

## **WPCC Statement to Wiltshire Council Cabinet Meeting – 19<sup>th</sup> November 2019**

The WPCC is grateful to Cabinet for allowing us the opportunity to present our statement today.

I would like to begin by recognising how parent carers have so passionately represented the needs of their children and young people throughout this process.

Parent carers have engaged in this process with immense passion, driven to advocate for the best provision to meet the needs of their children. It is undeniable that what we have heard from families, is that every parent wants the best for their child, however that may look. This has been a long and emotional journey for us all. Parent carers are exhausted emotionally and mentally by the process and there is desire among many that there should be no further delay.

Choice is important to parent carers, and parent carers have expressed concern that a single special school in the centre Wiltshire, limits choice. Parents advocated that one size doesn't fit all and we were pleased that this was heard, and the proposals for consultation were amended in response.

Thank you for recognising how important the existing specialist provision in the communities of Chippenham, Rowde and Trowbridge is to those with links to these schools. We were delighted to see in the revised proposals the commitment not to close the existing sites in Chippenham and Trowbridge on opening a new special school. We should however recognise that some parent carers and indeed some of the media are still getting confused by the language and are therefore misinterpreting the intentions to join the three schools under a single leadership to operate as one maintained school across three sites. There is some scepticism among some parent carers about the plan to consider the closure of St Nicholas and Larkrise sites at an appropriate time after the new provision is

built. We therefore urge Cabinet and officers of the Council to commit to being informed by the SEND population, and if there remains a demonstrated ongoing and significant demand at the time of consultation for specialist provision at these sites, this is recognised appropriately.

For many parent carers, the greatest anxiety that remains is not four years' time, but now, tomorrow, and the next day. New building and an amalgamated school across three sites is not a solution in itself, it only part of the solution. If we don't invest in culture at the same time, this significant investment in terms of money, time, passion and commitment, will not be enough to address our children's wide spectrum of needs across Wiltshire. We need to be committed to investing in a system of excellence that promotes in-reach and outreach to support the inclusion and improved outcomes of pupils with SEND, and enable them to be closer to their home communities wherever possible. This is our greatest hope of delivering provision that is future proof, flexible, facilitates integration, offers choice, and supports our young people to live their best adult lives, and will meet the needs of the thousands of children and young people in Wiltshire with SEND, not some of the hundreds. A system of excellence is different to a centre of excellence.

This aspiration might start with bricks and mortar, but it shouldn't end there. We want our parent carers to be partners in developing outstanding county wide provision that we can all be proud of. Most of all, we want our joint efforts to ensure that our most vulnerable children and young people thrive.