

# Millfields Primary School Consultation meeting

4<sup>th</sup> March 2009

Present – David Armstrong (Wirral LA)  
Jeff Turnbull (Director of Education, Chester Diocese)  
John Weise (Chair of Governors, Millfields)  
The Rt Revd Keith Sinclair, Bishop of Birkenhead)  
Michelle Holford, (Headteacher, Millfields)  
Sally Gibbs (Wirral LA)  
Prof. Tim Wheeler (Chester Diocese, Vice Chancellor University of Chester)  
Walter Doan (Chester Diocese)

The headteacher welcomed everyone, and the Chair of Governors introduced the panel.

JT – You'll be aware there's no longer a choice of a CE primary school in Eastham. Just because we would like Millfields to become Church of England, doesn't mean it's definitely going to happen, we're interested in your views. We believe that the Diocese can provide additional support to the school. The main differences are that collective worship must be Christian, rather than broadly Christian, the Diocese appoints Foundation governors to the governing body, and there is an additional inspection of religious ethos on top of the Ofsted inspection. There would be no change to admissions. All teaching and non-teaching staff jobs could be ring-fenced except the Head and Deputy/Assistant heads, however the circumstances would be made clear in the job advertisement.

- Staff – If everyone is made officially redundant, does this affect our contracts?
  - JT – No, terms and conditions all carry forward, all still employed by the LA as now.
- Resident – There was a perfectly good CE school across the road. The deeds are from 1854, it was built by the people of Eastham to be used solely as a school. A notice will soon go up, "to let". The Diocese did nothing to save the school. If you advertise jobs nationally and someone better qualified applies you would have to take them. Doesn't say anything about ring-fencing on this document here (waves letter from governing body), but does in your consultation document, that's a discrepancy, I don't think staff should trust your ringfencing.
  - JT – the closure of St Mary's was proposed by the LA, the Diocese opposed it and it went to the Adjudicator who approved the proposal to close.
  - DA – Officers were asked by the Council to pursue the possibility of Millfields becoming CE, the previous consultation had expired and is now being carried out again. With regard to St Mary's CE, the Council has now handed the building back to the Diocese. For staff, again all posts can be ringfenced except the Head and Asst heads, which is a legal requirement to advertise. All the documentation from the previous consultation is boxed up, happy for you to come and see it.
- Staff – Why are the head and assistant heads posts not ringfenced?
  - DA – legal requirement to advertise positions nationally under the 1998 Education Act.
- Staff – How long does it take to make appointments?
  - JT – The shadow governing body's first task is to appoint the new headteacher, which can happen before the school opens.

- Staff – Could you say in the advert why the positions were being advertised?
  - JT – Yes
- Staff – But interviews would take place?
  - JT – Yes, unless no other applicants applied and were shortlisted.
- Staff – Doesn't seem fair, the headteacher has only recently been appointed.
- Staff – What is the timescale?
  - DA – depends whether a competition is required. We would apply for a waiver, which should receive a decision within 6 weeks, then could go straight to legal notices.
- Staff – What happens if the competition is not waived?
  - DA – A six month process where other bidders are invited to operate the school.
- Parent –governor – You should have done all this 2 years ago when St Marys' CE closed. So someone like BT could buy the school and operate it as a business?
  - JT – No, the school would be maintained by the LA just as now, regardless of who operated the school.
- Councillor – Is it possible in the advertisement to word it in such a way as to put people off from applying?
  - DA – The shadow governing body would advertise the posts, but the circumstances can be made clear in the advert.
- Staff – What would happen to the governing body? Who decides which ones stay and go?
  - JT – the majority of existing governors remain in post, the Diocese appoints some new Foundation governors. Matter for governing body to decide who stays.
- Staff – Since the original governing body, plus a few, will advertise and interview, won't they simply reappoint the existing head/asst heads? Waste of time.
- Staff – I've applied for jobs before and when you get to the interview there's an internal candidate who will obviously get the job, just a waste of everyone's time.
- Bishop Keith – I've been in post for 2 years, and remember attending the St Mary's CE Adjudicator meeting. I'm thrilled that Millfields is considering CE status. Our intention is to add value, but we must do things legally.
- DA – We will arrange a separate meeting for staff with Peter Bishop's team to discuss issues.
- Parent-Governor – Does collective worship have to involve the whole school, or can it be done like the class prayer they have now.
  - JT – The law says collective as in groups, but no size restrictions. Worship is not forced as parents can withdraw their child, just as now.
- Bishop Keith – We're in the process of revising our collective worship guidance. I've seen schools operating a variety of styles and sizes, the common point is that when it's done well, children love it.

- Staff – Where does the Diocese stand on education on different faiths? Is there anything like the Catholic “Here I am” programme?
  - JT – All schools follow the Wirral RE curriculum, this would be no different. We would expect all CE schools to teach children about the major world faiths. Nothing like “Here I am”.
- Staff – We have other faith speakers in Assembly sometimes, is that ok.
  - JT – Prayers should be Christian, but within reason, the best way to learn about other faiths is often to meet someone of that faith.
- Resident – What’s the point of changing, the Vicar can already come into school whenever she wants.
  - Vicar – I can’t just walk in!
  - JT – Non-church schools can say no to religious speakers.
- Staff – The Vicar already comes into school regularly, but if she wanted to come more often, could it be forced?
  - JT – No, would be up to negotiation between governing body and vicar.
- Resident – We’ve got community spirit, we don’t need outsiders.
  - DA – We’re exploring the idea of a CE school in Eastham, Cabinet has made a resolution to do so.
- Parent – What money is it going to save the Council.
  - DA – None.
- Parent – When the two schools were fighting to stay open, of course it seemed like a good idea to become CE, but why come back to it now when you threw it back in our face then.
  - DA – Time has passed, we are holding a new consultation so you can let us know what you think.
  - JT – At the time, we said we were very happy for Millfields to become CE, but we felt we had to support St Mary’s CE. If there had been no further interest in CE status, we would not be back here now.
  - DA – The Authority makes wider choice for parents, there is no saving for the Council. Over the course of the review, 1,700 fewer places, resulting in £0.5 million every year back into the schools budget to benefit children.
- Governor – This is a big decision to take.
- Bishop Keith – I’ve asked schools through the Diocese if they like having CE Controlled status and every one so far has said they appreciate it.
- Staff – So what you’re saying is that in the long term, becoming CE would safeguard our existing ethos and make us safer if there are more school closures.
- Resident – The Adjudicator said we didn’t need another CE school because there were others within a certain distance.
  - JT – The Adjudicator closed the school because it was in Special Measures.
- Resident – So you say. So far closing St Mary’s CE has cost the taxpayer £50,000. It seems a coincidence to have handed back the keys just before this meeting took place.

- Staff – To say, we're here about the future of children, not about buildings.
- Staff – I think CE status can only enhance what the children receive here, I'm just worried about the headteacher and asst heads.
  - Head – I have already spoken to the union and they have offered support.
  - DA – We will arrange for Peter Bishop's team to come out and speak to staff about their concerns. We will look into the possibility of protecting the headteacher and assistant heads posts with the HR experts.
- Vicar – I wasn't intending to speak, however, it is odd to sit here when the Adjudicator said we didn't need a CE school, but it's all in the past now. The Diocese did fight to save St Mary's CE, it's a shame the LA pitted us against each other. Time now to look ahead. In my personal view, Millfields has a strong ethos and excellent knowledge of the Jesus story. Church schools provide children with a strong foundation for the future.
- Staff – Can we be involved with other churches in the area?
  - JT – Yes.
  - Bishop Keith – We are looking in other areas at the possibility of multi-church partnership working.
- TW – We must consider what's in this for children not just now but in 10 or 20 years time. We believe that CE status brings something extra. Concerns about staff uncertainty are understandable. Once the shadow governing body is established, the processes aim to be as quick, simple and stressless as possible.
- SG – It is possible to carry out the change for September, unless a competition is required.
- Staff – What about badges on jumpers and so on.
  - JT – Uniforms are a decision for the governing body, but some transitional arrangements are generally made.
  - SG – In other similar circumstances, the governing body has decided that children can wear their existing uniforms until they would be replaced anyway.
- Staff – What would the school be called, would the Diocese have any problem with Millfields CE Primary School.
  - JT – Name of the school would be up to the governing body, but we have no problem with Millfields CE.

JT thanked everyone for coming and wished them a safe journey.

### **Addendum (10/3/09)**

1. PB has contacted the school to arrange a meeting with the staff.
2. Further investigation reveals that regulations 13(7) and 22(7) of the staffing regulations provide scope for maintained schools not to advertise and conduct a selection process for head teacher and deputy head teacher posts under certain circumstances following school re-organisation, which are:
  - The new or merged school is formed from the immediately pre-existing schools.
  - For each head teacher or deputy head teacher post available in the new or merged school there is only one person from the pre-existing schools available

for continued employment in that role in the new school, and that person's performance and ability is highly regarded by both the governing body and the LEA.

- Any such person so accepted for a head teacher or deputy head teacher post has suitable qualifications, experience and ability to undertake the role in the new or merged school.

These criteria do appear to fit the potential situation if Millfields becomes CE Controlled and therefore the temporary governing body could decide to follow this course of action.