

SPECIAL SCHOOLS PROPOSALS (22 May 2019)

APPENDIX 5:

WILTSHIRE PARENT CARER COUNCIL MEETING NOTES

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5.1 Salisbury – Meeting with parents carers - 15 January 2019

Session notes

4 parent carers attended

The following are notes of the contributions made by the parent carers during the session. (text in *italic* indicates specific responses given during the session).

I can understand parents finding it difficult to understand the opportunities because it doesn't exist yet.

My child is stuck in mainstream because there is nowhere else for him to go. Panel won't agree special provision because there is nowhere to put him. My child doesn't have access to a teacher in his current mainstream school. He is taught by 3 TAs but no teacher. If I have to home school I will, but I don't want to so I would rather the current option I have at the moment, even though it's not perfect. I would welcome more provision.

How are the proposals helping children like my son who has a learning disability, autism and very challenging behaviour? Currently my son has to be educated out of county.

We need residential provision for children and young people with very complex autism, learning disabilities and challenging behaviour. Is this need being considered?

Will Mr Sambrook continue to head the Centre of Excellence in the south? I would be keen for him to continue to do so. Is there any chance that he will also lead the new school in the north of the county? *A discussion took place at this point describing the process for selecting the Multi Academy Trust (MAT) responsible for the new school.* Will parents have an opportunity to be part of the selection process for the new MAT in the north of the county? *The process is complicated, but hopefully yes.*

There are lots of children with SEND in mainstream schools now, these schools need the support now, not in 5 years' time.

The location of the new school in a rural setting seems perfect to me. Our children, especially those with ASD need a quieter environment and putting a school in the middle of a busy town wouldn't make as much sense.

The Wiltshire College option for post 16 young people is great for meeting vocational needs but not academic needs. We need an offer that can be matched to individuals and cater for all needs.

The new school needs to have an 'Open Door' policy. A true open door policy makes a real difference; not all schools currently operate in this way.

The provision and styles of approach in schools is not the same from school to school at the moment. So many different academy trusts running so many different schools seems to make things even less consistent.

The school environment is really important. Class sizes and outside space MUST be small. There shouldn't be bright colours in classrooms as it is overstimulating. The new school should feel spacious and relaxed. The school needs to have the facilities, opportunities and skills to transition children into adulthood. This needs to happen really early: it takes a lot of support and an awful lot of time (years).

As well as a new special school, we need more provision that sits between mainstream and special school. *We are developing more Resource Bases as well.*

Some of our rural mainstream schools don't understand SEND or EHCPs. There is reluctance in some schools to support the assessment process; these schools definitely need more support, this is real opportunity for the new special schools to do outreach support. Outreach support to our mainstream schools should include training for SENCos. Will the outreach support also challenge our schools?

Will there be someone like CAMHS in the new school? There are real benefits to opportunities and curriculums like outdoor learning and Forest Schools. Forest Schools are really good at supporting mental health, often without the children even realising it. Many of our schools aren't able to offer this at the moment.

There will never be one school that suits everyone perfectly. I hope people will have the insight and realise there are thousands of children not able to access what is right for their child. A journey to school in a taxi or minibus might be a small compromise to get the right provision.

Would it be fair to keep offering places at Larkrise if it is going to close? Couldn't there be a softer transition option?

I think there is so much opportunity for both children and staff in the Centres of Excellence. For instance, there could be more training, support and career development. The Centres of Excellence will also be a lot more visible in the county than our current special schools are.

Life skills are so important and this is a real opportunity for a new school to deliver on what children with SEND really need; there is so much more to education than just an academic curriculum.

How will a large school meet many different needs in one large school? *Separate schools within a school: smaller units, separate entrances, separate outside spaces. We are already having conversations with an organisation called Centre for Human Space Innovation to consider appropriate design options.*

How will you manage challenges like drop-off volume? Could you have different start and finish times, and split lunchtimes to ease the volume of traffic? *We are definitely considering these options. We might also be able to increase the number of access points into Rowdeford School.*

I can see that it would be affordable to have all the facilities such as a nurse etc. in three smaller schools, better to have excellent facilities all in one place.

Will there be an opportunity for wrap around care (breakfast club and after school club) at the new school? This could enable more parents to go back to work.

Could it have a swimming pool as well as a hydro pool? The two offer very different opportunities and could really bring something to the community.

5.2 Springfield Campus Corsham – 18 January 2019

Session notes

11 parent carers attended

The session was opened by Stuart Hall, followed by a short synopsis of the proposals by the Project lead from Wiltshire Council Alan Stubbersfield. A number of overall questions were responded to before moving into more detailed discussion as described below.

The session was organised into themes, all parent carers had an opportunity to spend time with a facilitator discussing a theme before moving to another facilitator to discuss a new theme. There were a total of 5 themes discussed during the session; each facilitator took notes to capture contributions by parent carers on the theme they were facilitating.

Theme 1 - Community

The facilitator asked: “What do you understand by the term Community?” The following are notes of the responses from parent carers:-

- My next door neighbour, the park, shops. I want more children to be part of mainstream community opportunities, not segregated.
- Moving out into the community and drawing others in to the school community.
- The school community is how children mix with each other in the school.
- There are several bits to community. Community use and community inclusion. The school could have a hydrotherapy pool that is open to the public. Children should interact as a whole school community and come together for special events.
- How will the community be present in the school? Will the community properly mix with the children at the school?
- Our children need to access the community where the school is located. Chippenham for example has a good community that knows our children. For example they visit Morisons, the church and use the community pool; the community is very used to seeing our children. It is important to realise the practicalities of using a bus e.g. how long will it take to seat several disabled children on a public bus, will it delay bus journeys for the public?
- Community is both within the school and where the school is based. Children need to be supported to integrate into their local community. The community needs to integrate into our school. I am worried we will lose acceptance if our

'normal' children don't see our children. There should be involvement with cafés etc.

- Footpaths in the village would need to be improved, and the community will need to be made wheelchair accessible.
- At the moment, my child watches plays in Paxcroft and does a little bit of technology with Clarendon.
- All children in a school need to know each other and mix. I am worried that if the school operates in 'pods', there may not be opportunities for the whole school to mix.

Outreach

- Outreach should include support from the community coming into the school. "It's the microcosm and the macrocosm". The school should take children from the area and help them integrate back into their community.

Choice

- Will people still be able to choose other schools? (including schools that are out of Wiltshire).
- One thing that wears parents out is the fight. This is an opportunity to think about being more accommodating to parents. Parents might want to choose provision that is outside of the authority if it makes sense e.g. shorter travel time, the setting, provision and ethos feels right.

Reassurance

- We want more of a guarantee, we want to hear: "We will...". Not: "We are hoping to...", or "We would like to...".
- I want my child close to me so I know they are safe and I want to be part of my child's community.
- How will staff be able to support my child better than they can now?
- What will happen in the meantime to our schools and children? We have a problem now, not just in 5 years' time. Will you keep placing children in schools you are proposing to close?
- Is the £20million being spent just on the new Rowde school, or will it have to be shared between Rowde and Exeter House School? Will the new minibuses that we are hearing about also have to be funded from the £20million?
- Buses would have to be able to administer emergency medication.

Risks

- One school doesn't give parents choice. If there is a breakdown in trust, where do you go? What is the back-up plan if it all goes wrong? I am worried we are putting all our eggs in one basket.
- It's concerning that it's one school. What if staff don't have the expertise to meet the needs of my child?

Opportunities

- We would like wrap-around care every day, it would really help. Would this be in the child's best interest though? It could mean a very long day for the child.
- Would people prefer an enhanced provision at one school, or an inferior option at several schools?
- What about having satellite primary schools in the current localities and a specialised secondary school in Rowde?
- An executive head for a centre of excellence can be part of planning for the needs of children and placing them appropriately at the right school.
- We live in Warminster and my child's journey is an hour and 10 minutes each way. *Other parents asked: How does he cope? Parent replied: He loves it.*
- Instead of all the new mainstream schools being built, why don't they build another special school?
- The more people see our children, the more they accept them.
- I don't think the money should be spent on building a swimming pool that the community could access, instead, the children could go and use Devizes swimming pool with the community.

Worries

- We're not scared of change, we know that change happens. I drive my daughter to school and I can take her into the classroom. I am worried about the stress of minibuses on a child e.g. noises and the time it would take just to get of our village by picking up all the children in our area; that could mean a lot of time sitting on a minibus and not really going anywhere.
- I don't want it to be a zoo where people visit to tick a box and then leave.
- My main worry is about children becoming invisible.
- If my child has a seizure, I can get to her easily. I would have to keep her at home more often as I wouldn't be able to get to her; her attendance would fall massively. I don't work for the very reason that if I can be on call to get to her.

Other

- Trowbridge and Chippenham are principle towns.
- Please don't make it like Brexit. We have to expand the provision somehow.
- This should have been done years ago before the problem got so bad.
- Has legal process been followed?

One parent wrote her worries and are summarised as follows.

'The communities of Trowbridge and Chippenham will suffer if they lose their special schools. Having SEND children visible breaks down prejudice.

I am worried about lack of inclusion/lack of community, the location is rural, transport links.

Transport to the school is a concern, I am worried that 100% of the children attending he school will have to us transport.

I am concerned about the possibilities of central pick-ups, taxis being stopped, parents being forced to drive their children to school. These were ideas for discussion in the unrelated recent SEN Transport survey.

Getting to the school for emergencies and appointments will be difficult for me.

I don't think Wiltshire College is suitable for all children, especially those with PMLD.

This proposal reduces our choice of provision.

Although Devizes is near to the school, children will have to get on a bus to get there as they can't walk.

Opportunities for parents to support other parents will be limited; they will never meet each other.

It is really positive that there is a proposal for a new school and new facilities, but we could have this in Trowbridge and Chippenham.'

Theme 2 - Health

The following are the main points made by parent carers about health:-

- Concerns about long days and health needs.
- Concerns that even with economies of scale there still won't be enough Health help.
- Being able to stay part of the care.
- Thinking about when I need to come in and distance to other places.
- Thinking about mental health concerns and how schools can work with this.
- Home schoolers: Cross overs with ASD & SEMH. There have to be nurturing environments.
- Distance learning options – for when ill at home.
- PMLD children:
 - Ensuring health needs are met in school.
 - Accessing quick care when needed.
 - Having mum and dad around when feeling unwell.
 - Five years: Consultant
A real multi-disciplinary Team clinics
- Taxi fares.
- Primary in two hubs and secondary together.
- Paediatricians:
 - Lack of continuity.
 - Need more direct contact.
 - Opaque systems for communication.
- Clinics in the hubs.
- Concerns about parents getting to emergency links to hospital.
- Paramedics – conversations with ambulance service about how we keep a local base.
- Hospital contact.

- Taking away choice if don't have more than one school.
- Coming into school to support.
- Emergency medication on transport.
- Attendance could go down because of the days when not confident that mum would be needed.
- Emergency bus/ people carrier for bringing in parents/ carers.

Theme 3 – Post-16 Provision

The following are the responses received by parent carers when asked for their comments about post-16 provision:-

Questions from parents:

- With only 1 proposed special school how do you propose to accommodate Post 16?
- What is the impact for young people who are due to leave school in 2023?
- The children are already dealing with many needs and attachments so how will they manage in a large school?
- How will transition work? When will one school close and the other open? How can Rowdeford close and open its door as a new school but still enable key transitions to take place?
- Independent Life - how would young people be supported to travel independently to a placement?
- What is the proposal for Poplar College if St Nicolas close?

What works well now:

- Currently Post 16 provision is on site so staff know the children well, can meet their medical needs and understand how they communicate and have a shared trust and understanding.
- The small 6th form provision at the special school works well. The space is small and quiet so they are not overwhelmed by noise or crowds.
- Seamless transition where school ends and post 16 begins.
- Post 16 provision that is within walkable distance to an accessible community e.g. St Nics is central so they can go into town but Rowde is in a village with uneven pavements and you would be unable to manoeuvre wheelchairs.
- Education is important but more important is that child is safe, secure and has their medical needs met, this happens in post 16 provision in special schools.

- The current classes are stable with the same room, same staff who know the children well, this would be difficult to replicate. Staff know here really well and I feel totally confident with them managing her needs day to day.

Concerns:

- I am concerned that my child will only have 1 year of transition into the new proposed school before having to move on again.
- I do not feel Wiltshire College would be able to manage the complex needs of many of the young people. Post 16 options would need to change dramatically to accommodate PMLD or those with SLD/ASD needs.
- If they have to move to Wiltshire College this would be too large and busy with neurotypical teenagers who are typically loud.
- The road in Rowde is also too busy and the pavements are not accessible for wheelchairs.
- Worried about provision for PMLD. I am realistic that my daughter won't work but what is the proposed provision for PMLD students. If this is set up in college I am worried as only a few PMLD children each year so it could mean only a small cohort to mix with peers. Currently there is only 6 in a class.
- How would they access hydrotherapy, SALT, Physio e.g. would they go into a day placement rather than going somewhere else that was local to where they lived?
- I am worried about the lack of continuity and stability e.g. having to move into a new school and then again into adult services - staffing knowledge, change of environment or change in staff/pupils.
- There are no plans for Post 16 on the new proposed site at Rowdeford. I am concerned how Wiltshire College would meet more complex needs. 16 seems a very young age to move to college, especially when they are developmentally younger.
- The school currently nurture young people - how would this translate to a post 16 provision. Would school support post 16 placements or TAs go with them to support transition?
- I am concerned about medical needs being met - is there going to be a gap in training staff or reliance on parents to do tube feeds/training and does this mean admission could be delayed whilst staff training is implemented?
- Will there be Post 16 variety of options e.g. traditional structured learning, life skills based curriculum or those who need more holistic learning e.g. outdoors, cafe. Will there be 1 of each type or more of this variety of provision within local communities?

- I feel transition to Post 16 off site is another hurdle for parents - many need to fight for the right provision where as currently so long as needs are met at St Nics/Larkrise they can stay.
- What work will go into the development of the post 16 services based on a range of needs e.g. the right environment, curriculum to meet developmental and sensory needs. Young people will need to adapt to a new environment, could be issues around safety - they currently have space and freedom to explore but how would a new environment ensure their safety?
- The proposal doesn't say where the post16 children will go. Could they transfer early if they only have 1 year to go when the new school opens?
- I do not feel Wiltshire College is set up to meet their needs and Wiltshire College have already turned down SLD pupils before because they couldn't meet needs.
- The move to one site is disruptive to students especially when they then have to go back into their community post 16.
- Concerned how SLD students would manage in a mainstream college.

Ideas:

- I would ideally like to see a staggered extension into further education. E.g. an extension from school for post 16, ideally being based at school with a slow supported transition with gradually increases to access college. They could then be supported by staff who know them.
- The new school needs to have a post 16.
- There needs to be transition work and support to ease into a Post 16 placement. There needs to be knowledge and experience of teachers who know the child well who can support transition. There would need to be more training for staff to manage the ever increasing complex needs of the young people e.g. feeding, sexualised behaviour - how would a mainstream college environment manage this?
- I would like the school to offer more life skills e.g. how to use a washing machine, washing up, using money, telling the time, support to set up a bank account.
- I would like the Disability Team to be able to write a letter that allows me to open an account for my child without having to apply to the courts.
- Would it be possible to include a 6th form block in the proposal on the same site, like the 16-25 placement in Swindon?

- I think it would be good if they could still have contact with the school for a few days but then spend time in their community area working on life skills like shopping, mixing in their community.
- There is a need to learn basic life skills like cooking and house maintenance. This can be done at home but I feel school is better placed to support this as they have the right skills and approach to support my child learn these skills. Being within school would also enable them to continue being educated to the best of their ability.
- There needs to be a small quiet, nurturing space with seamless transition and support by trusted staff who know their needs and can enable young people to feel safe and happy.
- Increased Post 16 for complex needs.
- Need for community presence to learn safety in the community e.g. to understand that a white light on a car means it's reversing.
- I would want provision in the town. Need different provision, possibly integrate in to day services sooner bring down the adult provision to accommodate post 16 PMLD students but would need to access relevant activities for their age. It would be too costly expanding Wiltshire College to accommodate PMLD e.g. hoists.
- I would want my child to be happy with opportunities to experience a variety of experiences e.g. sensory, hydrotherapy.
- I would want advice and support about what is available in the next stage of their life e.g. residential adulthood.
- I want Post 16 provision to deal with all Post 16 needs and it can be developed to give us what we need. With the right funding, provision and staffing this could work.
- If Wiltshire College were to expand and improve provision they would need the right facilities and specialist training and qualified staff. If you develop a centre of excellence and limit the age or ability so that PMLD children or very young or post 16 where you can demonstrate a greater reason to keep in their community area, especially parents nearby for medical needs children, then this could work. Larkrise and St Nics already have Post 16 - could these sites be used for the 6th form, PMLD or really young or high medical needs students? If not maybe a satellite 6th form centre?
- Could Ashton Street, Trowbridge, be used as a satellite 6th form centre?

Theme 4 – Transport/ Bus routes

The following are the comments, questions and concerns raised by parent carers when asked about transport and bus routes:-

- Central pick up points:
 - "I'm worried about having central pick up points as mentioned in the SEND transport consultation survey."
 - "If we had to meet at a central pick up point we would miss the bus every time."
 - "I do not like the idea of a central pick up point. I live in a village and there is no safe space for this."
 - "I want reassurance that my child will be picked up from home."

– All parents voiced their concern at this session about having a central pick up point. *Wiltshire Parent Carer Council (WPCC) is part of Wiltshire Council's Families and Children's Transformation SEND Transport sub-group that is exploring petrol & oil expenses. As part of this strategic work, WPCC decided to find out more about what parent carers thought of the petrol & oil expenses option by running a survey from Oct 26th-Nov 14th 2018; this was not part of a Wiltshire Council consultation. As a parent carer forum we have heard of other local authorities who have introduced central pick up points and decided to add a question about them to our survey to gather parent carers' views. This work was not part of the special schools consultation. If you'd like to take a look at the survey report, please click on the following link to go to our WPCC results page http://wiltshireparentcarercouncil.co.uk/en/What_we_do_-_Have_your_say!_-_Results*
- "It makes sense for school to have its own transport but what if Wiltshire Council promises this and when the academy takes over Wiltshire Council don't have a say?"
- Cost:
 - "It's all very well saying every child will have a transport plan but how can transporting all of these children be cheaper?"
 - "PMLD children require specialised transport which means the expense will be greater."
 - "There will be extra expense for parents having to travel to school meetings, pick their child up when ill, etc."
- Concerns about travel times for children. Parent carers felt that travel times were being underestimated as not taking into account:-
 - Country roads
 - Traffic congestion/ work traffic through Chippenham and Devizes
 - Time it takes to get children/ young people with SEND onto transport
 - Picking up other pupils en-route and extra time needed, e.g. getting wheelchair users onto transport, children with challenging behaviour, etc.

- Is travel time going to increase/ more pick ups? “My child already gets picked up at 7.10am in Hindon and arrives at Rowdeford at 8.45am with 3 others picked up on the way.”
- Child’s health/ wellbeing/ safety:
 - “What is the statutory guidance on the length of time our children should spend on school transport?” “50% of Larkrise children walk and if they do go on transport it is a short journey. Same for St Nics too.” “Maximum transport time depends on the age of the child but it needs to take into account the child’s special needs.”
 - There was concern about longer days impacting on children’s health.
 - Parents were concerned about the anxiety that longer journeys would cause their children and how the longer journeys would affect their children’s medical conditions.
 - “How will my child cope on shared transport with their sensory needs?” “Transport mustn’t be too big or noisy.”
 - “How is my child going to cope with learning if stressed from the journey to school?”
 - “Waking my child up earlier causes her to have more seizures. This will mean she won’t be at school so much.”
 - “If my child has a seizure at school what do I do as I don’t drive?” Another parent said that many parent carers were worried about not being able to get to their children if they had a seizure, which could happen at any time.
 - Another parent said they were concerned about health risks and the need for many of the children to be near major hospitals.
 - “I’m concerned about congestion at Rowdeford at pick up/ drop off times. My child is a ‘runner’ and I’m concerned that the gate will be open due to vehicles queuing to get in/ out of the school grounds. How secure will the school be?”
- Transport staff:
 - SEND transport PAs may also want to take on another role at the school, e.g. TA and having more hours may make the job more attractive to some prospective applicants:
 - “Someone said current TAs are going to be retained?”
 - “Many Larkrise TAs have swapped to become PAs.”
 - PAs/ drivers:
 - “If there are not enough PAs what happens?”
 - “How many PAs per bus?”
 - “Current PAs and bus drivers are good at knowing how to deal with my child’s challenging behaviour.”
 - “My child’s PA goes into school at pick up time to get him on the bus. Would this still happen with the new school?”

- Parents wanted reassurance on how those with complex medical needs would be treated and wanted expert PA training on epilepsy and other meds with comments such as, “I won’t let her go with just anyone”.
 - Parents wanted reassurance that PAs were trained in dealing with challenging behaviour.
 - “Consistency of driver is important. If the driver changes it causes big problems.”
 - Pre-meet and greet important – do more in advance such as photos of driver/ PA, etc. “Many taxi companies won’t do this at the. If the drivers/PAs were hired by the school maybe this wouldn’t be a problem?”
 - “It would be useful (if possible) if the transport fleet/ vehicles had a similar look/ colour for consistency for the children.”
- SEND transport PAs may also want to take on another role at the school, e.g. TA and having more hours may make the job more attractive to some prospective applicants:
 - “Someone said current TAs are going to be retained?”
 - “Many Larkrise TAs have swapped to become PAs.”
- Training of PAs/ drivers:
 - “Current PAs and bus drivers are good at knowing how to deal with my child’s challenging behaviour.”
 - “PAs would need to be trained to deliver complex medication.”
 - “Not all PAs are currently well-trained in administering medication. This often means the parent ends up doing the transport” (parent travels Corsham to Rowde).
- Other SEND transport questions included:
 - “What will the routes be?”
 - “Are journey estimates accurate?”
 - “Will my child have to share transport?”
 - “Will my child know anyone on the minibus?”
 - “What about breakfast/ after school clubs? How would transport work for those? Will there be extra buses for children who do or don’t want these clubs?”
 - “If there is a school transport fleet could these vehicles be used during the day for excursions, etc.?”
- Contact with teachers/ other parents:
 - “I currently choose to drive my child to school and claim petrol and oil expenses. I feel isolated as it is having a special needs child and if I was to use SEND transport I would feel even more isolated as I like going into the school every day and the contact with teachers/parents. Petrol and oil expenses should still be an option with a new school.”

- “At the moment I claim petrol and oil expenses. Driving my child to school means I can communicate with staff and this helps to stop me feeling isolated.”
 - “Some means of communication needs setting up for those parents who wouldn’t be going into school anymore.”
 - “We currently have a 3 minute walk to Larkrise School, many other parents do the same – it gives us the chance to meet, chat and support each other – we would lose all of that.”
 - “It would affect my mental health if I had no contact with other parents.”
- Public transport:
 - “Some parent carers don’t drive. There is no public transport in Rowde.”
 - “Trowbridge to Rowde will be a 2-bus journey for me which will include getting into Devizes and back out again to Rowde.” “From Tidworth it is probably more than 2 buses – I haven’t got a clue – I would feel stuck. Tidworth is like a ‘hole’ when it comes to getting to other places.” [Parent explained whether travelling to a special school in the south or north it was a long journey and felt that there wasn’t a choice in Tidworth when it came to special school provision.]
 - Another parent said it would take them 1.5 hours to get to the school on public transport.
- “The closure proposal doesn’t include increased car use.” Parent quoted from pg 30 of the DfE’s ‘Opening and closing maintained schools’ guidance which states ‘The proposed arrangements for travel of displaced pupils to other schools including how the proposed arrangements will mitigate against increased car use’. Parent does not believe Wiltshire Council’s transport algorithm.
 - “Transport is a ‘red herring’ and does not drive this debate.” Parent felt that whether the 1, 2 or 3-school option had been chosen, there would always be some children who had longer or shorter journeys and she didn’t think there would be a massive gain or loss. The parent felt that a good compromise would be to have the new school but have it for secondary-aged children (as they tend to be able to cope with longer journeys better than younger children and this is when parents tend to want the “best school”) and for the younger children to still go to Larkrise and St Nicholas School (removing mobiles at Larkrise so there is more outside space). This way primary aged children would be in their local area in schools that parents felt most comfortable with (some parents may prefer a local but not so well-equipped school). This would be in line with parents of primary-aged children in mainstream schools whose parents expect the school to be close by. “This should be the same for special needs children.”
 - Three Ways School in Bath is not a good comparison. “Bath is a city area and hugely different to our large, rural county.”

5.3 Stepping Stones District Specialist Centre – 8 February 2019

Comments on special school proposal

5 attended including 4 parent carers (one also being the Stepping Stones manager who had collated feedback from other Stepping Stones parents who could not attend) and 1 grandparent

The following is an overview of the morning's discussion:

General themes from parent carers of children at Stepping Stones

Debbie, the manager of Stepping Stones advised of what she was hearing from parents at their District Specialist Centre:

- Most parents do not think there is enough special school choice now and the one school proposal reduces choice even further.
- Critchill and Three Ways can meet needs but are saying “no more Wiltshire children”. Moving away from local choice, out of principle, is inappropriate.
- Many parents are not against a school in Rowde but why at the cost of closing other provision? We really feel this is a backwards step.
- Concern over parents having to travel more as well as their children.
- Many parents feel that they will be forced to home school.
- We need parent carers to be resilient as their children will need life-long support. Parents get support and learn from each other more than anything else. They get this when their children are more local to their school. The one school proposal reduces opportunities for parent carers to meet. This is setting up problems for the future.
- This is a tremendous opportunity and we are delighted that the LA want to spend £20 million but one school as a provision for such a wide range of needs is pushing their luck. There needs to be some sort of compromise, especially for the very young and PMLD children who are less likely to cope with a long journey.
- Wiltshire is “crying out” for new provision, space and teaching staff within the community. (For primary age).
- The proposal is not reflecting the different aspirations of what parent carers think is right for their child. Nobody is more ambitious than parent carers – don't presume we are not. If we lose local provision, it will never come back and this will be poor investment.

The following shows other topics discussed at the session:

Consultation

- Some are feeling very disheartened with attending consultations as they feel that Wiltshire Council are just not taking any notice of what parent carers are saying. “We want to see some compromise – who is going to listen?” “Wiltshire Council are not listening to us.” There is a real feeling that “Wiltshire Council don’t care about parent carers”.
- One parent had received the email about the consultation which had been sent out by the Local Authority to parents of children with an Education, Health & Care Plan. “This was the first email in 2.5 years I had received from the Local Authority to ask for my opinion. They should have done this earlier in the process.” “They should always contact people on the SEND register.” “This should’ve been more widely promoted.”
- One parent felt that the Local Authority’s latest consultation survey was too simple with only 2 questions – “it felt like a ‘tick box’ exercise”. “The survey should have asked if the child has medical needs.”
- “Most of the parent carers who are campaigning have children with high medical needs, seizures, etc. This is why we are worried and not because we don’t like change or are over protective.”
- One parent said that when she had seen the ‘Save Larkrise/ St Nics’ campaign in the local press it came across as an emotional plight. She said that after listening to parents concerned in person she had very much changed her perception and had a better understanding.

Location

- Rowdeford is isolated. There is no train station and no regular bus services which means using a taxi or car. It’s not about the facilities, it’s about the location. Opportunities for children to be part of the community are extremely limited compared to having schools in Trowbridge and Chippenham.
- A two-school option would have been more palatable.
- Rowde is one country road. Lots of lorries use it to get to the recycling centre.
- Traffic will get back up down that little lane. What about those country lanes if the weather is bad?
- One parent said it was in the news recently that a fire engine couldn’t get down the lanes in Rowde which is very concerning.
- The proposed school will be different to Three Ways as it is not in a city conurbation. Three Ways has Sainsburys next door and other ways the children can mix and be part of their local community.

- Larkrise children love walking around Trowbridge and they've got the farm. The school is easy to access for everybody.
- Why can't they build in Trowbridge/ use the Ashton Street site? [The Cabinet document from November 2018 when discussing the 2-school (Trowbridge and Chippenham) option stated:
- 'Trowbridge greenfield sites are challenging in planning terms and unlikely to be viable: use of Ashton St would mean a split site, congested access and operation of the school with an on-going building project incurring additional brownfield development costs;']
- Why not use the £20m for a new school but still keep Larkrise and St Nics? [See <https://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/documents/s154116/Special%20Schools%202019.1.18.pdf> item 13. for the analysis of the 3 school option.]

Provision

- One parent had a young child at Three Ways School. 1.5 years ago when it came to choosing a school they looked at Larkrise School (which was 2 minutes away) and decided it was not suitable. The parent said that the difference between the two schools is immense – two totally different entities. The parents recognised that her child had very different needs to some other children – “My child has severe autism. Some of the Larkrise children have a lot more profound medical needs. I wish my child's school was in Trowbridge but there is not choice. There is a big difference between complex needs like tube feeding, etc, and children with learning difficulties.” The parent explained how she would move to BANES at some point as she wants to go to work and have some separation from her child. (Parent currently transports child to/from Three Ways herself.)
- Another parent said she would not want to move house to be closer to her child's school as she had her family close by in Trowbridge.
- I feel that we should have a Centre of Excellence for Autism with the option of the child going back into mainstream school if appropriate.
- We need more resource base places and to upskill staff. My child might then be able to go to the resource base over the road from where I live.
- Another parent's child had Larkrise named for starting school in Sept this year. She spoke about how they had looked at Studley Green resource base but it was unsuitable for her son's high autism needs and they don't do 1 to 1.
- No Centre of Excellence is broad enough to do all SEND. We need a whole range of options. The whole menu under one roof is setting ourselves up for a white elephant. Everyone seemed to agree that there was a need to split complex medical needs and learning difficulties.

- It's not all about the building, it's also about the outreach. Outreach is expensive and needs massive amounts of money.
- I want my child to have friends and high self-esteem. We need different levels of provision.
- One parent said they didn't want their child in a big school with big class sizes. The parent with a child at Three Ways said that her child was in a reception class of 9 children (3 of whom are from Trowbridge). She felt that as they were a bigger school they were more able to group children to their abilities/needs.
- Academies do their own thing – the Local Authority won't have any control over them. One parent asked if the other parent felt that the Local Authority didn't care about their child wouldn't they rather have an academy who would strive to give their child the best?
- We need a new school with new facilities in Trowbridge regardless of whether it is an academy or not. The parent said they would still not want their child to go to a school in Rowde even if it was maintained by the Local Authority, so would not see this as a suitable compromise at all.

Transport

- Transport is a massive issue for parent carers and more are thinking of home schooling. "It puts more pressure on parents – we have no choice."
- We always hear about more mainstream schools being built. No other children are expected to travel so far to school so why should ours?
- I've heard some children have to use neck braces on transport to be safe travelling down the bumpy roads.
- What about if a child needs urgent meds/ oxygen on the journey to/ from school? Will PAs and TAs in school have these to hand and are they going to be trained to use them? What happens if my child has a seizure? There would be nowhere to pull over down the narrow roads/ lanes. What about the other children on the transport if this was to happen (e.g. distress caused)?
- Parent advised that if her child had to travel to school in Rowde she would be okay to drive him there but wouldn't know what to do in a medical situation. She also felt that he would start pulling at his seat belt. She said if he had to wait for or spend a long time on a bus he would start getting irritable within half an hour. "If a PA was quite elderly he is quite strong."
- The parent whose child went to Three Ways shared some insight into what it was like at the school at drop off/ pick up times. She described the amount of buses in the school car park and that they had to leave early enough to pick up

all the children and to get there but then most mornings those children were sat in the buses for around 20 minutes every morning waiting for the school to open.

- Parents felt that there could be more effective planning of transport routes, etc. “There is one minibus that just has a PA, one child and a driver – surely they could take my child?”
- There was concern about the training of transport PAs especially for those with medical or behavioural needs. “When I see some of the PAs on transport at the moment they look the same age as my granny!”

Health

- Impact of long journey on children and school staff, e.g. parent carers who currently change child’s nappy before school and the school staff know they don’t have to worry about changing it until midday. With children having longer journey times they will need changing at school in the morning which will take up more of the school day.
- Long journeys will make my child even more tired and this then affects his sleep at night.
- One parent said that their child gets blue lighted a lot. Parents are feeling anxious about the proposed school not being near enough to an A&E department. “This is a big risk for some of us.” Parents are worried about not being able to get to their children quickly – “I worry at the moment when I’m only 5 minutes away from Stepping Stones. The proposed school would be too remote for me even if they do have a full-time nurse.” “If Larkrise wasn’t there I would home school – I can’t take the risk of being far away.”
- One parent had a child with severe epilepsy and a sleep disorder. “When he starts at Larkrise he will only do mornings – if he was at a school in Rowde by the time get gets there I will need to get him back. If he can’t manage a whole school day how would he manage a long journey as well?”
- Many parent carers choose Three Ways School due to it being close to the Royal United Hospital.
- Parent advised that her child’s paediatric doctor and physio both go to Larkrise already.
- We’ve never been apart when my child has had a seizure. He also gets 12 hours of sickness after having one.

Post-16

- All we will have is Wiltshire College, Lackham and Fairfield Farm College. These aren't suitable for PMLD young people. An 11-19 year old Centre of Excellence would be better and keep primary-aged children local. Our complex needs children already have the least opportunities. The view of having the Centre of Excellence for secondary-aged children was not shared by the parents who had children of nursery/ reception age – they said that even a child who was secondary school age still might not have the equivalent mental ability. They felt that a child's needs could increase as they got older and it would be "putting off the inevitable".

Other comments

- One parent said that they were concerned about losing daily communication with the teachers if her child was to get on a bus to school. Another parent said they would be happy with a weekly update from the school but could see that her child's needs were different to children with complex needs whose parents might want a daily update.

Reception-aged children without a named school for September 2019

- Some parents had seen on social media recently that there are 20 Wiltshire preschool children who do not have a special school place for September 2019. The information they heard is that these children will be placed in a mobile classroom at Rowdeford School. This information has caused high anxiety amongst parents. When I heard this I phoned Phil Cook as I wanted to check my child still has his place at Larkrise in September." "It's disgusting that these parents didn't even know that there was no special school place for their children." [The Local Authority is currently in discussions with special school heads and they are exploring different options for September –a meeting that was due to take place on 1st February was postponed due to the extreme weather.]

5.4 WPCC SENDIS EVENT Information event – 8 February 2019

Feedback from Parent Carers

It's not a good idea, it isn't a good route from Lyneham. My child already has a long journey to get to St Nicholas. My child is picked up at 7:45am already and it takes 1½ hours to get to St Nicholas. I do agree that newer facilities would be good though. I want the school to be within walking distance of a park and a supermarket. I think if the schools close, they will also lose teachers; they won't all want to move to the new school. I don't like the single model, for example the SPA and the new Front Door has made things worse not better. I know a parent who lives in Swindon, her child has to attend St Nicholas as there were no spaces in the Swindon schools, the journey for their child will be horrendous.

I was initially against it; all schools cater for different needs and we need that range of provision. My son attends Larkrise, it's not great as it's too squeezed. There is not much greenery or outside space at Larkrise. I really like the Rowde site. I think it will be a good thing. The pod design is a good idea. One site is a good idea, but why not have satellites of the school in communities and link the offer across schools; this would help with resources. There is no nurse at Larkrise. I don't see why they can't do what they do at Larkrise on the Rowde site. The Rowde site has acres of land which would be great for our children.

As parents we know it's a struggle to get a place in a special school. I was surprised that the Rowdeford site was chosen though. Exeter House couldn't meet my child's needs but I think the opportunities offered by Springfield is great. I think what is being done to increase provision, especially the ASD provision in the south is great. I wish we'd had Springfield's South a few years ago, then my child may not have had to go out of county.

We have just moved to Salisbury and we want to go as mainstream as possible. My child is currently at a mainstream pre-school. I think what is needed is a more balanced approach between mainstream and special. Mainstream don't seem to have the knowledge and experience of Down Syndrome and they need some support, this is where a more balanced approach between special schools and mainstream could really work. The mainstream nursery is very open to working with us as parents though.

I am really keen for provision to continue at Rowdeford, the environment is very good and the school meets my son's needs.

I was concerned that a bigger school would be too much for my child. Now I understand the pod idea and small class sizes, this sounds brilliant.

The offer of outreach would be brilliant for a child like mine who is a round peg in a square hole. Mainstream schools need more support, especially at secondary level if they are to meet the needs of our children. I think flexible provision/attendance across more than one school would work well.

My child travels from Salisbury to Rowdeford but the journey is fine. I really like the idea of children travelling in people carriers rather than minibuses.

If my child went to Exeter House, she would exist; at Rowdeford she is pushed to her full potential.

I didn't understand what the new school could be like. I like this, it sounds good.

The journey from Bradford-on-Avon to Rowdeford seems okay. I think this is a brilliant idea.

Mr Sambrook is amazing!

I am disgusted by the proposals. Don't put our children away in a large school. I would prefer more special and resource bases attached to mainstream schools. There should be a special school in every town. Mainstream was not working for my child, my son was struggling and not getting the support he needed. The distance to the new school is a real worry, and I worry about the children's mental health. My child is doing well at Larkrise, why would I change it?

5.5 Devizes and District Opportunity Centre – 25 February 2019

Comments on special school proposal

This was a play session for 0-2 year olds and their parent carers.

The following is an overview of discussions had with parents:

General comments about the proposal

- Some of the parents said they had not heard about the proposal or knew very little of it.
- Two parent carers said they strongly disagreed with the proposal. "It puts extra strain on parents – life is already difficult being a parent of a child with additional needs. This is going to impact on families and upset a lot of people. Why make it hard for them?" There was a feeling from some that the proposal is going to go ahead regardless of what parents think.
- One parent said the same sort of thing happened when she lived in London and it was unsuccessful as the school lost its personal touch.
- There were a few parents who were concerned that if the new school was their only choice, their child might be 'forced' to go to a mainstream school.
- "It's hard enough choosing a soft play centre or restaurant to go to because we are lacking in choices for our children. This proposal means we will have no choice apart from mainstream or the new school."

- One parent felt that change was hard enough for her older child who was higher-functioning and on the autistic spectrum and said it would be harder again for children who were “less functioning” and their parents.
- One parent had mixed feelings about the proposal. The parent said, living in Devizes, the new school would be on their door step which was great but he felt it was a shame to shut Larkrise and St Nics and he knew other families this was going to affect.
- One couple felt very strongly that Rowdeford was a good school and site, especially the outdoor space (mum had attended Rowdeford School herself when she was younger). They felt that there were more children with additional needs being born now and that mainstream school wasn't suitable for a lot of them so schools like Rowdeford are needed.

Provision

- One parent said she could see the pros and cons. “All they want to do is help – they just need to it in the right way.”
- “It could be good to bring it all together.”
- “I wouldn't want big classes for my child.” “More people means it will be too loud.”
- “Bigger is not always better.” “Children and parents need to know the teacher and the teachers need to have time for the children.”
- One parent thought it was good to see older pupils at school as it gave parents of younger children some support being able to see how other children “got there”.

Location/ Transport

- “I don't drive so if my child did need to go to this school I would have to look at transport.”
- “I get a lift to the DSC and a bus back, so as I don't drive transport could be a big issue.” (Travels from Melksham)
- “Lots of parents here don't drive.”
- “We live in Bromham so transport is not an issue.”
- Two parents said that the proposal would mean too much extra travelling for children and parents.
- One parent had four other children at different schools and didn't know how she could be in different places at once.
- “My child is only two but I'm worried as the distance to the new school would mean I wouldn't be able to work.”

Health

- “Having professionals on-site would be good.”

- “We’ve not thought about it yet. We haven’t thought of a nursery let alone school.” The parent said they have to think month by month due to daughter’s health.
- Another parent said they liked the idea of health professionals/ therapists being on-site. They felt that their child’s physiotherapy was lacking since Virgin Care had taken over the contract so hopefully this would be an improvement.

Other comments

- One parent asked whether the proposal would affect resource bases/ places.

5.6 Springboard Opportunity Centre, Chippenham – 25 February 2019

Session notes

The following are notes of the contributions made by parents during the session.

Special Education Provision from the Beginning

Some families of summer born children are delaying their children's start to school because of fears about uncertainty of future provision. This is having a knock-on impact on the availability of provision at District Specialist Centres.

The Centre of Excellence

I think this sounds like a fantastic idea, especially as it is for the long term. A purpose built school will be great.

My child has cerebral palsy and really benefits from attending both specialist and mainstream provision. This benefits not only my child but the community, I would really like mixed provision as part of this new offer so that my child could continue to access some mainstream schooling with support, as well as the new specialist provision. Attending both special school and mainstream would really help integration.

We could work with other schools and especially Wiltshire College that have made integration work and let their experience support the outreach and integration of the new centres of excellence.

One school in the north of the county is a worry for me as it could be too insular; what if it doesn't work, we are left with no other choices. You learn from others and having more than one school could mean that schools could work together and support each other.

Why not fund District Specialist Centres to offer outreach support and training.

Transport

I was worried about my child being on a mini bus but the possibility that some people carriers might be considered I think is a great idea. I think the school owning and running the transport would be much better and using TAs as Passenger Assistants would work really well.

I think it's good for our children to be away from us for some of the time rather than parents taking their children to school, it helps them develop a little bit of independence and it helps the parents too.

Reassurance

My biggest worry is the transition from a school that is closing to the new school, we need time to get to know the new school before our children transition.

It has been really helpful to speak about the proposals and have a face to face discussion. I understand it a lot better now and I am a lot less worried. You can misunderstand what is written sometimes. Some of the information on social media is not helpful.

Post 16

I have experience of Wiltshire College and it has been amazing, to be honest they have been better than school.

5.7 John McNeill Opportunity Centre, Salisbury – 25 February 2019

Session notes

The following are notes of the contributions made by parents during the session.

Special Education Provision from the Beginning

How can District Specialist Centres (DSCs) continue without enough funding? The need is massive. Nurseries need the support that DSCs could provide, this could really help inclusion and the demand for places in special provision. Continual fundraising is exhausting for both the parents and the DSCs.

The Centre of Excellence

I am worried that 'Super Schools' won't treat children as individuals. I don't think this proposal is right.

The new build at Rowde doesn't bother me.

My child lives in Salisbury and attends Rowdeford; my child is happy to travel.

Transport is a worry for me, it needs to be a positive experience.

Outreach sounds great; how do we make mainstream schools engage and be open to taking our children? Many schools aren't keen at the moment.

We have seen a lot of information about the £20million investment in a new school in the north of the county, what investment will there be in Exeter House School? Will any investment at Exeter House School come out of the £20million?

I think some children in special school could be in a Resource Base but there aren't enough places. You need to talk face to face with schools to 'sell' the benefits of having Resource Bases, emails won't work. Identify schools that are already doing a great job and show good practice, and build relationships with schools that are not doing so well or not so open to including children with SEND.

We need Resource Bases at secondary schools, not just primary schools.

Language and Communication

We need a commonality of language to help understanding and reduce misconception e.g. if DSCs are recognised nationally as Specialist Nurseries, adopt this language in Wiltshire. The term My Plan is confusing, I prefer EHCP.

Reassurance

Rather than telling us what you hope to provide, tell us what will be provided and when. For example, it is difficult for parents to have confidence in provision when we are being told that we *hope* to have KS3 and KS4 provision for children with ASD at Springfield South, or when I asked when the modular would be built and ready a member of staff from Springfields told me "*if it's anything like the shambles it has been, I can't see it happening before the summer*".

What happens to rising 5s with ASD as Springfield won't take them?

Training for teachers at the new centres of excellence is key. There needs to be investment in their training.

There is a lot of vision and opportunity in the proposal which is great but my concern is about now, the year after, and the year after... This could create anxiety and anger and we could lose the opportunity to work collaboratively. You need to communicate with us so we know you are working to meet the needs that are there now.

Invest in the various transition points during a child's journey through education. There is nothing in the proposal to increase pre-school provision; if we get it right here, it can have a positive impact on the journey a child takes in their education and a significant positive impact on the parent.

Parents need to be true partners with the school. They should feel they could come in at any time to be reassured that provision is good.

Please keep communicating with the parents.

5.8 Calne – Meeting with parent carers - 28 February 2019

Session notes

The session was organised into themes, all parent carers had an opportunity to spend time with a facilitator discussing a theme before moving to another facilitator to discuss a new theme. Each facilitator took notes to capture contributions by parent carers on the theme they were facilitating.

Theme 1 – Worries/Positives/New School

Conversation 1

- Three Ways preferred from Melksham. Local special schools need replacing.
- Centre of Excellence is Okay
- Transition not good for children/ young people.
- What about the majority? Complex? (Will we be catering for those not PMLD?*)
*Admission threshold is a concern.
- Funding of CPD, specialist support, therapies – better in one place.

Conversation 2

- Physiotherapy is hard to get – better in one place.
- One school definitely positive. Specialisms and staff will make a difference.
- Post-16 parents need to worry about finding placement. Would prefer Larkrise 16+ - or post-16 on new site.
- Lack of choice – would want post-16 at Rowdeford.
- National Star College preferred to Fairfield. We want a National Star in Wiltshire!
- Wiltshire College too stimulating environment for ASD like the all-singing/ all dancing idea; but want it post-16.

Conversation 3

- Transition planning over years will help.
- Understanding of the word “complex”*. *People think it means very complex.
- Post-16 – age/ stage questions. Need choice. Swindon was chosen over Rowdeford because of post-16 offer.
- Will staff move?
- Would need transport for non-driving parents – Carer transport charity – for emergencies.

Conversation 4

- No issues – not too big – all seems positive.
- Residential.
- Future-proof – need to allow expansion.
- Wheelchair friendly.
- “Complex” – what is the range of needs?
- 2 cases of pupils with challenging behaviour/ ASD and academically able – Springfields & GCSEs.
- Need to meet academic needs: Springfields/ Dowlands not covering the “nearly mainstream”. For example, my child is at Studley Green and is an example of “nearly mainstream” i.e. complex/SEMH needs but academically able to succeed with GCSE.

Theme 2 - Health

Main points:-

- Parental choice.
- Extra resource base spaces. Need the support from special schools.
- ELP must be like resource base. ELP is not good enough.
- Fantastic idea – to have all on one site would be amazing.
- Lack of paediatricians in county.
- Virgin Care – I had to have 22 phone calls to get an assessment.
- Attending annual appraisals.
- Really important to encourage more training, secondments and sharing of knowledge.
- Three Ways is a great example of how to bring things together.
- Some primary schools to a great job.
- Local colleges and the scheme of things and concerns about falling through the gap.
- Notes that parents recognise the local authority are trying hard.
- WPCCC have been amazing, giving great support.
- Real concerns around Virgin Care and not being able to access. No one ever gets back and there’s no follow through.
- Community learning is a parent’s responsibility. We shouldn’t be expecting schools to take the lead on this.
- Concern about being further away when miss the bus.
- Will there be full-time nursing staff? This sounds like a real opportunity to improve healthcare.
- It’s not a deal breaker, but Rowdeford feels a bit isolated.
- Not being local is a real issue.
- Increase in resource bases and build them into secondary schools more firmly.
- It’s really important to build skills in mainstream schools.
- Encouraging conversation.
- We really have to improve communication with VirginCare.
- We need more joined up approaches.

- Paediatrician clinics on site would be a significant benefit – lots of comments repeated on this.
- Travel and health risk is a key issues – we have to have assurances that our children are not at risk.

Theme 3 – Transport/ Bus routes

The following are the comments, questions and concerns raised by parent carers when asked about transport and bus routes:-

- Location:
 - It will be more inconvenient for me if son has a seizure and I need to go and get him. (Often gets phone call to get him from school.)
 - What about the parents who don't drive? How do we get to the school in an emergency. A local taxi company had quoted the parent £120 for the taxi journey (from Calne).
 - One parent felt that the location/ travelling wasn't a big or fair enough argument as there were already many other children who travel, however, for those who aren't used to it it is going to be a sudden change compared to other children who have been used to travelling to school since the beginning.
 - I would happily move away rather than ship my daughter off – I want her to go to a local school and not shift her out of the community.
 - The impact of emergency vehicles if needed (remote location/ no main road in or out).
 - I live in a village and the bus services only run 2 hourly.
 - I worry about the amount of traffic – the Devizes to Chippenham route is already such a busy road. I'm also concerned about the country roads around Rowde.
 - There will be a lot more travelling – what about parents who work?
 - How do you expect SEN children to use public bus services?
- Choice:
 - We chose Larkrise as we thought it was the best school for our child and now that choice will be taken away from us.
 - Having this one school means there is no option to walk to school. Lots of children will not have the opportunity.
 - You would look up to mainstream parents and say the only school your child can go to is in Devizes. It's not fair and a step backwards.
 - My mainstream daughter doesn't have more choice – there is only one secondary school in our town.
- Provision:
 - If the provision is suitable and what is best for my child I don't mind them having to use transport to get there. My child struggled for years with schools on our doorstep where they didn't fit in. Choice is relative.
 - SEN education is not one size fits all. Hopefully this will be a chance to have more targeted education for children.

- My child will be 15 years old when he's due to move to the new school. He will be there one year and then have to find somewhere else because he will be too old for the school!
- Smaller schools work. We need to follow the pre-school/ primary school local model.
- My child is currently transported from their school to other settings to use their facilities, e.g. currently goes to a local secondary school to use Nessay. If my child is at Rowdeford where are they going to be integrated? How is the transport going to work?
- Concerns about travel times for children:-
 - Where is the SEND transport cut-off for statutory guidance on travelling? (especially with regards to picking up several children).
 - Who is doing the routing? The journey times to Rowdeford will be an extra half an hour at least. It currently takes my child 40 minutes on school transport travelling Trowbridge to Trowbridge (with pick ups, etc.)
 - I don't know whether the journey will be good or bad. It's the unknown and difficult to make a decision now.
 - There were many concerns about how routes would be planned, the amount of time it takes to pick up other children and particular concerns from those who lived in the far north of the county and also right the other side of Chippenham.
 - Many of our children's lives are already limited let alone having to wait for a bus to go or leave school – it's giving our children less time.
- Child's health/ wellbeing/ safety:
 - It panics me because I will be so far away.
 - How will the transport be organised? Will there potentially be 16 year olds on a bus with 3-4 year olds?
 - Will they look at who needs 1 to 1?
 - I'm concerned about the medical side. My child is already travelling longer than they should be already (22 miles).
 - Longer journeys will mean children are exhausted and in the wrong frame of mind for learning, plus a long journey home at the end of the school day.
 - What if my child has a seizure on the bus? Where will they pull over? My child is incontinent so if on longer journeys will be wet all the time.
 - There were concerns about those children with complex medical needs and that transport could be dangerous. Many concerns around those with epilepsy, sleep disorders, etc.
 - Some children will get picked up around 7.30am to get to school on time. That's a crazy time. Will there be breakfast clubs provided? What about those with sleep issues?
 - My child is currently happy to go on transport but gets so tired.
 - It's difficult to let go of my child as they are more vulnerable. If I take him I know he's okay.
 - I don't like the thought of primary-aged children going on transport, especially with parents not having direct contact with the teachers.

- Transport staff:
 - Transport manager/ co-ordination:
 - Will need to take into account parents needing to pick other children up from mainstream school too. There will be extra costs for families if they end up having to pay for breakfast and after school club to manage pick up/ drop off times. Many families also have more than one child with SEN and at different schools. They need to look at the whole family situation. One parent had concerns that neuro-typical children in these families would be put 2nd re school choice, etc. due to children attending different schools and children wanting to make it easier for parents.
 - Is the transport going to be flexible? How's it going to work with so many people arriving/ leaving at the same time? Will timings be staggered for different children – could school hours vary? One parent said in response to this that a mainstream secondary has 1000+ pupils and they manage the extra traffic.
 - Don't change the travel plans part way through, e.g. changing driver, transport company or multiple changes to pick up time – our children need consistency and so do the parents.
 - PAs/ drivers:
 - What if a PA is sick? Will there be staff to cover? My child's PAs change frequently.
 - One of my child's TAs used to be a PA as well. It worked well as they recognise that person.
 - Exeter House have TAs who are also PAs.
 - Need to take into account how emotionally draining a TA role can be, especially with those who are supporting young people with social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
 - If TAs take on PA role too could there be issues with the Working Time Directive re hours?
 - Many current PAs are older. Are they able to cope physically with children with autism/ behaviour/ those children who are 'runners'?
 - My child is post-16 so doesn't have a PA.
 - Ask if any of the parents want to volunteer to drive the buses (one parent already had the relevant driving licence for this type of vehicle and would be happy to stand in if a driver was off sick).
- Cost:
 - Will the new school have its own transport budget?
 - There have been no decent replies about the travel costings – they have got to go up due to the amount of children currently within walking distance of Larkrise and St Nics who will have a longer journey to the new school.
 - Transport will cost more.
 - I think it will be positive for the school to have its own fleet. Should be cheaper and more cost effective.

- Other SEND transport questions and comments included:
 - If the school has its own fleet of vehicles will the vehicles be purchased or hired? What is the cost involved?
 - You don't get a choice with SEND transport – you are dictated to.
 - What about after school clubs? St Nicks used to transport children to their after school clubs and then home but this stopped a while back.
 - I don't like the idea of central pick up points. (Parent said they had received a letter about this from SEND Transport.)
 - One parent said it was a nasty place to get in and out of. There is only one way in if it rains due to a huge puddle that floods the area.
 - They will need bigger gates/ more access points.
 - One parent felt that confidentiality was currently an issue with taxi drivers discussing pupils in front of others.

- Other comments:
 - Is it appropriate/ best for an academy trust to be running an SEN school? They will be running it as a business. It feels like our children should have extra care. Other parents responded that it would be up to the parents and governors to hold them to account and parents need to work in partnership with the school.
 - These same questions will keep coming up until it actually happens. We won't have accurate data as some of the children who will go to this school haven't been born yet. It won't be until over the next 3 or 4 years we know exactly what the needs of these children will be.
 - One parent had concerns about post-16 young people going through travel training, then not being able to cope and not being able to go back to having a taxi through SEND transport (this had happened to her son who was now struggling at the bus stop and refusing to go). Post-16 also have to pay/ contribute towards the bus.
 - Looks great on paper but these people making the decisions don't have children like ours. My daughter will hate it!
 - Does public transport drop outside of the school? One parent said there are no paths and this would be an issue for those young people who were learning life skills including how to use a bus timetable, etc.

Themes 4&5 – Post-16 & Community

Post 16 Opportunities

Poplar College is brilliant. It is independent of St. Nicholas' and it's going really well.

Post 16 provision is really important.

Being with older role models in mainstream settings is really good for our children.

I understand the proposal talks about the new school having a café that the young people could work in and draw people from the community into the school, St. Nicholas' has a coffee morning.

The new school should be an open environment that welcomes the community in.

Rowdeford already does loads to bring the community in, they would be good at doing more of this in the future.

It all sounds a really positive thing.

If the new school manages and runs the transport, I think there will be fewer errors and problems.

In terms of accessing the community and developing important life skills, are the local transport links e.g. buses good enough? I would like children to have lots of opportunities to practise using bus timetables, local to their school.

If you are spending all this money, let's get it right from the beginning; if you extend the provision to 19 it won't cost much more but it will prevent a lot of problems further down the line.

How will Polar College cope with increased numbers? I have heard that Poplar might be being moved to the Chippenham College site, if this is the case, would it not make more sense for Poplar College to move to the Rowdeford site instead?

Post 16 Worries

Chippenham College is not set up to meet the needs of our children.

There needs to be an option for post 16 provision at the new special school. I can't see my son being able to access what is available at colleges we have in Wiltshire.

Going from a very structured environment (special school) to an unstructured environment (college) is frightening to us as parents and difficult for our children, if it is to work, the transition needs to be sympathetic and done over time.

Life education starting at post 16 is way too late. Children need longer to prepare for adulthood and do more to develop life skills; this preparation and education should start in secondary phase of education but the special schools are not great at doing this at the moment. Post 16 should be about continuing life skills, not beginning to learn life skills. Our children need more time to ease them in to things.

There is an issue with support and services for post 16 young people, so many don't meet criteria as often services are designed to meet the needs of those with a learning disability. Some services also change their definition of learning disability as the young person moves into adulthood which further disadvantages young people.

Local established colleges with learning support would struggle to meet the needs of children with more complex needs. How will these children's more complex needs be met if there is no post 16 provision in the new special school? By not having specialist

post 16 provision in the new special school, I think we are at risk of creating a new 'cliff edge'.

If SEND provision is about 0 to 25, then the new school needs to reflect this.

My only concern is that my child who would be transferring from Larkrise, will only be at the new school for a year before he has to transition on again as he will be too old for the proposed provision this will be really unsettling for him and continuity of provision is a big worry for me.

I really like the thought of my child being in school until he is 18, it is one less worry for a parent to think about. The current options available aren't great. I don't think children with complex needs can cope with the post 16 options that we currently have.

How will Polar College cope with increased numbers? I have heard that Poplar might be being moved to the Chippenham College site, if this is the case, would it not make more sense for Poplar College to move to the Rowdeford site instead?

If my only choice of post 16 provision is somewhere like Fairfield Farm College, I would choose for my child to go outside of Wiltshire rather than there.

Community Opportunities

Community to me is about integrating with other children, for example at the local church. Community is also about bringing people into the school.

Our children live in Calne, we don't have a special school in our local community so we have to travel anyway.

I think it would be great to have a swimming pool and a hydrotherapy pool at the new school; they both have very different purposes and would be a great opportunity to offer another facility to the community to come in and use.

I live near Rowde. Rowde is a really inclusive village. HFT (Home Farm Trust) do a lot in the community and the people who live there are well known and welcomed by the community. They integrate well and are really well supported by the community. For example, they go to the pub and order a drink and are always really well supported to do so.

Community Concerns

I don't think people will walk into Rowdeford.

There is no local transport.

The proposal sounds brilliant but it should be happening in other communities.

The current structure in Wiltshire means that our schools and resource bases are separated; they operate in isolation and they are segregated. Good community should also be about all the schools (whether they are mainstream, special or resource bases) working together.

It's nice for our children to be able to walk from their current school to town. The community knows and recognises our children and I don't want to lose this. It also helps our community to be accepting of our children.

The Centre of Excellence

Why aren't there integrated therapies in our special schools now?

Outreach sounds great but I am worried it won't work. Thrive sounded great but I don't really see it working.

Mainstream needs to be more understanding of our children's needs, outreach from the new school could really help with this. Use staff in the new school to provide outreach support to other schools and train staff to be more understanding of our children's needs.

After school and holiday clubs are needed at the new school. A summer camp at the new school would be great.

I don't think anyone would say a shiny new school is a bad idea.

The design of the building and grounds is really important and parents need to be involved at every stage of the planning and development, for instance, we know that security and fencing is really important.

Could the existing special school buildings (St. Nicholas and Larkrise) be used as satellite schools if they close? For instance, one of the schools could become a specialist centre for teaching and developing life skills for post 16 young people, and perhaps work with businesses to develop enterprise opportunities at the other site.

I think the centre of excellence could create lots of new jobs and really develop facilities in the community.



I came expecting a fight today but I am coming away thinking it all sounds very sensible.