

Dear David,

I am not clear who, officially, should receive views about the proposals. I do hope you will find my comments useful but and pass them on to the official recipient, who is due to collate them?

I attended two presentations and have gathered opinions about most of the others.

Carisbrooke High

At Carisbrooke High the presenters seemed to be either nervous or not really fired up. AET was very professional but gave less detail than was helpful. Innovative Schools Ltd (ISL) were poor value and showed up their lack of experience. The Medina High group were very poor. One presenter simply could not answer questions asked of him. I did wonder if there was some marketing value in Medina bidding for Carisbrooke High as well as for themselves? Their 'bid' for running Carisbrooke High was shallow, confused and unthought-out. The meeting was poorly attended even from staff. Few parents other than staff were small in number. The audience seemed dispirited and contributions were good. The best speaker for my part was from the Head Boy. Medina team not only answered the young man poorly they could not understand a very effective question. He blamed himself for not being clear but it was like trying to communicate with a trio of rabbits caught in headlights.

The few questions from parents were excellent and challenged the proposer teams. A number of questions were about accountability. The reduction in parent governor places within the secondary school governing bodies was a concern. It seemed as if the parent and pupil councils proposed would downgrade the parental contribution to managing the schools. It is also unclear if the Governing Body has the same powers and responsibilities in the Academies.

A further concern was the small number of questions that could be put to the teams. In many ways the chairman was alert and strong except when it came to additional questions being put by a questioner or even a dialogue developing between him or her and one of the teams. The amount of detail that came out of the question part of the meeting seemed quite poor (see the Sandown meeting below by comparison).

Sandown High

This may have been the most full of the meetings. Even here the number of non-teaching parents was small. The energy generated by the East Wight Team was amazing and set the tone. It was interesting to see how the other two teams would respond. ISL was a better presentation but little further was disclosed. AET came out fighting and put over more information than they delivered at Carisbrooke. This was an altogether more lively and interesting meeting. Questions were good and searching although a rosy glow affected questions which seemed to be less critical of the detail required of the East Wight Team.

Medina High

There was a fairly poor attendance with few non-teaching parents. The Medina Team playing at home were better but not by much. The planning of the presentation appeared to lack proper organisation. With so little time to quiz the teams and extract key information the danger could be to react to the quality of the presentation rather than the quality of the bids. Easy access to the full bid documents well before the meetings meant that effective pre-planning of suitable questions was not possible. There have been no responses to questions handed to the teams, no replies to e-mails either, which seems rather poor.

Ryde High

The meeting followed the pattern of meetings at Medina and Carisbrooke with a fairly poor turnout, again only a few non-teaching parents. The East Wight Team suffered from the rousing night at Sandown and having to play away. Ryde staff did not seem impressed.

Cowes High

Expected a big crown but again the audience numbers were moderate. The Cowes Team failed to impress although the quality of the presentation was better the Medina Team had been at their target schools. AET were business like and conducted themselves in the way noted in all the school meetings.

East Cowes.

I expected the attendance to be very high but was actually very poor. Few parents were brave enough to attend. This is a puzzle when Whippingham parents have been so vociferous about their future. The AET presentation seemed less than satisfactory. For once they were not so clear and focused in what they said. It seemed as if they had added the two primary school bids for the sake of it.

In conclusion.

The experience and professionalism of AET overwhelmed the other proposers. It is hard to judge if their full bid would be good for the Island. The desire to have a variety of providers is attractive but sadly the other bids were not strong. Only AET spelled out how they would drive to improved standards. The Medina Team had nothing to offer Carisbrooke. East Wight had marginally more to offer Ryde. ISL were really an unknown quantity. Their reputation would fall or stand on their success on the Island. Do we want to be guinea pigs? AET were not really interested in the Primary School bids and the local proposers hardly set the fire alight. I actually wondered if the proposers actually know how demanding running the new schools will be. There is an impression that the non academy teams are imagining they will be operating within the old Local Authority framework.

Accountability and response to the community seem to be key issues when deciding who should run our schools. These issues need to be made much clearer. The amount of money available to the Foundation Schools, if formed, and the Academy Schools, if allowed need much clearer detail. It seems crazy that the Government will only decide on the number of Academies once the Council makes a decision, or can the Council make an 'if and but' decision and cover themselves depending on the Government's final judgement?

I do hope the process of deciding will be as open and transparent as possible. Will the deliberations be open to public scrutiny? Will the judgements and the reasons for them, for each of the criteria be published? Maybe parents were being canny in not wasting an evening during the best bit of the summer listening to so much hot air. The only judgements that truly matter are those to be made by the Council. If the Island Community is to remain engaged with this massive education change then the deliberations of officers, officers and Councillors or finally Councillors needs to be presented as clearly and openly as possible.

Stuart Clements

19 Clatterford Road

Newport

Isle of Wight

PO30 1PA