

**SEN Review Consultation Meeting with Parents – 15 October 2008  
at Heathside School at 7.35pm.**

**Present:** Ian Brown, Head of Infrastructure  
Odran Doran, Headteacher Heathside School  
Gary Nethercott, Strategic Commissioner  
Adrian Orr, Senior Adviser, Social Inclusion  
Sandy Ranson, Senior Adviser, Inclusion and Additional Needs  
Cheryl Sharland, Head of Integrated Services  
Kate Thomas, Programme Manager for the SEN Review  
Nicky Fisk, note-taker

The purpose of the meeting was to present stage 2 of the Consultation of the SEN Review to parents and other stakeholders in the Southern Area of the County. A presentation was given including:

- Why the local authority is reorganising schools
- The local context/background
- The proposal/options for the school and the area.
- How stakeholders can have a say during the consultation period

The consultation process started on the 22 September and finishes on 15 December 2008.

**Why Now?**

- The next phase of Building Schools for the Future Programme would enable us to improve facilities at Special Schools.
- We would be able to build on the successful models we have in place.
- Learning is at the core of integrated services.

There are three options for the Southern Area plus options for county wide resources for pupils with severe dyslexia, high level autism and significant social, emotional and behavioural difficulties.

***Q. If the schools were joined and come to Heathside or Belstead, how will the school be big enough?***

A. When the schools join together in 2010 they will remain on the two sites but will be a single school with one headteacher and one governing body. A new building will then be built in 2013.

If the two schools remain as they are the LA would not be able to access funding to build a new school. BSF is a big opportunity and this proposal would not be achieved through any other programme.

***Q. Would like to seek the reassurance that if my child was in a particular category of need that they would not be shipped off to another part of the country.***

***Queried part of the presentation about children attending their local school and being part of the local group.***

A. We do send children out of county where we feel that the provision on offer is in the child's interests but this would only be done with parental approval and where the needs of the child are so complex.

Some parents have said that they want their children to go to the local school. Every child is different and decisions are made with parents, teachers etc. It is not appropriate for every child but some do benefit from dual placement.

***Q. A comment was made that the attitude of the mainstream school is not helpful to parents.***

A. We need to develop the role of special schools and mainstream schools and teach them how children can be included.

***Q. I have concerns about my child with limited language, mixing with mainstream children and find it horrifying as my child will not cope. Other parents are saying that their children will not cope in a mainstream setting. There will be a lot more noise, children in close proximity and their child can just about tolerate children in Heathside. At a Parent Group meeting parents raised concerns about increasing the school to include Belstead children and uprooting them twice, they cannot cope with change, new staff etc.***

A. The school will be in a separate building so it will not feel any different. On the Thomas Wolsey/Thurleston site they will not be sharing classrooms and will have a sense of being in their own specialist environment. Facilities will be shared discreetly for the young people. There are examples around the country where this has already happened successfully. On a mainstream site there will be flexibility for the child if this is appropriate.

***Q. Parents are looking for clarification regarding uprooting their children.***

A. Transition and managing change. There will be a physical change but the children will be moving with their friends and staff.

Heathside needs to say what it is they want to achieve from the new school for parents, staff and children and build on all the good things that have been done already. At the moment Heathside lives with and overcome problems with the building etc and the new school will enable us to focus wholly on the children.

Parents will be involved throughout this process through the governing body. It will still have the feel and ethos of what Heathside has now. There will be a separate playground but there will also be the opportunity for some pupils to integrate if this is appropriate.

The LA offered to attend one of the parent support groups to discuss the issues raised tonight. There is the opportunity to make things even better for the children of Heathside and the LA want to do this in partnership with parents and the school.

***Q. A parent commented that she has had experience of her child in a special school co-located with a Mainstream school in America and can see where the LA are coming from with their proposals. It worked really well, the children in mainstream benefited too. It broke down barriers and the children's start and finish times for school was staggered appropriately.***

A. The LA has had the experience of taking the parents of Thomas Wolsey through the change of co-locating on to a mainstream site. There is provision in Telford called the Hadley Learning Community that has preschool, children's centre, primary, secondary and special schools all on one site.

***Q. How will the merger affect resources, for example SALT?***

A. There is a need to increase therapy provision and the LA is working at a high level with health partners/PCT colleagues to look at the baseline offer for families.

***Q. We are not against the new building but are concerned about integration on site and the location being in West Ipswich and the increase in traffic.***

***Most of the staff of Heathside live on the East side of town.***

***Felixstowe children will have even further to travel.***

***Was Copleston High Schools considered as a possible site?***

A. Copleston is not in the current wave of the BSF programme and in order to provide a suitable setting within the current timeline an appropriate site and school was required. Also the Copleston site is not big enough to host an additional school.

***Q. When deciding where my child should go I visited Thomas Wolsey and Heathside and the reason for choosing Heathside was because there were so many older children around at Thomas Wolsey. My child does not have severe autism or dyslexia and I am all for incorporating but I do not want my child to be in a very vulnerable position.***

A. There will be discreet areas and Early Years will have their own entrance. Specialist provision will be separate to special schools.

***Q. Severely autistic children are missing out as part of Beacon Hill school. There is outreach but no in-reach for him in Beacon Hill.***

A. Autism presents itself within all levels of ability. The very able pupils we would want to support in mainstream schools but with support. Others with profound learning difficulties and autism need special school provision.

We need to make it more explicit that this is new provision and add this to the detail in our proposals.

***Q. Heathside is excellent. What will the impact be on the staff and the Headteacher having to focus half their time between the schools?***

A. We met with staff earlier tonight and understand their concerns. We do not want to impact on the provision for the children. One Headteacher will have the oversight of the two sites and there will be senior staff on both sites. For other staff we would not expect to see much difference regarding numbers and types of staff. The two sites will continue to operate with the same number of pupils. For the period leading up to the new site in 2013 there will be quite a lot of stability in terms of staffing.

***Q. Feels there are unfounded concerns because of the information available. Would be interested to hear the outcome of the staff review and their concerns.***

A. The LA must go through the process of consultation and we want to do this. Information will be collected and report to SCC cabinet in January 2009 for them to decide how to proceed.

***Q. Not enough information about what the proposals mean for us to give useful feedback, i.e. building construction.***

A. The LA suggested that a stakeholder group is set up with parental representation to provide more details and give the opportunity for questions to be asked. The LA agreed to investigate possibilities of providing an interactive "web" tour of the new Thomas Wolsey site. A website is also being developed with FAQs.

Some of the detail has not been looked at, for example the design of the building for 2013. It is too early to have this amount of detail. Thomas Wolsey involved their parents from the beginning and the LA expects to replicate this process and offer opportunities for parents of Heathside and Belstead to be involved.

Heathside need to develop a strategy for change, working with staff, governors and parents and carers. Children and young people also need to be part of this development and will be key stakeholders.

Parents need to realise the ambition of the Headteacher of Heathside, the staff and the LA to get their school to be part of the process and locked into securing BSF monies.

With the opening of the SWISS centre there will be a significant number of pupils attending from Belstead School and therefore will impact the school significantly in terms of numbers. The LA would like to reassure parents, the Headteacher and governors, that the interests of the children and young people are upper most in the minds of the authority. The LA wants to work with all stakeholders to ensure that special educational needs provision is even better than that offered currently.