

## **Statement from Sean Wyartt (Assistant Head, Culverhay School)**

Councilor Watt in the Chronicle said; "He admitted that it had been a difficult decision to make, but hoped that in the future people would be able to look back and realize it had been the right thing to do.

Considering the comments in the press likening the closure of Culverhay to the final part in a jigsaw, the complete disregard of the Cabinet and Conservative Party generally to any of the points made and the blatant political nature of the decision, it does not seem it has been a really difficult decision.

During this charade we have been told there is only the need for one school North of the river, Keynsham would be better served by having only one school, BANEs residents should not be paying to educate pupils from neighboring authorities. We were also told that Culverhay is the best site for a school in the city, that it adds great value and there needs to be a school on the site.

In the end we see a decision that sees two schools north of the river ignoring the fact that St. Marks is likely to become unviable as pupils move to Oldfield. We see two schools in Keynsham even though neither has as high an Ofsted grading as Culverhay. We see BANEs not only educating students from outside the authority (BANES is the third highest importer of students in the country) but looking to invest money made from the sale of Culverhay in a sixth form college for a Catholic school of which over 30% of students come from outside the authority.

Is 30% not the percentage of parents who want a denominational school? Perhaps stopping these pupils coming into Bath and enabling an ecumenical school to be formed would solve both the surplus places issue, the financial issue and enable a co-ed school to serve the South West of Bath.

The initial proposal folded when articulate middle class public protest in Conservative wards was made. Let's be honest the change to then close Culverhay was because you felt it was easier to close Culverhay, the parents would not be able to articulate their opposition; how wrong you have been proved. Problem is you have backed yourself into a corner and cannot find a way out without losing face. Do not insult the people of the South West of Bath by continuing to suggest this is the difficult but right decision.

However I am sure that the 85% of pupils from outside BANEs at Broadlands will agree with this decision, the 76+% at Oldfield, the 34% at St. Gregory's etc. the pupils, parents and community in the South West of Bath will not however; but then why should they matter? They do not vote Conservative. I also feel the wider Bath population will question this decision when the true and long term costs are revealed. Will this be in time to make their views known in the May elections?

I would have raised the contradictions in the decisions that have been made; the illogical change in path, the fact that this decision is based on no clear argument and the fact that it seems those making the decisions are looking at their own self interest particularly with the local elections in May. There seems little point however as the concept of consultation seems to have been ignored throughout, the concept of pandering to middle class Conservative voting support however seems very much alive.

Therefore as the Cabinet will not listen to the community perhaps they will listen to a legal representation. The Parents Action Group funded by an ex local resident who made his money in retail selling sweets to Culverhay students in the sixties and seventies and now wants to put something back into the community, will be seeking a legal challenge based on the following, and I am sure, many other reasons:

- No explanation has been given for the change in decision regarding Keynsham and therefore suggests an issue of equal opportunities. An issue that Councilor Hanney has been so happy to talk about in other circumstances.
- The fairness of the Consultation process in light of the comments made in the press.
- The misleading if not directly incorrect use of figures by Officers in presentations. In particular I refer to the figure given for students living closest to Culverhay which in fact contains pupils who live closest to St. Gregory's.
- The fact that representations were made to other schools involved regarding federation before any consultation process on Culverhay had taken place.
- The lack of effective and suitable provision for Culverhay students should this decision be made.

The authority has already been contacted by a solicitor representing a parent on behalf of her stated son and can be assured that, as a school that believes pupils come first, we will ensure all our pupils are able to access similar support if required.

Through this legal challenge we will not be seeking to preserve Culverhay as a special case but we will be seeking a process that sets out fair criteria to make a decision by. A process that sees all schools graded on a number of criteria which should be decided in advance by the authority, heads, governing bodies and parent and community representatives; a process that should have been used in the first place.

A process like this with all signed up at the start open, honest and transparent might then see the sort of political and educational unity which surrounded the council's decision to elect their own leader as Mayor, for four years, with little or no regard to the public's views. Funny how some issues create political unity.

Criteria should include standards and progress but also site suitability, and potential for expansion, current costs, and outstanding maintenance costs, percentage of students attending who live in BANEs, sustainable transport, and Congestion issues as a starting point. This would be a truly difficult decision because the answer could not be determined around self interest. But as with the most difficult decisions it would also produce the right answer and deliver an education system fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As you have probably gathered I and, I think, many others do not believe this is about education or surplus places it is simply politics. The fact that politicians voted on mass along party lines clearly shows this. Not so much the actual decision but the manner in which this decision has been made is a disgrace.