

Statement to Cabinet 21-7-10

I am Richard Thomson and it is my privilege to be the Headteacher at Culverhay School.

Having been in post since September, I have quickly come to learn what is distinctive and special about Culverhay. I have become absolutely convinced that its unique ethos and character as a good and improving school should be retained as part of the educational offer for parents and children in Bath.

I would like to remind members of the Cabinet about the educational principles at the heart of the original consultation process, namely to ensure that parents can access good, local schools which are at the heart of their communities. This I believe is an accurate description of Culverhay and you will hear a number of representations tonight from parents, our young people and community partners to attest to the quality of the work Culverhay does in the south of the city. It is disappointing to see that the importance of community has apparently disappeared from recent discourse about secondary education within the city, but I would urge members of the Cabinet to weigh the track record of each school under review in terms of the strength of its community partnerships, when making their deliberations tonight.

I believe the rationale being used to justify the closure of Culverhay is weak and involves a series of assumptions which are based more upon statements of faith than hard evidence. The Local Authority is attaching a great deal of weight to potential partnerships emerging within the city, but I would like to point out that Culverhay has already demonstrated a strong track record of developing such partnerships successfully, for the benefit of the young people and the community served by the school. For example, in 2008/9 the school worked collaboratively with Norton Hill School, an outstanding provider and this year it has developed effective partnerships with St Gregory's Catholic College, another outstanding provider. Next year, Culverhay will be supported by a third outstanding provider, namely the John Cabot Academy in Kingswood and we see this established practice as strong evidence of our capacity and determination to become an outstanding coeducational academy, serving the south side of the city. This commitment exactly reflects the aspirations outlined in the consultation booklet.

I recognise that the Cabinet and the Local Authority are in a desperately difficult position, as both seek to address the long standing issue of surplus places and the prospect of severe cuts in education spending. However, there is a real danger, if all of the recommendations laid before cabinet tonight are adopted, that an ill-advised decision may be taken, which would have a significantly detrimental effect upon the community served by my school. Culverhay adds significant value to children's lives, both in terms of their achievement and their development as active, engaged and positive young citizens and should be retained as part of the provision available to the parents of Bath.