

To Cabinet: 19.11.19

Good morning and thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to the Cabinet members and those of you who have given up your time today to come and listen to this debate.

I wanted to speak for two reasons:

Firstly, to give my support to the Council's amended proposal to create a single school across three sites. I am particularly gratified that Wiltshire Council officers have worked hard to ensure that they collaborate, as Cabinet requested they should, with all stakeholders, including schools, staff, children and parent/carers to seek a way forward that genuinely addresses both the need for change and the need to retain what is valued in and by our communities. It is so much more effective when we work together!

The longer term plans for the new amalgamated school are progressing. However, the more urgent need now is the consideration of those children who will need a special school place in September 2020. As your proposal reveals, "current pressure on demand has not desisted" and transition to the larger site at Rowde will have to begin long before the new build is complete.

Although it is not yet established exactly which pupils might move first, the one thing we know for sure is that they will need, "Outstanding teaching from well-trained, well-paid, caring, specialist and dedicated staff." At the present moment this presents us with some safeguarding implications:

"44.The staff at Rowdeford currently teach secondary pupils with predominantly moderate learning difficulties. The proposal will mean primary pupils and secondary pupils with severe learning difficulties will be taught on the site. This will mean existing and new staff will need training to support these learners. Staff with the appropriate experience and expertise will need to be recruited to positions on the Rowdeford site as increased places become available. Post 16 students with severe learning difficulties will also be taught on the site. Staff will need training or to be recruited with the appropriate experience to be able to accommodate these learners." (Proposal)

So, I want to make the case to you for additional funding to be provided to ensure that these children, and at each stage all children who transition from one school site to another, have a good experience, with no interruption to the quality of their education caused by a lack of training or experience at their new site. This is important, too, for the confidence of all staff, that their current expertise is recognised and valued, whichever phase they are working in – and that they are given enough time and opportunity to learn the new skills and knowledge required to teach children of different ages and SEND designations which may be currently outside their remit. Nothing breeds confidence like teaching someone else what you know – and I cannot think of a better way to facilitate a smooth transition than to give staff the time to work side by side, learning with and from each other, as the new school begins to emerge. A sum of £100k would enable schools to engage some short-term temporary staff in order to release colleagues to work together – developing new resources, trialling them, observing each other, presenting their successes to their colleagues – building their

new school as they build their relationships with each other. Yes, it means more money to find. No, there is never enough. But it is not enough to want an outstanding school. You have to commit to it. You have to start at the ground and build it up from an agreed ethos of what we are here for. A good example I think is from an academy chain in Nottinghamshire. I give this example not because I stole it from David Paice (which I did, shamelessly,) but because it is where I started my own teaching career too many years ago now to remember. I ran a play scheme for the children of Aslockton Primary School during the summer holidays before I began as an NQT. Then it was a small, rural primary school situated in a small village – not unlike the village of Rowde. Now, it is part of a chain of outstanding schools, taking on other local schools and offering training so that they, too, can reach their goals. To quote their Vision Statement:

“Each Academy is a take care school, where we take care of our self, each other, the world and our work.”

It is simple, memorable – and it clearly works. And it comes from schools which have committed to a shared vision and ethos which is the result of building lasting relationships and learning from each other. I think this is my vision too. We have a golden opportunity here to create something very special in Wiltshire. So, we need to commit to it. And that means proper, quality training for our staff. Not to do so would risk not achieving the highest standards, not becoming a system for excellence and, worst of all, not giving our children the best possible start in their new school.

In the consultation responses:

“35. There was a widespread agreement that a change management plan should provide support and professional development to ensure all staff improved their skills and abilities to teach a wider range of children and young people. It was strongly emphasised that there should be budgetary provision for this.”

So I urge you please, to consider this aspect of our work going forward and to allocate funding for training for transition as a priority in this proposal.