

APPENDIX F

BOSTON ST BEDE'S PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING

20 JANUARY 2011 AT ST BEDE'S CATHOLIC SCIENCE COLLEGE

PANEL MEMBERS: Paul Holmes (LCC) (Chairman)
Andy Breckon (CfBT)
Ian Wright (Chair of IEB at St Bede's)
Adrian Reed (Executive Headteacher of BWSF)
Steve Gamble (School Admissions)

Approximately 110 parents and other members of the public were in attendance.

Paul Holmes introduced the members of the panel and briefly explained that this meeting is part of the consultation process on the proposal to close St Bede's School and expand Haven High giving members of the public opportunity to find out more about the proposal and express their views.

The following is a record of the questions and answers at the meeting.

Q Is the school going to close in September? If the school closes will all the children go to Haven High?

A No, the decision has not been taken to close the school; this is what we are consulting on now. The Headteacher intends to honour parents' choices so that current pupils at St Bede's will be able to see out their time at school at the St Bede's site. The St Bede's site will become a part of the federation which includes Haven High.

Q The perception is that this is a "done deal" and has been for a long time. The Diocese has "sold us down the river". I don't argue that something had to be done to meet government floor targets but why has there been no consultation with parents and stakeholders? We have had nothing from the IEB – there was a meeting in July when the message from the public was "aren't there any alternatives to merging with Haven High?" There is no-one here from the Diocese to answer questions because they were given too short notice to attend. We have been told that all parents have been notified but many say they have not received the consultation letter. We were promised a meeting after the summer holidays but this has not happened. This meeting has not been adequately publicised. Parishioners and Governors who have made financial contributions to St Bede's have not been notified. Why have all these stakeholders not been included?

A We have notified all the interested parties required by legislation and many more. Over 2000 consultation letters were sent out and we have done our best to contact the relevant stakeholders and publicise this meeting and ensure an appropriate set of people were in attendance.

Q Why has there been no consultation with parents before this? There is no-one here from the Diocese to answer questions.

A If there are any questions that need answers from the Diocese we will send them to the Diocese and publish their responses. It would be unhelpful to start consultation without any real issues to consider, there was little that we could consult on. Political changes at central government left us unable to make clear decisions about the school until after the County Council's Scrutiny meeting in December.

Q Parents should have been told to enable us to make informed decisions. We had a meeting in July and you knew that this closure was in the pipeline and didn't tell us. If I had known about the possibility of closure I would not have sent my child here.

A At July's meeting, it was made very clear that St Bede's in its current form would be difficult to maintain. Possibilities were considered then so that parents were aware of the issues facing the school. The reason why we are here today is that in 2008 this school had the 2nd worst results in the country and the government required a rapid solution. The Diocese tried to find a catholic partner but was unable to do so. The Diocese then sought a church solution ie a partnership with a local church school but was unable to do this. The LA was not part of these discussions but then moved forward with the BSF proposal under which funds would have been allocated to St Bede's and Haven High. However, following the change of government, the BSF funding was stopped. The government requires action to be taken where a school's results are below the floor standards. We have to find a solution or the government will impose a solution without consultation. This is why we are here tonight to hear your views.

Q Were any approaches made to other schools eg The Giles, Kirton Middlecott or Thomas Cowley in Donington – these might have been more acceptable to parents than Haven High

A A list of potential schools was provided by the government and all options were considered.

Q Were William Lovell and The Giles approached? Haven High is hardly above St Bede's in the league tables. In September 2009 it was discussed by a member of the Catholic Church what would happen to the buildings when the school closes and where the finance would go. The wording on the powerpoint slide proves that St Bede's is closing to enable the expansion of Haven High.

A We have no knowledge of the 2009 discussions you have mentioned. The wording on the powerpoint slide should not be interpreted in this way. Haven High is only expanding because we will need somewhere for the children to go if St Bede's closes.

Q We can accept that action is required because of the school results but didn't St Bede's do better than Haven High this year?

A There are a variety of ways of measuring school results, but the Headteacher did not believe that this was the case.

Q What were the percentages under the 5A*-C including English and maths measure?

A 20% last year, 26% the year before and 7% the year before that. The Headteacher confirmed that the curriculum will be designed to meet the needs of the children and not incorporate qualifications just to move up league tables. The curriculum will meet the needs of all the children by including a range of routes ie academic, vocational and practical.

Q My daughter is due to start in Year 7 in September, what will you do with this intake, will you use this site?

A We must focus on the consultation of the closure of St Bede's school. We cannot answer questions about what is going to happen as this would be prejudging the consultation. If the decision is taken to close the school we will consult with students, parents and the community about how best to meet the needs of the students and make best use of the facilities on both sites. St Bede's is in soft federation with 3 other schools; each school still has its own name and identity but is part of a family of schools working together giving the best opportunities and facilities for the children.

Q Mr Reed is a fantastic headteacher but how many schools can this federation take on? Will the other schools suffer by taking on another school?

A Each time a school has joined the federation it has been as a result of the school asking to join a successful partnership. No one school has all the expertise by itself. By working together we all benefit. Staniland was in special measures before it joined the federation but is now out of special measures. Carlton Road had no headteacher 5 years ago and had the lowest standards in town. Now it is one of the highest performing primary schools in Boston, 5th in Lincolnshire and in the top 2½ % nationally.

Q St Bede's is a small school. Is Haven High still subject to LCC behaviour improvement policy because of bullying etc. How can such a school take on another school?

A In 2005 the LA started working with the government on behaviour improvement programs in a cluster of areas (Boston, Grantham, Spalding) to improve standards of behaviour and attendance. The program no longer exists, but schools were able to invest in pastoral care and behaviour and attendance which have both improved so that the program is no longer required. In a recent Ofsted inspection Haven High was found to be a good school with outstanding features. Behaviour and attendance were judged to be good and leadership and management outstanding. The behaviour improvement program has had the intended results.

Q Will we be utilising skills of the good staff at St Bede's and will they keep their jobs?

A We have had a meeting with the staff today and explained the process. LCC has a clear redeployment policy and everything possible will be done to ensure that everyone has a job to go to.

Q Schools improve by working together. St Bede's has improved whilst being part of the federation; we are still improving why not leave us alone to continue to improve?

A The LA has been instructed by the government to provide a structural solution. We have to either close or merge the school if it does not meet the floor standard of 35% from 2011. If we stand back the government will impose a solution without any consultation. We are trying to consult with the diocese and community to find a solution. The diocese does support this proposal. We do not have the option to leave things as they are.

Q The government can't expect secondary schools to compete with grammar schools?

A The leader of the council has expressed this view to the government but the floor standards remain for all secondary schools, regardless of designation.

Q My daughter attends Haven High. I didn't want her to go to St Bede's. She is doing well and I am full of praise for Haven High. I will remove her from the school if this proposal goes ahead. The poor results at St Bede's must reflect on the teaching staff. What is the percentage of children at St Bede's who do not have English as their first language?

A St Bede's is a small school and has struggled to appoint qualified teachers in a full range of subjects. There are many very talented members of staff at St Bede's who are working very hard under challenging circumstances. I am sorry you would consider moving your child but we will continue to appoint the best teachers to ensure the best education for all the children. Haven High offers a wide curriculum choice which St Bede's cannot and if this proposal goes ahead the skills and expertise will be available to the children at both sites. The challenges facing schools who teach children not having English as a first language affects many schools in the Boston area. For St Bede's, the actual number of children is not large and the percentage figure is only high because it is a small school. Our aim is that all children whatever their nationality will get the best education we can provide.

Q I understand the restricted curriculum is one of the reasons for closing the school. My daughter is in the gifted and talented program at St Bede's. Will that group work with the fast track children at Haven High?

A There is a wide range of curriculum choices and education pathways at Haven High and if this proposal goes ahead we will ensure that this is available to all students whatever site they study at, and we will speak to parents about the choices available.

Q We understand there have been difficulties in appointing staff. What have the diocese and the LCC done to help?

A Staff recruitment is a challenge across Lincolnshire. The IEB has been in place for 2 years and has had significant support from CfBT e.g. consultants to ensure quality of education, upskilling staff on the job and many thousands of pounds have been invested in the school.

Q We are grateful for what CfBT have done but what have the diocese done. Edward Hayes recruited a headteacher on a 3 year contract but he only lasted half a term?

A The diocese would be in a better position to answer this question. I believe the diocese felt he was potentially a good candidate but then was found to be probably not the best person for the job. We will ask the diocese to respond to this.

Q (i) This is a done deal. LCC has a track record of deceiving parents as happened to the parents at Boston Grammar School when lies were told to us about funding applied for and answers have not been provided to FOI requests.

A We put in bids for BSF funding on 4 occasions, with each application being updated and were successful with our 4th bid. In submitting our bids we were doing our utmost to obtain funding for schools in Lincolnshire. Unfortunately the change of government meant that the BSF program was cut. If there had not been a change of government we would have received approximately £80 million to spend on 5 schools in Lincolnshire, 2 of which would have been in Boston.

(ii) Why did you not give me this information under the FOI request?

A The figures were published on the DfE website and the names of the schools were in the public domain so this information was already available. LCC could not release the full document as it contained confidential information.

Q Was the money applied for on the basis that the school will close?

A We were successful in obtaining funding, but BSF is not happening. We will continue to look for additional funding for Lincolnshire's schools.

Q My son has special needs and is escorted by a teaching assistant between lessons. Will this continue? Will he still be able to take the exams he is already entered for? Will St Bede's have its own prom?

A Any special needs detailed in a statement will be honoured. We have already said that we will honour the choices made by parents regarding which site a pupil studies at. Children in year 10 will continue with their courses. We would not wish to prevent pupils enjoying their prom. We do not wish to put any obstacles in children's way. The Headteacher stated that he has 6 children of his own and whatever he wanted for his own children he also wanted for pupils at this school.

Q The Prime Minister spoke about choices in education. Non-grammar children in Boston will have no choice if this proposal goes ahead. Many parents chose St Bede's for its smaller environment. 26 parents have already chosen St Bede's as their first preference school for their child for September.

A This is very difficult as no decision has been made yet. The school admissions team have written to all parents who have chosen St Bede's as their 1st preference for September 2011. If the proposal goes ahead all those offered St Bede's will have a place offered at Haven High unless the parent states another preference. Only one parent has said that they would not wish their child to go to Haven High.

Q Can CfBT say why they have not been successful in improving St Bede's? After the staff meeting today many staff still believe they will be losing their jobs. What is the plan, parents need to be sure it will be for the best.

A We are disappointed not to have been successful. The school is small and has been vulnerable for many years. Much hard work has been done by staff but the school has not made sufficient progress. The diocese was unable to appoint a permanent headteacher at a critical time when the school was not able to meet the government floor standards and the school has suffered. Standing alone the school is too small and not attractive to many staff. There is often only one teacher per subject with no career progression and causing difficulties with any staff illness. Staff have been briefed today about their rights.

Q What is the plan? I am sure Mr Reed will continue his excellent work but I need to know where my child is going.

A This is still a consultation and the question presumes an outcome that has not yet been decided. Haven High will be asked to put forward a plan, which will be done with consultation with the staff of all the schools in the federation. The curriculum will be at the heart of this plan i.e. broad, balanced, giving the widest choice possible. This will shape the staffing and leadership structure and is likely to be based on these 4 guiding principles;

1. We will honour the choices made by current students in selecting St Bede's
2. We will maintain the involvement and influence of the catholic community with representation on the governing body and catholic education schemes of work will be included in the curriculum.
3. We will consult with the community regarding the long term use of the sites
4. We will ensure that current and future pupils of both St Bede's and Haven High have equality of opportunity whereas at the moment the pupils at St Bede's do not benefit from a wide curriculum offer.

Q We admire what Mr Reed has done but we still need to know what the underlying plan is.

A There is no plan as yet; although some discussions have taken place this is not a done deal, it is a consultation. We cannot come up with answers until the consultation process has been completed but we will obviously continue to work to provide a good solution.

Q What about those who have already chosen St Bede's for admission in September, will they go to that site?

A If the proposal goes ahead we will not be able to accommodate all the new Year 7 children at St Bede's. It is expected that they will go to Haven High. When the site is able to accommodate a new Year 7 admission in full we will consult with the community but this debate will probably take place with parents of children who are currently in years 3 or 4. Children at either school now will be able to complete their education on the site they are attending at the moment.

Q Why not put information like this in the press?

A This is still a process of consultation and no decisions have been taken. It is important that everyone sends in their views and responses so that these can be taken into consideration as part of the decision making process.

Q If existing pupils stay on this site they will end up with a skeleton staff and they will suffer.

A If this proposal goes ahead we will be one organisation with one body of staff. The quality and flexibility of staff will ensure the best quality of education for the children.

Q Will the site maintain its name ie will it be called St Bede's site?

A If this proposal goes ahead the school will no longer exist. We will consult with the schools and community regarding names of buildings/facilities etc and how best to continue the tradition of .

Q Of numbers represented at a merged school only one third will be St Bede's and two thirds will be Haven High so St Bede's will get forgotten.

A We will continue to have the influence of the catholic community. Tonight governors are here from Staniland and Carlton Road so you can discuss this with them. They will tell you that although they are part of the federation they have kept their character and identity. They are proud of working together and benefit from this but still keep their own identity.

Q Why does the school have to lose its name?

A If the school closes the URN number must go under DfE rules and the name goes with the number, so we cannot keep the name of the school. It will no longer be a separate school.

Q St Bede's site will be 3 classes short this year and another 3 next year, but we don't want the children here to become isolated. Also we have just had a new uniform, will this mean another one?

A We do not want the children to become isolated and will plan to ensure that this doesn't happen. If the decision is taken to close St Bede's we will consult with parents about issues like uniform.

Q Can the residents of St Bede's Drive have assurances that pupils will respect their property, cars, gardens etc

A There must be mutual respect and if there are any issues we will work with the local community to ensure that students behave appropriately.

Paul Holmes brought the evening of questions and answers to a close at approximately 7.30pm and again stressed the importance of everyone responding to the consultation reminding all present that consultation documents were available to take home in English, Russian, Polish, Portuguese and Lithuanian as well as referring people to the website address on the screen.

In addition a number of written questions were also submitted on the day of the public meeting. Some of these questions were asked and answered during the meeting and therefore referred to above. Where it was not possible to provide a full answer to any questions at the public meeting, they have been referred to the appropriate body for a response and these answers are now detailed below.

1. What consultation has taken place by the IEB with stakeholders of the school in order to determine parental and stakeholder views, which may have deserved consideration?

A. There was no direct consultation by the IEB itself, only by the Diocese (who are represented on the IEB) when a consultation meeting was held in the Summer of 2010 with staff and parents about the federation and potential future proposals. The consultation currently being carried out by the LA, with the support of the IEB and Diocese, is to involve all stakeholders of the school and determine parental and stakeholder views for consideration in the decision making process.

2. Catholics and others felt reassured when Edward Hayes announced the appointment on a three year contract of a Catholic Headteacher who was described as an "excellent Headteacher". This excellent Headteacher only remained at the school for one half term, I understand. Why was his appointment of such short duration and what has been done to secure a Catholic replacement for him? (When I made enquiries about his term of employment I was told that had not been determined at that time!)

A. He resigned to take up another post. There is currently a very good Head of School for St Bede's who was formerly the acting head for 18 months. He is Catholic and provides a degree of stability and consistency.

3. What will become of the school premises? There will be no-one present from the Diocese to answer this, but there are still many Catholic parishioners alive who paid for the initial mortgage which was taken on the School. There are also a number of voluntary supporters who raised funds for many school projects and there are all those past Governors alive (like myself) who over the years agreed the Governors' Contribution of at least 10% of all new builds (in the last ten years there has been a few millions expended on new builds thanks to Governors' Contributions, financial supporters when the school sought Specialist College status and finally LCVAP. All such contributors have a right to know.

A. Initially the site would need to be leased from the RC Diocese to enable education to continue to be provided. The longer term solution requires the RC Diocese, the County Council and the Secretary of State to determine the outcome.

4. How many Governors will the Parish and stakeholders be granted on the newly formed Board of Governors if the amalgamation takes place and what percentage of the new Governing Body will this be?

A. The total number and composition of the governing body is yet to be determined. There is a long way to go before we know what the full governing body might look like as no decision has been made. If it were to go ahead then the Nottingham Diocese would appoint probably two representatives onto the governing body, likely to be from the local catholic community.

5. Was there no diary-checking done with the Nottingham Diocesan Education Service to ensure that they would be able to send representation even though they probably knew they would have difficult questions to answer? What does this say for the credibility and transparency by LCC?

A. The Diocese was informed on January 6th of the date of the public meeting to be held on January 20th. The LA was unable to provide sufficient notice to ensure that a representative of the Diocese could attend. The date had to be agreed and included within consultation documents over the Christmas period when it was difficult to get agreement from interested parties involved, but it was important to ensure that the consultation process was not delayed. The LA apologised for not ensuring Diocesan representation at the meeting, although we felt that nearly all questions on the night were answered, and those that couldn't be answered on the night are provided within this Q&A document retrospective of the meeting. The Diocese is being actively involved throughout the consultation process.