

Children and Young People Committee 10 November 2020

Item 6: Service Director Education Report

Question from Alistair Day, Head Teacher at St Bede's Inter-Church School in Cambridge

Thank you to members of the Committee for allowing my contribution to your discussions about the proposed free school in Soham.

My name is Alistair Day and I am the Head teacher at St Bede's Inter-Church School in Cambridge and it is St Bede's Inter-Church School Trust that has been approved to open the proposed new school in Soham.

St Bede's Inter-Church School is the only church secondary school in Cambridgeshire and as such receives applications from families living right across the county and beyond for the distinctive education we provide. Oversubscription denies many families the choice of selecting a church school and in 2020 it was only possible for residents within the city of Cambridge to receive a place for their Year 7 children at St Bede's, unless they already had another child at the school.

St Bede's enjoys an excellent reputation within Cambridgeshire for its inclusive and caring ethos combined with a very strong academic track record that ensures some of the highest levels of student progress in Cambridgeshire and beyond, including more vulnerable student groups. The school's Christian ethos is often identified as a determining factor in school selection for families with children with special educational needs and disabilities. Likewise, we have a high proportion of students for whom English is not their first language, as many families with links to countries overseas seek a school with church connections.

As Head of St Bede's, I recognise the value in working closely with other schools and chaired the Cambridgeshire Secondary Heads' Association and the Cambridge City Behaviour and Inclusion Partnership. I am a member of the Corporation at Hills Road Sixth Form College and support the governance of the Virtual School for children in the care of the Local Authority. St Bede's Inter-Church School will continue to work closely with other schools for the benefit of the communities we serve, be that in Cambridge and in Soham.

To assess the likely impact of opening a new secondary school in Soham, St Bede's Inter-Church School Trust commissioned Philip Cranwell Associates to conduct a survey of families living in East Cambridgeshire and in the adjoining areas of West Suffolk and West Norfolk. The conclusions from the study were shared with the local secondary schools to reassure them that there is unlikely to be any significant detriment from the new school opening. Families for whom a church school is important would be attracted from a wide area to attend the new school and of course,

they would be responsible for funding their own transport. Other, more local families were divided with the majority wishing for their children to attend the schools they already know and respect in the local area, such as Soham and Ely. The extensive housing developments in West Suffolk, such as Red Lodge are not served by a local secondary school and they will continue to rely on schools in East Cambridgeshire.

The opening of the new school will of course, follow the opening of the new train station in Soham, allowing sustainable transport from further afield for students. This will also serve to make Soham an attractive area for families to call home.

St Bede's Inter-Church School will only admit one year group at a time, so no students will be able to transfer from existing secondary schools to attend. The school's faith designation will ensure 50% of the students travel from a wider geographical area, reducing its local impact.