

## **EDUCATIONAL PROVISION IN GAMLINGAY: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

### **NOTES of Consultation Meeting for Gamlingay First School Parents, 7.00 pm, Tuesday 26 April 2011, at the First School**

#### **Cambridgeshire County Council Panel Members:**

Hazel Belchamber, Head of Infrastructure

Guy Dickens, Head of Standards and Effectiveness (11-19)

Gayle Gorman, Director of Learning

Councillor David Harty, Cabinet Member for Learning

Sian Phillips, Education Officer – note-taker.

At the start of the meeting, Jonathan Newman, the Headteacher of the First School, made a personal statement, responding to some of the comments that had been made by some parents in relation to his approach to the consultation on future educational provision in Gamlingay. He emphasised that his, and the First School governors', over-riding motivation was to provide the very best education for the children of Gamlingay.

Hazel Belchamber then gave a brief presentation which outlined:

- the reasons for the consultation;
- the options being put forward;
- the decision-making process and timescales; and
- answers to some of the questions that had already been raised.

Following on from this, parents were given the opportunity to ask questions of the Panel.

Question – What is being done in relation to rapid catch-up for pupils at Gamlingay Village College?

Answer – The Ofsted action plan sets this out. Maths and English specialists are closely involved with the work being done.

Question – How many places will be available at Bassingbourn Village College?

Answer – There is spare capacity in the future at Bassingbourn Village College because the projected future numbers of children in its catchment area are below its annual intake figure of 150. This means that the Gamlingay catchment figure of around 45 children could be accommodated without the need for significant building expansion or adaptations.

Question – Why is Gamlingay Village College not being given time to improve?

Answer – The local authority has to move to address the issues identified in the Ofsted action plan as quickly as possible. This includes looking at structural options.

Question – Who will run Gamlingay Village College from September 2011?

Answer – The interim Acting Headship arrangements will be reviewed in May.

Question – What is the longest secondary commute in Cambridgeshire?

Answer – The County Council's policy is that no journey should take more than 75 minutes.

Question – Would accessible transport be provided for children with disabilities?

Answer – Yes. Children's individual needs would be assessed in line with the relevant County Council Policy.

A large number of points were then made by parents. These are summarised below.

- Bassingbourn Village College was judged a 'good' school in 2004, but has been unable to maintain this standard.
- There is no public transport route to Bassingbourn. It will, therefore, be very difficult for children to access after-school provision and medical appointments.
- The shortest route to Bassingbourn, down Croydon Hill, is long and dangerous, and any alternative route would take even longer.
- There appears to be no educational benefit to sending children to Bassingbourn Village College, which is only a satisfactory school with good features, when Stratton Upper School is a good school with outstanding features.
- The opinion was expressed that it was difficult to believe anything that was said by the local authority and that the decision on the way forward had already been made.
- The £1.2 m cost of expanding the First School building would be better spent in supporting the Village College.
- If Gamlingay Village College was closed, this would reduce choice for parents, as they already had the choice of sending their children to Bassingbourn Village College.
- The context and ethos of a school are extremely important, as happy children learn well. The children at Gamlingay Village College are happy.

- Even though the local authority aimed to deliver the new secondary school in Cambourne by September 2013, doubt was expressed whether this was deliverable, and, therefore, whether it was a true option.
- A parallel was drawn with St Neots Community College, which was given time to improve and to exit the special measures category.
- The Council's sustainable travel strategy would be better served by keeping Gamlingay Village College open, as the majority of children can currently walk to school.
- The integrity of the consultation process was considered to be compromised by the identification of a local authority-preferred option, and possible closure being proposed alongside the Ofsted action plan.
- If the First School was expanded, careful consideration would need to be given to traffic and parking management in Green End Road.
- Children's views on the proposals should be obtained, not only those of parents.
- A member of staff of Stratton Upper School, who is a First School governor, provided detailed information about the comparative performance of Stratton Upper School and Bassingbourn Village College.

In conclusion, Hazel Belchamber summarised the consultation and decision-making timeline:

- Consultation closing date – 25 May 2011
- Cabinet decision on way forward – 14 June 2011
- Parents would be informed of the decision before the end of the summer term.
- If significant change was proposed, formal public consultation on this would start in September 2011.

Parents were encouraged to submit a written response to the consultation.