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7th July 2008

To: Members of the Cabinet
Swindon Borough Council

Dear Councillor

Proposal to expand Swindon Academy to include Penhill Primary and Nursery School - UNISON Submission

UNISON is the largest union for school support staff in Swindon, and represents 16 members at Penhill Primary School. Following consultation with our members, UNISON is submitting the following points on the above proposal.

The proposal to close Penhill Primary School and incorporate it as part of the Swindon Academy is opposed by support staff in Penhill Primary. There is a great commitment amongst staff to serving the local community through their work in Penhill School. Whilst it is recognised that in terms of 'results' Penhill School has had problems, its results are now improving and there is a dedication amongst support staff to ensuring the continuation of this improvement. There is a fear that the special relationship between the school and the community it serves would be diminished through assimilation into the Academy.

The school has a large number of pupils with identified special needs (55%) and it is strongly felt that these special needs are best catered for within a local community school rather than a large 0 - 19 Academy.

There is concern amongst staff that if the proposal goes ahead the Penhill site would become somewhat of an appendage to the main Academy operating in Pinehurst, that it would be difficult to be fully integrated, and that it would in fact be part of a 0 - 19 establishment in name only. Pupils in year 7 who then move to the main site would find this particularly traumatic, when most of the others of their year group would have already been based at this site. The possibility that pupils would be 'bussed' to the main site in order to familiarise them is not felt to be appropriate or helpful.

Similarly, the prospect that staff may be moved to the main site is not supported as they wish to work in their local school.

THE PUBLIC SERVICES UNION

The United Learning Trust does not have a proven record of success at primary level, and to date there is no evidence that the Swindon Academy has raised standards.

Finally, there are concerns by support staff about terms and conditions of employment. Whilst existing terms and conditions would be protected through TUPE, protection would not necessarily continue following any restructuring of the workforce which led to changes in jobs. Academies are not covered by the Best Value Code of Practise on the 'Two Tier' workforce, and as such inferior terms and conditions could apply to support staff.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bob Cretchley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping 'B' and a trailing flourish.

Bob Cretchley
Branch Secretary

cc Director, Children's Services

GMB Response to Penhill Consultation

This is a GMB response to 2 consultations:

1. DJB Consultancy carrying out a consultation on behalf of Swindon Academy to expand the Academy to include Penhill Primary and Nursery School.
2. Swindon Borough Council's proposal to close Penhill Primary and Nursery to allow an expansion of the Swindon Academy.

Because the issues relating to the 2 consultations are the same and because the meetings etc were held together we thought it appropriate that we respond with one document. Please excuse that a minimal number of points may just relate to one or other of the consultations.

GMB are a general Trade Union who represents a large number of schools support staff in Swindon. At Penhill we have a significant number of members amongst the support staff specifically teaching assistants and within the Best Team.

Consultation process

- The GMB have concerns that the supposed 'independent' consultancy - DJB have a long standing relationship with ULT. This may explain why there is no mention of any potential downsides to the proposals.
- The specifics of the consultation do not appear to consult with academy pupils or parents. Therefore does the proposal presume that the move to expand the academy is beneficial to academy pupils. GMB believes this is not necessarily the case.
- We are also concerned about the representation of Penhill parents during the consultation. From our local knowledge we are aware that Penhill parents are strongly against Penhill School being included in the Academy. We are concerned that parents views seemed to be dismissed at their meetings and have not been effectively sought out through the consultation process. This is especially important in the catchment area which Penhill is where it may be more difficult for parents to articulate their views and so may be more likely to be ignored or views not to be taken into account.
- GMB were extremely unhappy with the attitude expressed by ULT, the Academy and Swindon Borough Council in the staff consultation meeting. Criticisms of the plans seemed to be dismissed. Comments did not seem to be taken into account and were on occasion treated with inappropriate responses from the panel.
- With regards to the staff consultation; the meeting took place at 4.45pm when most certainly many support staff would have childcare responsibilities. It also was obviously not in working time, you would normally expect a consultation about something which could have such an impact on a member's employment to take place during working hours or at least to encourage engagement for the time to be paid.

- Despite the DJB consultation stating that trade union representative's views will be specifically sought out nobody has specifically spoken to the GMB.
- The proposal to look at including Penhill in the Academy was first discovered by Penhill employees when they read about it in the Swindon Advertiser. This is an appalling way to treat employees who have worked hard to improve Penhill School in difficult circumstances.
- The 'consultation meeting' consisted of a very long presentation promoting the benefits of the proposals which was followed by very limited time: 20 minutes where people could ask questions, which were often dismissed or responded to in a very abrupt way.

Concerns for Penhill School – Pupils/Parents/Local Community

- It is concerning that that the staff consultation meeting there seemed to be a clear message from Swindon borough Council that they did not feel capable of managing the necessary improvements at Penhill. This should be of huge concern to local tax payers who obviously trust SBC to manage the town in which they live including tax payers money. They would surely be concerned to hear that the LEA doesn't feel capable of managing improvements at Penhill.
- This would also be of concern to parents of children in other Swindon schools that the local LEA does not have faith in its own ability to continue to improve local schools.
- This is especially surprising considering Penhill School has been consistently improving over the last few years despite a challenging catchment area and a school building which is in need of major improvements.
- GMB is extremely concerned to note that there appears to be a significant amount of public money on offer to Swindon Academy were they to incorporate Penhill within the school. We would obviously ask why this money has not been made available to Penhill before? Why does the availability of this money appear to be conditional on incorporation into the academy? Why does SBC seem to lack confidence to manage improvements to the school internally? GMB is sure that this would be of great interest to Swindon tax payers that money is available to independent organisations to take responsibility of local schools because Swindon Council feel they cannot manage the project.
- Penhill School is in a relatively deprived area of Swindon. GMB have concerns that being included in such a large school but away from the main site will make Penhill the 'poor relation within the academy'
- Also that the specific needs of pupils and parents at Penhill School will be overlooked in the vastness of the Academy School.
- GMB are concerned that the Academy is still a new school and is likely to still have its own issues and problems to resolve. It seems extremely premature to try to incorporate another new school within the structure.
- The geography of the sites is still a big concern. How will Penhill School feel part of the Academy? Bearing in mind Penhill is an eco-

friendly school it seems ironic that part of the proposal might include bussing pupils between the schools.

- The idea that to create a seamless transition from primary to secondary education for Penhill pupils is a benefit to Penhill becoming part of the Academy is difficult to understand. Firstly presuming the 2 sites remain as they are there would still be a school move for pupils. Also surely secondary schools should be building good relations with their feeder primary schools anyway; they do not need to be part of the same school to enable this to happen. If this was true that they needed to be part of the same school then doesn't this move then leave Sevenfields and Gorse Hill at a disadvantage? Will the next proposal from Swindon Borough Council and the Academy be that all schools within the catchment area become part of the academy?
- The Academy in Swindon has limited knowledge of the very young Penhill pupils, specifically key stage 1. There is no senior management expertise in the Academy relating to these age groups. There is already a learning process to establishing the existing Swindon Academy without incorporating even more age groups at this time.
- We also have concerns about the health and safety of such small children using such a huge site.

Concerns for Penhill/Academy staff

- GMB members at Penhill wish to stay within a local authority schools where their terms and conditions are negotiated within a national structure and within the LEA's negotiation structure. This obviously brings with it security and protection which they will not have were they to move to the employment of ULT.
- Were the expansion of the Academy go ahead and include Penhill, there have been no guarantees made that Single status will be implemented. We would demand a commitment from ULT that they implement Single status as it should have already been implemented in April 2007.
- GMB members are also extremely concerned that with the ULT not implementing national and local agreements we will ultimately end up with a 2 tier workforce at Swindon academy and different terms and conditions in various Swindon schools. This would be undesirable considering the work which many have put into eliminating the 2 tier workforce in local government and the current negotiations nationally to establish a transparent and fair nation negotiating committee for school support staff.
- The failure to commit to implement Single status is of concern as it demonstrates that the ULT will not commit to implement national or local agreements which our members would have otherwise been entitled to.
- We also have concerns that in the long run there could be job losses as jobs that are being duplicated within the schools are identified.
- It needs to be clearly stated that were the expansion of the academy were to go ahead GMB recognition would transfer under TUPE for our members at Penhill.

- There is no clarity about were the proposals to go ahead what would happen to the employment of the Best team currently employed by SBC/Penhill but with external funding which covers Swindon ten.

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A member of United Learning Trust

9th July 2008

To whom it may concern

I write in favour of the proposal to expand Swindon Academy to include Penhill Primary and Nursery School.

My main reasons for doing so are as follows:

1. Penhill has a legacy of underachievement which is greater than our other feeder schools. Whilst there has been some improvement in the past two years it is unlikely to be sustainable as the level of intensive support from the Local Authority diminishes. It is my belief, as was the case with Headlands School, that in order to achieve the potential that exists in our children a radical change needs to happen. The evidence from our cluster over the past 10 years shows real difficulty in sustaining any improvements in attainment beyond 3 to 5 years unless significant changes are put in place.
2. When tracking our own year 7 students on entry and through the year it is evident that those coming from Penhill present particular challenges that others do not on the same scale. On average;
 - a. they are already below other schools in terms of KS2 standards, particularly in English and Science;
 - b. their CATs scores are below those of students from other primary schools;
 - c. their average reading age at 11 is just over 7 years;
 - d. within the first 6 months of year 7 they do not make the same level of progress as other students academically or behaviourally. In fact significant numbers present challenging behaviour during this time as they adjust to secondary school. This has been particularly pronounced this year;
 - e. a significant number arrive to us with high levels of SEN which have not been addressed. We have had to spend a great deal of time applying for Statements of Need within the first few months. This has been the case for 4 students this year. When talking with

the parents of these students they often tell us that Penhill School just sent their son or daughter home when they were naughty;

- f. a significant number were disappplied from the NC last year (5, possibly 8). They do not appear, however, to have followed an alternative programme and we were not informed of their diapplication. We were therefore unprepared for them in September.

Our Academy can build on the strengths that Penhill has. We can bring:

1. a consistent and coherent approach to teaching and learning which our children need;
2. an opportunity to build strong relationships with parents and the community which will grow throughout our children's education. This has been significant for us this year and we are already seeing the benefits;
3. a specialist delivery to aspects of the curriculum with targeted intervention when needed. The curriculum can be delivered as a coherent framework from 0 – 19, thus raising aspirations and expectations;
4. targeted SEN provision from a large team of specialists to ensure that student's needs are met early and proactively. We can provide SEN support on a scale which Penhill cannot.

I understand the concerns that staff in particular have about change. By embracing change it is seen as an acknowledgement that what has gone before is not good enough or needs to improve. This is sometimes difficult to accept but what must drive any change is that it will benefit the students.

As professionals we have a collective responsibility to explore any opportunities which come our way to improve the life chances of our children. I believe that this is one of those opportunities.

It was very disappointing to hear so many questions and comments made at the consultation meetings which either made assumptions with no basis or which had little to do with our children and their opportunities. In fact, having talked with many Penhill parents it appears that misinformation has been allowed to spread within the playground. Many parents at the consultation meetings had been told that the school was to be knocked down and the staff sacked – no wonder some were angry!

I have offered to come and talk to senior staff, staff and Governors about the structures and details of our Academy as we are at the moment. This offer has been refused. I have invited staff and Governors to come to our Beech Avenue site to see is in operation – this invitation has not been accepted. It is frustrating to hear such misinformation with no real attempt to find the truth.

At Swindon Academy our vision is to see every member of our community achieve to their best. We face the challenges of deprivation but will never allow that to be an excuse for under achievement. Time and time again we have seen our students outperform others and themselves to realise their

potential. I believe that the same will be true for the children of Penhill if they become part of Swindon Academy.

Yours sincerely

Ms J Shadick
Principal