

## DEPUTATION FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Mr P Hendrick (Spokesperson)

### **The Case against the Merger of St. Luke's Infants with St. Luke's Junior School**

#### **1. 109 Votes against the Merger only 11 votes for...**

This is a very clear vote against. If the Council listen to there own consultation this merger should go no further. Add to this the opposition from the Governing Body of the Infant School and over 300 signatures on the petition including Des Turner MP then it is clear there is no appetite for merger.

This is not an academic argument about the merits of infant/junior vs through primary schools. This is a real situation involving real schools and real children who are receiving a really excellent education in the existing schools.

The Governing Body of the Infant School disagrees with the proposal on the basis of increased size, potential change of ethos and the loss of phase specialism.

#### **2. The Council have not proved there is any Significant Educational Benefit from a Merger**

The Council have not made any convincing case or supplied any evidence that the merger will improve standards or educational performance . As parents the only evidence we have are the current OFSTED assessment s (see Appendix 1 and Appendix 2). In June 2002 Ofsted Awarded St Luke's Infants an OUTSTANDING Grade and the Junior School a GOOD grade. Please take the time to read the OFSTED reports.This tells us if it isn't broken don't try to fix it.

#### **3. Transition - We feel the problem of transition between the schools has been overstated. OFSTED noted "They (pupils) leave the school with exceedingly good skills in numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology, balanced with excellent personal skills. They are very well prepared for the next stage in their education and later life."**

There are always transitional teething problems between Infants and Juniors. However transitions if effectively managed, are important rites of passage. Transitions can it easy to see ways in which this could be achieved without the huge risks of disruption caused by major strategic change. For instance, a dedicated link teacher in each school. Good communication rather than structural change is needed. Previous administrations have pursued mergers in the face of similar parental objections, the adjudicator has rejected these mergers on the grounds that the case for educational merit has not been made. We firmly believe that this is the likely outcome in this case.

For these reasons we strongly believe that St. Luke's Infants and Juniors should stay as two separate schools. Please celebrate the fantastic success of these two schools and allow them to continue to develop. Please don't merge the schools.

#### **4. Loss of Specialist focus at the Infant School - The two schools already function in a partnership providing excellent educational opportunities for the children who progress through them. In the Infants two generations of head teacher have been able to resolutely**

focus on early years practice, leading to a whole school team delivering excellent early years teaching and learning, rated “outstanding” in all area by Ofsted. A similar situation exists in the Juniors where focus on the specific needs of the age group also produces superb teaching and learning.

The 3 extracts below give an indication of the very special ethos at the Infant School.

A good example of this is the peer massage sessions. Pupils said of a massage sessions, ‘It was really good, all the way through it made me feel really relaxed’; ‘I liked the thunder movement best, it was just like the real thunder we had last night’; ‘I liked the cat move she made on my back, it felt real and made me feel relaxed’. This is just one example of why care, guidance and support are outstanding.

In the Ofsted Report. The support that these pupils get is exemplary. Initiatives such as WWO (working with others) and SEAL (social and emotional learning), and the excellent school curriculum, including its personal, social and health education programme, are helping all pupils to learn better, improve their self confidence and increase their ability to work independently as well as in a team.

In the Ofsted Report. One parent noted, ‘When my child has needed help the head teacher has shown the extent of her experience and empathy with the five-year-old mind’. OFSTED REPORT 2007 Unique Reference Number 114375 Brighton and Hove.

A merger will inevitably dilute this specialism.

5. **The new school will be too big** - The Infants have 246 children on roll and the Juniors 355. Combining the two schools will mean a primary school of approximately 600, making it the biggest in Brighton. The National Average size for Primary schools is 239 Pupils. A number of studies show that children do better in smaller institutions. A view supported by Ofsted. Until very recently, this was reflected in Brighton and Hove City Council policy. The size of the infants allows the Head to be a regular visitor to the classrooms. He knows every child in his school personally and engages with all the children. Nationally most Infants and Juniors combine when the numbers are very low. A merger in this case would produce a school that was too large.
6. **At Least Two Years of Disruption** - The disruption caused to both schools will be immense. It has been long accepted that mergers of organisations cause major disruption and reduced performance for at least 2 years. Such disruption still occurs even when change is well planned and supported with additional resources. In the case of St Luke's, this planning has not taken place. The disruption must effect the education of the children and the morale of the teaching staff who will have the burden of making changes whilst trying to carry out there existing workload. Standards must surely be in danger of slipping during this time.
7. **Unanswered questions from the Consultancy Process** - Parents have been given no information on the proposed management structure of the merged school. We do not know who the new head will be. We don't know what the budget will be. We don't know what the curriculum will be. Surely a detailed feasibility study would need to be carried out BEFORE merger not after. At the public meeting the council stated that monies could be made available from the Primary Capital fund. The current financial crisis will surely impact on all

areas of local government. In the current climate it seems risky to decide to merge without having a committed budget. Until these issues are addressed it would be reckless to proceed.

8. **86 Term Days An Unrealistic timetable** - On the Council's current timetable, the decision to merge will be made on March 2nd 2009. The newly merged school would open on Sept 1st 2009. That leaves just 86 school term days in 2009 to organise planning, budgets, curriculum, building works, staff contracts all whilst trying to maintain the already high standards. Surely this is not possible. The loss of focus, the effect of the extra workload on the children's and staff morale has been grossly underestimated. It should be noted that neither head at the Infant or Junior School have experience of project managing such a complex process.
9. **Problems with the Listed Building** - Ofsted noted in its report that the listed status of the building places restrictions on development (see below).

This work is currently on hold owing to the extensive building repairs to the junior school and restrictions placed on the site because the building is listed. The building is in a constant state of disrepair and raises many unexpected building concerns, which has an unpredictable impact on the budget and outdoor education provision for Early Years pupils. OFSTED REPORT 2007 Unique Reference Number 114375 Brighton and Hove.

The council have stated...

To support the creation of a new all through primary school there will be some building adaptations using the Primary Capital Programme with the intention of providing accommodation to better fit the needs of current teaching and learning and the delivery of a broad and balanced curriculum. Brighton and Hove Council Consultation document Sept 2008

It has taken years to make relatively minor alterations to the infant school to open up the classrooms. The parents have been given no detail on what these alterations might be. Given the complex nature of the 'Listed' building the adaptations that might be needed to improve the building in merged school of 600 pupils could take years. Surely more detail is needed on this question BEFORE merger not AFTER.

## **SUMMARY**

**St Luke's Infants and Juniors are state schools they are great schools. Ofsted think so too. The council must take some credit for this success alongside the staff and pupils for letting them get on with their job without unnecessary change. Let's celebrate and learn from the success of these schools. Why risk all this for some uncertain and unproven gains.**

