

SOUTH TYNESIDE COUNCIL

THE FUTURE OF SOUTH SHIELDS SCHOOL - CONSULTATION MEETING FOR PARENTS/CARERS OF PUPILS IN YEARS 10 & 11

LOCATION: Temple Park Leisure Centre, South Shields

DATE: 20 September 2018

TIME: 6.30pm – 8:00pm

PRESENT: John Pearce - Corporate Director of Children, Adults and Health
Beverley Scanlon - Head of Learning & Early Help
Val Thompson - School Place Planning Manager
Enid Fairbrother - Service Manager Education and Standards
Mrs G Hodgson - Minute Taker

Mr Pearce welcomed parents to the meeting and introduced himself, Ms Scanlon and other officers from the Local Authority.

Attendees were informed that this was the first day of the statutory consultation on the future of South Shields School and that the purpose of this meeting was to provide parents with information and seek their views.

Attendees were informed that a PowerPoint presentation would be delivered, detailing the consultation timeline and other relevant information. It was requested that attendees ask questions at the end of the presentation because many would be answered by the information in the presentation.

Attendees were also told that notes were being taken of the meeting and would be included as part of the feedback on the consultation process.

Question - The pupil numbers of 528 current and 472 surplus places does not add up to 1,100?

Reply - The capacity of the school is 1,100, which is different to the numbers admitted via the Published Admission Number (PAN).

Question - So the school was never going to get the numbers and so not get a sponsor?

Reply - The school has a large number of surplus places based on both the PAN and its capacity.

Question - When the school was built the Local Authority (LA) must have known those numbers then?

Reply – The school was built on information available when it was being planned, based on 2006 projections but has never been full to the capacity it was built for. *

Question - Why wait 11 years to tell us it's going to close? You've built it too close. You're going to use it for a special school. You are failing these South Shields School pupils.

Reply - The consultation is about the future of South Shields School and does not include plans for a special school.

Statement - What about the pupils? There have been outstanding exam results.

Statement - The LA feeds information to the Gazette. The news was released in the summer holidays, so people didn't then send their children into Year 7.

Statement - The Ofsted inspection report said the LA didn't support the school.

Reply - The Ofsted report referred to a specific point, about the plan to support the school to convert to an academy, to which the LA responded.

The support the school had received was detailed.

Question - Funding is based on pupil numbers so oversubscribed schools get lots more money. We have two boys, one at South Shields School and one at Harton Academy. There isn't enough funding to promote sport etc. Whitburn Academy are getting funding so why isn't South Shields School?

Reply - The funding for sports promotion activities is government funding which the Local Authority has no control over.

Statement - South Shields School got next to no funding while others are thriving.

Reply - Money is channelled through funding formula's based on national criteria linked to pupil number, so this is reason why, with falling pupil numbers, the funding is lower.

Statement - So this is why oversubscribed schools will always thrive. And you'll have Boldon and others closing and there'll be 40+ pupils in a class.

Reply - It was explained that the majority of school funding is an amount per pupil therefore oversubscribed schools receive a budget to reflect the number of pupils they have.

Note - A parent of pupils in Years 8 and 10 queried the presentation slide on the transition by year group timeline.

Response – It was confirmed that the slide needed to be amended and clarified the position for all year groups.

Question - Will the current Years 10 and 11 definitely stay in South Shields School?

Reply - Yes.

Question - What will happen if the school closes, other schools will be full and students will not get a good education?

Reply - There are sufficient places in alternative schools for all pupils.

Question - What about claustrophobic students in full classrooms?

Reply – Pupils will be supported whichever school they are in taking into account their individual needs.

Question - For pupils in Years 10 and 11, can you guarantee teachers will stay?

Reply - It can't be guaranteed but the LA is meeting with staff to discuss their options.

Question - Do teachers have to give a terms notice to leave?

Reply - Yes.

Question - Will you be keeping existing staff and not having supply teachers? The teachers at South Shields School are passionate about their work.

Reply - We cannot guarantee that staff will stay but will do everything possible to keep them. However staff will make their decisions based on their individual positions.

Statement - Need to provide good quality staff.

Reply - We will do everything we can to maintain staffing levels and standards.

Question - My son is in Year 10 and wants to stay but I have concerns over staffing levels if there are only 110 pupils for example. Can you guarantee qualified teachers?

Reply – Every effort will be made to maintain consistency and specialist staff, particularly in English and Maths.

Question - Can you get support from other schools?

Reply - That is something we are considering.

Question - Will the pupils be able to finish all their GCSE's in their chosen subjects? Can you guarantee this?

Reply - Yes.

Question - Will you keep key staff?

Reply - We will talk to individual teachers and work with all staff to see how best to retain them.

Question - Will staff be looked after and given other jobs?

Reply - This meeting is about parents but we will be supporting staff.

Question - What about as staff leave?

Reply - We will maximise stability to avoid using supply staff.

Question - What about my child in Year 9?

Reply - The proposal is for current Year 9 to transfer to a new school for Year 10 in 2019.

Question - What about other schools? Mortimer Community College is not good.

Reply – That is a personal opinion but not one that the LA believes to be correct. Mortimer is an improving school.

Question – Do I have the option to move my child now?

Reply - It is an individual decision and a parental right to transfer their child to a different school but we would encourage parents to consider the benefits of their children transferring school in a managed way.

Question - It sounds like the school is definitely closing, so why is there a consultation?

Reply - A statutory consultation is required in order to seek parents views and look at options but with no sponsor the school is not viable and cannot remain open.

The role of the Regional School Commissioner (RSC) and the need for a sponsor was explained, along with the statutory process.

Question - If no sponsor is found, when will the school close?

Reply - If the decision is made to close the school it is proposed to be in the summer of 2020.

Question - But no guarantee to keep the teachers?

Reply - That is why the proposal is for 2020 as it becomes more difficult to maintain the school over a longer period. Parents of pupils in Years 7/8/9 in the earlier meeting had suggested keeping the school open until all pupils finished.

Statement - Parents need to ensure their questions are asked, must get the message across and it was not right to have released the information in the summer.

Question - At the Cabinet meeting, could the decision be to not close the school?

Reply - Yes it could and at any stage the process could be stopped.

Question - Emma Lewell-Buck (MP) said it will go to a full council meeting after the Cabinet, is that right?

Reply - No, Cabinet make the final decision.

Question - Will there be any other parents meetings for those who couldn't attend today?

Reply - There are no plans to have any more meetings but all of the information is available on the Local Authority website.

Question - Will you come along to a meeting if we arrange one?

Reply - Yes.

Question - If a parent can't attend, will the LA send information out in a letter?

Reply – All parents have been sent letters about the meetings and how to access the information on the LA website.

Question - Will you collect everything sent to you by email and verbally?

Reply - Yes. Everything will be collated as part of the consultation process which will be passed to the decision makers.

Question - Decision makers?

Reply - That is the Cabinet, which is made up of Councillors.

Question - The Cabinet decision making process? If we felt not every option has been considered can we call them in?

Reply – Scrutiny committee can arrange a meeting at any point to call in a decision and look at all information. Decisions can only be called in by Scrutiny committee not members of the public.

Question - Will you take all emails, petitions etc. into account?

Reply – Yes the decision makers will consider all responses to the consultation.

Statement - The law doesn't give a timeline so this could last 10 years. There's no funding, however the LA could fund it themselves. Nowhere in law does it say it can't be done.

Reply - Technically the law doesn't state a timeline but, as a person with statutory responsibility for children, I believe it would not be in their best interests and would have a negative impact if this took up to 10 years. Delaying this process with no credible alternative would present substantial risks for the school, pupils, and staff. The timescale is in our control and the proposed 2 years would minimise disruption.

Question - I wasn't talking about timescale. Revoke the academy order? If the LA fund the school it can continue to run under continuous school status? The viability would improve. The Gazette says pupil numbers are increasing and primaries are oversubscribed.

Reply - The item in the Gazette about the 12% increase in numbers was a national lobbying report to government to increase school place numbers in areas with demand. It was not DfE data as had been reported.

There are sufficient secondary places within this LA if the school were to close. The number of pupils in this LA was detailed and it was highlighted that this was based on actual numbers and not predictions or from a lobbying report.

Question - Why are some primaries oversubscribed? There are 16 secondary schools.

Reply - There are 9 mainstream secondary schools in the LA and the projected numbers, based on primary numbers, will not change in any material way.

Question - If numbers aren't changing why are you closing the school? And why is it South Shields and not Boldon or Mortimer?

Reply – This was triggered by a directive academy order on South Shields School and RSC being unable to find a sponsor. Neither Boldon nor Mortimer are in this position.

Question - Why has Ofsted not come back in? What if it's improved?

Reply – Ofsted would not normally reinspect a school which is subject to a directive order. The monitoring visit was not a re-inspection and the school would remain with an academy order whatever the findings of a monitoring visit or subsequent inspection were.

Question - Why not change the boundary? It would give more funding.

Reply - Boundaries are only relevant if the school is oversubscribed. The Admission Code does not allow a LA to refuse a parental preference if there is a place available. If a school is oversubscribed then distance from home to school would be taken into consideration where there is competition for a place. There are substantially fewer pupils than places at South Shields and neighbouring schools so changing the catchment would not increase the number of pupils at the school because parents could express a preference for a different school and be offered a place there if one was available.

Question - I chose the school because it's close to home. What about safeguarding? Travel is an issue.

Reply - Most pupils live within a 1 mile radius and there is a crossover of pupils in Boldon, Mortimer and South Shields. Other parents living in the same area send their children to Boldon School for example.

Statement - Don't make our parents feel bad. I have anxiety and don't want my child to travel by bike to another school. This is a mental health issue.

Reply – Many parents from the same area choose to send their children to another school. It is a parental decision as to the most appropriate way to travel.

Question - My child is in Year 8. Can I pick the school?

Reply - The proposal is not to move Year 8 pupils yet but parents will be able to express a preference for a school and they will be offered a place if one is available in that year group.

Question - What about resources in those schools?

Reply - The LA will work with those schools and as the majority of a school's budget is based on pupil numbers they will receive additional funding when their budget is calculated.

Question - Most pupils live within a 1 mile radius? Is that direct or actual travel?

Reply - It's direct.

Question - In September next year when some pupils move on, what about the school budget, canteen, staffing level, pupil ratio etc?

Reply - The teaching ratio in Year 11 will remain but may not with the same teachers. Catering will remain.

Question - How will you utilise staff and teachers from other schools?

Reply – We are considering all options including support from teaching schools. This will be planned with the school.

Question - Do you have the ability as the LA to utilise staff to provide that rather than use supply teachers?

Reply - We will work with the other schools to support the school as required

Question - What about the school building? Will the site be used for housing?

Reply - The consultation is about the school, not about the site. The school would remain open until at least July 2020 and the priority at the moment is the consultation not the site.

Question - Why would you keep the Years 7 and 8 there?

Reply - The proposal is for pupils to transition in groups.

Statement - My child didn't have transition days. I appealed for a place at other schools and ended up with South Shields School. He has built a relationship with friends now and this will break him, never mind the education side coming into it. I want professional people not supply teachers and I want a guarantee.

Reply - We have a responsibility to work with the school to ensure consistency and standard of teaching.

Statement - In previous amalgamations of schools, pupils have clashed, there'll be battles, it will be huge due to the number of children moving.

Reply - We are aware of the challenges and will work with the schools to support integration.

Question - Will pupils' voices be heard?

Reply - Yes as part of the consultation.

Question - Will this go to Cabinet?

Reply – Yes as part of all the consultation feedback.

The meeting closed at 8.00pm.

**** Note: Pupil projections were added to the information available on the consultation website in response to requests during the consultation.***