

COMMENTS MADE AT FUTURE LEARNING PUBLIC MEETINGS

One meeting was held at each of the fourteen mainstream secondary schools. In total about 1,300 people attended. Six of the meetings were attended by over 100 people, while five meetings were attended by no more than 20. All meetings followed the same format: a PowerPoint presentation followed by an open session for comments and questions.

Detailed notes were taken at each meeting. The following is a summary of the main points raised.

General comments and concerns

At many of the meetings concerns were expressed over the consultation process:

- Inefficient distribution of the Future Learning booklets.
- A belief that decisions had already been made.
- The booklet presented too few options.
- The consultation period left insufficient time for responses.

Other views expressed at many meetings:

- The need to promote sustainable travel.
- Concern over the potential disruption to education during building and refurbishment.
- Lack of confidence in the pupil number projections, particularly in view of increasing levels of immigration.
- A welcome for the opportunities presented by BSF investment.
- A desire to challenge the constraints imposed by government.
- Endorsement of the Council's bid to merge the two BSF waves.

Comments specific to each of the integrated service areas:

Billingham

Overall there was a preference for Option A (retaining three schools with St Michael's moving to the Campus site). Comments in support of this option:

- Northfield would be too large with 1400 students.
- Traffic congestion around Northfield would worsen.
- Standards of attainment at Campus School are rising.
- Staff at Campus School have particular expertise in catering for students with special educational needs.
- Closing Campus would reduce choice for parents and would reduce healthy competition among schools.

Other views expressed:

- Northfield should not be reduced to 800 places. The three schools should be reduced in size in line with each school's projected roll.
- Closing Campus School would address falling rolls and standards issues, and create a potential building for St Michael's.
- Diversity could be improved by replacing Campus with an academy and turning Northfield into a trust school.
- St Michael's is seen as operating a selective admissions policy.
- The right number and size of schools for Billingham depends on decisions about the future of Catholic schools.

North Stockton

Overall there was an acceptance that this area cannot sustain three schools, but neither of the options in the booklet received strong support. Instead a variant of Option B was put forward: that North Stockton should have two schools, one located in the east of the area and the other in the west. Comments in support of this new option:

- South Norton and Tilery are highly deprived communities that should not be left without a secondary school.
- Those communities supported the school in its successful bid for specialist status.
- The Norton School is easily accessed on foot.
- Travelling distance from South Norton and Tilery to Blakeston would be too great.
- Very few parents in this area are car owners.
- New homes to be built at Northshore and Norton Road will increase the need for school places in the east of the area.

Other views expressed:

- Consultation should not have named any schools for possible closure.
- Concerns around the nature of academies.
- Extended services are particularly important to these communities.
- Decisions should not be based solely on attainment at GCSE.

Central Stockton

Of the two options there was a clear preference for Option A (three schools on one site), but some concerns were expressed about this option:

- The impact on traffic congestion of having 3,000 students on one site.
- It is important for the three schools to retain their separate identities.
- Shared facilities might dilute the distinctive ethos of the two aided schools.
- Potential for bullying with students from three schools on one site.
- Longer journeys to school for some Ian Ramsey students.
- The need for improved cycle and pedestrian access.

The Catholic community was strongly opposed to Option B (closing Our Lady & St Bede's School) on these grounds:

- The school is successful and central to the Catholic community.
- The town of Stockton needs a Catholic secondary school.
- Closure would harm the Catholic primary schools.
- Closure would mean long journeys to school for many students.
- Some students might opt for non-Catholic schools instead of travelling.

Other views expressed:

- There is a strong body of opinion that Ian Ramsey School should be rebuilt on its present site.
- Smaller schools are better for pupils than large schools.
- Technology should reduce the need for large schools and for travelling between institutions.
- Is there a possibility of a joint-faith school (Catholic and Church of England)?

South of the Borough

The meetings in this area did not produce a clear preference for either of the options. Some views were expressed very strongly:

- The number of students in Ingleby Barwick justifies at least 800 more secondary places. All Saints School should be enlarged or there should be another secondary school in Ingleby Barwick.
- Student numbers in Yarm and Egglecliffe do not justify rebuilding or refurbishing two large schools.
- The Catholic community is strongly opposed to any change that might diminish the Catholic ethos of St Patrick's School.

Other views expressed:

- Concerns about the suitability of the Allens West site for Egglecliffe School, and that the sixth form should not be separated from the rest of the school.
- Either Conyers or Egglecliffe could be relocated to Ingleby Barwick.
- The optimum school size should be 600 to 800.
- Thornaby Community School could be replaced with an academy.
- A community school and a Catholic school in the same building would not work.
- Catholic schools should cater for Catholic pupils only.

A different option was put forward for consideration, increasing the number of schools from five to six and creating a tertiary centre:

- Reduce Conyers School to 800 (11-16 places).
- Reduce Egglecliffe School to 800 (11-16 places).
- Increase All Saints School from 600 to 800.
- Create an academy for 800 in Ingleby Barwick.
- Retain St Patrick's School for 600.
- Retain Thornaby Community School for 600.
- Create a post-16 centre, either at one of the school sites or elsewhere in the South of the Borough.