

Andy Lenthall Statement to Cabinet 21-July-10

First and foremost, I am saddened that any school in Bath has to close but, as the Council remains convinced that this is the only option to resolve the issue of too many desks, keeping Oldfield School open as a co-educational school, whether as an academy or remaining under local authority control is the best for the city.

As a member of the co-educational Oldfield group and a parent of a 10 year old daughter deciding on senior schools next October, I am astounded that, under the current arrangements, our only realistic choices for a local school are all-girls. If we were to have a co-educational school as our first choice, it is highly likely that we wouldn't get a place next year. If Oldfield were currently co-educational, it would be our first choice.

The council's aims for improvements in standards are commendable and entirely achievable. Taking an already-outstanding school and refocussing it as a co-educational establishment for ALL children would be a massive step towards achieving its aims; closing Oldfield, removing choice and forcing more children to make tiring journies across an already-congested city would hinder progress towards excellence – and a local, excellent education is something that we all want for our children.

Criticism has been levelled at Oldfield's disproportionate intake of children from South Gloucestershire and Bristol. It is not only the fact that half of the children in the local area can't attend the school because they happen to be boys, but the shadow of the axe that has been hanging over Oldfield, the logistics of sending a boy to Beechen Cliff and a girl to Oldfield AND sibling guarantees that have favoured the Beechen Cliff/Hayesfield option for parents with girls and boys that has created a skewed 'market' for school admissions. The co-educational Oldfield group has conducted a simple survey, the results show that parents of primary-age children within Oldfield's catchment would indeed consider sending their children to a coeducational school in their local area.

My daughter's year has 70 pupils, boys and girls, whose parents would welcome the choice of a local, outstanding co-educational school. There are several more schools within walking distance that would provide fulllly-subscribed intake to a co-educational Oldfield School. A co-educational scholl in our community would be supported by our community.

To close Oldfield would remove the choice of a co-educational, non-denominational school for the North of Bath, a choice that parents in the South of the City already have and will still have if the Council's choice follows the recommendations.