

Furze Platt Senior School

Response to Building Schools for the Future Consultation January 2009

Context

This response reflects the views of the Governing Body and the leadership team at Furze Platt Senior School. It is also informed by discussions with students and staff. There has been some informal discussion with parents beyond those on the Governing Body but it has been limited due to the time scale of the consultation.

We welcome the local authority's decision to bid for BSF funding and the commitment outlined in the Expression of Interest to the DCSF. We are very excited by the opportunities it presents. We have already started discussions on our vision for Furze Platt Senior School if it were to be rebuilt and plan to have a detailed vision for change by the end of March 2009. Some of these ideas are reflected in our responses to the questions below.

We have also responded to the question on **Maidenhead Schools Designated Areas**. We would like to record formally how unhappy we are that this question is tacked on to the end of a very detailed consultation document. Our view is that whilst the document will have been sent to parents of primary age pupils very few will have picked up the significance of this question for their child.

Our Responses

Question 1: How could we improve secondary provision in Maidenhead and our secondary school in particular?

Furze Platt Senior School is a popular, oversubscribed secondary school. We are very crowded in our current buildings and have little flexibility to develop spaces further (more detail will be provided in Question 2). The key challenges for Furze Platt Senior School are to continue to improve outcomes for all students through a number of different strands:

- by meeting the ambitious requirements of the 14 – 19 agenda by providing high quality, vocational resources both on school site and in the locality. Maidenhead provision should complement but not replicate that being developed at the Windsor Skills Centre
- by developing specialist facilities and learning suites which promote further innovative and high quality practice in our specialist subjects (Maths and Computing)
- by significantly enhancing accommodation for a very strong Arts provision
- by developing coherent extended services provision which meets the needs of secondary school aged students and their families
- by promoting community cohesion in Maidenhead, enhancing each school's ability to be a focal point in its local community
- by building on our Healthy Schools accreditation, improving our sports facilities and making them accessible to the community out of school hours

Question 2: the quality of school accommodation

Furze Platt currently accommodates 1140 students in a number of buildings. The original school was built to accommodate a much smaller intake of students. A number

of additional buildings have been added over time to meet the growing school population. We have significant and urgent needs which are detailed below:

Our main school block has many deficiencies.

- Most classrooms fall well below DCSF size guidelines and it is impossible to have classes of 30 in these rooms without seriously compromising the teaching and learning environment. As such the school has invested in smaller teaching groups: this has a significant impact on the school budget
- This block is over 3 floors: there is no lift facility so access is very limited. In addition there are no corridors on the first and second floors. This provides significant challenges when students are moving about the block at lesson changeover. Staircases are inevitably crowded with movement of students from 3 floors.
- Corridors are narrow for such a large number of students
- We have concerns about the stability of the structure of the building and problems relating to cracks in the concrete have been regularly documented by the local authority
- Windows and doors fit poorly, heating is inefficient. There are many cold spots in the building and energy is wasted.

Other significant issues relating to accommodation include:

- The sprawling nature of the site makes accessibility a challenge, and coupled with the restrictions in the main block, means the site is not suitable for students with physical disabilities
- Increasing problems with the flat roofs (these exist on all main teaching blocks): there has already been significant outlay repairing roofs in two areas of the school and these problems will continue
- Science laboratories are not all housed in the same teaching block. At least 4 are still of inadequate quality to fully meet curriculum requirements
- Accommodation for drama and music is poor. Drama is taught in two old 'terrapin' style classrooms. The music rooms are poorly designed and old. Music, Drama and Dance are all located in different parts of the school reducing opportunities for Performing Arts development
- Students are required to move frequently between outdoor spaces. There is little shelter in cold or very hot weather.
- The main hall is too small and facilities for performances are inadequate.
- Accommodation for support staff is poor. We resorted to purchasing a PortaKabin from RBWM (ShopMobility) for our ICT and Site teams. It is not fit for purpose but is currently the only way to accommodate a growing support team.
- Our outdoor sports spaces are old worn tarmac and we have no floodlit facilities to support evening and community use

Looking to the future we would envisage a school where:

- All learning spaces are designed to meet the needs of 21st century learners
- there is first class specialist provision for the Arts, science and technology
- new technologies are imaginatively planned and available across the school
- all areas of the school are fully accessible
- there is high quality, comprehensive sports provision which promotes healthy lifestyles
- a range of community services are provided and the site is used during and beyond the school day by the local community

Question 3: Single Sex Schools

Maidenhead offers a good choice for parents. We do not recommend an increase or decrease in single sex provision.

Question 4 and 5: School Sizes

The consultation document outlines the potential benefits of larger schools. Furze Platt Senior School has an intake of 190 students. Our overall school size is 1124 students. The national average is approximately 980 students. This size allows for a broad curriculum and enables all students to feel part of our community. If a school had an intake of 300 students a year its estimated overall size would be 1900 students. We cannot find substantial research that supports the suggestion that very large schools raise standards.

We do not support reducing the number of schools.

Question 6 and 7: Schools with religious status

We are comfortable with the current position in Maidenhead. We do not believe the population is large enough to sustain another school with religious status unless another school is closed.

Question 8: New Routes to Qualifications

At present there is not enough specialist vocational provision in Maidenhead for Maidenhead students. Looking towards 2013 when all students are required to stay in education or training until at least age 17 this requires urgent consideration.

As alluded to in Question 1 there should be planning to ensure sufficient opportunities for **off site vocational learning** and **specialist vocational learning** in schools beyond the remit of the Windsor Skills Centre. With the closure of East Berkshire College in Maidenhead FE provision in the town is poor and BSF is an opportunity to develop facilities which could also be used by other sections of the community in the town centre.

Question 9: All – through Schools (pupils age 4 -19 on one site)

The Senior Leadership Team and the Governing Body are very interested in pursuing this as one option. We are unique in the borough, having an infant, junior and secondary school all on one campus. Research indicates that outcomes for students in all-through schools are very good. In addition, the opportunities for extended services and developing the school as a true community school with 7 days a week access are clear. We would not wish to discount it as a consideration at this stage.

It is clear that much more research needs to be done, and that detailed work would need to take place with the leadership teams and the governing bodies of the infant and junior school. There would also need to be consultation with the local community. Therefore we will also continue work developing the vision for a new Furze Platt Senior School in tandem with these discussions. Any plans for a new senior school would still look actively at how links with the other two schools can be strengthened through joint access to facilities and services.

Question 10: Academies

Schools in Maidenhead achieve good standards for the majority of students and all are actively working to improve on previous best. We do not see that an academy will significantly enhance educational provision in Maidenhead. Collaboration between schools is strong. The existence of an academy could seriously undermine this good partnership working.

Maidenhead Schools Designated Areas

We strongly oppose the proposal to change the current arrangements and urge the council to maintain the status quo until more research is undertaken.

Currently 94% of Maidenhead applicants get a place at their preferred school. This is a very good figure. Unfortunately neither of the options presented have been calculated to show what difference they could make to families. Therefore we have no information about the consequences of these changes. We urge the local authority to complete far more detailed work on predicting the likely impact on parental choice of these changes.

In RBWM's consultation literature some significant issues with the preferred option are highlighted. These include:

'The impact is very significant and likely to bring large shifts in parental preference.'

'Although all Maidenhead children would continue to be offered a place at a local school without proper modelling it is difficult to make any firm judgements. Large shifts in parental preference could mean that there would be a significant fall in the proportion of children offered their highest ranked school.'

'Many children living in the current designated areas for oversubscribed schools are disadvantaged as many other Maidenhead children are now much closer to the school.'

It is our view that parents of primary aged children will not be aware of this consultation and its possible impact on their children. This, coupled with the lack of modelling which **MUST** be undertaken to provide us with some detailed evidence of likely impact, underpins our argument for **no change** at this point.

Should the local authority be successful in attracting the early BSF funding it would be sensible and desirable for designated area discussions to form an integral part of these planned developments. This is a more strategic approach which would have our support.

Ms T White
Headteacher

Mrs S Le Page
Chair of Governors

On behalf of Furze Platt Senior School Governing Body