

Appendix B

Highfields

Summary of objection letters and itemised points of objection

Objection Letters Summaries

Letter No	Objection codes	Status	Signatures	Summary
42	1, 2, 3, 4	Parent	1	Parking hazards. Community links. Links to Darkhouse Church and facilities. Adult classes. Outdoor activities. Balance between community and church schools. Disruption to children. If school can be an annex, then must be viable to be kept open as it is.
43	5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Parent	1	Eliminating surplus places. Admissions at other schools. Council didn't listen to suggestions. Building at other schools. Accommodation. Lack of consideration for children. Educational and psychological needs. Freedom of choice. Driving to school. Quality of Highfields school and staff. School environment
44	1, 2, 3, 4	Parent	1	Parking hazards. Community links. Links to Darkhouse Church and facilities. Adult classes. Outdoor activities. Balance between community and church schools. Disruption to children. If school can be an annex, then must be viable to be kept open as it is
45	1, 2, 3, 4	Parent	1	Parking hazards. Community links. Links to Darkhouse Church and facilities. Adult classes. Outdoor activities. Balance between community and church schools. Disruption to children. If school can be an annex, then must be viable to be kept open as it is.
46	1, 2, 3, 4	Parent	1	Parking hazards. Community links. Links to Darkhouse Church and facilities. Adult classes. Outdoor activities. Balance between community and church schools. Disruption to children. If school can be an annex, then must be viable to be kept open as it is
47	1, 2, 3, 4	Parent	1	Parking hazards. Community links. Links to Darkhouse Church and facilities. Adult classes. Outdoor activities. Balance between community and church schools. Disruption to children. If school can be an annex, then must be viable to be

				kept open as it is.
102	10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 24	Parent	1	Primary Review responses and proposals. Petition. Voting process. Councillor's governorship of Primary schools. Letters of preference for new school. Birth rates. School Organisation Committee approval. OFSTED reports. Visit from Headteacher of Christ Church. Pre school facilities. Over subscription. Building plans. Interests of children. Wasted efforts.
116	2, 4, 7, 10	Parent	1	Emotion and socially impact on children. Disruption to education. Alternative proposals. Local community. Achieving goals.
151	7, 8, 10, 11, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23	MP	1	Inadequate response to initial consultation. Education Department overwhelmed. Respondents rejected Authority's plans. Failure to inform Borough MPs. Support for individuals and groups affected by changes. Well being of students, families staff and community. Loss of careers / job relocation. Traffic flow. Customer reduction for local businesses. Guarantees in place. Special Needs Students. Providing a choice. Quality of teaching. Rationale of choice. Political representation. Area of high deprivation. Minority ethnic concentration. Value of land. Reinvestment into education. Alternative uses of spare space. Funding. Reputation of the Authority. Time limit on Consultation period. Birth rates. Immigration.
152	1, 7, 8, 10, 24, 25, 26, 27	Unknown	1	Nursery school facilities. Secured funding and Ofsted registration. Alternative proposals. Original consultation. Inadequate information. Parental choice. Smaller schools. Parking hazards. Community. Social cohesion. Socially deprived area. Governors' plans.

153	1, 2, 3, 4	Parent	1	<p>Parking hazards.</p> <p>Community links.</p> <p>Links to Darkhouse Church and facilities.</p> <p>Adult classes.</p> <p>Outdoor activities.</p> <p>Balance between community and church schools.</p> <p>Disruption to children.</p> <p>If school can be an annex, then must be viable to be kept open as it is</p>
193	5, 25	Unknown	1	<p>Responses to the initial consultation</p> <p>Eliminating surplus places.</p> <p>Admissions at other schools.</p> <p>Nursery Facilities.</p> <p>Secured funding and Ofsted registration.</p> <p>Building at other schools.</p> <p>Support for small schools.</p> <p>Alternative uses for spare space.</p> <p>Offer to work in partnership and offer satellite services from the main children's centre.</p> <p>Emotional and educational effects on children.</p> <p>Year 6 SATs.</p> <p>Moving to Secondary School.</p> <p>Continuity of provision and maintenance of progress levels.</p> <p>Facilities.</p> <p>Social cohesion.</p> <p>Community.</p> <p>Socially deprived area.</p>
194	2, 10, 17, 23, 24, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37	MP	1	<p>Responses and petitions to initial consultation process.</p> <p>Response to Statutory Notices.</p> <p>Consultation process.</p> <p>Birth rates.</p> <p>Black Country Study.</p> <p>Immigration.</p> <p>Housing development.</p> <p>Pupil numbers.</p> <p>Road Safety.</p> <p>Alternatives.</p> <p>Extra use of space.</p> <p>Extended Schools.</p> <p>Nurseries.</p> <p>Community provision.</p> <p>Area of high deprivation.</p> <p>Result increase</p> <p>Special needs.</p> <p>Facilities.</p> <p>Extra investments.</p>
198	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30	Chair of Governors	1	<p>Responses to the initial consultation</p> <p>Eliminating surplus places.</p> <p>Admissions at other schools.</p> <p>Nursery Facilities.</p> <p>Secured funding and Ofsted registration.</p> <p>Building at other schools.</p> <p>Support for small schools.</p> <p>Alternative uses for spare space.</p> <p>Offer to work in partnership and offer satellite services from the main children's centre.</p> <p>Emotional and educational effects on children.</p> <p>Year 6 SATs.</p> <p>Moving to Secondary School.</p>

				Continuity of provision and maintenance of progress levels. Balance between Church and Community places. Facilities. Safety. Social cohesion. Community. Socially deprived area.
199	2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30	Unknown	1	Responses to the initial consultation Eliminating surplus places. Admissions at other schools. Nursery Facilities. Secured funding and Ofsted registration. Building at other schools. Support for small schools. Alternative uses for spare space. Offer to work in partnership and offer satellite services from the main children's centre. Emotional and educational effects on children. Year 6 SATs. Moving to Secondary School. Continuity of provision and maintenance of progress levels. Facilities. Social cohesion. Community.
200	7, 30	Parents and Carers	2+	Effect on education. Emotional upheaval. Facilities. Expansion. Smaller class sizes.
252	2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30	Parent	1	Responses to the initial consultation Eliminating surplus places. Admissions at other schools. Nursery Facilities. Secured funding and Ofsted registration. Building at other schools. Support for small schools. Alternative uses for spare space. Offer to work in partnership and offer satellite services from the main children's centre. Emotional and educational effects on children. Year 6 SATs. Moving to Secondary School. Continuity of provision and maintenance of progress levels. Facilities. Social cohesion. Community.
253	1, 7, 30	Parent	1	Facilities. Safety. Security. Social and emotional effects. Disruption to education. Environment.

265	2, 4, 8, 24, 30, 38	Parent	1	Expansion Maintenance. Promotion. Over subscription of neighbouring schools. Pre school facilities. Safety. Security. Parking. Welfare. Community. Choice.
270	2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30	Unknown	1	Responses to the initial consultation Eliminating surplus places. Admissions at other schools. Nursery Facilities. Secured funding and Ofsted registration. Building at other schools. Support for small schools. Alternative uses for spare space. Offer to work in partnership and offer satellite services from the main children's centre. Emotional and educational effects on children. Year 6 SATs. Moving to Secondary School. Continuity of provision and maintenance of progress levels. Facilities. Social cohesion. Community.

Itemised Points of Objection.

Obj Code	Objection point
1	An issue that has not been fully addressed is parking. To the alternative schools on offer, parking is a potentially dangerous hazard as there is no provision for it. This will get worse if pupil numbers increase. Highfields has safe, off-road parking thanks to a partnership with a neighbouring church and so this does not cause any disruption to the highways or to any other children. What plans will be implemented to deal with this issue?
2	Highfields is a focal point for the already deprived local community and closure will take this away from them. There are strong links with Darkhouse church and their facilities are used to run adult education classes to help this community. Highfields also holds outdoor activities which local people are invited to. To close the school will lead to a decline in feelings of social identity and belonging in a community that already feels it is ignored and neglected by its local authority.
3	The balance between community and Church schools in the area will be out of proportion if Highfields closes.
4	Children are scared, disappointed and will feel out of place in another school. Obviously the schools will work to smooth the process of moving but it is inevitable that the children and parents will feel like outsiders.
5	Closure of Highfields would only mean that 70 surplus places are eliminated from the system. Instead of increasing admissions at other local schools, why not decrease them slightly? This would then eliminate the surplus at Highfields.
6	The Council intends to build 7 new classrooms at surrounding schools to cope with the intake of Highfields pupils. Why do this when there are already 7 suitable classrooms at Highfields? Why spend even more money on the building work? There is also room to expand at Highfields if needed.
7	Our children and teachers will be placed into larger class sizes and new environments if Highfields closes. Not only does this affect learning but also increases stress and anxiety. How is this beneficial to education? This contradicts the Government's promise of smaller class sizes.
8	Parents should have a right to choose the school they wish their children to attend. By closing Highfields you are taking this choice away from us.
9	The alternative schools proposed are not within walking distance. Children would have to be driven to school which will increase pollution and reduce the amount of exercise the children now get. These are both big issues for the local council and the Government. How do you justify this?
10	No consideration or adequate response has been given to the questions, suggestions and proposals put forward in the original consultation. These proposals would have achieved the same numbers DMBC require whilst still keeping three schools open.
11	Is it true that only 785 responses were received to the initial consultation and that these mostly had negative feedback to your proposals?
12	How can a fair vote to these proposals be taken 'on block'? Surely at least one school out of the 5 could have had an alternative proposal considered?
13	The local authority has already asked parents to state their school preference if Highfields closes. Why do they need this information now when Highfields has not even closed yet? Surely the Schools Organisation Committee still have to approve your plans?
14	It has come to our attention that one of the alternative schools on offer, Hurst Hill, has just failed an OFSTED report. Can this be confirmed?
15	Christ Church is a small school which is already over-subscribed. How do you intend to fit Highfields pupils into this school? You have stated that there are plans to build at this school. When were they submitted to the council? Can they be viewed? How quickly will they go through? What is the normal time for agreeing such applications? Will there be an added cost to the taxpayers? What are the costs of this expansion compared to keeping Highfields open?
16	Was this already a 'done deal' and have our efforts to save our school been in vain? It seems the consultation was merely a paper exercise as the council need to cut costs.

17	The local authority has failed to ensure people have been properly notified of the statutory notices and told how they can respond.
18	DMBC failed to inform all four Borough MPs of their plans until after informing the local media.
19	Will there be support available for the pupil's, their families and the community as a whole while they adjust to these changes?
20	Teachers, administrators, support staff and all other staff at the school will be affected by potential losses of careers or job relocation.
21	Dudley citizens will be affected by the change in traffic flow and business owners will be affected by the reduction in customers.
22	DMBC has not specified exactly where additional funding will come from in order to 'merge' and build new schools. Nor does the Authority specify land available for new schools.
23	The rise and fall of birth rates are cyclical and cannot be predicted just on a current low point. ONS data actually suggests birth rates could be increasing, not falling.
24	Surveys carried out by Highfields show that if they offered nursery facilities, more parents would choose the school for their children. School Governors have already secured the funding and OFSTED registration to do this and the provision was due to be launched in January 2006 but the plans are now on hold. This would have gone a long way to reducing any surplus places that may exist at present.
25	The responses to the original consultation were so heavily paraphrased that the opinions contained in them were not adequately conveyed to council members who therefore came to a decision based on inaccurate and misleading information.
26	The proposal to close the school has caused much anger and is seen as another attack on a socially deprived area by distant, uncaring bureaucracy. It has given rise to feelings of resentment against the other schools who are rightly or wrongly seen as the benefactors of Highfields' demise.
27	Dudley Education Authority has decided that a school of less than 210 pupils is unviable. Many other LEAs up and down the British Isles support successful schools much smaller than Highfields will ever become, especially with the Governors plans to manage the falling roll situation. High quality education can still be offered and staff structures altered to reflect pupil numbers.
28	Governors had recently bid to develop a children's centre on site. Whilst this bid was unsuccessful because there was a more experienced provider in the area, the offer had been made for Highfields to work in partnership and offer satellite services from the main children's centre. This is something that would have benefited our local community tremendously.
29	There are particular concerns regarding Year 6 children. This is probably the most important year in their primary education yet they will have to move school in the middle of it. They may also have different teachers and senior leaders. All of this would be extreme unsettling for them, particularly with the pressure of KS2 SATs on them as well. After getting through that they would then have to transfer to secondary school. In effect they will be moving school twice in the space of 9 months.
30	Children will be forced into schools that do not offer the same high quality range of facilities that are on offer at Highfields. This is also combined with the ethos, environment, highly qualified staff, security, large playing fields and new equipment at the school. In effect, the educational opportunities for the pupils will be comprised by moving to a new school that cannot offer the same standards.
31	The impact of policies such as child tax credit, increased support for childcare, better maternity and paternity pay and leave, and the Child Trust fund on birth rates has not been taken into account.
32	External factors such as immigration and the Black Country Study have not been taken into account when predicting birth rates in the area.
33	The council has not taken into account the impact increased housing development in the area will have on pupil numbers in the future.

34	For children to move from Highfields to Hurst Hill will mean they have to cross the busiest road in the Borough which is counter to both the council's and the Governments guidelines.
35	What thought has been given to using part of the buildings to expand other much needed community provision?
36	Standards are increasing rapidly at Highfields having just achieved record SATs results.
37	54 of Highfields' children have special needs and the school has been complimented by the local authority on the provision it makes for them.
38	Highfields School is set back from the road so not everyone is aware that the school is there. This could be addressed with better signage and Dudley LEA promoting the school more as an alternative for parents in the area. This would help increase our numbers.

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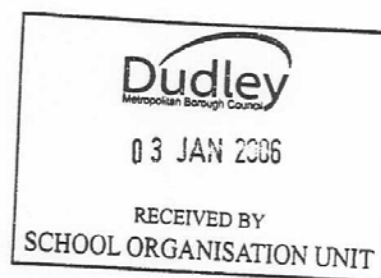


Ian Austin MP HOUSE OF COMMONS
on your side LONDON SW1A 0AA



Carol Williams
Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning
Westox House
1 Trinity Road
Dudley
DY1 1JQ

29th December 2005.



Dear Ms Williams

Please find enclosed a letter to the School Organisation Committee setting out my objection to the statutory notice issued by the local authority proposing the closures of two schools in my constituency, Highfields and Sycamore Green.

I wrote to the Council in October objecting to the proposed closures of these two schools and enclosed letters and petitions sent to me by parents and children. Can I ask that those letters and petitions are put before the School Organisation Committee as well?

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you need further details.

Yours sincerely,

IAN AUSTIN
Labour MP for Dudley North

Working hard for you in Dudley North - all year round

Constituency Office - Tel: 01384 233100 Fax: 01384 233099
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Ian Austin MP HOUSE OF COMMONS
on your side LONDON SW1A 0AA



Schools Organisation Committee
C/o Carol Williams
Directorate of Education and Lifelong Learning
Westox House
1 Trinity Road
Dudley
DY1 1JQ

29th December 2005.

Dear Member

I am writing to set out my objection to the statutory notice issued by the local authority proposing the closures of two schools in my constituency, Highfields and Sycamore Green.

I wrote to the Council in October objecting to the proposed closures of these two schools and enclosed letters and petitions sent to me by parents and children which demonstrated the strength of feeling against them. I would like to ask that those letters and petitions are considered by the School Organisation Committee.

I have not received any response to those letters or the proposals and suggestions they made, nor have I received any answers to the questions I raised. More importantly, parents tell me they have received no response to their letters, questions and petitions either. The local authority has also failed to ensure people have been properly notified of the statutory notices and told how they can respond.

The number of letters and petitions these proposals generated shows how deeply parents care about these issues and the council's failure to show that it has considered the points they have raised has undermined the trust people have in the process.

Surely parents should have been written to and told how they could respond to the notices. At the very least the council should have written to all of those who wrote to the initial consultation period, setting out the details of the statutory notices and inviting them to respond.

Working hard for you in Dudley North - all year round

Constituency Office - Tel: 01364 233100 Fax: 01364 233099
London Office - 0207 219 4611 Fax 0207 219 4486
Email: austini@parliament.uk

I am sorry to say that I and many parents believe the consultation process has been unsatisfactory, and it is because I believe that the other proposals that have been suggested by the schools, governors and parents should have been properly considered, that I am calling on the council to halt this process, think again, look carefully at the alternative suggestions, respond to them properly and produce alternatives that do not involve the closure of either school.

Driving forward with the original plans to close these two schools without having responded properly to the case put forward by parents, governors and the public will increase resentment at these decisions.

Surely if the council believes it has arrived at the right decisions, it can answer in detail the questions raised and suggestions made and explain why its proposals would better serve the education of local children than the alternatives put forward.

1. Birth-rates

My objections are based on the fact that I do not agree with the premise the council has put forward for changing the current pattern of primary schools.

The council has failed to answer the entirely legitimate criticism and questioning of the projections it has put forward for birth-rates. I have examined the ONS figures on birth-rates and I believe ONS data actually suggests birth-rates could be increasing, not falling.

For example, the total fertility rate in the UK was 1.77 children per woman in 2004, 1.71 in 2003 and has increased from 1.63 in 2001.

Second, I commissioned independent expert research from the House of Commons Library which shows that the underlying assumptions do not take into account the fact birth rate trends might rise in the future. They do not consider the impact that policies such as the child tax credit, increased support for childcare, better maternity and paternity pay and leave and the Child Trust Fund.

Third, the proposals also do not take into account other issues that could result in increased population in Dudley. For example, the council is supporting the Black Country Study. One of its objectives is increasing the area's population by 100,000. Has the impact that this and other external factors such as immigration could have on school numbers been taken into account?

Fourth, can the council show it has taken into account the impact increased housing development in Dudley North will have on pupil numbers? For example, outline planning permission is being sought to develop 250 homes on land next to Highfields and there are plans to develop 700 homes in an urban village nearby. Both of these developments would clearly increase the need for school places. There is also a proposal to develop some 200 homes at the old Shaws Factory site near Sycamore Green.

If birth-rates are increasing, and these other factors result in a population increase, closing schools could well result in too few places to meet future needs.

2. Pupil numbers

I do not accept that rolls are falling so dramatically at these two schools that closure is the only option.

As I understand it the council's policy is to have no school with more than 15% surplus places. The number of pupils at Highfields is not very far below this figure at the moment and meeting this requirement could easily be done by some of the measures set out later.

Under the Council's proposals, it is not at all clear where the 7.5% extra capacity the council wishes to provide would be in Coseley. The extra spaces proposed in the area would be needed for the children from Highfields. The council proposes to make available spare capacity at Hurst Hill, but that involves crossing the busiest road in the borough which is counter to both the council's and what I understand are the government's guidelines.

Similarly, reducing admissions at Sycamore Green to one class entry, would reduce capacity to 210 which again could easily be achieved by developing a nursery or by some of the other proposals set out later.

3. Alternatives

Even if the council's case that surplus places have arisen and birth-rates are falling is correct, I do not accept that closing schools is the only way of addressing them.

I do not necessarily accept the council's assertion that smaller schools with fewer pupils would find it difficult to sustain high quality education and staff structures can be altered to reflect pupil numbers.

Better still, schools can look to provide extra facilities. For example, both Highfields and Sycamore Green would be ideally suited to the development of SureStart Children's Centres, for example. Both schools are in deprived areas that could qualify for such provision, both have the space needed and such provision would generate increased revenue to help meet the cost of running the buildings.

Governors at both schools have also drawn up proposals for extended schools provision which will increase both numbers of children and the use of the buildings.

Both schools have plans to provide new nurseries which would increase the numbers of children going into the schools and address the decline in numbers at both schools.

Highfields, for example, has already applied to Ofsted to register for pre-school provision. Their target date is this January. Governors at Sycamore Green are in discussion with the local authority about early years provision as well.

What thought has been given to using part of the buildings to expand other community provision? Both schools are used by various community groups and have

plans to expand such provision. Such facilities could be provided at both schools without requiring new buildings.

There are many other ways in which local authorities have reduced surplus places that have not involved the closure of schools by, for example, combining the school with other community facilities, providing "wrap-around" childcare or moving in educational support facilities, libraries, extended schools and so on.

Can I reiterate my request that these proposals and others I know have been made by parents, teachers and governors at the schools be considered properly before any final decisions are taken?

4. Conclusion

Both schools and Sycamore Green in particular, serve areas of high deprivation where children need more support and stability, not less.

Results at both schools are going up. Sycamore Green is achieving 82% in literacy, 63% in maths and 82% in science.

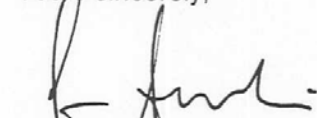
Standards are increasing rapidly at Highfields as well, which has just achieved record SATS results. 54 of Highfields' children have special needs and the school has been complimented by the local authority on the provision it makes for them.

Facilities at both schools are of a high quality and have been improved with extra investment recently. These facilities, combined with the ethos at the schools and the support they receive from parents and the wider community are serving the children well and I am very worried that their education will be destabilised by these changes.

The council should answer properly the questions, criticisms and questions put forward. It should think again and bring forward proposals that prevent the closure of these two schools.

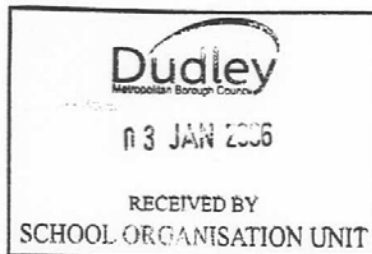
I ask that the School Organisation Committee take these points and the other objections into account, ask the council to produce alternatives that do not involve the closure of these schools and refer the proposals to the Independent schools adjudicator.

Yours sincerely,



IAN AUSTIN
Labour MP for Dudley North

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Schools Organisation Committee
C/o Carol Williams
C/o Dudley Borough Education & Lifelong Learning
Westox House, 1 Trinity Road
Dudley, DY1 1JQ

30 December 2005

Dear Member,

I understand that you are to review the decisions made by the LEA to reorganise Primary Education in Dudley.

I did contribute to the initial 'consultation' in reply to the Dudley Borough Primary School Consultation Document. However, to date, I have received no adequate response to my questions and points, nor indeed have any of my constituents. The Education Department was totally overwhelmed by the response of local parents and residents and was not able to conduct anything like a consultation. Indeed if one reviews the Department's own figures one can see that almost three quarters of respondents rejected the Authority's plans. I do hope that you will be able to investigate the points in my contribution and hold the LEA to account for what I consider to be an ill conceived and badly managed situation.

My concerns fall into eight main areas:

1. I hope that you will investigate and censure the Director of Education and the Portfolio holder for failing to inform all four Borough MPs of their plans until after informing the local media. This I believe shows total disdain for the office of Member of Parliament and for the constituents we represent. Upon challenge on this point Mr Weston, Assistant Director admitted they had 'forgotten' to consult us as part of the initial group of consultees. (Contrary to Ministry Guidelines.)
2. I am thankful that support is planned for different individuals and groups that may be affected by the changes to the primary schools in Dudley. However, change creates a delicate time in the lives of many people and it will be very difficult for students and their families, as well as the community as a whole, to adjust. Should these plans be accepted, students will be required to learn while adjusting to new environments and will face anxiety about change; the anxiety will create difficult amounts of stress that will affect learning.



Moreover, many other people will be affected by the changes than just the primary school students and their families. Teachers, administrators, and support staff will all be affected with potential losses of careers or job relocation. Similarly, Dudley citizens will be affected by the change in traffic flow and business owners will be affected by the reduction in customers.

I am curious to know if there is a guarantee that students will be able to attend the closest schools to those that are being closed. It is very hard for students to transfer into different schools, and it will presumably be difficult for the students from the closing schools to transfer in. Having a guarantee will provide a smooth transition and the least drastic amounts of change and will cause the least disruption in the communities.

On the same point, the authority does not address the changes to the students with special needs who attend the affected schools. Beauty Bank has a large percentage of students with special needs and they will especially feel the impact of all of the changes.

3. While small schools are expensive to maintain, they provide alternatives to the large schools which the Borough seems intent to keep and expand. Keeping the small schools provides a choice, which provides the best option for all students.

While I agree that critical factors in school performance are the quality of leadership, management, teaching, facilities, and sufficient budget, the Borough needs to realise that all of these factors are not independent. Teaching methods, and therefore the quality of teaching, can be very different when a teacher teaches a large class versus a small class.

I am curious to know how each of these schools was chosen. Although I have read the relevant documents it is hard to understand the rationale of choice as not all of the schools are losing pupils at a fast rate in fact one can point to other schools in the Borough whose rolls are falling faster.

It has been pointed out by my constituents at numerous meetings and is interesting to note also, that in each case of the five schools earmarked for closure, their political representation at council level is with an opposition party or in an area of high deprivation, minority ethnic concentration or on land which would release a high resale value. This is an unusual statistical anomaly which merits further investigation.

4. It was very apparent from all of the parents and members of the community who desperately tried to save Beauty Bank Primary School that the school is an extremely loved and important part of the community. In addition, the school is more than just a primary school as it provides extended services for the family and the wider community and serves many adults, including adults who send their children to other primary schools.



While Beauty Bank Primary School is an integral part of the Beauty Bank community, its role will be inherently different if the building is no longer a school. Any converted buildings have different community roles. The needs of the community must be taken into account if the building is converted. However, I agree that if Beauty Bank Primary School must be converted that it remains as a community centre and is not used for any other purpose or bulldozed in order to have the land sold. I would also like to reiterate and receive assurance that all monies saved through combining the schools should be reinvested into education and should not be used in other pursuits.

5. Ideally Beauty Bank Primary School should remain as a primary school in order to have it remain in its same and present community role. Has the Borough explored the option to use the available space in the schools for alternative purposes? If available space is used in more creative ways, education money can be saved and the changes in the community will be the least drastic. Many other authorities have faced falling rolls and employed creative ways of using premises such as children's' centres, sure starts and so on. I would like the Authority to confirm and show evidence that they have investigated this and other options such as federation as suggested by local parents. I believe demonstration of such studies is a requirement of the Ministry's guidelines also.

6. Furthermore, the Authority has not specified exactly where additional funding will come from in order to 'merge' and build new schools. Nor does the Authority specify land available for new schools and in the particular case of Maidensbridge does not even specify a school with which to merge! Therefore, I ask the SOC to investigate where the funding will come from in order to merge and build the schools as well as to assist in the transition and identify land and timescales for the new schools.

The Borough's track record is less than sparkling when considering that its plans to merge two Church of England schools in Halesowen, St John the Baptist and Hasbury have been rejected by the Education Minister twice already. Can the Authority guarantee this will not happen to their plans this time around?

On the subject of merging or annexing schools. I have recently received many complaints from parents from Greenfield Primary School. These parents were only informed of the plans for their school on 16th December and given until 2nd January 06 to comment. This 'consultation' period has taken in the Christmas break and there has not been adequate time for parents to meet nor to consult with staff and Education Officers. Many of them have questions on class sizes and space for pupils that will now go unanswered. Once again I believe the Department has treated my constituents with complete disdain and failed in their duty with respect to the staff, pupils and parents of this school.



I am appalled that the Authority has also seen fit to cut the admission numbers for Mount Pleasant School. This will mean that the school will receive less money and eventually may have to lose staff. This effectively means death by a thousand cuts for this wonderful little school. The school has been praised by OFSTED for its methods and standards and is world renowned for its methods of team teaching and ethos. Cutting admissions for this school effectively shuts it down year by year. Once again sacrificing standards for the balance sheet.

8. While the annual birth rate in Dudley has gradually fallen from a peak of 4,116 in 1990, this falls in line with the cyclical nature of birth rates. The Authority did not specifically answer my point about the different generations and the cyclical increases and decreases in population that correspond with the different generations.

ONS projected population numbers for Dudley between the present and 2028 suggest that the population decline reaches a low point and then rebounds afterwards; supporting that the rise and decline of birth rates are cyclical. Similarly, the numbers provided do not take into account a change in population based on people staying in Dudley longer and an increase in immigration which will add to the population should the objectives of the Black Country Study be achieved.

I feel that it is very unfortunate that the Authority has taken the option of closing schools and not really addressed any of the concerns or suggestions posed by my constituents. I believe that the schools are closing without just cause and that they are an irreplaceable treasure to the entire community. I do not believe that the Authority has actually taken on board their responsibilities to the community and that the consultation was merely a paper exercise.

I am asking the SOC to reject these plans and hope that you will see them for what they are, an ill conceived plan simply to close schools without looking seriously at alternatives that could benefit pupils, staff and community alike. An attempt simply to cut costs demonstrating that the planners understand the costs but not the value of the service that these schools provide. If you reject these plans they will have to be investigated by an independent adjudicator. I am sure that at this point these plans and this so called 'consultation' will not stand up to scrutiny.

Yours Sincerely

Lynda Waltho MP
Labour Member for Stourbridge

42

Westox House
1 Trinity Road
Dudley
West Midlands
DY1 1JQ

Dear Carol Williams

SAVE HIGHFIELDS PRIMARY SCHOOL

As a parent I feel very hopeful that my issues will make a difference to the outcome of this decision to Save Highfields Primary School from closure.

The parking around Christ Church and Wallbrook is a potentially dangerous hazard and I, as a parent, are worried that this issue has not yet been fully addressed. As it is currently a major problem if any decisions are being made to extend admissions to these two schools what plans, if any, are going to be implemented regarding parking? Highfields Primary School has off road parking and so this does not cause any disruption to the highways or to any other children.

With Highfields being a large part of the community we feel that this has not been taken into account during the initial consultation. We have strong links to Darkhouse Church and their facilities where we have run adult classes for the community to attend and been successful in inviting local people to our outdoor activities.

With Christ Church being a Church of England school and with Highfields closing we strongly feel that the balance between community and church schools places will be out of proportion.

The most important factor in this process is our children and the disruption it will cause to them. In your Primary Review letter you talk about "development in schools and that this will engage excitement and the feeling of belonging". Our children will not feel excitement only disappointment, fear and the feeling of being out of place as they are being forced to go to another school.

The only reason that keeps being quoted about closing Highfields School is the apparent falling birth rates in the Dudley area. If the school is viable to be kept open as an annexe to Christ Church, as proposed, or for **any other purpose** then surely it must be viable to be kept open as Highfields Primary School.

Yours sincerely

43

Westox House
1 Trinity Road
Dudley
West Midlands
DY1 1JQ

15th December 2005

RE: Proposals to close Highfields Primary School, Coseley.

Dear Carol Williams

During the last consultation period we were asked to put forward other possible proposals on how to eliminate the surplus places in the Dudley Borough without closing the schools.

I understand the problem the council faces with the 5000 surplus places in the Dudley Borough but closing Highfields would only eliminate a measly 70 of these so, one suggestion we at Highfields put forward was, instead of increasing admissions at other schools in the area why not reduce them. For instance, the council proposes to increase Wallbrook's admissions from 40 to 45 - why not reduce this instead to 30 which would then over the next few years eliminate the 70 surplus places. This suggestion, however, was just twisted by the council with them alleging that we were suggesting that Wallbrook children were being made to come Highfields. This was a very poor excuse and not a serious explanation for why a very good suggestion was not suitable. The council asked us to come up with suggestions and then didn't even bother listening.

The council also intends to build at Christ Church and Wallbrook to accommodate for the extra children which to me doesn't make sense. They will create a total of 7 new class rooms at these two schools, 4 at Christ Church and 3 at Wallbrook, which leaves me with one question - why? when we have 7 perfectly suitable class rooms here at Highfields. They say they will save 1 million pounds a year by closing the schools but will be spending a fortune on building on these 2 schools so where's the savings.

They say that they are looking to the future to guarantee our children's education needs are met but I do not agree with this. I feel that the children haven't been thought about at all. The only thing the council seems to have thought about is the money. Our children will suffer badly if these proposal go ahead. They will be uprooted from their safe, familiar environment and placed into classes of considerable increased amounts over what they are used to. How can this benefit them at all?

The council are taking away our right to choose what school we wish our children to attend, and they are taking our children's right to attend the school they love.

44

EL

10 DEC 2005

Westox House
1 Trinity Road
Dudley
West Midlands
DY1 1JQ

Dear Carol Williams

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With Highfields being a large part of the community we feel that this has not been taken into account during the initial consultation. We have strong links to Darkhouse Church and their facilities where we have run adult classes for the community to attend and been successful in inviting local people to our outdoor activities.

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The only reason that keeps being quoted about closing Highfields School is the apparent falling birth rates in the Dudley area. If the school is viable to be kept open as an annexe to Christ Church, as proposed, or for **any other purpose** then surely it must be viable to be kept open as Highfields Primary School.

Yours sincerely

45

Westox House
1 Trinity Road
Dudley
West Midlands
DY1 1JQ

14 December 2005

Dear Carol Williams

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46

Westox House
1 Trinity Road
Dudley
West Midlands
DY1 1JQ

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Yours sincerely



(48) (41)

Westox House
1 Trinity Road
Dudley
West Midlands
DY1 1JQ

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Yours sincerely

Carol Williams (DELL_ES)

From: Raymond Watson
Sent: 01 December 2005 07:52
To: Carol Williams (DELL_ES)
Cc: Cllr. David Vickers
Subject: FW: School Closures

C~carol

can you point this enquiry to a copy of the cabinet report and appendices with a note saying that these may be helpful

Thanks

ray

-----Original Message-----

From: Cllr. David Vickers
Sent: 30 November 2005 09:19
To: Raymond Watson; School Organisation
Subject: FW: School Closures

Unhappy

David Vickers

Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong Learning
Tel.No. 01384 814207
Mobile 07812896528

-----Original Message-----

Sent: 29 November 2005 22:38
To: Cllr. David Vickers
Subject: School Closures

Cllr David Vickers

Firstly, can I put on record that I DO NOT thank you for your effort that has been put into the school primary review and your proposals (unlike the Conservative cabinet of Dudley) as I believe that no thought as gone into this at all and any responses or proposals that you have received in order to keep these five schools open have been totally ignored.

Is it true that only 785 responses were received and that these mostly had negative feedback? All the petitions objecting to the proposals 40,000 plus names in total. It is obvious that if these were considered before a final proposal was made then the five schools would not have closed. (Keeping them open and renaming them as an annex to another school is still closing them)

How can a fair vote on these proposals be taken 'on block' - surely at least one school out of five could have had an alternative proposal that was put forward considered.

After reading the edited minutes of this cabinet meeting I note with interest that quite a few councillors have interests of governorship of various Primary schools - yourself included - I wonder how many of these schools

are proposed to close?

I have a son who currently attends Highfields Primary School (in Coseley - just in case you had forgotten) that is one of the schools that you plan to close, and I have just received a letter to state my preferences of his new school so that you can forward plan in estimated numbers of available schools.

WHAT A JOKE.

There should be no need for this as according to your figures birth rates are falling so there will be plenty of excess places available in the Dudley area - the quote in the original proposals put to us. If this is not the case in this area then keep Highfields open.

Why then do you need this information, Highfields School has not CLOSED yet? It has to still go the School Organisation Committee to be approved or do you know something that I do not?

With reference to alternative local schools for my son, one of these is Hurst Hill Primary which I am led to believe has just failed an OFSTED report. Can this be confirmed or denied as I need to know so that I can consider my options?. I want the best education and school for my son.

Today Highfields School had a planned visit from the Headteacher at Christ Church to meet the parents and discuss the proposals and answer some of our questions.

Quite a few things came out of this meeting , one being that Christ Church nursery is already over capacity (falling birth rates spring to mind). It shows that this pre school facility is needed for this area and as Highfields has passed an OFSTED check for pre-school and funding is in place for the next three years, if required, then there is a good case to reconsider your proposals.

Also if this is the case then how are current Highfields children going to fit into this small school that is already over subscribed - your documentation.

It was stated that there building plans to make this school bigger.

When were they submitted to the council?

Can they be viewed?

How quick will they be forced through?

What is the normal time for agreeing building plan applications?

What will be the added cost to the Dudley council taxpayer?

What are the costs involved in this expansion compared to keeping Highfields open?

I do not want to be negative about the future of Dudley Education but I do not believe that the best interests of these children are being considered (relocating , extra travelling and different teaching methods) and I thought that in Dudley EVERY CHILD MATTERS.

From all the correspondence that I have seen, the meetings that I have attended and the attitude of the councillors I believe that this was a done deal from the 12th September 2005 and all our efforts in trying to Save Our Schools has been a complete waste of time.

I would appreciate a reply to this email and an answer to the questions that I have raised but on current form I do not think this will happen and it will be another piece to add to the School Primary Review Ignored Folder.

Many thanks in taking the time to read this

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Message

Page 1 of 1

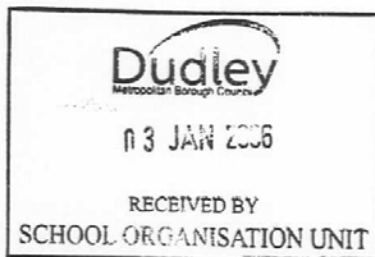
Carol Williams (DELL_ES)

From: Cllr. David Vickers
Sent: 31 December 2005 09:45
To: School Organisation
Subject: FW: proposed school closures

Sent: 30 December 2005 18:38
To: Cllr. David Vickers
Subject: proposed school closures

I am sending this email to object to the proposed closure of Highfields Primary School. My five year old son currently attends Highfields and he is very happy there. I am really concerned about the impact of changing schools will have on him both emotionally and socially, also the disruption this will have on his education. Please look closely at the alternative proposals that have been sent in from the school as you will see there are alternatives other than closing our wonderful school. Highfields has so much to offer the local community, please give us the chance to show you and the authority what our school can achieve with the determination of the children, parents and staff, by working together we can achieve any goal. I know you are extremely busy and I thank you for taking the time to read this email, I look forward to hearing from you in the near future. Please reconsider these proposals and keep Highfields Primary school open.
Yours sincerely,

151



Schools Organisation Committee
C/o Carol Williams
C/o Dudley Borough Education & Lifelong Learning
Westox House, 1 Trinity Road
Dudley, DY1 1JQ

30 December 2005

Dear Member,

I understand that you are to review the decisions made by the LEA to reorganise Primary Education in Dudley.

I did contribute to the initial 'consultation' in reply to the Dudley Borough Primary School Consultation Document. However, to date, I have received no adequate response to my questions and points, nor indeed have any of my constituents. The Education Department was totally overwhelmed by the response of local parents and residents and was not able to conduct anything like a consultation. Indeed if one reviews the Department's own figures one can see that almost three quarters of respondents rejected the Authority's plans. I do hope that you will be able to investigate the points in my contribution and hold the LEA to account for what I consider to be an ill conceived and badly managed situation.

My concerns fall into eight main areas:

1. I hope that you will investigate and censure the Director of Education and the Portfolio holder for failing to inform all four Borough MPs of their plans until after informing the local media. This I believe shows total disdain for the office of Member of Parliament and for the constituents we represent. Upon challenge on this point Mr Weston, Assistant Director admitted they had 'forgotten' to consult us as part of the initial group of consultees. (Contrary to Ministry Guidelines.)
2. I am thankful that support is planned for different individuals and groups that may be affected by the changes to the primary schools in Dudley. However, change creates a delicate time in the lives of many people and it will be very difficult for students and their families, as well as the community as a whole, to adjust. Should these plans be accepted, students will be required to learn while adjusting to new environments and will face anxiety about change; the anxiety will create difficult amounts of stress that will affect learning.



Moreover, many other people will be affected by the changes than just the primary school students and their families. Teachers, administrators, and support staff will all be affected with potential losses of careers or job relocation. Similarly, Dudley citizens will be affected by the change in traffic flow and business owners will be affected by the reduction in customers.

I am curious to know if there is a guarantee that students will be able to attend the closest schools to those that are being closed. It is very hard for students to transfer into different schools, and it will presumably be difficult for the students from the closing schools to transfer in. Having a guarantee will provide a smooth transition and the least drastic amounts of change and will cause the least disruption in the communities.

On the same point, the authority does not address the changes to the students with special needs who attend the affected schools. Beauty Bank has a large percentage of students with special needs and they will especially feel the impact of all of the changes.

3. While small schools are expensive to maintain, they provide alternatives to the large schools which the Borough seems intent to keep and expand. Keeping the small schools provides a choice, which provides the best option for all students.

While I agree that critical factors in school performance are the quality of leadership, management, teaching, facilities, and sufficient budget, the Borough needs to realise that all of these factors are not independent. Teaching methods, and therefore the quality of teaching, can be very different when a teacher teaches a large class versus a small class.

I am curious to know how each of these schools was chosen. Although I have read the relevant documents it is hard to understand the rationale of choice as not all of the schools are losing pupils at a fast rate in fact one can point to other schools in the Borough whose rolls are falling faster.

It has been pointed out by my constituents at numerous meetings and is interesting to note also, that in each case of the five schools earmarked for closure, their political representation at council level is with an opposition party or in an area of high deprivation, minority ethnic concentration or on land which would release a high resale value. This is an unusual statistical anomaly which merits further investigation.

4. It was very apparent from all of the parents and members of the community who desperately tried to save Beauty Bank Primary School that the school is an extremely loved and important part of the community. In addition, the school is more than just a primary school as it provides extended services for the family and the wider community and serves many adults, including adults who send their children to other primary schools.



While Beauty Bank Primary School is an integral part of the Beauty Bank community, its role will be inherently different if the building is no longer a school. Any converted buildings have different community roles. The needs of the community must be taken into account if the building is converted. However, I agree that if Beauty Bank Primary School must be converted that it remains as a community centre and is not used for any other purpose or bulldozed in order to have the land sold. I would also like to reiterate and receive assurance that all monies saved through combining the schools should be reinvested into education and should not be used in other pursuits.

5. Ideally Beauty Bank Primary School should remain as a primary school in order to have it remain in its same and present community role. Has the Borough explored the option to use the available space in the schools for alternative purposes? If available space is used in more creative ways, education money can be saved and the changes in the community will be the least drastic. Many other authorities have faced falling rolls and employed creative ways of using premises such as children's' centres, sure starts and so on. I would like the Authority to confirm and show evidence that they have investigated this and other options such as federation as suggested by local parents. I believe demonstration of such studies is a requirement of the Ministry's guidelines also.

6. Furthermore, the Authority has not specified exactly where additional funding will come from in order to 'merge' and build new schools. Nor does the Authority specify land available for new schools and in the particular case of Maidensbridge does not even specify a school with which to merge! Therefore, I ask the SOC to investigate where the funding will come from in order to merge and build the schools as well as to assist in the transition and identify land and timescales for the new schools.

The Borough's track record is less than sparkling when considering that its plans to merge two Church of England schools in Halesowen, St John the Baptist and Hasbury have been rejected by the Education Minister twice already. Can the Authority guarantee this will not happen to their plans this time around?

On the subject of merging or annexing schools. I have recently received many complaints from parents from Greenfield Primary School. These parents were only informed of the plans for their school on 16th December and given until 2nd January 06 to comment. This 'consultation' period has taken in the Christmas break and there has not been adequate time for parents to meet nor to consult with staff and Education Officers. Many of them have questions on class sizes and space for pupils that will now go unanswered. Once again I believe the Department has treated my constituents with complete disdain and failed in their duty with respect to the staff, pupils and parents of this school.



I am appalled that the Authority has also seen fit to cut the admission numbers for Mount Pleasant School. This will mean that the school will receive less money and eventually may have to lose staff. This effectively means death by a thousand cuts for this wonderful little school. The school has been praised by OFSTED for its methods and standards and is world renowned for its methods of team teaching and ethos. Cutting admissions for this school effectively shuts it down year by year. Once again sacrificing standards for the balance sheet.

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I am asking the SOC to reject these plans and hope that you will see them for what they are, an ill conceived plan simply to close schools without looking seriously at alternatives that could benefit pupils, staff and community alike. An attempt simply to cut costs demonstrating that the planners understand the costs but not the value of the service that these schools provide. If you reject these plans they will have to be investigated by an independent adjudicator. I am sure that at this point these plans and this so called 'consultation' will not stand up to scrutiny.

Yours Sincerely

Lynda Waltho MP
Labour Member for Stourbridge

(152)

2 22 2005

12 Ribbesford Crescent
Coseley
West Midlands
WV14 8XU

20th December 2005

Dear Mrs Williams

I am writing to register a formal objection to the statutory notice of closure that has been published in respect of Highfields Primary School, Bell Street, Coseley. My reasons for this objection are as follows.

Highfields is undersubscribed by 70. In part this is because it currently lacks a nursery school, because understandably once a child is settled into a nursery the parents are reluctant to change to a different primary school. Surveys conducted by the school show that if Highfields offered nursery facilities the parents would choose to use it and then their children would go on to join the main school. I believe that the governors of Highfields have secured funding and Ofsted registration to do this very thing, starting in January 2006, but now the project is on hold because of the proposed closure. This project would have gone a long way to reducing the undersubscription, and within a few years may well have eliminated it all together.

My understanding is that alternative proposals to achieve the same numbers but still keep three schools open in Coseley have been submitted but not given the consideration which they were due, and also that the responses to the original consultation were so paraphrased that the opinions contained in them were not adequately conveyed to the council members who therefore came to a decision based on inaccurate and misleading information.

The closure of Highfields will lead to increases in the size of Wallbrook and Christ Church schools. Thus there will be a reduction of a third in the number of schools for parents to choose from, and both remaining schools will be bigger in numbers. I believe that there is a case for making schools smaller rather than larger. The benefits of that are of course more to do with children's education than to do with economies of scale, but which is more important?

Dudley Education Authority has decided that a school of less than 210 pupils is unviable. Many schools throughout the land run successfully on lower numbers than Highfields and to talk of 'unviability' based on numbers alone shows evidence of a bean-counting approach to children's education.

Highfields is the only one of the three schools which has adequate parking for parents dropping off and collecting children. This parking has been provided by the local Baptist church. The other two schools have no provision for parental parking. The area around Christ Church school in particular is chaos at the beginning and ending of the school day, with vehicles parked on

pavements and grass and all over the 'School Entrance – No Parking' areas. If a fire engine ever needed to get up Church Road around 3.30 in the afternoon it would find it very difficult. This will only get worse if the numbers increase.

Highfields draws children from a particular community and is a source of contact and social cohesion for parents who traditionally see it as 'their' school. The proposal to close the school has caused much anger and is seen as another attack on this socially deprived area by a distant uncaring bureaucracy. It has also given rise to feelings of resentment against the other schools, who are rightly or wrongly seen as the benefactors of Highfields' demise. Keeping the school open and allowing the governors' plans for the future to come to fruition would be good for the community and show the council in a positive light.

These are the grounds for my objection. I would urge that you reconsider the decision to close Highfields.

I would like to point out that although I am the Curate at Christ Church, Coseley, I am writing this letter in a personal capacity.

Yours sincerely

/ /

Westox House
1 Trinity Road
Dudley
West Midlands
DY1 1JQ

Dear Carol Williams

SAVE HIGHFIELDS PRIMARY SCHOOL

As a parent I feel very hopeful that my issues will make a difference to the outcome of this decision to Save Highfields Primary School from closure.

The parking around Christ Church and Wallbrook is a potentially dangerous hazard and I, as a parent, am worried that this issue has not yet been fully addressed. As it is currently a major problem if any decisions are being made to extend admissions to these two schools what plans, if any, are going to be implemented regarding parking? Highfields Primary School has off road parking and so this does not cause any disruption to the highways or to any other children.

With Highfields being a large part of the community we feel that this has not been taken into account during the initial consultation. We have strong links to Darkhouse Church and their facilities where we have run adult classes for the community to attend and been successful in inviting local people to our outdoor activities.

With Christ Church being a Church of England school and with Highfields closing we strongly feel that the balance between community and church schools places will be out of proportion.

The most important factor in this process is our children and the disruption it will cause to them. In your Primary Review letter you talk about "development in schools and that this will engage excitement and the feeling of belonging". Our children will not feel excitement only disappointment, fear and the feeling of being out of place as they are being forced to go to another school.

The only reason that keeps being quoted about closing Highfields School is the apparent falling birth rates in the Dudley area. If the school is viable to be kept open as an annexe to Christ Church, as proposed, or for **any other purpose** then surely it must be viable to be kept open as Highfields Primary School.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

193

1 JUL 2005

Carol Williams
Westox House
1 Trinity Road
Dudley
DY11JQ

For the attention of the School Organisation Committee

I write to register a formal objection to the statutory notice of closure that has been published in respect of Highfields Primary School, Bell Street, Coseley. My reasons for this objection are as follows.

Firstly, I feel that the responses to the initial consultation put forward by LEA officers were heavily paraphrased and as a result did not accurately reflect what had been said. Governors had put forward an alternative proposal which I again set out below.

The proposed closure of Highfields only removes 70 surplus places from the system. When the LEA is trying to cater for a 5000 surplus this seems to be a drop in the ocean. This figure of 70 is arrived at because Highfields has an admission number of 210. However in order to accommodate Highfields children the admission number at Christchurch is being increased by 105 and at Wallbrook by 35, giving an increase in of 140 places in neighbouring schools. The difference between 210 and 140 is 70.

In their response to the proposals governors at Highfields argued that the reduction of 70 places could have been achieved another way. Christchurch's admission number could have been left unchanged at 45. Instead of Wallbrook admission number being increased from 40 to 45, it could have been reduced to 30. The difference between 40 and 30 is 10. Multiply this by the 7 year groups in a primary school and you have 70! This achieves exactly the same reduction in numbers but all three schools remain open. This suggestion was paraphrased in the responses as follows:-

Keep Highfields open. Reduce admissions numbers in other local schools and direct children to Highfields.

It is within the Council's power to change the planned admission numbers for schools. Parents have a right to express a preference for places in schools and have a statutory right of appeal if they are dissatisfied with the place offered. It is not in the council's power to direct parents to send their children to Highfields."

Governors were not suggesting that parents were directed to Highfields. The point was that with a reduced admission number at Wallbrook, coupled with a fair application of the appeals procedures if necessary, there would have been a natural re-distribution of pupils around the Coseley area over a period of 2, 3, 4 years as that new number worked through the system. Numbers would stabilise at all three schools.

My second point is that Highfields numbers have also suffered due to the lack of nursery facilities. Christchurch has the local nursery which is used by parents of Highfields school. A very successful Parent and Toddler group has operated at Highfields over recent years. Many parents have informed us that they wish to bring their children to Highfields but have been reluctant to do so once they have entered the nursery. The main reason for this is that parents feel, quite rightly, that their children have made friends in the nursery and they wish those friendships to continue into school. So if their friends are feeding into Christchurch then reluctantly some Highfields parents place their children at Christchurch for this reason. This is a situation that has lead to Christchurch being 20 children over its admission limit on PLASC 2005

Over the past 18 months Highfields has carried out surveys which have shown that if Highfields offered provision for three and four year olds, parents would choose to use it and would then feed their children into Highfields. Governors have planned for this. Registration has been sort with OFSTED and Surestart funding has been secured. This provision was due to be launched in January 2006. Due to present circumstances it has now been put on hold.

The above proposals would, I feel, have left 3 viable schools in the local area without the additional expense of building 4 new classrooms at Christchurch and three new classrooms at Wallbrook. Why build 7 classrooms when there is a school already in existence in excellent repair already offering 7 classrooms? This would also leave room for expansion in the future should demand rise due to building in the local area or rises in the birth rate.

Thirdly, in various meetings it has been suggested that Highfields would become so small that it would become educationally and financially unviable. This stems from Dudley LEA's views that no school should be smaller than 210 places. This is their view. It should be pointed out that LEA's up and down the length and breadth of the British Isles support successful schools much smaller than Highfields would ever become. The governors of Highfields had planned to manage the falling roll situation. This did involve slimming down the staff and if necessary introducing mixed age classes (something, incidentally, that will have to take place at Wallbrook, given their proposed admission number of 45).

The other facet to the plan included using spare space for alternative uses and the proposed pre - school for 3 and 4 year olds was part of this. Some staff would have been transferred off the staff of Highfields School and onto the staff of the pre - school, thus cutting the schools costs. Contributions towards heating, lighting etc. would have also been sort from the pre - school again to offset running costs. Similar arrangements would have been put in place with the proposed After School club that would have offered parents childcare both before and after school. We have already invited our local Priority Neighbourhood Manager to work from our premises. This is something that has worked successfully since October 2005.

Governors had also recently bid to develop a children's centre on site. Whilst this bid was unsuccessful because there was a more experienced provider in the area, the offer had been made for us to work in partnership and offer satellite services from the main children's centre. This is something that would have benefited our local community tremendously.

I do not know of any evidence to prove that small schools are educationally less successful than larger schools.. The truth of the matter is that Dudley LEA has chosen not to support small schools in the proposals they have t forward.

Fourthly, little consideration has been given to the effects, both emotional and educational, that the proposals would have on our children. Parents and children are concerned about the integration process of bringing two schools together. They know that the schools will work to smooth this process but feel that it s inevitable that the children and parents will feel like outsiders.

There are particular concerns regarding Year 5 children who will become Year 6 in September 2005. This is probably their most important year in primary education. In the Highfields case they will find themselves housed on the Highfields site (which would then be an annexe of Christchurch). We are told that this could be for a period of a few weeks whilst building work is completed at Christchurch. They would then move to the Christchurch site around October time. They may also have different teachers and senior leaders around school. All of this would be extremely unsettling for them particularly with the pressure of Key Stage 2 SATs on them as well. After getting through that hurdle they would then be faced with moving school yet again in the summer when they transfer to secondary school. In effect they would be moving school twice in the space of 9 months. Indeed the stress levels in all of our children have already been raised significantly by these proposals despite our best attempts to shield them from the effects.

There are also concerns around the continuity of provision and maintenance of progress levels. We will work closely with Christchurch and pass on records etc. However, inevitably many of our children would be in a new environment with new professionals and those new professionals would take some time to get to know their

individual needs. Even with the best transfer arrangements in place there will inevitably be a hiatus in their progress.

My fifth point is that parents of Highfields children feel that they would be forced to move their children to schools that do not offer the same range of facilities as they are used to at Highfields. In particular they are acutely aware that Christchurch does not have a sports field. They are aware of the arrangements to use Coseley Cricket Club and are also aware that Christchurch may be developing an all weather sports area. However they do feel that both of these arrangements are not as good as what they have now and therefore the educational opportunities on offer to their children are being compromised by the proposals.

My final point is that the closure of Highfields would seriously affect the social cohesion of an already deprived area. The school is a focal point for the community and is often the first point of contact for all sorts of agencies for many parents. By forcing parents to take their children to various other schools it can only contribute to a decline in feelings of social identity and belonging in the local community, a community that already feels it is ignored and neglected by its local council. In an area where many youths already feel alienated this can only lead to further social problems in the future due to feelings of disenfranchisement. The falling roll situation could have been seen as an opportunity to really boost a socially deprived area. The current proposals miss that opportunity and indeed will contribute to the steady decline of the Highfields area.

To summarise, I am objecting to the closure of Highfields on the grounds that:-

1. The responses to the initial consultation were heavily paraphrased and did not accurately reflect the opinions of the people who sent them in. This meant that the Council's cabinet had not been accurately informed of the outcomes of the consultation when they debated it and came to their decision.
2. Alternative proposals that achieve the same reduction in numbers but keeps all 3 schools in the Coseley area open have been submitted but have not been given due consideration.
3. We do not accept that small schools are educationally and financially unviable and that LEA is inaccurate in making such suggestions to councillors.
4. Little consideration has been given to emotional and educational effects these proposals would have on the children of Highfields
5. The proposals would force Highfields parents to send their children to an alternative school that in their opinion does not offer the same levels of provision as they currently used to.
6. The proposals diminish the quality of the local area and will not contribute to social cohesion, indeed they will make it worse for the children of the area and their families.

For these reasons we ask you to look again at the proposed closure for Highfields Primary and reconsider the decision.

Yours sincerely,

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