

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

13 September 2011

**Public Participation
Item No. 6 - Denominational Home to School Transport**

Statement from St Patrick's School Governing Body

The Rapid Scrutiny Exercise on 8th September demonstrated to the public participants that there were no concrete figures associated with this proposal in terms of current pupils having to migrate schools. The Admissions Forum could not be definitive on answers as numbers were not known. The disruption to education for children was noted to have not been properly researched. No definitive costing could be given for future scenarios. Assumption is the mother of all mistakes.

All we can do at this point is to appeal to the Cabinet to please not vote to go ahead with this action, in any of its proposed options.

St Patrick's is a small school, and upwards of 30 pupils currently rely on this travel. To lose those pupils should they have to move elsewhere, and to lose future pupils, will result in a 40% drop of the denominational children attending our school. This action means that the school built for their needs becomes inaccessible, and the fabric of the school itself is shaken. Fundamentally, Faith schools need denominational childrens' attendance to survive. The Faith community cannot support a school if it is not serving its purpose. Financially our school's viability is at stake as well; if we lose these children, and should the school not survive, you as a council will have not just 30 children to place at other schools as could happen in 2012, but the other 170 St Patrick's pupils living in Corsham.

Should you accept option 3 of this proposal we also do not have the expertise, staff and funds to cope with travel arrangements ourselves. The council has offered to help us with travel, and we have already starting making enquiries to travel operators as suggested by the Transport Team. The prohibitive cost of any arrangement makes this an impossible situation in our case, with an annual fee of £36,000 to be spread across some 30 children on average; we are looking at £1200 per child, a sum I am sure you agree is extortionate. We are prepared to ask parents to contribute more via an inflation-based percentage to the current costs, but how can we ask them to pay more than double? There is no public transport available for our children as an alternative. The congestion in Corsham is already at dangerous levels at school run times, so more cars would exacerbate the problems, if there are enough parents who can transport their children. It is a no win situation for our school.

We have mentioned before the worries we have that this is a pre-determined decision. Cllr Gamble assured us at the Rapid Scrutiny meeting that it was not. Maybe it is caution on the Council's part, or maybe it is pre-determination, but our school has already been removed from the School Transport Team's list for travel assistance in 2012. The Council's letter to parents sent on 5th May which started this process, repeatedly stated it was withdrawing transport. There was no offer of consultation in that letter, and what has followed has not adhered to due process and has been hastily patched together.

I would urge you to please think of the long term consequences of this proposal which indicate higher & unfathomed costs to the Schools, Education and Travel departments. We are all aware and sympathise with the cost cutting exercises necessary across the Council, and that to reject this action will be to 'rob Peter to pay Paul' for your departments. But the wider implications that we see for the future of Faith Schools and the children who attend them if this action goes ahead, are far more detrimental and expensive to the Council and Children than the saving of £170,000.

To honour the children and your own motto 'Where Everybody Matters' this must not be a political decision in any form, but a humanist one. To break a traditional arrangement that is so successful and cause such disruption for the sake of £170,000, is a real catastrophe. This country's constitution and fabric is supposed to be based on Christianity and Faith; we swear an oath in court in God's name... assistance on the daily practicing of faith in a Christian country will be taken away from the children by not helping them have access to their schools,. Not just that, but taken away by the people constitutionally charged to nurture them.