

08/10/2020

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Dewsbury

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Re: the proposed reorganisation of school places Dewsbury West.

Thank you for taking the time to read the concerns raised by parents at St John's infant school regarding the recent decision made by the LA which does not support St John's infant school to become a junior school by September 2021.

Included is a petition signed by the parents at St John's and members of the local community who are in support of the school becoming a junior school. Within 10 days, the petition has been signed by an overwhelming majority. I know the panel have already taken parents views into consideration however I would like to ask that our views are considered in more detail in light of the petition and the reasons given below as to why we feel so strongly about this decision. After speaking to fellow parents, we feel the 3 main points written below voice our concerns and would like our views to be taken into consideration.

1. WE WOULD LIKE OUR CHILDREN TO CONTINUE AT A FAITH BASED SCHOOL

By not allowing junior places to be allocated at St John's Infant school, children in the local community are being deprived of attending a faith school for their junior years. The feeder school which is Westmoor is not a faith-based school and there are no other faith schools (within walking distance) which can accommodate ALL of the children currently attending Year 2 at St Johns. To take this away from the community is problematic for the following reasons.

a) Religious teaching

Faith schools allow academic and religious teachings to intertwine, this offers our children a unique learning experience and a strong understanding of faith. Issues of social justice, moral, and ethical responsibilities and other topics of religious and spiritual importance will be part of their everyday life which as parents we strongly encourage. St John's has children from different faith backgrounds mainly Christianity and Islam, parents of both faiths celebrate the fact that they share the same values which are taught in school. St John's gives our children the opportunity to come together and celebrate the same values which is extremely important in todays fragmented society. This will lead to a more cohesive community if this is continued throughout their more formative junior years.

b) A Strong Sense of Community

As I have witnessed with my own daughter, attending a faith-based school offers a foundation for friendship building almost instantly, if St John's becomes a Junior school this will be extended into their later years which every child has a right to experience. Parents have also built strong friendships which offer many benefits to our community and the school.

St John's provides stability that other schools cannot offer. Attending the same school from early childhood straight into high school allows children to feel comfortable and secure in their school environment. Our children feel like they are part of not just a school, but also a family. We as parents feel the comfort and care that this offers our children is priceless.

c) High quality teaching

Faith schools often offer higher quality academic teaching, religious education can provide advantages well beyond a strong sense of faith. It also provides a community of friends, teachers and clergy with the same moral base, and a stable environment in which to learn, grow and thrive. This will all make for a positive and inspiring school experience.

2. WE WOULD LIKE OUR CHILDREN TO STAY IN A SMALL SCHOOL

If St John's becomes a Junior school it will be one of the smallest schools in the area. This will offer a better sense of community than larger schools. Parents, staff, and pupils are all known to one another and have strong relationships. This sense of family and community which is fostered helps our children feel more confident in the classroom and allows them to grow sharing their ideas with peers. Not only do pupils learn to speak up in class, but also, the strong bonds pupils develop with their teachers and peers can help them to develop strong relationship skills that will benefit them later in life.

We as parents feel St John's provides a unique learning environment that allows our children to flourish, and develop foundations that will give them the best chances of succeeding in later life. Our school also offers an environment that fosters empathy and positive wellbeing in a way that a large school does not. I have experienced this myself, my daughter attended Crossley Fields Junior and Infant school prior to St John's. Crossley Fields is a much larger school which has 3 in-takes for each year group. The difference between the two schools is vast and in a short period of time of XXXXXX attending St John's, she has flourished beyond expectations.

a) SMALL SCHOOLS ARE ALL ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS AND CONNECTION.

No child slips through the cracks. Their social, emotional and medical needs are known by all staff and with my daughter having drug refractory epilepsy this is a huge advantage as all staff are trained in using rescue medication for seizure control if needed.

Research tells us that belonging to close-knit communities is vitally important in developing a child's resilience. It is also a protective factor against mental health issues and bullying. When children have a feeling of belonging, they can relax, get on with learning and thrive.

b) THE PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND STAFF

There is a real sense of community at our school, parent help is encouraged and welcomed. If a parent wants to have input into decision-making or wants to speak with the Headteacher, they can. In bigger schools, head teachers are not as readily available to parents. Mr Blackburn greets all parents and children personally every day at the school gates. This offers a direct communication which unfortunately is not seen in many schools anymore.

Currently St John's is the feeder school to Westmoor which is a larger school and is not faith-based. Therefore, our children will be deprived of all the above benefits which are vitally important to our community.

3. PERSONAL AND MEDICAL REASONS

Many parents have personal reasons for their children to remain at St Johns which affect the overall wellbeing and health of their children. I was not able to put forward my views when parents were initially asked as XXXXXXXX was not attending St John's at that time. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to share my story.

As a parent living in the heart of the community, I would like to put forward my own concerns about my daughter (XXXXXXX Dhorat) who is currently in year 2 and would have to transfer to another school if the decision remains the same.

XXXXXXX had a troubled start at Crossley Fields Infant and Junior school both in Reception and in Year One. She used to come home upset most days and struggled both emotionally and academically. Due to this I decided to transfer XXXXXXXX to St John's Infant school where almost instantly she settled and is now happier emotionally and performing better academically. XXXXXXXX suffers from drug refractory epilepsy and has seizures most nights in her sleep. Her condition also affects her emotional wellbeing and vice versa. If XXXXXXXX's emotional needs are not being met and she is distressed at school she is more likely to have a seizure at night. It is therefore of the utmost importance to her mental and physical health that she remains at a school where she feels happy and safe.

With St John's being a small faith school, they are able to offer XXXXXXXX a close-knit family environment in which she is now flourishing. As a primary school teacher, I know this kind of environment is difficult to foster in a larger school. All staff at St John's are trained in administering epilepsy rescue medicine which XXXXXXXX has in school if needed. I have included a letter with some information on about XXXXXXXX's condition. To transfer XXXXXXXX at this point would be to the detriment of her overall wellbeing, her health and her education. We would be very grateful if the wellbeing of all the children currently attending St John's is made a priority in any further decisions made by the LA and that our concerns we have raised as parents are taken into consideration with immediate effect.

RESIDENTS OF CHURCH LANE DEWSBURY

The majority of residents who live on Church Lane in Dewsbury have also signed the petition in support of St John's becoming a junior school. The residents are concerned by the amount of traffic and congestion that is caused by parents dropping off and picking up their children from Westmoor primary school. This is a hazard for residents, pedestrians and motorists in the area. The residents have raised this issue with the Council in the past and people have been sent out to monitor traffic. However, this was only a temporary solution and now residents are back to having their driveways blocked and vehicles parking on the pavement making it hard for pedestrians to walk past especially if they have a pushchair or a mobility scooter. If St John's is to become a junior school this would help ease the congestion on Church Lane as there would be less parents doing the school runs to and from Westmoor primary school.

Council Report

Lastly, I would like to refer to the report which was published regarding the decision not to support the current proposals at this time. There are a couple of points within the report that should be highlighted:

'These proposals have been School led. Both schools and the LA have been in discussions for some time. It is acknowledged that during the non-statutory consultation Westmoor Governing Body

undertook further analysis about their financial risk and as a result responded to the consultation by strongly opposing the proposal. The Local Authority recognises the potential risk.'

This comment cements the decision to retain the current position and lends weight to the decision being based on the financial effects of any change to Westmoor. Although the governing body of Westmoor Primary school strongly oppose the plans because of financial reasons, I, as a parent, would like to ask the panel to put the needs of the children currently attending St John's before anything else. Westmoor already has two in-takes for every year group from Nursey to Year 6 and has 544 children on role which exceeds the average number of pupils in most schools. The school had the opportunity in 2013 to merge with the local infant school. It seems unfair to deprive St John's of the opportunity to provide, for our children in their junior years, the smaller faith-school environment that our parents desire.

'There are potential benefits to all-through primary schools including:

- **Evidence to suggest that the reduction in the number of transition points can improve educational outcomes for children and young people.**
- **The removal of the requirement for parents to apply for a new school at the end of key stage 1.**

For these reasons Kirklees Council is generally supportive of such proposals where there is school system solution which can be self-funded.'

This comment acknowledges that the children would clearly benefit from the proposed changes but seems not to mention it again. It is recognised that many parents and children have expressed their satisfaction and happiness with St John's C.E.(VC) Infant School and value the staff who work to educate and support their children

From the consultation within the parents of St. John's 88.3% are in favour of the changes and only 4.2% opposed, the remaining 7.5% undecided.

I appreciate there are other factors involved but can regard be given to the over-whelming majority?

I accept that the consultation is wholly concerned with interested parties who have the future of their children at the forefront of their decision-making, but it appears that the Council has made its decision on financial grounds and are prepared to overlook the overwhelming benefits to the children of St Johns.

Is it not true that the Council should have the real interests of the children at heart and not make a decision which, in essence, requires Westmoor to make financial adjustments to its future?

'In the past the council have been supportive of reducing transition points for our children which provide a whole school system solution and a long-term sustainable model for each school. However, the non-statutory consultation has revealed this is no longer the case.'

I would like to ask why this is no longer the case?

Thank-you for taking the time out to read our concerns, it is much appreciated and I look forward to hearing from you regarding any up-dates or feedback.

Yours faithfully

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