

Meeting: Parents' Consultation

Date/Time: Tuesday 6 July at 6.30pm

Venue: Hookergate Comprehensive School

Present: Cllr M Graham	Portfolio Holder for Sustainable Communities: East, Economic Development
Margaret Whellans	Group Director Learning & Children
David Mitchell	Director Learning and Schools
Peter Crabtree	Headteacher Hookergate School
Steve Williamson	Headteacher Ryton School
Tim Nelson	School Inspector
Anita Dowson	Note taker

Attendance: 54

Margaret Whellans opened the meeting and thanked those present for attending and explained the purpose of the meeting.

Introductions were made by representatives from the Local Authority.

David Mitchell gave an overview on progress since informal consultation in 2009 and highlighted issues regarding recent announcements by Government indicating that BSF projects in Gateshead have been suspended.

The following questions and comments were raised by parents of pupils at Hookergate Comprehensive School.

- Picked up issues regarding money. Understanding is that scheme has been scrapped not frozen. Frozen would indicate that there is still money available.
- Parents point of view is that they are no further forward than a year ago. What are the implications for children at Ryton what provision will be made regarding accommodation?
- After consultation held last year indication was given that children would be on both sites. This is a big issue and would be considered as moving onto someone else's territory.
- Told that when schools merge there will be no "them and us" but there was lots of problems on Facebook last year from Ryton pupils and parents saying that they don't want Hookergate pupils at their

school.

- Three different moves will disrupt child's education could Hookergate not stay open for 1 year longer? Don't want child disrupted by multiple moves.
- Will teaching levels be sustained for pupils going into year 10 and have the same level of teaching as they receive now?
- What will the class sizes be when children transfer to Ryton? Will current class sizes be maintained in Ryton?
- Need to act in the interests of children and push ahead with plans. Feel that it is no longer sustainable. If new building is delayed will Hookergate remain open or will build happen at Ryton?
- If Hookergate is closed need to improve facilities at Ryton – temporary buildings are very expensive.
- Everyone moving to Ryton will mean the school is overcrowded – is this to help get money?
- It has always felt clear that Hookergate will close and Ryton will remain due to having sports hall. If Hookergate had had the new Sports Hall would it have remained open?
- Parents feel between a "rock and a hard place" nothing has come from the consultation process and feel disempowered. Having siblings at different schools is not normal school life. Children learn from social experiences. Parents would have preferred to have been told last year that the school would close in September. There is a feeling that the children don't matter.
- Still don't know what will happen about the new school, and no information about temporary accommodation feels that it has been a convenient way to railroad proposals. Council are guilty of political cowardice – Hookergate is a better school than Ryton. Majority of children won't have as good an experience as they have at Hookergate. Hookergate is in it's current state due to exclusions from Ryton. Has been a good school but the Council wants to see it closed. Ryton has always been seen as a coasting school. Hookergate has been ruined by LA and now has to go because of LA. Ryton has been listened to not Hookergate.
- Parents at Ryton will object to change of uniform due to financial implications.

- New image is fair enough but won't be seen as a new image by Hookergate parents.
- Is there a hope of Hookergate staying open? Rather than spending money at Ryton could it be spent at Hookergate? Only 50 pupils due to come into school due to comments made last year.
- When some year groups combine in 2011 will Ryton Year 8's join Year 8's at Hookergate and join them together? Can this be considered and have joint Year 7, 8, 9 at Hookergate?
- Is Cabinet meeting open for public to attend?
- Where is the demographic centre of the West?
- Junction near site is very dangerous.
- How many sites have been viewed?
- Rename Ryton to Hookergate and use Hookergate uniform.
- Whose aspiration was it to have a new name?
- Why should it be a Ryton Governing Body decision should be a decision by the joint Governing Body.
- Still talking as if new building will happen. What happens if no money comes through at all?
- Must have known following Government change that there was a possibility of this programme being stopped.
- Can't have children in portakabins. Need a guarantee that this won't happen.
- There is no mention in the consultation booklet regarding 6th forms and would like daughter to go to 6th form. Would have like some mention of 6th forms in booklet. Would like to see the current provision at Ryton. Can 6th form places be guaranteed at Ryton?
- Will Hookergate be sending correspondence out to parents about 6th form?
- Some disappointment about the consultation process so far. What is the process now? Need to look to the future. More dynamic process is needed and more planning with a different process.
- Understand that drop-in sessions are being held do a more dynamic process and exciting process on how things move forward. Need to

have input as do children if there is to be an inclusive school in a year's time.

- If there is money to spend at Ryton why isn't there money for the new school?
- Very disappointed in process. If Hookergate closes and pupils go to new school which is on a very dangerous junction council will be sued if any child is injured on the road within the next 10 years.
- Don't feel involved in what happens. Feel it would be useful to have a joint meeting with parents of Ryton pupils. Need to take best of what there is and integrate parents which may give more confidence in Ryton.
- Not amalgamating schools. One school is being closed and the pupils moved to Ryton meaning only one school.
- Thinking positively strengths have been discussed, what can Ryton offer and how will Hookergate feed in?
- What in-put will kids have when they have their meeting?
- Will there be an inclusion centre at Ryton?
- Links are needed between the schools for year groups to work together.
- Everyone's support is needed at Ryton.
- If all cards had been on table originally Council would have got better support.
- New school will get support. Everyone will be at Ryton by the time the money is freed up.
- What will be discussed with kids? School and pupils need to work together.
- Reassurance needed that if daughter goes to Ryton 6th form this will be a good experience. Need to discuss with both Headteachers. Power is in hands of Ryton and Ryton Governors, not a merger but subsuming Hookergate into Ryton. Council should have had a mixed governing body who will support the Headteacher.
- There is an ability to have a 2 site school if the will is there. There is an entrenchment to have the school in Ryton.

- Last year the closure of Hookergate depended on the building of a new school Hookergate shouldn't close unless a new school is being built.
- Location is a major issue to get child to and from school. Need written guarantees that child is safe to get to Ryton and free transport will be provided.
- 1 child will be in Ryton and 1 in Hookergate and a small child and will have to drive all over to drop children at school create difficulties as a single parent. Why aren't Ryton parents invited to the meeting and why is there a need to have separate meetings?
- Not just pupils from Ryton using Facebook but parents as well.
- Is there a positive example available of merging schools?
- Sounds like there will be a Ryton School and Hookergate will close. If a new school is built local residents will complain about the new building. What guarantees can be given that they won't be split up or sent to a failing school?
- Will transport and buildings be guaranteed? How can something be promised if the process hasn't been gone through.
- Proposed catchment area would be divided.
- How can consultation be carried out if no promises can be made.
- Need guarantee that Hookergate pupils going to Ryton there will be no safety issues and will have adequate room and accommodation.
- Statement by Community Governor of her nervousness and anxiety about being part of the joint governing body. All issues have been warmly welcomed by Ryton. Has to say there is a significant shift in belief in what Ryton will be in the future. Government pulling the money was a major issue. Feels convinced the Governing Body at Ryton want Hookergate to be part of their school. Discussed how to bring schools together and feels reassured that there will be a new identity. Ryton will have a new identity from September 2011 including new uniform. Need to get things right for the kids there are kids who want to get together. This is a formal and blunt process now but have to make it happen at every level. Ryton Governing Body do want to make this work.
- Not being told how kids will get to school and it will cost more to get kids to Ryton.

- Question posed to Ryton HT as to his comfort with the site for the school being next to a busy by-pass.
- Are children allowed out of school at Ryton?
- Ryton school starts earlier than Hookergate which will impact on travel. Can start time be looked at?
- Last year talks were held around possible opportunities. Money situation puts this right back where it was. Want the best for children don't want short changed.
- Will Hookergate closure mean sale of land? Could the money be reinvested in the new school?
- If the value of the land at Hookergate and Ryton were sold at market value could the value be used to advance possibility of new school since the freezing of BSF money?
- Will pupils at Hookergate have a choice of who they go into classes with at Ryton? Has grown up with group of friends since nursery and very close.
- How can guarantees be given that places will be available at Ryton once all of Hookergate are accommodated there, will High Spen pupils be guaranteed a place?
- Houses in High Spen aren't 3 miles from school will have to pay extra travel than pay currently.
- Who will the Headteacher be at Ryton? Why can't it be Mr Crabtree?
- When will Headteacher of Hookergate leave as he is the voice of Hookergate at the minute? Will Peter Crabtree be around for initial changes?
- Will council ringfence commercial gain from Hookergate sale for Ryton?
- David Mitchell's opening comments indicated 5 schools have been affected. By freeze is there an assumption that Ryton/Hookergate will be at the top of the list when it is unfrozen?

Margaret Whellans urged those present to completed the consultation questionnaires and return them to the Civic Centre with any questions and comments.

The meeting of parents at Hookergate School closed at 8.20pm