

From: Councillor Garry Bridges <cllr.g.bridges@manchester.gov.uk>
Date: Thu, 30 Jan 2020 at 13:50
Subject: Newall Green High School
To: <lwy.rsc@education.gov.uk>

Dear Ms Beer

I am writing on behalf of Manchester City Council to formally oppose the decision to close Newall Green High School.

The decision to close a school is one that should be taken very seriously and only after alternatives have been fully exhausted. It should also only be done where there can be minimal impact and disruption on the children in the school and their families. The proposals which are currently in a "listening" period do not meet those tests and so cannot be supported by the Local Authority.

This decision has already been met with upset and protest by parents and children at the school as well as the local community including Councillors and the local Member of Parliament. I do not believe that a closure is in the best interests of the children at the school or the school system in Manchester more generally.

I am very concerned about the speed of the process that has been initiated and the impact this has on families. Staff, children and parents were made aware of the possible closure in the week of the 13th January and will only know the final decision 4 weeks later meaning that their school could close only 5 months after a decision is made. For children in the school this is very disruptive and likely to have an impact on their education. Children will be facing the possibility of being separated from their friendship groups, teachers and support staff whilst families will be worried about the possibility of new uniforms, increased travel time and disruption to their child's education.

Senior officers at Manchester City Council have made your offices aware that a decision to close Newall Green would cause serious concerns for place planning in the city. There is no school with enough capacity to take the entire group of pupils and there is a shortage of places for pupils across the city in certain years- particularly Year 9. If this decision goes ahead then all capacity in the city will be lost, making it extremely difficult to find places for any children new to the city, putting our ability to meet our statutory duty at serious risk. The short time frame for this decision means that the Council would find it very difficult to commission additional places.

I also maintain that there are alternative options which should be explored before taking the decision to close. Since the listening period was announced I have met with the leadership of the Trust to better understand their position and what it would take to keep this school open. They explained to me the challenges that their falling roll presents to their budget and the insistence that the Department for Education has on a budget which balances or a recovery plan. Following on from my meeting with the Trust there were some very specific proposals for using part of the site for alternative education which would contribute to resolving their budget deficit. I have asked senior Local Authority officers to explore this further which is underway but presents a solution to the short term financial position of the trust which would give more time to work on a sustainable long term plan.

The school has had a difficult recent history and its Ofsted rating has hindered their ability to attract parents and children to the school. However, Ofsted monitoring visits at the school have praised the progress the school is making and noted the improvements made to the education offer. To consult on a closure before the leadership of the school has been able to complete that improvement process is short sighted and unfair to the staff team who have been turning the school around.

You will be aware too that we have established a Wythenshawe Education Board which brings together a wide range of partners including key business links, to raise the aspirations and the offer for Wythenshawe schools, drawing on the growth in employment opportunities locally. This work is an innovative place based model looking to connect education with local opportunities and the decision to close a high school whilst this work is in development undermines our chances of success.

The decision to close Newall Green High School would damage the interests of pupils and their families and would undermine the wider school system in Manchester making it harder to offer children school places. I can only conclude it has been taken for narrow financial reasons driven by an education system where schools have to operate as financially viable businesses in the very short term rather than a system where schools in difficulty can be supported.

I firmly believe that every realistic alternative should be considered before closure and the option which the Trust and the Local Authority have had early discussions on seem to present a real opportunity to keep the school open. I would like to discuss this in person at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

Garry Bridges

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