

**Mel Pritchard – Statement regarding agenda item 6  
Specials Schools Consultation**

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

I stand here before you this morning confident that you WILL NOT vote for the proposal being put forward for ONE single school for the North of Wiltshire for all of our special needs children.

I don't think a single member of the public or indeed anyone in this room would disagree that some of the most vulnerable children in our county are entitled to an exceptional education with outstanding staff delivering that. However, we as parents of these children and future families moving into our county or families discovering that their young child has a diagnosis which means they will need special education, NEED CHOICE! Not a choice whereby they are going to send their child to the only available school in the county, or home school them. Not a choice whereby they will send their child to the only school in their county or send them even longer distances out of county. I mean WE NEED CHOICE of local schools in our local towns. IN OUR OWN COMMUNITIES.

Why do we, the advocates for the special needs community want the largest special needs school in the country? The answer is, we simply don't! There is a reason why there isn't a school already in place in our country as large as this... because for our children, it JUST WON'T WORK!! No matter how much you polish this proposal, no matter how much you talk up statistics, no matter how you say our children (and future ones) will be assisted in transition, this school is going to be just too big, too overwhelming, have too many people and be too far away from a lot of their homes and where they call their local community. There are indeed some higher functioning children who will no doubt manage this change with help. However, the majority of them WILL NOT. Many of our children cannot even manage a trip to the supermarket on a weekend. The overload in stimulation is too much to bear and can have catastrophic fallout for the families. Imagine then if these children are put on a bus for a far longer journey to get to a school which is so large that just a trip through the car park to the front door could send them into a complete overload shutdown. Then there are children with severe medical issues such as my daughter who has epilepsy. Stressful situations can trigger seizures. Seizures are life threatening. I currently drive my daughter to school. We chose St

Nicholas school because it felt right for my daughter. We knew other parents with children at St Nicholas who spoke highly of it. Therefore, when we had to move house 2 years ago we decided that we wanted to still be close to St Nicholas school and our son's schools. If this so called super school goes ahead I will have no choice but to send my daughter on the bus. Door to door from my house to the current Rowdeford school is, on a good journey, not including rush hour 30 minutes. However, it would not be 30 minutes, it would, in experience of children currently travelling those kind of distances be more like an hour. This is due to the fact my daughters bus would have multiple stops to pick up other children along the way. Why should I alone, not even taking into account the other hundreds of families have my choice of driving my child to school in 10 minutes and having that wonderful relationship with the school I visit twice a day on the school run be taken away from me? It's simply not fair.

I cannot step down from here without telling you that I value St Nicholas School so very much in my families life. Every single member of staff at our school is amazing and they have nurtured each and every one of our children to be the best they can. Having been at the school for nearly 4 years now, I have seen a lot of change, not just in my daughters development but in her peers too. That is evident when we attend the much loved shows and family events they put on. I not only fear that a lot of the staff will not move with our children to the proposed school and therefore to the detriment of the children but I KNOW a large percentage of them won't. I have seen this for myself in feedback to questionnaire's we put out to staff regarding the Council's proposal. Many of our staff either live local in Chippenham and currently walk or have a short distance to travel, or they are currently travelling a long time to get to Chippenham, therefore the further travel on to Rowde would be a deal breaker for them. This truly scares me! I am sure as quoted in your document that Rowdeford have never had a problem with recruiting. However, Rowdeford have never needed such a large workforce to man a school of the proposed size.

I was once told, rather childishly I might add, by a member of Wiltshire Council at one of the consultation meetings when I first properly questioned having a 'super school' placed out in the middle of nowhere in the countryside that "I chose to live in a rural county".

Yes, I did choose to live in a rural county, but I didn't choose to have a most utterly beautiful child with a sever disability. I did however, choose the school I felt best fitted her needs and boy did I make the right choice with St Nicholas! However, I do not want Wiltshire County Council to take away my only choices of where I'd like my child to be educated!

Thank you very much for your time.