

SPECIAL SCHOOLS PROPOSALS (22 May 2019)

APPENDIX 6: (ADDENDUM)

LETTERS AND EMAILS RECEIVED

6.4.28 06.05.2019 Melissa Loveday

Hi Helen,

Thank you very much for your reply, especially on your day off. We, too, appreciate the professionalism you and your team have shown to our campaigners. For us, it's always been about criticising policy, not people, and we recognise you are only doing your job, in the same way we are only doing ours as parents and advocates of the disabled community.

I thought I would note a few things for clarification purposes. First, our group, which has run the Keep Special Schools Local campaign, is now called Wiltshire SEND Action. It is not just a combination of the Friends of Larkrise and the Friends of St Nicholas schools. Our membership is drawn from friends' groups, school staff, governors and parent/carers of SEND children all over Wiltshire. We represent the wider views of people who work with SEND pupils. For instance, I have spoken with a speech therapist and my GP, both of whom oppose the one-school at Rowdeford model; I have spoken with early years practitioners who oppose the one-school at Rowdeford model; our members include or can reference friends with children with SEND who have either been failed by the education system and are now home schooled, or whom have to be supported in school by a parent who was forced to give up work to become a voluntary TA in order for their child to access education. Many people in Wiltshire reject the one-school-fits-all concept at Rowdeford and we have received active support from the local press, our local MPs, local businesses and local councillors for our campaign. Wiltshire SEND Action is a group led by individuals who have years of experience, from early years to further education, as well as the passion and determination to ensure ALL children with SEND in Wiltshire receive an appropriate education. So it is not fair to say we are 'a few families', or the friends groups combined; we are a much bigger group than this, representing and reflecting the views of a much wider cross-section of Wiltshire. It is unfortunate that the WPCC has not been able to articulate the views of all of these key stakeholders, and this failure to take the widest possible view is why we felt compelled to take action.

The extended pre-publication consultation has not made it clear that Wiltshire Council is continuing to consult on the closure of the 3 schools and to replace them with a large school in Rowde; quite the opposite, parent/carers tell us that they thought their school was now safe due to the legal challenge that took place.

I also wanted to express that although we value community as part of quality provision and ensuring the best outcomes for students, we are clear that community means different things in different contexts. What works brilliantly for a group of ambulant, MLD pupils who can adapt relatively quickly between home and school, may be an insurmountable difficulty for a highly anxious SLD pupil for whom change needs to be kept to a minimum and familiarity with their environment is paramount, or one whose medical needs make a long journey from home perilous. We believe that it is key that this CHOICE remains, so that current and future families can decide what works best for their individual child's needs in order for them to flourish.

We would expect nothing less than to have our proposal, including Jan's presentation (and notes? Do you have these?), included as part of the consultation. As a fair amount of the extended consultation took place during school holidays when most of us become carers 24/7 with other children at home, we were only able to meet last week to nail down all of our ideas and articulate our vision for the future of special education. Our proposal takes on board these key features, which we can all agree, namely to keep provision in Chippenham, Trowbridge and Rowde by expanding all three schools, offering flexible suggestions on how to make this viable. We appreciate that Rowde has space for expansion, but also hope you will appreciate the increasing need for specialist provision in Chippenham and Trowbridge as they are rapidly expanding towns (note new Government projections say 45,600 new homes are now needed in Wiltshire by 2036, with most new homes needed for Chippenham; if you take away specialist provision from such a growing town, that is a lot of children having to be transported, which is costly, both financially and environmentally, and is only set to increase).

However, what we hope to discuss with you in greater detail on Thursday, is how to make our proposal viable and I hope we can have a frank discussion about what would work/wouldn't work.

We recognise that where the three-school model fell down before was its long-term running costs, not necessarily the initial capital investment needed to expand/rebuild the facilities. So, to mitigate this, we set out below some ideas we think could make the three-site model work, which we wanted to ensure are included as part of the official consultation:

- **Amend Section 106 to change the legal agreement between applicants seeking planning permission and Wiltshire Council to include a 'Special Schools Levy'**; this will ensure county-wide housing development mitigates against their impact on infrastructure by contributing a certain percentage towards the ongoing running costs of specialist provision in strategic areas, which should be ringfenced, and reflect the increase in need. We understand that currently CIL applied to planning permissions only contributes towards mainstream schools, not towards specialist provision; many towns have adopted their own Neighbourhood Plans, which incorporate an increase of CIL. Wiltshire Council must amend Section 106 to ensure ALL future planning permission incurs a Special Schools Levy, which is a clever and logical means for providing much-needed funding for special schools.
- The three special schools form a Multi-Academy Trust, managed by an executive head teacher; this would reduce costs to the LA, but it would also provide economies of scale: we would be able to have a centralised ICT team, one bursar, one catering provider, centralised transport (essentially, all non-frontline staff could be centralised); it would enable us to have more buying power and the ability to negotiate better deals
- Expanding Rowdeford to make it the administrative hub for a 'Centre of Excellence' run across the three strategic sites. Most importantly, this would allow for strategic vision across the three schools, with inreach/outreach training and pupil admissions all managed from a central hub, thus making much better use of resources and data to ensure appropriate places and better outcomes for all children.
- Expanding Rowdeford to potentially house some external healthcare services, such as OT, PT, wheelchair services and SALT, if specialist equipment/space could be included.
- As a last resort, retaining the existing buildings at St Nicholas and Larkrise, but scaling down the numbers towards DfE guidance, either as primary provision or for students with both physical and cognitive disabilities to allow them to be nearer to acute medical centres and improved health outcomes, with the potential of joining in activities held at the other two sites, so those with the most profound needs are not segregated from their peers

- Ensuring all children with an EHCP are on the correct banding and therefore funded appropriately for their needs; this may require more money from the HNB and should feed into the consultation with ISOS
- Ensuring funding for children with an EHCP is ringfenced for that child, and not used to plug funding gaps in mainstream schools; for instance, if the money is invested in specialist equipment that can then be used by SEND children in following years, the money continues to reap rewards for children with SEND.
- Creating eco-friendly buildings, for both new designs and adapted current buildings, using solar panels, ground-source heat pumps etc, which would not only save on annual running costs, but demonstrate Wiltshire Council's commitment to a Climate Emergency and mitigating against environmental impact. Possibly using electric mini-buses (which could be fundraised for) for shorter transport journeys.

We know not all of these ideas will be popular with everyone, but we feel these must be explored if it means keeping special schools local.

We look forward to meeting with you on Thursday to discuss them in more depth.

Many thanks,

Melissa Loveday