

St Dunstan CE VC School, William Street, Calne

**Public Meeting held at St Dunstan School
Held on Wednesday, 23 January 2013 at 18:00**

Present: Anne Davey (AD) [Chair of Governors]
Mary Pope (MP) (Headteacher)
Sarah Clover (SC) (Early Years and Childcare - Local Authority)
Perry Chadwyck-Healey (Foundation Governor)
Bob Kenway (Foundation Governor)
Margaret Lodge (Staff Governor)
David Conway, Larkhill Ward Councillor
4 x staff from Sunbeams Pre-school
1 x Governor from John Bentley School
2 x parents
2 x local childminders
1 x interested local party
2 x Parents
2 x Member of staff (does not include Staff Governors)

Clerk: Barbara Falkner

1. Opening and Welcome

Anne Davey welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced herself as Chair of the Governing Body; Mary Pope, Headteacher and Sarah Clover Childcare Manager for the Local Authority.

AD stated that the public meeting was a consultation about the future of the maintained Nursery provision at St Dunstan Primary School.

2. Background

Chair of Governors:

AD explained that part of the consultation process was to have a public meeting to give people the opportunity to discuss and ask questions.

The numbers attending the school's nursery has declined from 44 in 2008 to 13 in 2012. In the past the nursery was funded for 52 places regardless of the number of children who attended, it is now funded on the number of children who attend and as the school is required to have a qualified teacher it is no longer economical to run. Competition from other local pre-schools, which are not required to have a qualified teacher, means they can charge lower fees.

Children from the local community can access pre-school provision from the on-site voluntary pre-school which has places for these children.

We are advised by the Local Authority that in addition to the places on site, there is a variety of childcare places in the local community area and parents will be able to choose from a range of options. These include childminders, pre-schools that offer sessional hours and full day care nurseries for working parents. The on-site provision enrolls children from 2 years and has been offering free places for 2 year old children whose parents are on low income in the area as well as 3 and 4 year olds universally free places. Overall in the community area there will be sufficient free places for all 3 and 4 year olds and for the number of funded 2 year olds who will be accessing free places.

Local Authority (LA)

SC stated that the on-site pre-school (Sunbeams) was interested to expand so they could take in more 2 year olds within this immediate area. They are also looking to increase the number of 3 and 4 year old places within the pre-school. This would be very helpful and complimentary to what is happening at the school with regard to the maintained nursery.

The LA is able to assume all 2 years olds eligible for free funding that would have gone into the school's maintained nursery can go into the expanded Sunbeams. There are sufficient 2 year old places in this area. The Free School Meal data correlates that there are other places with this

provision around the area. There are 9 accredited childminders in Calne who also take 2, 3 and 4 year olds on free funding.

SC said there was a list of spaces around in the area if people wanted

Due to the drop in numbers at the nursery some of the take up will be in the on-site pre-school and also other providers in the area.

Headteacher

MP reported that the decision has not been an easy one. The Governors had been talking about the problem at least since September 2008 looking at the number of children enrolled and the cost. As the nursery was becoming financially unviable the decision was taken to close the afternoon sessions and only have morning sessions as a halfway measure.

To try and increase numbers the school had advertised in the Town Crier, toddler groups and had leaflets delivered to newly built show houses. Whilst it is wonderful to have a qualified teacher in the nursery the cost of the salary has to be paid together with a TA. Regulations state we have to have a qualified teacher regardless of the number of children in the nursery. The change in funding means it is impossible to maintain year on year. The teacher needs to be paid whether numbers are small or totally full. We have to protect the jobs of all staff within the school.

On site we have a pre school with places. Should the decision be to close it would be a planned closure.

We can develop stronger links with Sunbeams whereas at the moment we are in competition. Aim to foster strong links to encourage the children to come into our school which would also benefit the school in the long run.

It is an emotional issue as the nursery has part of the school for many years. Used to be "the nursery", but things have changed.

3. Open Discussion

Members of the public, parents, staff and governors were invited to ask questions and give comments.

- a) There was a query as to whether or not the maintained nursery could get funding for 2 year olds.

It was pointed out that the school is only registered to take children from 3 years onwards. It would need to register as a child care provider.

Then asked if the school would consider registering?

The reply was that the school had considered it, but there is already provision on-site (Sunbeams) which wants to develop so there will be something there.

It was pointed out that this would be another risk to the school as the ratio for staff would change to 4:1 and the school would have to pay for another teacher.

- b) Query about whether there was enough funding of spaces for 2 year olds if they go to Sunbeams.

It was pointed out that the age of the children in the school's nursery is 3 to 4 years.

SC stated that there are 280 2 years olds in the Calne area. 157 childcare places for them. 36 are likely to qualify for free funding.

It was added that although there were potentially lots of children to come to the maintained nursery. Parents tend to not want their child to move. Once they started in the term after their 2nd birthday at Sunbeams the parents have left them there until they started school. This was their parental choice.

- c) Query about ensuring that once children are at Sunbeams that they will be able to go to St Dunstan.

It was pointed out there is no agreement that children from Sunbeams will automatically feed into St Dunstan. Historically not all children do move on to St Dunstan.

A person from Sunbeams added that they did promote St Dunstan, but people can choose to go elsewhere.

There was a comment that comments on social networking sites had not always been favourable. SC said that staff would be bound by the same confidentiality rules and policies as the school as to their conduct and confidentiality and it would be something the LA would monitor.

- d) Asked if there was a waiting list for children to go into the nursery?

The reply was that the school did not have anyone on the list for September 2013 at the moment. Some came with an older child when they looked around, but anyone who has asked has been directed to Sunbeams.

Asked to clarify if the waiting list was for this academic year as there are 3 intakes – September, January and April.

Told that there was no more than the 13 who started at the start of this academic year.

- e) There were questions on the financial side of the problem. Was the nursery funding separate from the school funding? Could the school cover the losses of the nursery?

Told that the school is not allowed to subsidise the nursery from the school budget.

MP said she had met with a financial officer from the LA who said 18 months ago that the nursery was not viable to sustain. The school had subsidised the nursery, but should not have done so and cannot keep doing it.

- f) Buildings

There was discussion about the buildings who owned what buildings, what space Sunbeams would expand into, leases and rents.

- g) Question as to whether the nursery unit had approval for other childcare users. Had it been tendered out?

The reply was that it had not as it was agreed that the on-site pre-school could develop into it.

- h) Query about the drop in numbers year on year from 44 to 10.

It was confirmed that 13 were expected to start last September, but only 10 took up their places.

Asked if the school had taken into account children could not come at September, but would be old enough at Easter. Would a second or third intake make it viable?

It was explained that the school had 13 on the list for September 2012. Some had moved and there were only 10 now on the register. A decision has to be made not to continue to make a loss. Agreed that last year a few more came during the year, but cannot keep running the nursery hoping more will come in throughout the year.

- i) Concern was raised by a person that the consultation does not state that if any children wanted to come in January or April they could not do so. The position that the school had outlined to people did not make them aware that it was not taking in any more children. The nursery had the potential to have 20 children after Easter. Believed the information given out was misleading.

Last year (2011/2012) there were 19 on the register in September, 26 in July. Numbers are always low in the first term. The take up of places grows at Easter and summer.

Replied that the “bottom line is that finances will not support it”.

Person continued – stating that the Governing Body had made the decision to close the nursery which had been judged as ‘outstanding’. Pointed out that the nursery had been rated as good, good and outstanding by Ofsted and that this should have been said in the school’s documentation.

Replied that when advertising the nursery it had said it was rated as outstanding and had a qualified teacher, but it had not made any difference.

- j) Asked if the new housing plans to build another 350 households had been taken into account. The houses are on this side of the town. Half have been built and people considered children would come to St Dunstan as no other school is planned to be built.

Replied that the school has to make a decision on the reality of the present.

- k) Asked if the governors chose to keep running the nursery who picks up the loss?

It was explained that there is no funding for that. Could potentially pay out low sustainability funds which are for institutions which get into difficulty with a shortfall, but it is not to be paid out year on year.

- l) Asked if the nursery cannot subsidised by St Dunstan and it carried on at a loss would the loss be written off. Could it go into liquidation?

Potentially it would not be able to pay staff. Historically money moved from one pot to another by auditors. Plans for schools are made for 5 years. Sometimes it happens there is a gap in costs and money coming in. Pointed out that the sustainability funds are for the whole county.

- m) Asked what the breakeven headcount is?

Informed that the nursery needs to be full from Day 1 with 26 children in the mornings. There would be the teacher and TA. This would not pay the overheads but could just break even and school paid for initial loss including another TA.

Pointed that with the three point entry in a year the nursery needs an intake of 24, 25 or 26 from the start of the year, but only had 13 on list for this year. Historically the nursery had 26 from the start of the year. For example Tidworth has 48 on its waiting list all the time.

- n) Asked if the decision were to close it down, Sunbeams expanded and there was an increase in demand would it be possible to re-found the nursery?

MP and SC agreed that technically it would be able to re-open, but SC pointed out that she had no known it to happen before.

4. Process and Timetable

Everyone was invited to complete the pro forma response form to give their vote and comments. A note had been put in the school newsletter encouraging people to reply. A note will be placed again before the closing date. The website address was also included for those who wanted to respond online.

4.1 Timetable:

09. 01. 13 Start of consultation period on proposals.
6 weeks (not including school holidays)

23.01.13 at 6.00 pm Public meeting at the school

20.02.13 at 12.00 noon Close of consultation period.

28.02.13 (time span 28th Feb – 19 March) Report and recommendation to be submitted to Wiltshire Council on results of consultation.

Wiltshire Council's Lead Member for Children's Services will consider the consultation results and agree to go to statutory notice period of 6 weeks (holiday periods can be included)

Political lock-down 19th March-3 May

Statutory notice period during this period.

19. 03.12 to 02.05.13

If approved by the Lead Member for Children's Services (Lionel Grundy) prior to political lockdown, statutory notice of proposals published for 6 week period; during which formal representations and objections can be made.

21.05.13

If required, close of statutory publication. Wiltshire Council will then consider the publication results and make a decision on whether to implement the proposal

18.06.13 OR 23.07.13

Cabinet consider decision.

23.07.13

Only if approved by Wiltshire Council, implementation of the proposal for closure of the maintained Nursery.

4.2 Report

The School Report will include

- i. A list of the people who have been consulted:
 - Parents of pupils currently attending the maintained Nursery at the school.
 - Parents of children enrolled to join the Nursery in September 2013.
 - Parents of other children at the school.
 - Teachers and other staff at the school
 - Diocese of Salisbury – Ms Joy Tubbs.
 - The Local Wiltshire Councillor - Councillor Chuck Berry and Wiltshire Council's Lead Member for Children's Services - Councillor Lionel Grundy OBE.
 - The Local MP – Mr James Gray.
 - The County Secretaries of the relevant trade unions and professional associations.
 - Heads and Chairs of Governors of cluster primary schools.
 - Manager and Committee Chair of the voluntary pre-school on site (Sunbeams)
 - Owners or manager of other pre-schools or nurseries within Calne town.
 - Calne Town Council
- ii. Minutes of this meeting.
- iii. Views of the people who were consulted.
- iv. A statement confirming that all statutory requirements for the consultation have been complied with.
- v. Copies of the consultation document (and any other consultation documents) and details of how they were made available. This will include the website.

The report will be considered by the Council's Lead Member for Children's Services who will decide whether or not to publish a public notice proposing closure of the maintained nursery. If this goes ahead, there will then be a six week period for formal representations to be made. If there are objections to the public notice the matter will be considered and determined by the Cabinet of the Council.

AD drew the meeting to a close at 18:40 and thanked to you to everyone for coming out in the bad weather.

Signature of Chair: Date: