the proposal that Rydon commence the process of becoming an 11-16 school in September 2017.

12. Nick Wergan, Headteacher of Steyning Grammar School, addressed the Committee and highlighted the following points:-

- The educational environment was changing in the way schools and pupils were assessed.
- Steyning Grammar School (SGS) is in the top 10% of schools in the country for pupils making progress between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4.
- There were insufficient pupil numbers to create a viable 11-16 school in Storrington and, should this occur, it would reduce the numbers going to Steyning Grammar. This would mean SGS being unable to sustain the current wide curriculum offer and choice available and potentially affect the viability of the sixth form and boarding provision.

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- Being a large school of 1500 pupils, excluding sixth form, should not be considered as a negative as there were other successful secondary schools in West Sussex that were this size. Indeed it could be an attractant to staff as, having achieved national recognition, SGS was bucking the trend and averaging high numbers of applicants for teaching posts.
 - Pupils attending the annex of SGS at the Rock Road site would be able to benefit from the same curriculum choice on offer as the Church Street site, along with all the resources of the main school, including pastoral staff and the extracurricular activities.
 - A sub-committee of the governing body would be set up for the Rock Road site and work had already been undertaken in mocking up a timetable for the annex to assist in the consideration of allocation of teacher resources.
13. Sally Collins, representative of the Church of England Diocesan Education Board addressed the Committee and highlighted the following points: -
- She clarified that the written submission from the Diocese contained an error in the third paragraph, and the reference to the SGS split site should have said Year 7 to 8 not Year 8 to 9.
 - The Diocese was responsible for half of the First Schools in the STARS area and the main secondary school SGS.
 - Support was expressed for the County Councils proposals and the drive to limit transfers in line with the Key Stages.
 - All pupils would have greater choice in relation to either pursuing a secondary church education at Steyning Grammar, or to seek secondary provision elsewhere in the wider area.
 - The proposals would provide the option for those who wished to pursue a church education through both Primary and Secondary education to do this without the need to move a child from completing first school at Year 5 to primary school for one year to complete Year 6 before starting secondary school.
 - Should an 11-16 school open on the RCC site it would create a rival secondary school that would not be considered beneficial or viable at under 900 pupils and lead to a reduced curriculum choice and impact negatively on SGS.
 - There would be an expectation that those in the catchment area for an 11-16 school in Storrington would go there, in effect limiting the option of choosing an all through primary and secondary church education.
 - SGS had a proven track record of delivery of education on split sites and was well placed to take on the change
14. Pat Arculus, Member for Pulborough, addressed the Committee and highlighted the following points: -
- It would have been helpful to see an analysis of the consultation results by postcode area to ascertain the geographical spread of responses.
 - It was understood that some people felt unable to respond to the consultation due to concern about expressing views that may be contrary to the views of others in the local community
 - Some parents in West Chiltington wanted to send their children to the Weald school as it was geographically closer but currently this was difficult due to the difference in the age of transfer.
 - She regretted the fact that resolution could not be achieved amongst the schools themselves in seeking an agreed way forward to change the age of transfer.

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- She believed secondary education should be retained in Storrington and the proposals did enable this.
- The over-riding objective should be to obtain the best education for the children in the area and it was not clear that this would be achieved by having an 11-16 secondary school in Storrington, due to the potential lack of curriculum choice.
- It would be helpful to have more information about the suggestion that Rydon Community College may become an academy, for example, whether they had a potential academy sponsor agreed
- She supported the move of Thakeham school to a more appropriate site.

15. David Barling, Member for Bramber Castle addressed the Committee and highlighted the following points:-

- He had taken careful interest in these proposals as they had developed and listened to the arguments put forward.
- He wouldn't wish anything to happen to harm SGS and the offer they provide and it was felt that a new 11-16 school in Storrington could potentially have a negative effect on SGS.
- The majority of Rydon staff would transfer to the new school meaning there would be limited redundancies
- Concerns had been raised that with SGS being such a large school the headteacher did not know the pupils, but this was not the case.
- He had belief in the management team at SGS who were dynamic, capable and would be able to manage a school over three sites.

16. Philip Circus, Member for Storrington, addressed the Committee and highlighted the following points:-

- There was a large amount of support for Rydon, it was a popular and successful school and in an ideal world would become an 11-16 school.
- Small secondary schools were not unique in the County and could be sustainable and successful.
- There was concern that the future pupil projections did not take account of the influx of residents from other areas, such as London, Surrey and Brighton and Hove, where the cost of housing was becoming prohibitive for many families.
- The Horsham District Council District Planning Framework was reflected in the emerging Storrington, Sullington and Washington Neighbourhood Plan whereby it was only intended that small scale development would occur in the area. However it was not clear whether any proposed larger developments that came forward may be approved via a Planning appeal that would mean much larger pupil numbers coming forward than was projected.
- He had confidence that Rydon could be a good 11-16 school and would be popular locally but appreciated that there were financial viability issues.

17. The following points were raised in discussion; Members:-

- Queried if Thakeham school was relocated to the RCC campus whether the funds obtained from the sale of the current Thakeham school site would be invested into development of the Rock Road site. *Mr Olway explained that this had been the case with previous school relocations but it was not certain in this instance. The approval of the Cabinet Member for Finance would have to be sought for using this funding within the Storrington area. The Cabinet*

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Member for Education and Skills indicated that he would be urging the Cabinet Member for Finance to ring-fence this money for educational use.

- Requested clarification as to why parents had not been consulted when the suggestion that the age of transfer should change was originally raised in 2012. *Mr Mercer explained that a number of years ago the governing bodies of the schools in the area had initiated talks internally to discuss changing the age of transfer. At this point there were no formal proposals so it would not have been appropriate to consult parents. However as resolution could not be achieved amongst the schools, the County Council became involved and once formal proposals were developed these were then the subject of a full consultation process.*
- Highlighted that the proposal to move Thakeham school meant that the school would no longer be in walking distance of the homes of the pupils, which was one of the stated policy aims of the County Council for primary schools. *Sam Norton clarified that the majority of pupils that attend the school on its current site were brought by car. In addition only 1/3 of the pupils lived in Thakeham itself but 1/3 of the pupils lived in Storrington; therefore moving the school to the Rock Road site would make it easier for them to walk to school.*
- Raised concern that these proposals were being progressed when the recently published government White Paper set out a number of suggested wide-ranging changes for schools and that the County Council should consider these further before enacting the reorganisation. *Mr Mercer explained it was not anticipated that the changes set out in the White Paper would affect the proposal to alter the age of transfer. It was the right time to progress with these changes as Key Stage 2 results in the area were below average and changing the age of transfer to assist in addressing this and improve pupil outcomes should not be delayed. In addition it was acknowledged that there had been concern raised amongst education professionals about the content of the White Paper, and it was possible that there would be changes to the proposals made by the Government prior to implementation. Sam Norton also indicated that changes to the age of transfer had been discussed for a number of years and further delays in implementing them would cause unnecessary anxiety and uncertainty for parents and pupils who wanted resolution in this matter.*
- Queried what steps Mr Wergan had taken to consult with existing staff at SGS and Rydon staff in relation to the proposals. *Mr Wergan advised that it was not appropriate to meet with Rydon staff until a formal decision had been made. In addition it was important to focus on core business so discussions with SGS staff had been limited so far, but he had received some feedback that they were excited about the prospect of the additional annex with an identical curriculum. Pastoral staff had been considering ways to ensure pupils at the Rock Road site received the same benefits as those at the Church street site, including arranging joint trips and sporting activities.* Members asked Mr Brien what he felt the views of Rydon staff were. *He explained that they were fundamentally opposed to the change and parents were very concerned about their children having to go to a very large school.*
- Noted that a number of the first schools were very small and that by changing them to Primary Schools the increase in pupil numbers would improve their viability.
- Asked Mr Brien for clarification in relation to the suggestion that Rydon were considering becoming an academy. *He explained that the governing body were developing a proposal to become an academy and that they did have a*

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potential sponsor, but it was not appropriate to disclose who this would be. The academy application had not been submitted as it was considered appropriate to delay this until after a Cabinet Member decision had been made. He acknowledged that the academy application would have to reflect the current set-up – i.e. to be an academy for pupils of Years 7 to 9.

- Sought reassurance in relation to the accuracy of the projected figures for future housing and the associated pupil numbers. *Mr Olway explained that in projecting future pupil numbers it was only possible to take account of sites where there was a degree of certainty that the proposed development would occur. It was difficult to account for possible developments or changes in demography – i.e. where there was a sudden influx of families or, conversely, where families left the area in significant numbers. However it was usual practice for the County Council to build in a degree of flexibility, allowing a margin of 5% of places over and above requirement in an area to account for movement of pupils in year.*
- Raised concern that students at the Rock Road site wouldn't feel part of Steyning Grammar School as the main site was 7 miles away. In addition some students would be quite nervous about the transition to the main site at Steyning in Year 9 which may have an adverse on them and their initial outcomes after the transfer. *Mr Wergan explained that this was similar to the existing situation with pupils transferring from Rydon to Steyning at the end of Year 8. The current evidence indicated that the transition between the two schools was managed well and there was no reason to believe that changing the Rock Road site to an annex of Steyning Grammar would alter this. It was accepted that there would be a small number of children who would find the transition hard but SGS had a good pastoral team, including an Educational Welfare Officer and councillors who would provide support to these pupils.*
- Requested clarification regarding the impact of an 11-16 school at the Rydon site on Steyning Grammar. *Mr Wergan indicated that pupil numbers would reduce by approximately 150 per year across years 9-11 which would have a subsequent knock-on effect on the sixth form provision. This would lead to a reduced curriculum offer with a likely removal of subjects such as dance and photography; extracurricular activities would also be more limited. Staff numbers would be reduced and it was unlikely the school would still be able to continue employing an Educational Welfare Officer.*
- Acknowledged that the evidence provided indicated that pupil attainment appeared to be better in larger schools but highlighted their concern that not all pupils would thrive and some would be happier in a smaller school.
- Welcomed the clarification that the only option for a free school to open would be if Rydon closed. Any application to then open a free school in the locality would still rely on provision of evidence that there was demographic need.
- Sought clarification regarding the suggested cost that provision of an 11-16 school would be in the region of £11-14 million whereas governors of Rydon had estimates of £5million. *Mr Olway confirmed that the projected figures in Appendix 2 had been independently verified and based on DfE guidelines. Much care had been taken in ensuring that the estimates produced were for the creation of a comparable 11-16 school to others in the County and not a 'second best' school. Mr Brien was concerned that a breakdown of these costs had not been shared with Rydon or the Select Committee so it was not possible to clearly ascertain how the figures had been developed. It was felt*

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these costs could be reduced by adopting a modular classroom solution rather than traditional build.

- Acknowledged that there would be cost implications of transporting pupils to SGS but that transporting a larger number of pupils meant a greater economy of scale. Reducing the number of pupils being transported may not reduce costs due to the stepped cost changes applied by the transport contractors.
 - Welcomed clarification from Mr Wergan that should the proposals go ahead it was anticipated the catchment area for SGS would be divided with children in the Chanctonbury locality going to the Church Street site and those in the STARS area going to the Rock Road site, although there was likely to be some flexibility in this.
 - Welcomed clarification that the RCC site could sustain both an 11-16 school and the relocated Thakeham School, but that Sport England were likely to have concerns due to the lack of playing field space
 - Stressed that in considering moving forward with these proposals the most important aspect was ensuring that the children have the best education.
18. Mr Parsons proposed that the Committee recommend to the Cabinet Member that they supported recommendation 1 and 2 within the report but that instead of recommendation 3 they supported the creation of an 11-16 school on the Rydon Community College site. This was seconded by Mr Smith.
19. Dr Holt explained that the creation of, what in effect would be a new school, was not within the power of the County Council to set up. Decisions in relation to the setting up of new schools via the creation of a Free School or Academy were the responsibility of the Regional Schools Commissioner. Mrs Henshaw, Principal Solicitor, concurred and explained that as the Cabinet Member did not have the authority to create a new Free School or Academy the Committee did not have the power to make a recommendation to the Cabinet Member to suggest that.
20. Mrs Jupp proposed that the Committee recommend to the Cabinet Member that should the opportunity arise in the future for Steyning Grammar School to expand and therefore move the annex from Storrington to Steyning this should be explored. *Mrs Henshaw explained that the Committee also didn't have the power to make a recommendation to the Cabinet Member to do this.*
21. Mrs Wilson acknowledged it was clear that the Committee were concerned that the service could do better in planning for future need and should be exploring more creative options, including partnership working, for delivering pupil places in the coming years. She suggested that the Business Planning Group should monitor progress the service were making with these developments to assess whether the Committee should receive an item on this at a future meeting.
22. Resolved that the Committee:-
(1) Endorses the proposed decision to extend the age range of Amberley CE First School, Ashington CE First School, Storrington First School, Thakeham First School, St Mary's CE First School Washington and West Chiltington First School

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- from age 4–10 (Year R–Year 5) to become age 4–11 (Year R-Year 6) primary schools with effect from 1st September 2017.
- (2) Endorses the proposed decision to relocate Thakeham First School from its current site at The Street, Thakeham to accommodation on part of the Rydon Community College campus, Rock Road, Storrington, West Sussex and increase the Published Admission Number from 14 to 15 with effect from 1 September 2017.
 - (3) Endorses the proposed decision to close Rydon Community College with effect from 31 August 2017 and open an age 11 -12 (Year 7 to Year 8) annex of Steyning Grammar School in part of the former Rydon Community College campus buildings with effect from 1 September 2017
 - (4) Requests that the Business Planning Group receive an update from officers in relation to future expansion to assist in monitoring the impact on pupil places in the area.

Appointment of the Business Planning Group

23. The Chairman indicated that, as the new Vice Chairman of the Committee, Mrs Evans had also confirmed she was content to become Vice Chairman of the Business Planning Group (BPG). Mr High and Mr Parsons confirmed that they were also happy to continue as Members of the BPG.

24. As Mrs Mullins was not present it was agreed that she would be contacted to ensure she was happy to continue as a member of the BPG. This would mean the Business Planning Group would comprise of:-

Mr Cloake (Chairman)
Mrs Evans (Vice Chairman)
Mr High
Mrs Mullins
Mr Parsons

25. Resolved – That, subject to Mrs Mullins agreeing to remain as a BPG member, the Committee appoints those Members named in Minute 24 to the Business Planning Group.

Forward Plan of Key Decisions

26. The Committee considered a tabled paper which was a revised version of the Forward Plan, May – August 2016 (copy appended to the signed minutes). This version of the Forward Plan was not included in the Committee papers as it had been published following the statutory despatch of the agenda.

27. Resolved – That the Committee notes the Forward Plan.

Possible Items for Future Scrutiny

28. Dr Holt highlighted the issue of the federation of small schools and the pressure for rationalisation. *Mrs Shipley, Senior Advisor Democratic Services, indicated that this matter would be referred to the BPG to consider whether it should be brought forward as an item for consideration by the Committee.*

29. Mrs Wickremaratchi highlighted concern regarding the recent announcement in relation to the closure of the Haywards Heath campus of Central Sussex College. *It was explained that it would not be possible for the Committee to influence sixth form provision in the area, however it may be possible for the Committee to receive an item on sixth form provision across the County in general.*

Date of next meeting

30. The Committee noted that the next scheduled meeting will be held on 27 April 2016 at 11.30am at County Hall, Chichester.

The meeting ended at 2.50pm.

Chairman