

Statement from Richard Thomson – Headteacher of Culverhay School to Cabinet on 25th November 2010

I remain immensely proud to be the Headteacher of Culverhay School. I am here tonight to ask the Cabinet members to reconsider the recommendation to close Culverhay School.

The decision you have to make is a momentous one; one that will have profound implications for the future of secondary education within the city for generations to come. In the current context of a rapidly changing educational landscape, there is a golden opportunity to pursue a radical and transformational alternative to closure – a course of action which would leave a hole at the heart of a vulnerable and less advantaged community.

Culverhay's alternative proposal, to allow the school to transform itself into an all through co-educational academy, could potentially deliver a profound transformation in standards, not only in the south west of Bath, but across the wider educational system. Such a provision would be highly distinctive, increasing the diversity of choice for parents and could become a 'flagship provision' for the Local Authority. The Academy would also leave the educational system in a stronger position in terms of being able to respond to a rapidly changing educational landscape.

For example, from his latest pronouncements, it would appear that Mr Gove is determined to reduce the influence and contribution of universities in recruiting and retaining the next generation of teachers – essential if the profession is to continue to drive up standards and to improve outcomes for children and young people. His expectation is that schools will increasingly take on the responsibility for all aspects of teacher training. However there are genuine concerns about the capacity of schools to be able to deliver this extra obligation, particularly at a time of dwindling resources.

The induction and training of new entrants to the profession is time consuming and there are important areas of pedagogy which need to be covered thoroughly. The proposed, new all-through academy would allow the Local Authority to deliver a new model of initial teacher education, with university PGCE programmes being delivered from the heart of the school. A theoretical session could be consolidated by an immediate opportunity to practise what had been learned in the classroom with 'live' pupils. I believe the quality of the teacher training experience we could offer in partnership with BSU would be outstanding and could help to recruit, train and retain the very best new entrants to the profession, both at primary and secondary level, adding value to the education system as a whole in Bath and North East Somerset.

You will hear many representations tonight from the wider educational community in the Authority about the quality of the work the school already does now for its community, but also supporting the principle of an all-through academy, as a transformational driver. I would ask the Cabinet to take heed of the weight of professional opinion, particularly from primary Headteachers, who have a huge amount of expertise and many years of distinguished service to the education system, in support of our alternative proposal.

I urge the Cabinet to embrace the opportunity it has been presented with; an opportunity which will meet the strongly articulated wishes of Bath parents for non-denominational co-educational places; which retains an excellent site for educational and community uses; which consolidates and

develops leading edge practice in initial teacher education for the benefit of future generations of school children.

Closing Culverhay slams the door on the opportunity to remodel secondary provision in the city – an opportunity which will never be available again. I ask Cabinet members to allow us the time to develop our proposal with the wide range of powerful educational partners who wish to support us in our continuing work on behalf of children, young people and the wider community. Closing the school is not the answer to the challenges faced by our education system.