NUT Section

School Organisation in North Yarmouth

Alderman Swindell (Community) Primary School Statutory Proposal to close the school

North Denes (Community) Primary School Statutory Proposal to change the Age Range.

Consultation Response from Norfolk NEU, NUT Section and Norfolk NASUWT representing teaching staff members

We are disappointed that despite the response to the initial consultation favouring the stakeholder's preference for the status quo the consultation has moved to the next stage. However, this being the position, following the much appreciated opportunity given to the unions to meet with Chris Hey, Carol Human and Caroline Money we would like to submit the following response to the consultation, outlining our continuing opposition to the closure of Alderman Swindell school (from our position defending the conditions of our members in that school) and consequently the expansion of North Denes school, while additionally voicing our continuing concerns over the process and the likely outcomes of the proposals should they go ahead.

Our initial concern is with the process of the consultation. The informal stage, taken to be the first proposal issued, does not explicitly state that the closure of the Alderman Swindell School is a likely outcome, as we understand it should have done, therefore we have some issues over the validity of the process. In addition, the current proposal to expand North Denes is unclear on what form the building work will take. The consultation document states:

"In order to create a single primary school for the children in North Yarmouth we would build a **new 240 place primary school**…" (Point 3, paragraph 3)

and

"**A new school** would give children 21st century facilities and would be more cost effective." (point 4, paragraph 2)

This is misleading as the actual proposal is not for a new school but for a new building on the North Denes site to house the current school in its expanded form.

Finally, in terms of procedure, we would like to express our concern that the date proposed for the closure of Alderman Swindell (September 2018) gives very limited time to complete the necessary processes thoroughly and does not allow time for the completion of the building work at the North Denes site.

In direct response to the proposals made, the proposal to close Alderman Swindell School states that the County Council considers pooling the funding for the North Yarmouth schools and building on the North Denes site is the most cost-effective option. We understand that the pooled capital may not be sufficient to create a new school building and therefore this may not be the most cost-effective option, as once embarked on the local authority would undertake to maintain their commitment to completing the building work, therefore bearing any additional cost.

In addition, the proposals involve moving all of the children and staff to the North Denes site before building work will have been completed. The North Denes site as it stands is not suitable to host the pupils from both schools (otherwise we would question the need for the building expansion in the first place). We are therefore worried about the quality of education that pupils will be offered and the conditions in which our members will be required to work.

We are concerned that the Requires Improvement status at Alderman Swindell School has been listed as one of the reasons for this school being ear-marked for closure. This is demoralising for a committed and hard-working staff who have shown progress toward leaving this status. It seems that the key drivers of the proposal to close the school are in fact the opportunity to build at the North Denes site and the desirability of the Alderman Swindell building for use in a different context. Citing these reasons alone would have been a more upfront approach and less damaging to the morale of our members in the Alderman Swindell School. Also, we would not wish to see any precedent set for the assumption that RI schools should close.

Furthermore, the proposal to extend North Denes School states that one anticipated outcome would be easier recruitment of staff. There is, of course, no guarantee that a larger school in the same area would be more appealing to teachers as a workplace. More importantly during the transition process it is very likely that both schools will lose valuable staff due to the instability inevitable in such a process.

Finally, we are anxious that should the proposals go ahead, the local authority will make a large investment in the North Denes site which will inevitably, under the current government, become an academy, this being the case in all likelihood the valuable new school building will be handed over to an academy chain. Likewise, the empty Alderman Swindell building will be vulnerable to being handed over to an academy chain to be re-opened as a free-school. In the unfortunate event that the proposed closure was to go ahead we would be encouraged to see the Alderman Swindell site used for the support of the children of Yarmouth who cannot currently access mainstream provision and have no other provision in the area, however we would want to see this being provided through the local authority, and would at least seek assurance that the local authority would maintain control of the site and its use.

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