

Minutes of the Consultation drop-in session for the parents of Belle Vue Infant and Newport Junior School, held at Newport Junior School at 4.30pm on 14th July 2016.

1.	<p>Reason for the Meeting.</p> <p>The meeting had been called to hear views and answer questions of the parents following a proposal dated 1st July from the Director of Children’s Services to the Executive Member for Education that “the Connaught secondary school, Newport Junior school and Belle Vue Infant School should merge to form an all through age 4-16 school; this would be achieved by closing the Connaught and Newport Junior Schools and extending the age range of Belle Vue Infant School to 4-16, with the anticipated implementation being between January and September 2017.”</p>
2.	<p>Lead Officers present:</p> <p>Mr Brian Pope – Assistant Director (Education and Inclusion) Hampshire Children’s Services Ms Karen Nye – School Improvement Manager for Hart and Rushmoor, Hampshire Children’s Services. Mrs Gemma Bowry - Capital Development Officer, Hampshire Children’s Services.</p>
3.	<p>Introduction</p> <p>This meeting was conducted as a “Drop in Session” with parents coming into the hall as they arrived and joining one of three or four groups, according to numbers. At its most popular there were some fifty to sixty parents in the hall. The conversations and opinions below are from questions and answer sessions of a random mixture of groups.</p> <p>Officers outlined the process of going out to consultation and to ask for the views of parents. Data from these views will inform the process.</p> <p>The good work done at Connaught was acknowledged but unfortunately it was impossible to get away from the fact that attainment was much lower than the National Average. The parents were invited to ask questions.</p>
4.	<p>Question and Answer Session</p> <p>There was a question and answer session a broad selection of which is captured below.</p>

Number	Question / Comment	Answer / Response
1	Surely the problem is also the catchment area? Many pupils are disadvantaged, with English as a second language, etc.?	There are many challenges facing the Connaught but ultimately, their pupils are the same pupils that achieve well at primary.
2	What has caused that dip; I cannot see how a merger will improve it?	Transitions will be smoother; there will be less learning lost in transition and more continuity of curriculum and behaviour, with consistent high expectations. There will be one governing body which would develop the leadership structure. There would also be a change of governance and leadership, the governing body would do a skills audit to see if they are well positioned for expertise across primary and secondary and if not bring that expertise in.

3	What happens if the schools merge but the attainment doesn't rise, what choice would we have then?	Exactly the same choices as now, you would be able to choose Connaught or any other secondary of your choice.
4	Why take away our excellent head teacher and spread her thinner? Why three schools?	We believe that your children have had a good experience at Belle Vue and Newport; they deserve a good experience at Connaught too. This is a different model of leadership and a different structure. There would be an expanded leadership team across the all through.
5	It is a mistake to just go by the current situation; you should look ahead to an increase in numbers.	Of the children in their catchment area, only 30% have elected to go to Connaught as a first preference, 70% do not. There is currently capacity.
6	Most of their children come from a council estate which is in upheaval; it has been being regenerated for the last four years.	
4	Why can't we get a grant from the council to help us recruit more teachers, the trouble is we are right next to Surrey. The council should be more adventurous. You need to look at the whole school to address the problems.	Belle Vue and Newport are not merged they are federated. The changes that will come about will support/improve standards and bring more children. It should be a more attractive place to work with greater opportunities.
5	How will it affect the curriculum?	It will give primary expertise to support transition. It will offer greater continuity and improved expectations. It may offer greater breadth at secondary if numbers and therefore budget improve.
6	How can this help Connaught, why do it just now?	Currently, Connaught has 547 pupils, the way the school is funded this can't raise enough finance, the school ideally needs 700 -800 pupils as a minimum to facilitate effective improvement and performance. Connaught is struggling to give the full range of options to pupils because of financial restrictions. The time has come to address the long-standing performance issue because we think the community deserves better and the good work in the primary sector is not capitalised on sufficiently.
7	If the schools merge and people can go elsewhere I still can't understand how this would benefit Connaught. League tables don't reflect the good teaching in the school. Parents themselves can sometimes be the cause of underachievement.	

8	If the budget for the three schools is merged, then won't the other schools suffer?	The National Funding Formula is changing but we don't have the details as yet. There will be one budget. The exact figures are something we will need to explore closely.
9	I'm in favour of merging but it needs to be done a.s.a.p.! We feel targeted. They should just merge. How could we stop the teachers from leaving?	There will be opportunities for the teaching staff. Lots of professional development to broaden the scope of their specialisms. There will be some overlap. All three schools will have the same ethos. Staff would hopefully have the opportunity to work in a thriving, successful school community.
10	There was a teacher here at Newport who wanted to teach in the lower school but he wasn't allowed.	I'm sorry; I'm not familiar with that case.
11	The current Newport Head is excellent; we don't want to lose her. Our schools have their own uniforms; we don't want to change that would be extra expense.	That is up to the head teacher and the governing body. There might not be any change in uniforms.
12	We want the current head of Newport and Belle Vue to stay. She is well thought of by all the parents.	
13	We felt that press article was very derogatory; it did a lot of damage in the community.	
14	Because of the stigma now people will not even go and view the school. It has changed a lot since Lindsey (current head teacher) took over though.	
15	Next year the numbers at Connaught will increase there are big housing developments in Aldershot. All these extra children, will there be room for them here? It can't just be a numbers game there are other issues as well. Surplus places will be filled within a few years.	Whilst there is room at the Connaught no other new secondary places can be established. A needs analysis would be undertaken if numbers grew significantly. Surrey secondary schools are also expanding.
16	We don't think that the merger will make things better.	Some of the teaching at the Connaught is requiring improvement. If you are a good practitioner in a good school there are many opportunities, by

		<p>attracting different people of a high calibre. The school has tried many things but the quality of teaching and learning continues to require improvement. This is an alternative strategy to secure improvement in attainment.</p> <p>The bottom line is that all children in Connaught should have a good education and good life chances. They can still choose to do some of the more vocational courses.</p>
17	<p>If Connaught doesn't improve will it drag down Belle Vue and Newport?</p> <p>Can the leadership not change unless there is a merger?</p>	<p>The leadership team needs to make sure that doesn't happen.</p> <p>Possibly, it depends on the option chosen.</p>
18	There have been lots of academies that have failed.	
19	<p>What about all the new housing coming to Aldershot, surely that will make a difference?</p> <p>Ash Manor has about two thousand new homes in their catchment area.</p>	<p>New developments tend to have very young children. Primary provision is currently full but it will be some years before those numbers filter through to the secondary phase.</p>
20	We are not totally against the plans but Connaught needs to be brought up to where it should be.	
<p>As no further parents were arriving, the meeting closed at 5.45pm</p>		