

Appendix C

Transcript of questions and answers from the consultation public meeting held on 10th February 2021:

Questions in bold. Answers in italic. Chair in red – chair's comments included if relevant to questions and answers:

Person 1:

As you are consulting on closing the school in a community, are you confident that the process you followed fulfils full consultation and that the process that you have followed reaches all within the local community. That you have completed a full assessment of the impact on the local community and can you explain the response and the actions you have taken in full to provide a full, thorough and fair process.

Chief Executive:

So, with regards to the consultation, whenever an organisation seeks to make significant changes to the school, there is a list of statutory stakeholders that need to be engaged with and we have worked with support from our local RSC's office and Local Authority who have provided a list of key stakeholders and that has gone through as per one would expect. It also follows the same list of stakeholders that was used in similar consultations within Norfolk over the last 12 months; so I do feel that we have fulfilled that aspect of the consultation.

In terms of making it accessible for everyone, by going out to all the statutory stakeholders and also people who we would expect to throughout the Diocese and our Parish Councils. We have had responses via a number of different formats, whether that is through email response, through online form, through a paper form returned to the schools. In fact we have received responses to the consultation from all of these different formats which will be published

Follow up:

Considering that removing a part of the local structure and fabric will impact business and residences, how come they haven't been consulted by yourself. And also on your list in the consultation documents, you list the parish councils and students to be consulted with. Neither of these two parties have been consulted with and contacted by yourselves so how can we trust that you have fully consulted with the other people that you have listed in your documentation.

Chief Executive:

I will have to correct you. The Parish Councils were emailed by the Trust and it was discussed by Runcton Holme PC and I will respectfully disagree with you on that point. And in terms of local businesses, we contacted all the statutory stakeholders as part of the consultation and local businesses don't fall under that statutory responsibility. In terms of students, we haven't contacted those yet as we wanted to start the initial consultation off. We understand that some students will be potentially upset and we also understand that some parents have contacted us and asked us not to contact students at this point as parents want to do so and haven't yet had the opportunity. We are balancing up those two different points.

Chair:

(name), if you still feel that you want to ask questions, please remember that you can do that through the consultation process. Are there any other questions?

Person 2:

You talked about what you think will be the positives, what are the negatives? Because once you have closed this school – like Dr Beeching when he closed all the railway stations. How do you know what the movement of people will be, especially now when people are moving out of towns? How do you know that people are not going to move to this area with children?

Chief Executive:

Thank you. That is a really interesting point and that is the difficulty you have when looking at primary pupil place planning; when we look beyond the four year time frame, clearly children have not been born yet which is why we look at both place planning and the place planning from the local authority is informed by house building in the area, which looks at potential growth in the mini catchments and helps inform what the potential numbers could be and we couple that with the historical place preference information. When you balance up the two it does unfortunately show a decline in the foreseeable future. By merging the two schools, we do create the opportunity, especially at Runcton Holme, there is room to house those and there is potential room for growth on the site and by changing the catchment area, should more pupils move into the area in the future, there will be more room for them at the Runcton Holme site.

Follow up:

Because there are a lot of children now being bussed around at such young ages. So what are the negatives of shutting this school and moving them all to Runcton Holme?

Chief Executive:

So clearly there are some negatives on pupils. Pupils currently attending Wormegay who live on the Wormegay village side of the school, there will be further to travel.

Follow up:

And also they'll be in a bigger environment and as we all know and learning that children – the better understanding and attachments that they have when they are younger, the easier it is to grow up.

Chief Executive:

I don't disagree with that point. I think it is important for children to be in a nurturing environment and it is pleasing to see from this consultation that so many people feel that Wormegay provides that environment which is testament to the headteacher and her team – and that same team are going to be responsible and are responsible for provision at Runcton Holme and the amalgamated school. I do want to take this opportunity to point out that the amalgamated school will still be small and will still be able to provide that small, nurturing environment. The classes will be around broadly potentially between 18 and 20 per class, with pupils in a closer banding of age. But it is a good question.

Chair:

Thank you, that is a really important question, and I am very glad you raised it as there are negatives as well as positives. I am conscious that we need to move on, so if there is anything that you want to say do remember that there are ways to ask questions through the consultation.

Person 3:

I, for my sins, spent several years as Chair of Norfolk County's Small School Working Group that looked at small schools and how they functioned right across the county, and during that time we were fortunate enough to have a very few schools that had to physically shut and most had the added success, if you like, of working collaboratively. I appreciate that educational outcomes is the important thing and one of the overarching criteria that we used in judging any of these types of moves or merges, or similar, was always that the bottom line was the educational outcomes and the educational environment that the children were learning in. Given that some parents will have further distance to travel with children possibly that were walking to school in one location will now be in a car travelling to another location, what offset will there be in terms of flexibility of dropping off and collecting children? I am aware that, as with all schools, dropping off and collecting time makes for traffic congestion and the ability to have some form of phasing so that the motor car does not prevent those that do live close from walking to school for me is an important consideration.

Executive Headteacher:

Thank you (name) for your question. Currently at the moment we do offer a soft start to the beginning of the day where children can be dropped off anything after 08:45, with registration starting at 09:00. Particularly with the way schools are operating at the moment with the Covid situation that is even more staggered to allow for this. But this is something that we will be looking towards, should the amalgamation go ahead, is the structuring of the school day as we are aware that there are parents within our community that drop off to more than one school, and to also ease the traffic congestion outside.

I would like to say at this point that there is a social club at Runcton Holme, it is literally 2 mins walk from the school and a number of existing parents do park there and walk their children to the school so we will be encouraging that. With the amalgamation at the moment, the numbers that we have on roll are higher than what we have had at our highest at Runcton Holme and we have always been able to support the congestion within the village; our parents have always been very supportive of thinking about what times they are dropping their children off at school.

No follow up question required.

Person 4:

It's not really a question but I would just like to point out that Tottenham and Wormegay Parish Councils were not informed in any way of this closure. At all. They are aware now as we have made them aware through social media.

Can I also say that this is not a good time to be doing this in the middle of the pandemic. I've got grandchildren that go there and my daughter hasn't told them because they are going to be so upset and there are children that have been told that are upset.

It's not fair. You've not been inclusive because not everybody can get to this meeting. If it was a different time and we could meet in a village hall it would probably be different. You are not being inclusive. Can we not postpone this for a couple of years, or anything?

Chief Executive:

As I said in the answer earlier, both Clerks at Wormegay and Runcton Holme Parish Councils were emailed on 20th January and we have the email chain to suggest that. Regarding terms of timing, it is difficult and we understand that. The very nature of the pandemic makes it difficult, and it is not something that even 12 months ago we were used to doing, acting in this way. But it has got to the point where we need to accelerate some thoughts. The financial situation in the school, the need to improve the academic outcomes in the school, needs to happen and by delaying further the pupils numbers and demographics will continue to fall, giving additional strain and stress on both the school and the Trust. So whilst I understand that it is not a good time – of course it's not, we understand that, but the situation we have found ourselves in is that we are at the point where we have to make a decision and that very question was debated at Board and a decision was made that we do have to proceed with the consultation at this time.

Chair:

And of course we would want to have a normal public meeting, but under Government legislation we are not allowed to at the moment, so we do have to hold our public meeting in this way. Would you like to ask any follow up question?

Follow up:

The point is, if we were in normal times, we would be having a normal meeting and there would be a lot more people at this meeting. There would be a lot more parents because this is now bedtime so how are they supposed to get on this call? My daughters can't get on the phone to this call and I don't really like being on here. But, it is not just the children. It's the community as well and it's going to affect the community. We link up with the

village hall, we do things there with them. And what about the financial impact from this? It's going to cost approximately £1k a year to get the kids to Runcton Holme. There are people that do not drive. What about that?

Chief Executive:

Just to highlight in the consultation document that we have said that we will, again, speak to anybody who will find difficulty with transportation, should it go ahead, moving from one school to another. It does say quite clearly in the consultation that we will engage with families on an individual basis should that happen.

Follow up:

Yeah, but are you willing? Sorry, I'm going to jump in. Are you willing to actually pay £1k or get a bus up to transport these children?

Chief Executive:

As I said, we are willing to have that conversation with anyone who is affected by this to ensure that those potential barriers are resolved but that is something that we don't know and can't commit to until we know whether the proposal will go ahead or not. But we have said in the consultation document that we will talk to people and engage on an individual basis to try and resolve any difficulties such as that.

Chair:

Thank you and thank you for coming on – we know you're not familiar with zoom so thank you very much.

Follow up:

No the school is very important to me. Could I just read something out from a child that actually wanted to be on here tonight but it wasn't a very good idea. Are you happy for me to read the letter out?

Chair:

Can we leave that until later in the meeting – I would rather deal with questions first. I won't forget it, but perhaps we could deal with some questions first and perhaps come to that later. Any more questions?

Person 1:

I have a few more questions actually. Because of the amount of parents that weren't able to attend tonight, we did put some questions together beforehand. So, bearing in mind the one question and follow up – because of the significant numbers that couldn't attend, because they've not told their children, they're worried about the impacts on their children and it is bedtime, I do have a number of further questions if that's ok.

Chair:

Yes of course.

Person 1:

So, can I just clarify as well. You quote in your documentation, 6 pupils for Wormegay for 2023. I just would like to clarify how you reached that figure considering there will be 6 in Tottenhill, the smaller village of the two, alone in 2023 from what's currently sitting in the village.

Chief Executive:

It was based on pupil preference data and LA authority data of where pupils are and where they are registered. So we have used demographic data that's been provided to us and pupil preference data that has been provided to us, which suggests that, based on the numbers in there, that pupils will be registering or even will be sending to school.

Person 5:

With Runcton Holme being a failing school, and the roll already being less than in previous years with pupils leaving RH because of it being a failing school in Special Measures. What makes you think that people from Wormegay school are now going to want to go over to Runcton school in the first place? And how are you going to make sure that you get more people go to Runcton Holme and retain those pupils so that we are not in this situation again in 2 years time, when you decide that Runcton Holme is not performing as it should be, does not have the pupil levels that it should have, and we're going to close Runcton as well. Then what are we going to do? We will be back to square one again. And the trust has gone to be honest and the children are absolutely devastated. And also none of them want to go to Runcton Holme as well. We've discussed it with them and they do not want to go over there.

Chief Executive:

First of all, just to point out for clarification that Runcton Holme is not a failing school. A failing school is one that is rated Inadequate or is in a category by Ofsted. Runcton Holme, whilst we all acknowledge that the inspection back in 2017 was Requires Improvement and we would prefer it to be higher. Clearly, we want all of our schools to be Good. It is the same rating as Wormegay. What I will do now is ask Cathie and Emma to reiterate the points made at the beginning of the meeting as to what is happening in the schools at the moment to improve the quality of education and how we can avoid this in the future.

Director of Education:

Just to reiterate that it is in a Requires Improvement category, similar to Wormegay, and it is important to recognise the work that has been going on there over the last year, and certainly since Runcton Holme's intervention and since Emma became head across both schools. That they have absolutely transformed learning across both schools and that has been through working together. There is significant experience and expertise at both schools which is being used really, really well at the moment. My team oversee that and we work really closely with the schools and we have a School Performance Director for the schools who regularly meets with Emma and her team so we are really aware of the challenges and we are really aware of the successes that they have been having as well and we know that bringing them together is the next step in helping both schools together move forward well.

Executive Headteacher:

I reiterate what Cathie has said, that both schools are in an Requires Improvement position, with Good for their pastoral, behaviour and attitudes. Pastoral support is something that we pride ourselves in across both schools for a number of years, so when looking towards the amalgamation, should it happen, a huge amount of support will be put in for the children to aid that transition. Through the recent Covid lockdown the provision that we have had has been through Runcton Holme and a number of Wormegay children have accessed that provision and through some of the purple pupil surveys that we have carried out in the past, the children have shown that they do enjoy coming over to Runcton Holme and the joint activities that we do there. So that I would hope that the amalgamation going forward would build on that and that I can assure you that there would be a lot of work going into transition of pupils going into Runcton Holme. Not just done on the Runcton Holme site, our staff would be going to Wormegay too so that they can meet those people that they are not so familiar with in their own space. And that we use that to move forward to make sure that they transition successfully into the Runcton Holme site.

No follow up question required.

Chair:

As there are no other questions at the moment, shall we go back to (name – Person 1) as she says that she is representing other parents. Do you have another question that represented them?

Person 1:

Can you describe your understanding of the emotional and mental impacts of this on these children and their families by holding this consultation at this time? Especially considering news reports on the BBC news service and BBC Look East last week which highlights how children are already suffering with their mental health during the pandemic. And what will be your offering to families and children in terms of compensation for the level of additional emotional stress as well as financial cost.

Chief Executive:

Clearly, we don't underestimate the impact this could potentially have on children and young people. It's difficult, we know, simply moving schools as part of your natural transition: whether that be from infants to juniors, primary to secondary, secondary to sixth form and beyond then on to university. These significant changes and key milestones in your life does have an impact. We know and we've seen potentially in schools where the mental health is something that we are aware of and is something that we need to make sure we support and do everything we can to help them through this and part of that is the offer that we do have within the Trust. All of our schools have Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA). I know that there have been questions already sent in asking about particular support for an individual pupil, which I know you are aware of, and that is a key part of this process and should we go ahead we will make sure we do everything that we can to provide the necessary support.

Executive Headteacher:

We are already running pastoral sessions where some of our children participate on a 1:1 basis where we know that there are significant anxieties about the Covid situation at the moment. Within that is dealing with their anxieties, with not with the school, because we are mindful and respectful of the fact that some of our parents have not told their children yet. We have a number of staff who are trained as Youth MHFA who will be able to support your children at the time or be able to signpost to other agencies if it is felt that would be beneficial to them. We would endeavour to use emotional literacy that we have and social stories to support them with this as well and we do have access within the Trust to a SEMH Officer who can help us to enable to provide the support to your children. The best interests of your children are at the heart of everything we do and we have always tried to offer that pastoral support not only to our children but to their families as well so that wouldn't change, we would still ensure that that continues if the amalgamation goes ahead, or even in the process of amalgamation; you know, it is there and we have had some families come forward and ask us about that and we are offering that.

Director of Education:

Just to add to that that this has been recognised both internally by our quality assurance but also by Ofsted as a real strength of the schools at Wormegay and Runcton Holme, that their pastoral support is really strong and we would expect that to continue and certainly we would support that. We have SEMH officers centrally that can also support staff at the schools to ensure that their offer is really exactly what is needed in the community for children and parents.

Follow up question:

Person 1:

So could you help me to explain to my daughter how she talks about Christian values that are taught to her in assemblies but she can't understand how the current action supports the ethics and morals that are taught within these assemblies.

Executive Headteacher:

The Christian values do underpin everything that we are doing. And as we said earlier this is what, as a team, is what is in the best interests of our children and is supported within the Christian ethos that we are providing the best that we can to our children. And the ethos is not going to change just because we are going to forward with the consultation to amalgamate. And, with regards, with supporting talking to your daughter about that, that is something that we could do potentially in school later as well.

Diocesan Director of Education:

It is an absolutely reasonable question to ask, isn't it, because it always is the same question when we are having to deal with difficult issues where there are negatives and there are positives. I am absolutely confident and I have made sure that Bishop Stephen and Alex Hughes, as the Chair of the DBE, is fully abridged of the process and also the choices. And whilst one is always extremely mindful of closing any school or proposing the merger of any school, we have to do, as Emma has just said, what is right for the children, and that sits right at the top of the tree of the prioritisation of the Christian values which we all espouse. So, I do understand the question that is being asked but I am sure that, over time, that will come to be understood and appreciated by the children should the consultation and other process result in us carrying through what is proposed.

Follow up:

With all due respect, neither of those answers actually answer my question of how I explain to my daughter the contradiction between the Christian values that she hears in an assembly and the current actions.

Chair:

I think perhaps both of those people have tried to answer your question, (name), by explaining how they possibly see this action doesn't necessarily go against the Christian values of the school and of the Diocese. Obviously, they are not able to explain to your daughter, but they have tried, I think, to give you their views on the difficulties of balancing those two things.

Person 6 (household):

I am asking this for someone who is a bit camera shy! So, because of Covid, it might be that people might prefer to move out to villages over the next few years anyway and someone else just wondered whether that kind of movement has been taken into consideration as maybe that might see an increase in students over the next year.

Chair:

In the pupil numbers. Yes, we can see that. That's a very good question. Adrian, do you want to talk about how the pupil numbers have been estimated again, obviously it hasn't been quite understood by everyone. Perhaps you could repeat that.

Chief Executive:

It is a good point because we are seeing reports that people want to flood out of the cities into more rural areas, but we have taken the latest data from the LA in that one. So, that is how we have based our course from that; and housing growth and capacity in the area has fed into that.

Follow up question:

Person 6:

I think the point would be that this is so much of an unknown that the LA when they have made their predictions have based it on what has happened in the historical past but we are seeing people who are more able to tele-work than they used to be, and now want to live in much nicer environments than in the cities. And, also perhaps people who are going to have anxieties about living in more built up areas or having children who go to larger schools, and my husband's concern is that the demographic predictions are not taking that into account because they are looking at what is happening in the past. And with the effect of Coronavirus things could be looking very different going forwards.

Chief Executive:

I take that point, but where we are with the school at the moment, particularly with the amount of funding we are having to top the school up, we are at the point where we have to make a decision on what the viability of the school

is at this time because the numbers that we have in front of us, the known figures that we have in front of us, we know if the next couple of years will be declining, which will only put a greater pressure on the school itself which will in turn put pressure on us as a Trust, itself, to divert money from elsewhere into this school with no known guarantee that any migration from the cities will end up in this community. And that is why we have had to make a decision at this time. I do take your point that it is an unknown, but we have to deal with what we have at the moment and that is why we have made the call.

Person 5:

With student retention and getting numbers up, what have you actually done to get students into the school? As I personally know that quite a few people, who live either in the village who have thought about going to Wormegay and haven't. And moving that on to Runcton Holme as well, how are you going to ensure that you are getting pupils into the school when you haven't done anything actively to Wormegay to get the numbers up to increase the funding.

Executive Headteacher:

We do have a communication with our local pre-school, so we started at Ofsted to encourage people with that. We have overhauled our website for when people are looking for local schools that that comes up and is better placed with a stronger prospectus involved for that. And promotion is something that is going to be needed in the new school going forward and hopefully as we move through with the quality of education improving, there will be scope for us to be able to offer provision to pre-school because we know how important that that has been in providing numbers to Runcton Holme.

Director of Education:

I think to echo what Emma said about the school improvement element of things. We know that one of the biggest factors in increasing school numbers is to increase those outcomes from the school and the Ofsted inspections. And that is the really big thing that we are focusing on now and, as I spent some time explaining at the beginning of the meeting, how much more viable that is if those two schools come together as a slightly larger, more high performing school and that would be one of the ways in which we will be able to attract more children and staff and various other people towards the school.

No follow up question required.

Person 3:

My question is about future prediction of demand for Wormegay school. Given that within Kings Lynn and West Norfolk site allocations for new development there are proposed circa 3,500 to 4,000 properties likely to be built between West Winch and North Runcton, I went to North Runcton school and it shut soon after because the pupil numbers dropped so I am familiar with this although I left before the time it happened. But bearing in mind those massive increases in numbers and that the development includes provision of a new funded school, that school won't be delivered when the first house is built, when the second house is built or probably when the thousandth house is built. It might be in construction at that point. Is there an opportune that actually Wormegay could provide for some of that future numbers, bearing in mind that the actual development sits between North Runcton and West Winch and North Runcton to Wormegay isn't very far – at least it wasn't when I was a boy.

Chair:

What about the capacity for growth if necessary, Adrian?

Chief Executive:

I think this is a key point. Again, the forecast data does take into account potential new growth in the areas. As I mentioned earlier, there is still an immediate, pressing concern that the school is still requiring additional funds in

addition to its revenue funding that it receives from the government to keep running, which we are moving within the Trust from other schools to ensure that Wormegay can currently stay open. By the time it takes to stay open, and the ground is used to build those new houses up, what potentially could come into Wormegay school does put an increased strain on our other schools before those houses come to fruition. By bringing the schools together in an amalgamated site, Runcton Holme would still have capacity and there will still be capacity at Runcton Holme to potentially accommodate other pupils, plus there is potential on that site for growth should it be required should the primary school not be delivered on time, but hopefully the LA can deliver the new school on time.

Follow up question

I think any modelling that tries to look where parents might choose to take their children cannot be as clever as the reality of the real world, as the real world parents choose all manner of criteria in their own minds as to which is the right school for their son and daughter. And, on the basis of that, it may be – and we have heard from people this evening – that they expect to see more growth in both villages in terms of people wanting to live more in the rural areas rather than in towns and we know that there is a large amount of growth going forward. Parental choice will say perhaps that we don't want to go to that big school with a 1000 pupils, or whatever, that is going to be built between West Winch and North Runcton, we want to vote with our feet and send them to a proper, traditional, rural school in a proper rural setting and will the opportunity be lost at that point, or if the numbers are there would the Trust consider Wormegay being re-opened because there was a demand.

Chief Executive:

Good point, (name), I think that that is not a feasible point that we can speculate on at this time. What I can say is, as in the last comment, Runcton Holme will have spare capacity when both schools are amalgamated. Should the proposal go ahead in September, it will not be at capacity and we will have capacity to house further pupils on the Runcton Holme site and there is capacity to potentially expand the site and still remain a small school, thus providing both the rural benefits of a small traditional school. So that is one route we can look at.

Follow up:

If I may, given the fact that parents sometimes pick schools because they are convenient that they can drop people off and head off in the same direction towards work or shopping, or whatever else they have to do in their busy lives, going to Runcton Holme if you live in Wormegay or Tottenhill when you probably pertain to Kings Lynn for shopping, recreation and employment, wouldn't be likely. What numbers would you envision losing in total when you shut Wormegay school to perhaps West Winch or other schools in the area?

Chief Executive:

I would hope that we lose no one, (name), it is as simple as that. And to be honest that will be something we will look at at the end of the consultation, should the proposal go ahead, then we will work with the LA to conduct a place planning, a preference exercise and that will give us an idea then of how many pupils will be transferring then, or won't be, but my desire and hope would be that everyone transfers over to stay with their teachers who have been praised throughout the consultation for the quality of education that Emma and her team have been providing, that we've received so many positive comments about the support and care given by the teachers is something that people don't want to lose and thankfully we will move these people with the pupils to develop that.

Person 3:

Chair, I am somewhat assured by that answer.

Person 5:

You said you can't speculate about how many people will move into the area, so how can you speculate on how many children may go to Wormegay in the future?

Chief Executive:

Again, we have the pupil data which, according to the registrations that the LA hold, we know how many people are apparently in the area and we use that place planning preference which looks at historical pupil preference of people both living in the village and local villages which helps to give a pupil forecast. The data also takes into account new builds and they use an algorithm that for every few houses will produce a certain number of pupils and that helps to inform a place planning for schools and other developments.

Person 7:

Following on from all that. What is the disposal of the Wormegay site and is there a possibility in a few years time that if numbers increase it can be reopened?

Chief Executive:

As a MAT the Trust doesn't own the Wormegay site, the actual site is owned by the Diocese and we occupy that for the purpose of educational provision. If the proposal does go ahead, we will vacate the site at which point it reverts to the Diocese, EDBF, and at that point, it depends on one of two routes. At that point, when it reverts to the EDBF, the original title deeds are held by a law firm in their strong room and the deeds will inform the Diocese whether the site was gifted to the Diocese for their use, or whether they have what is known as a reversing order on it, at what point it was gifted for the purpose of education; in which case, once the school vacates from it, the property will revert to the original descendants of the original owners who gifted it. But it depends on the details within that element of the deed and that is part of the process that is currently being undertaken to bring that out of the strong room.

Diocesan Director of Education:

I would be comfortable in saying on public record if it gives some reassurance that the predilection and the hope of the Diocese would be that the details of the trust deed means that we can maximise the use of any benefits that occur from reusing or selling the site for the educational benefits of the children of the locality. As well as opening some schools in different localities, we have shut a lot of schools as a Diocese, as all Dioceses have, particularly in 1944 so there is a lot of precedent for disposal of educational assets and it is always been the case that those assets have been used for the benefit of the children. I am expecting it to stipulate that in the foundation deeds. Unfortunately, Covid has meant that we can't get access to those deeds at the moment; we'll have them shortly. However, because they normally do. They normally say that. But what that does mean is that it is unlikely that the building could simply be left empty or put over to an entirely different resource, because it is unlikely that we will be allowed to. If there is free reign about the use of that building, then the proposal will certainly be how to use it to the best benefit to the children of the locality, which may include selling it and giving the revenue to the school. But that will all be determined. But, again, when it comes to that point, we will be more than happy to discuss that with the community, I am sure through the school, to make sure that the resource stays in the locality and doesn't end up centrally anywhere else.

Teacher at Runcton Holme:

I just wanted to take the opportunity, I am a teacher at the Runcton Holme site and I've got to know lots of children from Wormegay because I was leading the lockdown learning for them during the previous lockdown and I just wanted to take the opportunity for the parents that haven't met me personally to reassure you that if the amalgamation does go ahead every single member of staff across the two schools will do the utmost for every single child to make sure that that transition is as it can be. We will be with them and with you every step of the way and I just wanted to take this opportunity to just make that really clear. Because I won't maybe see some of you – the Covid situation doesn't lend well to me meeting you, you meeting us, but we are a passionate team across the Federation and all of the good things that we have all got going for us can all be pulled into one place. Thank you.

Chair:

Thank you, (name), and I know that everyone here will be thankful that you joined in and I know that, as a parent myself, I know that if I was in the position of some of the parents this evening, they would be really pleased to hear you speaking in that way, so thank you for your contribution.

Now, as I say, we are approaching the end of our meeting this evening. I do want to just return to the query that the lady asked me about whether her grandchild's statement could be read out. I am aware of the fact that at the very beginning of the meeting I did say that we were concentrating on adult stakeholders, that is the parents and community members, at this meeting. There will be an opportunity for the pupils to give their opinions and I am aware of the fact that some parents have not let their children know about this yet for, I'm sure, excellent reasons that they have. And, therefore, I feel that such a statement should either be made through the consultation process or that statement should wait until the children can take part in their consultation and give their opinions. So, I hope that you pass that message back to the pupil concerned and that it's not that we don't want to hear from her – we do want to hear from her, but we would prefer to hear from her at the time when other children can give their views.

So I am going to begin to draw the meeting to a close. Do remember that we are not stopping off any questions or comments. The consultation process is open for another 3 weeks. You do have an opportunity, having listened to this evening, to think about what you have heard and to make more statements and ask more questions. So I am going to ask Adrian to go through how that process is working so everyone is quite clear about it and to make his final statement.

Chief Executive:

Thanks. Just again to thank everyone for their time tonight. It has been incredibly useful to hear different views and opinions and hopefully we have been able to provide more clarity to those questions. And, just to reiterate that the consultation is open to 5th March and we have had a large number of responses so far and again we would hope to see more as all this information helps to shape our final decision, so please do pass the message on.

Chair:

Yes, indeed, thank you Adrian. And thank you everybody. I have been really pleased to see you all and meet you all and, as I say, I don't live in your area but I do really wish all the parents and children of Runcton Holme and Wormegay, the very best for the future and ..

Person 1:

I thought this was running to 10:00pm. In the consultation this was meant to run to 10pm so I was wondering why we're stopping at 08:30 when we've got plenty more questions.

Chair:

I'm sorry, I wasn't aware that you had any more questions, (name). How many questions do you have?

Person 1:

I believe there is either 4 or 5 left still to be answered.

We talked a little bit about financial situations so can I ask why the financial positions of these schools have not been disclosed and communicated to the key stakeholders to allow them to see exactly the financial position of both of these schools at this moment in time. And historically, actually, over at least the last 5 years.

Chief Executive Officer:

So the financial statements of the whole Trust are on the website and they go back a couple of years. The 19/20 financial statements are there and they do physically have the position of schools – I just checked before the meeting to make sure, and they are there. I think at the moment, Wormegay is sitting in a deficit position and that has been

getting worse. So I am happy to have a conversation for more clarity, but I do believe that they are on the website and that the financial position has been stated of the schools as well as the whole Trust.

Person 1:

Have you completed a full environmental analysis of making such a move?

Chief Executive Officer:

We haven't as yet, but we can certainly look into doing it as part of the consultation and check the requirements of that to make sure that we are compliant. I don't think that is an issue, but I can certainly look into it.

Chair:

So we are undertaking to make sure that you do have access to financial details, and also that environmental analysis will be made. Any other questions?

Person 1:

Yes, so the next one that was pulled together was can you explain the performance measures that you put into place at Wormegay to return it to a Good school since the 2017 Ofsted, providing specific dates and details of SMART objectives, how were each of these objectives, when, what, why and how? And if this process was completed successfully why is the school still been sitting as RI since this time and following a further Ofsted in 2019. And then also how can this school go from being a good school in 2014 to RI twice consecutively under your care? And now on the point of closure.

Chair:

I'm not sure all the details of the targets we can deal with in this sort of meeting, but I'm sure that in general Catherine you would like to talk about the performance of the school over time. I think that is really what the question is.

Director of Education:

Yes, so targets for individuals and performance management are confidential so we wouldn't be releasing those separately, but what I can tell you is that we do have a performance management schedule in place at schools. We have somewhat changed that over the last year and headteacher performance management now comes in house, which we think is an improved way of doing things. And cascading down from that in exactly the same way, is the performance management of the whole school and we have done some work with Emma and her team to ensure that that is securely in place. School judgements do change over time. However, we will be waiting for Runcton Holme's next Ofsted and at that point we are really very sure that that judgement will change, but we have to wait for Ofsted to come, unfortunately, we can't just get it changed of our own accord and when they next come we are certainly expecting a different outcome. I am confident in all the work that the school has been doing and I can tell you, having been involved with it personally as well as lots of members of my team, that there is a very clear line of accountability through to the Trust now, possibly in a different way now. There is a larger education team, there is a larger central team that are involved in that and the school is making great strides towards that.

Person 1:

As a follow up question to that, then, can you provide an acceptable explanation about how children's opportunities will be effectively improved considering that the adult/child ratios will be decreased?

Director of Education:

I am not sure that they will be significantly decreased. We will have to look exactly what they will look like but what we are anticipating is that there will be just a very small increase to each class because of the additional class it will have. It will be a very small increase of children to child/teacher ratio and, hopefully, as I explained before to

everybody at the very beginning the opportunities for teaching the curriculum, sequencing the curriculum and teaching the children at their level are greatly increased when we increase the number of classes in a school.

Person 1:

The next question was: will you be providing compensation for parents at Wormegay for additional travelling expenses for closing this school, for the duration of the child's time at school, or just for a limited period of time. And if a parent chooses to take their child to another school rather than Runcton Holme, will you also be compensating them?

Chair:

I think Adrian answered part of that earlier – but I think there is an additional bit to that question there.

Chief Executive:

As I said earlier and is included in the consultation document on point 7.8.3 that we will engage with anyone on an individual basis who is having difficulty moving to Runcton Holme from Wormegay. So, if there are transport difficulties, we have already said that we will talk on an individual basis to support that.

Person 1:

So can I just clarify, so you're not guaranteeing financial compensation for the parents that are having to increase their journey into school because of their decision to potentially close Wormegay school.

Chief Executive:

As I said, we will talk to anyone on an individual basis who is in that situation and look to find a resolution should anyone face that barrier.

Person 1:

OK, so that suggests not a fair and consistent approach, doesn't it?

Chief Executive:

That may well be your view on that one, but I have just got to refer to the consultation document. We have answered this in the consultation document that we will speak to anyone on an individual basis who happens to be finding transport to Runcton Holme a barrier.

Person 1:

Next question was, will you be providing compensatory payment to Parish Councils for the potential risk of loss of a village hall and also to residents for the potential impact on house prices.

Chief Executive:

I think the answer to both of those is that it sits beyond the scope of the MAT because, again, for that you would be looking at a correlation and causation argument. For our effect of the school, we are making a decision based on the best education provision for young people. We are not a user of such of the village hall and, in fact, with the case of the Tottenhill village hall there is no reason to suggest why. You know, children from the village will still remain part of that village. Therefore, that village will be part of the community. Just because the children of that village will be taught in another village, as they are when they are taught where the current Wormegay school is. There are children of different parishes. By merging those schools, all those parishes become part of the community and I believe that Emma has already said that provision and support wouldn't necessarily just happen solely in one parish. All of the parishes that are part of that community are part of our DEMAT community now and will continue to be part of that community and part of the school community. So where and how we operate additional events, I think the school are already showing that they have that commitment.

Person 1:

There is another question around, what is the current capacity of Runcton Holme school?

Chief Executive:

70.

Person 1:

And what is your anticipated figure if you did amalgamate the two schools of what would sit in the new site. Numbers of students.

Chief Executive:

It would be around about 60.

Person 1:

OK. I believe it was 26 you quoted in your papers at Runcton Holme and 26 at Wormegay, which is 52.

Chief Executive:

Yes, that is current roll and if you look at the forecast data for both schools you would get around 60 for September. However, if some people don't choose to transfer, or if we have in-year movement and transfer for work or anywhere else, those numbers fluctuate as happens in all schools. So, we are hoping for around 20 in each class.

Person 1:

So with the potential housing uptake, it would only leave you with the capacity for another 10 students. Is that what we're looking at?

Chief Executive:

If the current site remains as it is, however, we have the potential to expand.

Person 1:

So the large level of housing, there's only 10 capacity to fill that upsurge of the local building.

Chief Executive:

Within our schools yes, but with liaison with the LA, they have confirmed there is spare capacity in some of the local primary schools and the new development will require a whole new school because of the size of it. But there is current capacity within the locality and other primary schools. The LA do not consider the proposed amalgamation to be detrimental on place planning in the area.

Person 1:

Just to clarify, you will lose students from the transfer from Wormegay to Runcton Holme because I do know that there are children that will not be going to Runcton Holme from Wormegay.

Chief Executive:

And I am sorry to hear that and we would clearly hope that that wouldn't happen and I know that the teachers and Emma wouldn't want that – again, we will support students with whatever decision their parents make for them.

Executive Headteacher:

The pupils have been at the heart of everything that we have tried to do at the school, particularly with the rest of the staff, so, yes, it would be incredibly disappointing for us to think that some of those children from Wormegay

wouldn't come over to Runcton Holme. We would intend to keep the ethos as very similar to what we are doing at the moment and we do believe that this is about creating a new school it isn't about bringing Wormegay children into Runcton Holme, it is about bringing Wormegay and Runcton Holme children closer together. Yes, it would be upsetting to hear that, and we would hope that as many people would come with us as possible on this journey going forward. It is a difficult one.

Person 1:

Just to add in to that point, I think it says in your documentation that you would see the school as viable if it sat at more than 50 pupils, I would suggest that it would be sitting under your headcount of 50 if you did amalgamate. Sitting at Runcton Holme.

Chair:

That possibly is something that we don't know definitely, do we, and I guess we would just have to wait and see. Is that right, Adrian? Is that how you would see that?

Chief Executive:

We currently anticipating around 60 pupils. We have got precedence that it can be financially viable at 50 pupils and that is one of the benefits of being a MAT that we ensure that can happen and we will endeavour to do so.

Chair:

OK, (name), are there any other questions?

Person 1:

There is just one – just around... it feels at the moment as if what has been described tonight provides significant gains for you versus significant losses for the communities for Wormegay and Tottenham. Is there anything that you can say that justifies that this isn't the case?

Chief Executive:

I think the justification sits within the consultation document, it sits within what has been described regarding the quality of education for the young people. Everything in there is to ensure that we can create a sustainable model of education, not just now, but for the future. We know that there will be children in all of the parishes that value a CofE education and this proposal allows us to do that for many years to come. And yes, while we understand that it is difficult in this time. We are custodians of the school, we are custodians of education in this area and we need to find a way and propose a way in which we can do so sustainably for many generations.

Person 1:

Will you also be disclosing your data regarding the predicted numbers?

Chief Executive:

It is the public domain.

Chair:

Thank you, (name), for that and I do hope that you didn't think that I was finishing the meeting because I didn't want to hear from you, it's just that I hadn't realised that you had additional questions. So I am sorry about that.

Person 1:

I was concerned because it was due to go on to 10pm and when you were shutting it down ...

Chair:

Yes, absolutely. And I wasn't shutting it down for any other reason at all and I hope you feel that you have been able to ask your questions and I do thank you for them and for the work you have done collating them from other people as well. I'd like to thank everyone else who have asked questions and made comments because I know it is a very important contribution you have made to the consultation and as, Adrian, has already explained. The consultation goes on for another 3 weeks to 5th March so you will have an opportunity to put in your views and ask your questions and in that case, I would like to thank you all for coming this evening and to wish you a good evening for the rest of the evening, and now, (name), you do have a bit of time now before 10pm that you can spend with your family so I do hope you have found it useful.

Person 4 indicated they would like to talk.

Person 4:

I just don't think it's fair. We're not having a fair crack of the whip here for everyone to put their views forward. Yes, alright, I know you're saying you're keeping the consultation open to the 5th March, but this is not the same as meeting face to face or having a meeting at the school or in the village hall. You are not being inclusive. This is why I think this decision needs to be put off until way after Covid has, um ...

Chair:

You made that point before, didn't you, very well. And, thank you for making it again because it is a very important point that you have made there.

Person 4:

It is, but there are lots of questions that we all have that cannot be answered either through emails, or like this, or letters. You know, we need a proper meeting so that we can talk to people face to face in the good old days. You know, this seems to me as though this is a done deal and no matter what we say it's going to happen, regardless. That's my opinion.

Chair:

Thank you for making your point known, it is an important point of view and I am sure that representatives from DEMAT have heard that. It is unfortunate that we are not able to hold a public meeting at the moment and therefore this is why we are including as many people as possible in this particular way. (Name), did you want to come in there?

Person 2:

Yeah, I've been listening and it just seems like it's a cut and dried deal, personally. Thank you.

Chair:

OK, thank you for that. I hope at least you feel that you have made your point to us this evening and that people have listened to you and I do thank you for making your points of view. So I am now going to close the meeting. Thank you for spending your time this evening.

(person 4 heard as meeting was closed saying 'was that it ...?...')