

Burnt Yates Church of England Primary School
Parents Forum
Meeting Minutes

6 December 2017

I. Call to order

Jean Tither ('JT'), Chair of Governors for Burnt Yates Church of England Primary School ('BY') called to order the meeting of the Parents' Forum at 6.30pm on 6 December 2017 at BY.

II. Roll call

Jean Tither introduced those in attendance:

Andy Lancashire ('AL') Principal Advisor for Primary Education, NYCC

Steven Holmes ('SH') School Improvement Partner

John Lee ('JL') NYCC Strategic Planning Officer

Andrew Dixon ('AD') NYCC Head of Strategic Planning

Fiona Beavers ('FB') Deputy Diocesan Director of Education

III. Introduction – Andy Lancashire and Steven Holmes

AL noted that he appreciated it was a very difficult time for the School and he recognized the gravity of feelings within the room. The decision to close the School was not one that had been taken lightly. AL explained that as Local Officers of the Government they were bound to implement processes set by those at a higher level.

IV. School's Current Position – Andy Lancashire and Steven Holmes

SH discussed the performance of the School. BY had received support in Math's teaching from Michelle Hattersley. BY had received support for EYFS. BY had recently undergone a full safeguarding audit and the team were very impressed with the improvement. There are lots of areas which strong improvements had been made, including age-related expectation with the provision of education matching the Children's ability. Presently the School and the teaching outcomes would be deemed to be 'Requiring Improvement'. SH noted there is a strong improvement plan and the overall aim would be to move to 'Good' but progress is

difficult given the issues facing BY. Regarding the Governors, Stephen Bootham had visited BY and provided support to the Governing Body especially about holding Leaders to account.

V. Diocese Update – Fiona Beevers

FB provided an update from the Diocese. She had spoken with the Regional Schools Commissioner ('RSC') both via email and in a recent face-to-face meeting. FB noted that given the focus of the meeting the RSC and Philippa James both felt that it was not appropriate to attend the meeting as their remit is to support the Schools on converting to an Academy, which is now no longer relevant to BY. FB noted that all options had been pursued and acknowledged the difficulty of the situation. FB was disappointed that amalgamation had not worked out, FB noted that she could see the potential however the finances did not stack up even when revisited. FB stressed it was both frustrating and disappointing. FB explained that after speaking with the Chair of Governors at Ripley, there was not any mileage in revisiting the proposed amalgamation and she was very sorry about that.

VI. Questions/Discussion from Parents:

(1) **Parent Question: Please can you provide detail on the Finances?**

AL explained that the Budget was set at County Hall. In DD the Sponsor would consider this. Ripley had considered this in their DD. The Financial Model was based on a 3-year plan – looking at the School objectively. JL to provide further detail later in the meeting.

(2) **Parent Question: Are there a lot of Schools in deficit?**

AL explained there are several Schools struggling with deficits. Smaller Schools are suffering particularly. There will be changes because of the funding formula.

(3) **Parent Question: Is there no scope for the Council to consider the prospects of the School/Local Area and revisit the decision?**

Parent noted that BY was on a main thoroughfare to Harrogate. The decision not to amalgamate which had resulted in the impending closure of the School had ultimately been taken locally by the Governing Body and not against a broader strategic view. AL noted that he did not disagree with Parent and that it was the policy of Government to empower the Governing Bodies of local Schools. Parent noted that it seemed unbelievable that decisions of such magnitude could rest with a group of

Volunteers. AL agreed noting that this was how the position stood now, and that he was duty bound to follow the strategic approach set by the Secretary of State and the Government.

(4) Parent challenged and asked could the Council challenge such bodies?

AL noted that they can, and they do. Parent requested that AL/Team used BY to challenge Government and Secretary of State on the Policies that had lead to closure of School. AL explained that they do present on behalf of Rural communities, but they are limited in the challenge they can make. AL explained that from the point of BY when it received the poor Ofsted judgement it became locked in a process.

(5) Trustee challenged on Financial Viability – how can BY pay large sums of money for an outdoor toilet block, yet be running at a deficit?

Governor highlighted there was a difference between the on-going spend and that for one-off capital projects such as the toilet block.

FB noted that BY made the decisions about the capital spend. The spend on this was a one-off and was determined by the capital budget of BY. The intention was for the toilet block to be used as part of the development for the outside space. Governor explained that he did not agree with the spend, but that if they had not spent the money, the budget would have disappeared. Governor further noted that in his experience, generating an income from outdoor classroom can prove challenging.

(6) Parent Question – how can Parent get the information on the Financials to make an informed choice about the next school for their Child?

AD noted that the OFSTED judgement should be considered. AD noted that Parents can always speak with the Governing Body to seek reassurance on the stability of a School.

(7) Parent Question – how can Parents seek reassurance from a Governing body when the Governors of BY did not know the issue BY was facing?

Parent further noted that Leaders of BY did not appear to know the limitations that BY was facing. Governor explained that even 3 years ago it was clear that the School was not financially viable. Governor noted that it would take 42 children on the role for the BY to break even. Governor noted however, aside from the Financial performance, BY had been

misled by overly positive reports on BY performance. AL noted that he did not disagree with this, but unfortunately as soon as BY entered special measures, the process of academization began.

(8) Parent Question – how can the Council be trusted given the history of the BY?

AL noted that they had worked hard over the past 12 months. AL stressed there was no agenda to seek closure, nor any conspiracy theory. Because of BY being entered into special measures, BY was locked into a system. They had exhausted the Academy option.

(9) Parent Question – Was the route of an Academy ever a viable option?

Parent noted how at a Parent Forum meeting in Summer, it was noted that a School would need upwards of 95 units (children) to be considered viable by an Academy. Therefore, the Parents had been given false hope from January as BY as a stand-alone school could never be academized. AL noted that they had spent 7 months pursuing the Academy route and it had only recently transpired that the RSC would consider Amalgamation as a possible solution late in Summer. Parent noted it was frustrating, as if this position had been known 18 months' ago, the situation facing BY could have been different. Parent stressed the potentially devastating effect of the School closure on the local community. Parent further noted their frustration with how the process had been run, and that it was incredulous that no-one was accepting that errors had been made. Parent further asked why AL could not challenge the process facing BY, if mistakes had been made, why are the team not trying to fix it.

(10) Parent Question – Are Academies a realistic solution for rural schools?

FB noted that they had challenged this and made representations to Philippa James.

VII. Consultation Process – Andrew Dixon

AD moved on to discuss the consultation process. AD explained that the consultation process would take place in January. The Officers and Members would meet first. They can be lobbied, but AD would be recommending to the Board that BY should be closed due to the current Pupil numbers and the financial deficit. Even if the Council decided to keep BY open, evidence would have to be provided as to how the financial

situation could be improved. A plan would have to be presented to demonstrate the future sustainability of BY. Parent summarized their view noting that AD/AL in their capacity as Employees of the County Council cannot see how the situation can be improved and therefore the recommendation would be for closure. Parent further noted that at the meeting in January 2017, the room was full of committed Parents who wanted BY to stay open. The fact that there had been no transparency throughout the past 12 months, had led to the reduction in Pupil numbers and that the support offered by the Council had come too late in the day.

VIII. Further Questions from the Parents

- (1) **Parent Question – Can the names of the Council Members be provided?**

AD explained that Cabinet Members would make the decision. The Public consultation meeting would be chaired by Patrick Mulligan.

- (2) **Parent Question – Why don't NYCC use BY to make a stand against the Academy order process?**

Parent further noted that there will be several Schools in the local area that are struggling and that unless action is taken several other Schools will face the same predicament.

- (3) **AL Comment**

AL discussed the consultation process. He noted that there would be the opportunity to lobby councilors. AL noted that even if the NYCC did agree to keep the School open, then the Secretary of State could still instruct BY to close. That had not happened before, and would represent uncharted territory.

IX. Projections for Future Demand and Financial Modelling from Due Diligence – John Lee and Andrew Dixon

JL moved to discuss the future demand and alternative Schools that could be provided within a 5-mile radius. JL discussed the spreadsheets that were circulated to Parents. JL noted that applications would be dealt with on an individual basis. JL encouraged any affected parents to discuss with the Admissions team at NYCC.

JL explained that the future pupil numbers were based on 1 new pupil for every 4 new houses built.

JL discussed the financial model of the proposed amalgamation with Ripley as circulated to the Parents at the meeting. JL explained that this was built on the expectation that pupil numbers would stay stable during the 3 years of the model. Funding would be delegated from the Local Authority, but the benefit of funding would be capped. The staffing model was based on 2 classes operating in each site with 5 FTE plus 4 assistants. JL highlighted the financial model forecasted a deficit arising in future years and therefore was unsustainable.

X. Further Questions from the Parents

- (1) Parent Question – it was noted that Pupil numbers are very fluid and that the models of Pupil numbers were very dependent upon the Leadership team in place at that time.**

JL noted and agreed.

- (2) Parent Question – is it reasonable to assume that 5 miles is a realistic radius?**

Parent further noted that they have two children at BY, one in Year 1 and one in Year 3. They are currently unable to find an appropriate School for both Children.

AD noted that the best approach would be to approach the Admissions Office for guidance on this.

- (3) Parent Question – How can NYCC support Parents now at this time?**

Parent challenged AD and asked how Parents can be supported? Will the admissions team consider the special circumstances? AD noted that

- (4) Parent Question – why doesn't the model consider any future growth in pupil numbers given the housing developments that are planned in nearby communities?**

Parent noted that they had researched the requirements placed on Housing Developers when building in a Community. Parent noted that they had spoken to the Developers for the site within a local village and that she had been advised that they expected to contribute c.£500k to the School in the area. Parent asked why the Council could not use that funding in a strategic way to support rural schools in the area.

AD explained that under this process, it was the 'Named School' which received all the funding for capital purposes and the funds were not able to be distributed elsewhere.

Parent asked was Hampsthwaite land-locked?

SH noted there was scope for Hampsthwaite to be developed further.

JL noted that the funding depended upon the exact terms of the s106 agreement.

XI. Parents' Campaign – Michelle Irving ('MI')

MI read the prepared statement from the Parents.

XII. Closing Questions/Remarks

(1) Parent Question – are there any other Academies that can be approached?

Parent referred to the 'two or three' Academies that were reference in January 2017 meeting. FB noted that the second Academy was now up and running (as of September 2017) and therefore they could now be approached. FB agreed to approach the second Academy to see if there was any scope for them to consider BY

(2) Parent Question – what lessons will be learnt from BY closure?

Parent noted that if BY does close, the relevant Officers should review the history and consequential events to see if any learnings can be taken to avoid the same situation happening again to another School in the area. Failure to do so, could lead to the sense (rightly or wrongly) that there was a lack of support for Rural Schools which could present itself as a possible hidden agenda.

AL noted and agreed to consider this and revert to the Parents in writing on this point.

XIII. Adjournment

Jean Tither ('JT') adjourned the meeting at 8.20pm.

Minutes submitted by: Jane Smith