



HOUSE OF COMMONS

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25th October, 2011

Cllr. Roy Perry,
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John Roy

On 14th October, I took the opportunity to visit both Beaumont Primary School and West End Infants School to understand at first hand some of the issues which are at stake in the County's proposal to amalgamate the two Schools.

I found immense enthusiasm amongst the teachers and parents at West End Infants for the retention of the School as it is, not least amongst those parents whose children also attend Beaumont School. The numbers at West End clearly testify to the population of the School. If there is a problem, it lies with Beaumont School where the numbers enrolled are clearly well short of the school's capacity. However, the overwhelming view at both Schools was that Peter Smith at Beaumont needs to be given more time to improve the standards there and that closing the School from under him is at best unfair and at worst seriously undermining the teaching profession.

Popularity

My considered view is therefore :

1. Closing a successful School like West End Infants in order to compensate for the perceived inadequacies of Beaumont is not sufficient reason for seeking to create a large 420 pupil primary school.
2. Any rationalisation would quite clearly have to be done at the Beaumont site and would require a complete rebuild although I understand that there is some capacity for an extra classroom at West End. Given that West End is, I understand, a Listed Building, there is clearly a limit to the likely capital receipt that the County might obtain from its sale.



3. As I have said above, it does appear to be somewhat peremptory to close Beaumont without giving the team there sufficient time to attempt the School's turn around. Part of the reason for the inadequate performance might be the constant change at the top and now with the continuity provided by Peter Smith, surely that should assist the School's recovery.
4. The parents clearly have a choice and since parental choice is a cardinal consideration for Conservatives, I think the County would have to do much more than it has to persuade people that uprooting a School which enjoys enormous local support to amalgamate it with one which has been in difficulty, would reduce that parental choice.

In view of the foregoing, I am afraid I am not persuaded that John Coughlan is right when he wrote to me on 4th August to say that 'the closure of both schools and the establishment of an all through primary school offers the best opportunity of security outstanding educational provision for the community.'

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gerald Howarth'.

GERALD HOWARTH MP