



**Isle of Wight County Teachers' Association
(IW National Union of Teachers)**

1 Victoria Lodge
20 St Thomas's St
Ryde
Isle of Wight
PO33 2DL

Wednesday 29th July 2009

David Pugh (IW Council Leader)
18 Spring Gardens
Shanklin
Isle of Wight
PO37 7AQ

cc. Laura Hales
School Reorganisation Team

Dear David,

Isle of Wight Secondary Schools' Competition

This letter outlines my response to the Isle of Wight Secondary Schools' Competition bids and presentations.

Firstly, the timing of the public meetings were at the worst time of year for most people involved in education. Several schools had already broken up before the meetings were held and there is continued uncertainty about the deadline date for responses. Needless to say, the attendance at the meetings was poor, especially by parents. The Isle of Wight Council needs to realise that, if the new schools are going to raise standards, pupils, teachers and parents must be 'onboard' from the start. Engaging with these groups at every stage is essential to the successful implementation of the proposed changes. Linked to this first point is the poor planning and publicity of the meetings. I attended four of the new secondary school public meetings (Cowes, Medina, Sandown and Ryde). However I was unable to attend the primary public meetings at Medina Theatre as I had a holiday booked, a booking I made prior to the dates of the meetings being known. It would have been helpful to all concerned if these meetings had been planned further in advance. The confusion surrounding the bidding process has, I feel, contributed, rightly or wrongly, to the mistrust currently felt by many teachers towards the IW Council.

Secondly, I feel it is important to attempt to offer a response to the theoretical underpinning that appears to be driving the changes to the island schools. The seemingly headlong pursuit for the marketisation of schools on the island, underpinned by neoliberal principals, would punish the most

vulnerable members of our island society. A situation where there are faith, independent, academy and trust schools all competing for pupils would inevitably lead to the formation of 'sink' schools where underachievement is the norm. Proactive parents, where there is a history of educational achievement in the family, would favour the well-funded schools with the right 'ethos' and pupil intake. This will leave families where education is not currently valued to send their children to a school(s) where both aspirations and attainment are low. Sadly, it is these families who did not attend the public meetings at the end of term. We need to engage with such families if we are to raise educational standards for all on the island and increase social mobility. Expecting social mobility to improve just by getting more of these less privileged to pass more exams in a delusion. Social barriers are more complex on the Isle of Wight requiring engagement with the whole community.

I believe that you should be wary of using academy schools as a panacea to such underachievement. The issues related to educational underachievement on the Isle of Wight require an evidence based policy that deals with the intricacies of the island situation. Academy schools have been shown to change their socio-economic intake to improve exam performance (Gorard 2005). We should be wary of those who offer to transform educational 'output' for a school on the island to the detriment of other schools. It is my view, and that of my union, that each child should have a good local school that they can attend. To achieve this we need to have qualified, well-motivated teachers in every classroom.

I will now turn my attention to the individual bids for the secondary schools on the island. I have made comments on my perceptions and posed questions that need to be considered by the Council when decisions are being made.

The Academies Enterprise Trust (AET)

The AET team detailed a pragmatic and realistic proposal for raising attainment in island secondary schools. Their presentation impressed many teachers and school staff. However, as they pointed out in their own presentation, it will only work if all island secondary schools come under their control. This would enable collaborative working between staff at the different schools and would eradicate schools competing for the 'best' pupils allowing schools to focus on raising standards. However, what would happen to schools on the island when David Trigg and his team retire?

Cowes Pathfinder Partnership

The 'Cowes Learning Campus' would be *open 15 hours a day, 6 days a week, 48 weeks of the year.... Employing a 'reformed' workforce and using a variety of skills in enabling learning and personal development* (page 4, Cowes pathfinder Partnership Proposal document). However, the bid makes no guarantee that each classroom would have a qualified teacher, a factor I have already highlighted as being a barrier to pupil achievement. The presentation seemed to be more concerned with attracting businesses to use the facilities at the new school instead of teaching children. This bid effectively maintains the status quo, which is worrying considering the perceived low morale amongst teachers at the current Cowes High School.

East Wight Educational Trust

A community bid composed largely of the current Sandown High School governing body. The joint bid for both Ryde and Sandown would see many advantages, especially in 14-19 education. However, transport and timetable issues would have to be resolved. Funding (lack of) for the schools seems to be the major issue with this bid, which was not dealt with at the public meetings.

Innovative Schools

A poorly planned and executed bid and presentation. Valarie seemed to know little about schools on the island or education at large. Many factual errors were made in the presentation and the full written bid had obviously not been proof read considering the poor spelling, syntax and grammar it contained, this is worrying as Literacy was an area they highlighted that they would improve. If they are awarded the running of any of the new secondary schools then it could only be detrimental for pupils, parents and teachers. They said they were invited to bid for the schools on the island. The question is who invited them?

Medina Trust

A bid staged managed by the current Medina High School leadership and therefore the question remains what happens to the school when they leave? An impressive array of partners involved with the bid; however, one of which is Portsmouth University, which many of the high schools on the island currently work with, especially in Initial Teacher Training. Would these partnerships with the university no longer exist when schools are competing with each other?

To summarise, I feel that consultation is essential and by that, I mean engaging in a frank and, if necessary, lengthy process with all stakeholders, not the poorly managed process we are currently enduring. Furthermore, I would wish to warn against any situation where schools are competing for pupils instead of focusing on raising educational standards, which is, after all, the goal of all teachers, parents and pupils.

Yours sincerely



Mr Dominic Coughlin
President
Isle of Wight National Union of Teachers

Reference

Gorard, S. (2005) Academies as the 'future of schooling' is this an evidence-based policy? *Journal of Educational Policy*, Vol. 20, No. 3, May 2005, pp. 369-377