



School Consultations

WSCC

County Hall

Chichester

PO19 1RQ

Response to school effectiveness consultation

Dear Sirs

In response to the above consultation, the parish council has instructed me to respond as follows:

1. **Vision:** We would like to be assured that the over-arching vision (“to improve educational outcomes in West Sussex by championing all our children and young people”) is not aimed purely at test results in a few key subjects at primary level. Many parents put other factors much more typical of small village schools (eg friendly, safe environment; small classes; stage-not-age philosophy from mixed-age classes etc) above test results and Ofsted ratings.
2. **School organisation:** Setting the minimum size of primary schools at 210 places excludes many rural schools in the South Downs. Is there any evidence that schools above this size are more attractive to parents, perform better in educational assessments (eg Ofsted), reject less children (exclusions, special needs referrals etc) or have better records of not running deficit budgets? This strategy should not be accepted by elected councillors unless the evidence is compelling.

WSCC is suggesting that walking 2 or 3 miles to school makes it “accessible” but this is not the case for our residents. It is already a problem for our residents to get their children to the two nearest primary schools: they cannot do so without walking along and / or crossing the A272, and there are no suitable bus services. It would not be acceptable for the distance to the nearest school to be doubled by closing either Rogate or Stedham.

We are aware that our two local primary schools have been trying for six months to have substantive discussions with WSCC, backed by solid and comparable information about other local schools, about different forms of collaboration and partnership – as called for in your strategy. Yet the governors appear to have been given little support in these studies. The draft strategy appears to expect all schools to make these decisions and execute them within 3 years, but WSCC seems unwilling to provide the information and unable to provide the support to “enable schools to form sustainable partnerships”. We are happy that the governors at Rogate and Stedham are ahead of the pack in thinking about collaboration, but we do not wish to see our them pushed into rushing such a decision or forced into some form of partnership based on inadequate information and inadequate planning and support.

For parish councils, it should be possible to see information on current and projected pupil populations at a local level and on current parental choices, so that we can assess how many of our residents go to which schools and whether this was by choice or compulsion.

3. General comments: The draft strategy fails to recognise the importance of primary schools to small rural villages and *vice versa* and needs to be considerably improved in this area before it should be accepted by our elected representatives.

As we argued when we were asked to comment on the similarly ill-informed consultation over the expansion of Easebourne, it is time WSCC engaged in more open dialogue with schools, governors and local communities, instead of trying to make policy in isolation.

This should involve the release of much more information (eg admissions and parental choice patterns) to inform the dialogue. Improved education is a high priority for residents of West Sussex, which has badly under-performed national standards, and the policies and strategies to achieve it should be developed more openly.

There is too little evidence given to support some of the objectives and assumptions (eg that larger schools provide better outcomes) and there is far too little recognition of the value of small schools to the children that attend them (aside from SATs results), and to the communities around them.

This consultation – like other school consultations before it – is asking people to judge very vague propositions with totally inadequate explanations and supporting information, as outlined above. It needs much more detail and justification before it is put before the West Sussex council. Most of all it needs to be developed in partnership with school governors, staff, parents and community representatives, not written as a theoretical strategy with no supporting evidence.

Yours faithfully,

Carola Brown

Chairman, Trotton with Chithurst parish council