

**Minutes of the Consultation Drop-In session for Parents held at the Connaught School
at 4.30pm on 13th July 2016.**

1.	<p>Reason for the Meeting. The drop-in was held to give parents the opportunity to express views and ask questions face to face following the proposals for the merger of the Connaught school with Newport Junior School and Belle Vue Infant School, to form an all through school for ages 4-16 years. A detailed paper dated the 1st July listing four options had been in the public domain prior to the session and the school had been asked to circulate details of the consultation, including the link to the website.</p>
2.	<p>Lead Officers Present: Karen Nye – School Improvement Manager for Hart and Rushmoor, Hampshire Children’s Services Richard Vaughan – Deputy Head of Strategic Development, Hampshire Children’s Services. David Hardcastle – County School Improvement Manager, Hampshire Children’s Services.</p>
3.	<p>Introduction. Richard Vaughan opened the parents drop-in meeting at 4.30pm.</p> <p>The purpose of the event was explained and the consultation process outlined. Richard highlighted the fact that this was a drop-in event and was not intended to be a formal presentation by officers. Karen Nye joined Richard at 4.45 pm and David Hardcastle joined the meeting once the staff meeting had concluded.</p>
4.	<p>Question and Answer Session. There was a question and answer session for the parents, this is captured below.</p>

Number	Question / Comment	Answer / Response
1	<p>How can you criticise this school? Newport’s entire year 6 are coming to this school? If you change things, people may not choose Connaught.</p> <p>If parents don’t choose this school, it’s irrelevant. Then it won’t work!</p>	<p>It depends on the curriculum offer being made, that has to be attractive. We hope that this will be the school of choice for more parents due to better standards.</p> <p>Parents should have that choice. Many parents currently do not select Connaught as their preference school.</p>
2	<p>Can’t you just bring in better teachers now?</p>	<p>It’s not about better teachers, we are not saying that the teachers are not good; we feel a different approach and structure should be explored to raise standards</p>
3	<p>The Council is short of money, so it seems like a good idea to sell?</p>	<p>No, it’s not about money. Secondary provision will continue on this site.</p>

4	I chose this school for my son, there have been excellent transition arrangements and a fantastic family environment.	We acknowledge the strengths but feel attainment is presently not high enough. We feel the community should have a say about improving academic standards.
5	Why is it not an option to improve this school? Why not give the school more money? With all the people moving in to this area the school won't be able to take all the children in a few years.	The funding is not driven by the local authority but by the government based on a national formula which includes the number on roll. With its current number of pupils, the school's income is insufficient to support the school's structure moving forward. The local authority can only invest in new schools when all provision is full, currently there is plenty of capacity. Ten years down the line there may be case for expansion and that would then be considered. Setting up a through school would generate economies of scale offering opportunities to review spending and organisation.
6	There is a great deal of new housing in Aldershot, the spaces will be needed.	We accept that Aldershot is growing significantly but there is a significant drop off at transition from KS2; currently the school has capacity and this proposal does not remove any capacity.
7	My son is autistic and has made fantastic progress at Connaught.	The Connaught has many strengths and it is good that you feel your son has done well.
8	I don't understand why you didn't consult with the parents and staff before putting that article in the paper. That was disgraceful! Parents who wanted to come here will have been put off by that article.	We follow a statutory process of open consultation. There will be a series of consultations, evidence will be collected and a report will go to the lead member. Everyone has a voice in this consultation process. We cannot legislate for what the press writes.
9	We were not told or consulted before the article appeared in the press. It's disgraceful how you have gone about it. We want to influence things; how do we make our views known?	There is a process for consultation. Local head teachers were informed before the news became public and it was up to the head teachers to determine when they would share the news with their communities. There is a consultation website.

10	<p>Aldershot is increasing in size with young families moving into the area, why not make plans for the future of this school?</p> <p>Put your cards on the table, you want to sell this site!</p>	<p>There are very strict rules about the use of unused school buildings. Currently the school has capacity; we do not need more capacity. This proposal will not change the capacity available.</p> <p>We are interested in establishing an all through school out of three schools. The process to achieve this is set down in law. We expand the age range of one school and close the other two. The governing body and leadership of the expanded school determines the structure of that school moving forward.</p> <p>The site is needed. The secondary provision will continue on the current site. There are no plans to sell the site; it is needed for continued educational provision.</p>
11	<p>Why do we have to do this? Why pick on Connaught?</p> <p>There are other schools in Farnborough which do not have good attainment, why pick on us?</p> <p>You have damaged the reputation of the school by using out of date data, we have improved.</p>	<p>We need to achieve a higher level of attainment.</p> <p>This school has been under-performing consistently for a number of years and we are looking at alternative ways to improve performance in the secondary sector.</p>
12	Who would lead the new school?	<p>There would be one governing body to make the decisions. The leadership of Belle Vue Infant school would most likely change in structure and form, to run all phases/key stages but this would be the decision of the governing body.</p> <p>The school (Belle Vue) would have the same DFE number but would change its age range; technically Newport and Connaught close to achieve the merger but their sites and the provision remains.</p>
13	<p>What happens if the Connaught pulls them down and they pull out of the deal?</p> <p>Based on what facts?</p> <p>What happens when children come from other junior schools?</p>	<p>It is not about Ofsted it is about improving attainment levels in the secondary phase for local children. Once the merger has been achieved there can be no further change without a similar process to this.</p> <p>It is anticipated that raised expectations through the all through model would</p>

		prevent any loss of time on learning early in KS3. Children from other feeders would be able to join in Y7; equally parents of children at the all through school could select alternative provision at Y7 should they wish
14	<p>My children came here five years ago and both have done well. My son is SEN, how will he be affected and how will he cope?</p> <p>The autistic children here are very upset at the thought of moving. They are happy in this small, very well supported school.</p>	The school will not move; the site and the classrooms will remain, as will the staff should they wish to.
15	<p>The school is failing because the education team has not supported the teaching staff.</p> <p>This school has fantastic Value Added, they have made my son the best he can be which is what this school is all about.</p> <p>What about the autistic children? My child cannot cope with an ordinary school. Many children here can achieve and do so.</p>	<p>Progress is important but also important is attainment at GCSE level and particularly 5 A-C including English and mathematics.</p> <p>We believe it is possible to achieve high standards for all.</p>
16	<p>What about after school clubs would they raise attainment?</p> <p>Pupils are upset and afraid about what will happen to their school.</p>	They may do so but it is parental choice if they are accessed; fundamentally we need to improve provision in school hours.
17	Is there any proof that this plan will work and raise attainment?	One of the challenges nationally is that year 7 has a dip and teachers have to recalibrate. There is evidence that through schools can be successful in eliminating these dips in progress.
18	Can we achieve better results without going to a through school? Why can't we recruit more and better teachers?	Staff tell us they are doing the best that they can. We are happy to hear views about other ways to improve the school's performance; this is why we are consulting. Many head teachers in Hampshire and nationally have difficulty recruiting staff.
19	Don't talk about Wavell, they don't want us, they are offended by us!	
20	How will all this affect pupils, teachers and grades?	This proposal is a structural change. Most likely to affect staff in leadership posts more than teachers. It has been proposed to improve grades.

21	Children and parents have to put effort in as well as teachers. It doesn't have to be a negative change.	
22	Will my daughter's GCSE options change?	It is unlikely that any governing body will change the options of those children currently studying GCSEs.
23	How can an infant school governing body have any expertise in secondary schools?	The governing body will most likely undertake a skills audit and where they feel they lack expertise they can add experienced governors with expertise in those areas.
24	<p>This is a brilliant school, Mrs Abbott knows every child's first name, and they are not just a number. There are some great people here, particularly for special needs. You have trashed the reputation in the press.</p> <p>You are contradicting yourselves; first you say the school is closing then you say it's not!</p> <p>Admit it, you are closing the school to sell the land.</p> <p>You need to make it clear in future that you are closing the name but not the school and be careful how that comes across. This school is so passionate.</p>	<p>We can't control the press; you have my assurance that we will make the point clear to them that this issue is about attainment.</p> <p>This is a merger but technically we have to close Connaught and Newport to achieve the merger so yes, technically the school will close but provision and the site will remain (said repeatedly and rejected repeatedly).</p>
25	Your report listed the number of single parents and referred to this as a disadvantaged community, was that necessary?	The report uses some Ofsted terminology.
26	How can you be sure that the people who don't speak English understand what is going on?	We have offered translation services to the school as required and can also do separate sessions. We have left this to the head teacher to decide and let us know if this would be helpful.
27	The uncertainty of the situation may cause a slump in intake. It puts us in a very uncertain situation; we need to decide for our children.	We appreciate it's a difficult decision regardless; it's a decision you have to take.
28	You say our 5 A-C's were 29%, the previous year it was 48%. This year was just a blip. This school's reputation belies its qualities. Parents are amazed at how good it is.	Last year was an improvement but it was not sustained and was still below the national figure by some margin.
29	You make these decisions and we are just left to get on with it!	
30	Belle Vue currently has one head teacher for two sites – how is that going to work here?	The governing body, in consultation with others, would determine the leadership structure.

31	There are 3,800 new houses being built in Aldershot, surely some of them will want their children to come here?	The school will not be closed; places will still be available as they are now.
32	You are judging attainment on a one-year blip, remember the children we take in. This is a community; you keep moving the goalposts.	This is about under-performance over time. We recognise the challenges of the community.
33	All children are different, what suits one child will not suit another. This school takes many children for whom English is not a first language, or who have special needs.	That is correct. A high proportion of children in this school are achieving below the national average. Regardless of their contextual factors we want all children to achieve well.
34	You will still have feeder schools coming in with that transition.	You will have a leadership team that can manage that transition. There will be an established culture and high expectations plus a better knowledge of what children are achieving in the primary phase.
5. Observations		
5.1	You owe it to the parents in this room to do another consultation and in a more structured manner. You haven't structured this well at all. That was naive.	This initial session was a drop-in session. A meeting such as this was not what was intended or offered. There will be further opportunities, including those already available on-line.
5.2	You did not bring any information for parents and that was disrespectful.	
5.3	All the stronger male teachers have left the school. Very strong help is needed, Lindsey the head teacher is brilliant but she can't do everything on her own	
5.4	There must be a reason we dropped this year, all this upset does not help. Teachers have not felt supported and have moved on to other jobs.	
5.5	If, on paper, Connaught and Newport close then this school automatically becomes an outstanding school and recruitment will blossom and the numbers on roll will rise.	
5.6	Why didn't you explain it like that before? Is this the only meeting?	There is another tomorrow at Newport and opportunities to share your views through individual written responses.

5.7	What happens now?	There is consultation until the end of September on our website. We will then report to the Executive member as part of the process as described.
5.8	When will we have a decision?	December at the earliest. We encourage you all to go on the website. The minutes of this meeting will go to Councillor Edgar and all consultation views will be available. If it is decided to go ahead, there will be notices to close this school. You have a month to make representations. Cllr Edgar will consider all perspectives.
5.9	Why is it the decision of just one man?	This is a statutory process and it is being followed.
5.10	Can you guarantee that we will be the first to know because other parents are finding out the details before us? This is really important.	Councillor Edgar's decisions are reported publicly.
5.11	Why can't we get to know first? That's not right.	We will do everything we can to make sure that the school communities are the first to know.
5.12	What would happen if we became an academy?	This is another option in the report. Then a sponsor would be found and the local authority would no longer be directly involved with the school.
<p>Parents were encouraged to go on to the website and complete responses; hard copies were also made available at the session.</p> <p>The meeting closed at 6.30pm.</p>		