



Mike Wood MP

Member of Parliament for Batley and Spen

Primary Schools for the Future

RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON PRIMARY RE-ORGANISATION

Introduction and summary

Having assessed the council's proposals, spoken with key people in some of the schools, looked at the detailed pupil forecasts and spoken with Kirklees education department officers I have a number of initial observations.

- The options presented in all cases are lacking in detail
- There are insufficient options presented for consultation in all cases
- The pupil forecast figures are unreliable and do not reflect any joined up relationship with housebuilding targets across Kirklees
- The financial implications/costings are described by Kirklees as 'loose'
- Kirklees is resistant to anything other than whole class entry arrangements
- Not enough regard has been paid whatsoever to existing identity or the principles of safeguarding and enhancing sustainable communities
- In fact, this process is seen by some as actively fermenting community discord

Birkenshaw and East Bierley

Of the three options, the status quo proposal (Option 1) is the only one I could support as it is the only one that proposes keeping the school at East Bierley open. However, it is my view that Kirklees should have produced a fourth option. This option would be a version of existing Option 3. I have drafted an Option 4 for you to consider. In essence this is to enlarge East Bierley and relocate Birkenshaw First to the Birkenshaw Middle site. Neither school closes. I am concerned about the negative impact closure of East Bierley First would have on the village as a whole.

Hightown

As with the East Bierley proposals, it is my view that Kirklees should have presented an additional option – in this case one that represented the status quo. There must be some serious consideration given to keeping both schools open, one way or another. Parental preference is an important and influential factor in Hightown. Presenting options that do not acknowledge this issue or seek to mitigate the affects it could have is far from ideal.

Cleckheaton

The issue about whether Heaton Avenue or St Luke's should be closed is divisive and unsatisfactory. The suggestion that Heaton Avenue moves to the West End site and St Luke's moves to the Hartshead Moor site is far and away the most sensible option put forward and one I would support. It means the excellent work being done in Cleckheaton schools can continue and would mean we would keep four schools rather than reducing to three. While my priority is to keep both schools open, if that can be achieved with tailor-made admission arrangements then I am more than happy to support that.

I hope these suggestions are helpful and given serious consideration.

Mike Wood MP

June 29 2009

Constituency office

9 Cross Crown Street
Cleckheaton
BD19 3HW

Tel: 01274 335233
Fax: 01274 335235
woodm@parliament.uk
www.mikewood.org.uk

Parliamentary office

House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA



The UK's first
Fairtrade constituency

Birkenshaw and East Bierley

OPTION 4 (MW) - Develop East Bierley First building as a 1-class entry primary school. Build a 2-class entry primary on Birkenshaw Middle site. Birkenshaw First relocated and building closed.

1-class entry, 5-11 CE (VC) primary school on the East Bierley CE First School site. Admission number of 30 pupils per year. 210 pupils.

2-class entry, 5-11 CE (C) primary school with nursery on the Birkenshaw Middle School site. Admission number of 60 pupils per year. 420 pupils plus nursery.

PRIORITY ADMISSION AREA – As Option 3

Advantages

- This arrangement better matches the school sizes and locations of the distribution of the pupils in the Birkenshaw-East Bierley area, with 5-11 primary schools serving the northern and southern parts of the area.
- The majority of pupils would be in a brand new building with excellent fit for purpose facilities.
- This would represent good value for money and provide a good investment for the future.
- The new school on the middle school site would have the potential to be further developed and extended should that ever become necessary.
- The existing East Bierley school would be enlarged to create a 5-11 all-through school and the Birkenshaw First school would be relocated to a more sustainable site and enlarged to create a 5-11 all-through school.
- Land is available adjacent to East Bierley to allow extending provision.
- Both distinct villages retain a school of their own and the principles of maintaining sustainable communities will be observed.
- Resolves the potential conflict caused by the PAA in option 3 whereby children living literally across the road and near Birkenshaw First would be expected to travel to Birkenshaw Middle.

Disadvantages

- East Bierley is a small site with small classrooms and limited internal and external spaces. These spaces would be more restricted if the building was enlarged to 210 places. **However, this could be offset through use of adjacent land.**
- Kirklees would maintain that East Bierley provision would not represent a good value for money investment. **No reasoning is given and costing of formal proposals is described as 'loose'**. It is therefore reasonable to discount financial considerations at this stage.

Potential changes to PAAs

- The option necessitates changes to the current PAAs serving both schools.
- The migration of pupils to the replacement sites and the change to Admission Areas should be agreed through further consultation with schools and parents.

Timeline

- Year 5 pupils would be retained in the first schools from September 2011 and they would remain until the end of Year 6 in 2013.

Outline of construction works

- The new school building on the Birkenshaw Middle site would be constructed first.
- Pupils from Birkenshaw First would be re-located to the new building at Birkenshaw Middle while East Bierley pupils moved to Birkenshaw First for enlargement works at East Bierley.
- Pupils would move back to East Bierley once works were completed.

Implications for East Bierley village

East Bierley is a distinct community unlike any other facing changes under the present consultation. The presence of the school within the village is, in my view, a vital component in maintaining and sustaining this distinct community. It is vital in my view that for the village to continue to exist that the school must remain open.

It is no exaggeration of the threat to the village to say that should the school close the nursery would close. This is held in the church hall and is one of its primary sources of income. Without it the church hall could be forced to close and it would not be long before the church itself was also then under threat of closure. This is something that is of great concern to people in the village and is something that I share. This follows closely on the heels of the post office's closure.

It is essential the school remains open if the village is to continue to exist as something more than a collection of houses along side the road. However important these issues are, it is my contention that the primary arguments for keeping the school open are educational.

Implications for Birkenshaw village

I am not proposing Birkenshaw loses its First school. I am suggesting it be relocated and enlarged. I do not consider that this would be of detriment to the life of the village in the same way as would be the case for East Bierley. In fact, a new larger and purpose built school on a less constrained site would be a distinct benefit in my view.

The offer of a village high school to Birkenshaw parents remains a contentious issue. But as parents in Birkenshaw already send their children out of the village for secondary education continuing to do so would represent the status quo and would not represent a reduction or loss in provision. Ring fencing the middle school site for the prospect of secondary school provision to the detriment of established need for primary provision is unrealistic and would mean the certain closure of East Bierley school.

Hightown

OPTION 3 (MW) - Retaining a school on the sites of both Hightown School and High Bank School. Kirklees should consider an option that would provide either:

- a. **Two schools on the existing sites to continue to run autonomously.**
- b. **One school located on the two sites but with a shared, integrated management structure**

The consultation from both Hightown schools will show that the overwhelming feeling will be for a school on both sites, perhaps more a vote for the status quo. This could be achieved in a number of ways. What is important is that parents in Hightown continue to be able to choose whether to send their children to High Bank or Hightown. This is not an option presented by Kirklees but should have been. It would require extension of both schools but doing this should require less overall capital spend than creating a new school on the Second Avenue site.

The education department acknowledges the divisions that exist in parental preference in Hightown as a whole. The proposals presented do not reflect the existence of this division. Educationally and socially both schools at present provide excellent and valuable services to their local communities. This should not be lost.

Although Kirklees is resistant to establishing part-class entry arrangements for schools, if it could be convinced that the unique situation in Hightown requires a bespoke solution, split-class entry could be the solution. The inherent problem with Kirklees's proposals is that the outcome would create a one class entry school. Even if projected pupil numbers are taken at face value, this will leave a surplus of children with no school in Hightown to attend. This is excluding the small number of parents who live in the admission area but whom opt to send their children to other schools, such as Headlands. If however we accept that the figures are untrustworthy and liable to increase or even remain at present levels, then there could be a need for a 2-class entry provision in the village. Two sites would be better prepared to deal with this.

These proposed admission arrangements could create division beyond the existing issue of preference as to where the school is sited and the recurring geographic bias that comes into play in parental preference.

Advantages

- An arrangement such as this would satisfy parental preference and better serve the distribution of pupils in the Hightown area.
- It would address the patterns of parental preference and avoid the risk of either proposed site become unsustainable in the future, and for this reason it would represent good value for money and provide a good investment for the future
- Both existing school sites could be extended.
- Sharing facilities will reduce the cost compared with a new build and allow both schools to benefit from existing restrictions in access to facilities.
- Distinct communities within Hightown would retain a school of their own and the principle of maintaining sustainable communities would be observed.
- There is more scope to accommodate future increases in demand for places.

Disadvantages

- Kirklees will say that the sites are restrictive, particularly High Bank. **But this is not the case and there is adjacent land at High Bank available.**
- Kirklees would argue that the organisation over two sites and improvements at two sites would not represent a good value for money. **This would need to be thoroughly explored.**
- Kirklees is against creating non whole class entry arrangements – **although the existing arrangements are not whole classes.**

Cleckheaton

Maintaining four primary schools in Cleckheaton rather than reducing to three, keeping both Heaton Avenue and St Luke's open

This would mean that there would be 60 church places and 60 community places in Cleckheaton. Under Kirklees's proposals, closing St Luke's would lead to the same split of places, while closing Heaton Avenue would mean a split of 90 church places to 30 community places.

However, the fine detail of the admission arrangements needs scrutiny – particularly in respect of Heaton Avenue. I would support Heaton Avenue's submission including the proposal to increase to a 1.5 class entry school while ever this does not affect the viability of keeping other schools, notably St Luke's, open. Such an increase at Heaton Avenue would mean a higher proportion of community places in Cleckheaton.

The proposal that Heaton Avenue move to the West End site and St Luke's move to a new site, such as the former Hartshead Moor school site is one that I would support.

This would also more closely represent the status quo – and considering the continuing excellence of Cleckheaton schools, maintaining the status quo has to be a serious consideration.

Advantages

- Allows for smaller primary schools and for these excellent schools that are performing well to continue doing so.
- Resolves the ill feeling generated in the community by the proposals.
- Schools are sustainable.
- Brings the derelict Hartshead Moor site back into use.
- There is existing political and community support for these proposals.

Disadvantages

- Kirklees may argue that these plans do not represent value for money and that the Hartshead Moor site is too small.

Important note

The issue of transition arrangements is an over-complicated and unsatisfactory minefield. Some pupils reportedly face moving schools up to four times on their journey to secondary school. These arrangements need urgent attention from the education department and a plan needs to be published as soon as possible. This will benefit First school pupils as well as Middle school pupils.