

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

14 June 2011

Public Participation

From Tamara Reay and Sue England, Co-Chair Governors, Grafton Church of England Primary School - Proposed closure of Grafton Church of England Primary School, Background paper for consideration by the Cabinet on 14 June 2011

Statement

Governors would like to take the opportunity to provide the following additional background information which provides more detail on some of the points raised in the objection from Mr Armstrong.

Data on births (as at 31 August 2010) show 48 under 5's in catchment – many more than some of our neighbouring schools in the Marlborough and Pewsey area. This demonstrates that if our school were school of choice then Grafton Primary School could be a good sized small school of approximately 60 children. That the children are there to grow our school has been a great motivation for governors.

Work to increase the popularity of the school has been carried out across a number of strands over the last few years. In addition to contributing to the good and growing reputation of Sunflowers, governors have been involved in Friends of Grafton community and fundraising events, have been involved in establishing Grafton Goslings baby and toddler group and a community wide newsletter (the Community News) to publicise activity at the school and promote the benefits of small schools. Good working relationships have been developed with the Parish Council and Parochial Parish Council.

There is widespread local support for our school but this does not translate into pupil numbers. Though parents appreciate our local school the perceived benefits of Grafton Primary School are outweighed by the perceived benefits of neighbouring schools.

Formal research was carried out with parish parents in February 2010 and showed that the 4 key reasons that Grafton is not the school of choice for the majority of parish parents are:

- Limited opportunities and choice for children to make friends
- Classroom arrangements mean that siblings will be in the same class
- Grafton is not a feeder school to preferred secondary school
- 4 year groups in the Key Stage 2 class is too great an age range.

In addition governors have developed excellent networks with local parents through Sunflowers, Grafton Goslings baby & toddler group and Friends of Grafton community and fundraising events. Governors feel that the combination of formal

and informal research facilitated by this provides a solid foundation for the work which has been completed. We know from this research that are several key factors why we are not school of choice. Not being a feeder school for St Johns is one of those factors – and it is clear that changing that element alone would not be enough – cohort sizes and the perceived lack of social opportunities from small class sizes are the overwhelming reasons.

The Governing Body first recognised that developing some form of partnership with another local school was the best route to secure our future following the publication of the Small Schools Strategy document by Wiltshire Council in 2005. At this point our school already had a long history of fluctuating numbers and lack of appeal across our parish and had fought off 2 previously proposed closures.

Over this 7 year period governors have considered options and made multiple proposals to 5 of our neighbouring schools on different forms of partnership. Most recently we proposed an Early Years model in which Grafton would focus on pre school and KS1 provision with pupils transferring to a partner school for KS2. Research with parents of children starting school in September 2011 demonstrated that this would positively influence many parents and result in an intake of a minimum 5 pupils. Unfortunately none of the governing bodies of our neighbouring schools have felt able to respond to our approaches positively and as a result most of the 2011 parents (many of these children are at Sunflowers) felt that the current Grafton model was not the best option for their children. Advisors from the Local Authority and Diocese have commended the creativity and volume of strategic partnership development work carried out by governors.

Throughout this time the teaching staff has maintained a good quality of education for our pupils. We received a Satisfactory Ofsted rating Sept 2009 and feel that the collaborative activities undertaken with other schools has mitigated the low pupil numbers at Grafton. Parents of the current 11 pupils feel strongly that the education their children are receiving is good, although some parents do have concerns that the social and friendship opportunities offered by the small cohort numbers are limiting. The decision to consult on closure was a very difficult one to make and was based on the advice of professionals, including our teaching staff and Local Authority and Diocese advisors.

The implication of closure on Sunflowers has been fully considered. There has always been a close working relationship between school leadership and the voluntary management committee which runs Sunflowers. A working party has been established to develop plans for growth to maintain pre school education on the site – and governors are closely involved with this.

We appreciate the response to the statutory consultation from Mr Armstrong and plan to contact him and offer to meet in order to reassure him that we have neither lost interest nor resigned ourselves to closure. Additionally we would welcome his involvement as a parent in the Sunflowers working party and other community activities. This was not a decision taken lightly, nor prematurely. The fact that just 1 objection was received, from an individual who does not currently reside in the parish, sadly speaks volumes about the current position of Grafton Primary School.