

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

22 May 2019

**Dr Ursula Green – Statement and questions regarding agenda item 6
Specials Schools Consultation**

To Councillor Laura Mayes – Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Skills

As a parent of a child at St Nicholas School I remain against the proposal to close St Nicholas and Larkrise Schools and replace them with a larger school in Rowde. My main reasons for this are a) the loss of Special Schools in the main urban centres of Chippenham and Trowbridge and b) the size of the new proposed school.

Let me expand on that last point in more detail. We recently moved within central Chippenham to be close to both Sheldon School, where my eldest son Freddy will be going from September, and to St Nicholas School which my younger son Lucas currently attends. Lucas is 8 years old and has a rare genetic syndrome, severe learning difficulties and autism. He has been attending St Nicholas School since he was 4 years old and he is extremely happy and developing well there. Other than the fact that the closure of the school will be extremely disruptive and upsetting for him, it will also mean that he is no longer going to be a five minute walk from the school, while his able bodied brother will remain five minutes walk away from his. Instead, I would expect that Lucas will have to travel to school by bus which will take around 45 minutes to an hour. It is discriminatory that Lucas is made to travel this distance when his non-disabled brother (who to be frank would be far better able to cope with a long journey) is not made to travel.

In addition, I feel I am being discriminated against as a Parent Carer. My work-life balance juggling a high pressure job in financial organisation as well as parenting three children, including a disabled child, hangs on an extremely fine thread. We intentionally selected our current house so that we would be near to the schools that our children attend, meaning that I can attend the school for parents evenings, be available in emergencies and manage getting Lucas to/from school for hospital appointments. If, as per the council's proposal, Lucas has to attend a school in Rowde, I will no longer be able to do any of these things and my working life will be significantly compromised. If I am not able to work there will be the obvious implications of significant reduction in our household income, increase in benefits to our household (carers allowance) and of course the state will lose my tax

contribution. None of these things would be an issue if I was not a Parent Carer and if Lucas's education remained based in Chippenham.

Question 1

Can the council explain how their proposal explain how their proposal is not discriminatory to disabled children in situations similar to my son? And can they explain how their proposal is not discriminatory to Parent Carers in situations similar to mine?

Response

The council has undertaken a detailed Equality Impact Assessment as part of an extended pre-publication consultation to ensure that the proposal does not discriminate against disabled children and young people. In terms of travel time, the proposal reduces the overall times travelled for the majority which is an improvement and shows due regard has been paid to the general duties.

The proposal does not treat children and young people less favourably or put them at a disadvantage because of their disability. Rather it is a significant investment to improve the life chances of children and young people with SEND.

The Council has assessed the proposal with a view to protect people from discrimination.

In addition to 'protected characteristics', we have considered the role of parents and carers as part of the Equality Impact Assessment. It is acknowledged that for some parents and carers like yourself the proposal represents an increase in travel time. To address this, we plan to further develop our whole family approach. With the child's needs at the centre, we will identify what other family members need too so that we can include and support all of them. The on-site paediatrician should assist working parents as this should remove the necessity to remove children during the school day to take them to appointments as clinics will be available at the school. It is also acknowledged that for some children the journeys are significantly shorter.

Question 2

How can they continue to ignore the fact that the results of their consultation showed the majority of respondents were against their proposal for a single site school yet continue to put this forward as their recommended option? I understand the cost implications, but it seems the three site option put forward by the parent group hasn't been given due consideration.

Response

The report carefully reviews and explores all options put forward acknowledging both the benefits and drawbacks of each option.

Question 3

Should the proposal go ahead, what plans are in place to ensure that the wellbeing and education of pupils at St Nicholas and Larkrise Schools is not negatively impacted? Note at St Nicholas we are already seeing an impact in loss of teaching assistants in my son's class.

Response

Whatever proposals are taken forward, the impact on the pupils will stay at the centre. This includes understanding how decisions impact on staff.