

PENHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL

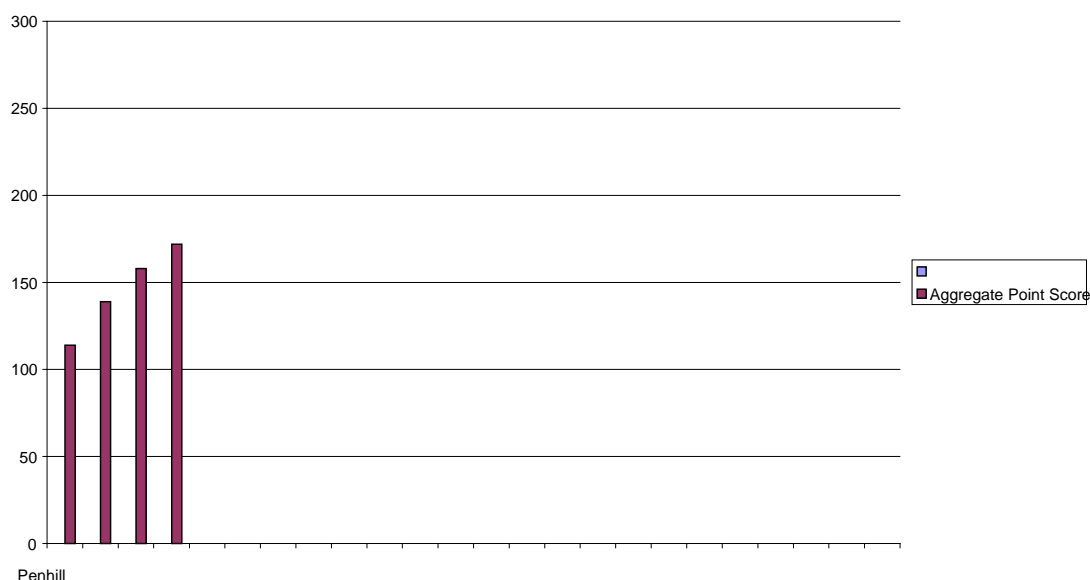
THE BEST WE CAN BE TOGETHER

Headteacher: Linda Rankin B.A.

I am writing to formally object to the proposal to close Penhill Primary School and amalgamate it into Swindon Academy.

I urge councillors to carefully consider the next step for the pupils of Penhill Primary School, within their context. The 2007 Index for Multiple Deprivation placed Penhill Primary at the top of Swindon schools. A Joseph Rowntree Foundation analysis of the Department for Work and Pensions (Sept 2007) placed Penhill as the 5th most deprived ward in SW England as measured by the percentage of children dependant on worklessness. The insular nature of the estate is significant. Having reached a certain point in the raising of standards, I know that creative and innovative solutions are required to break down the remaining barriers to that improvement. Pinehurst's solutions, or Oaktree's solutions do not necessarily answer Penhill's needs. However, opportunities to work with high performing partners, with schools whose proven practice results in high standards of achievement, will help to increase our upward trends.

Last September, Ofsted reported "...there is clear direction for raising standards and a steady improvement has been secured in pupils' achievements". Our average point score shows a consistent upward trend from 2003/4, which continues to 2007/8.



Similar data is available for all Swindon schools and this can therefore help us to identify strong partners to work with. We can plot our progress against any school in Swindon in order to identify 'like' schools who have had a significant impact on standards or outstanding schools who could share good practice. Value added scores also reflects consistent rising trend.

During the first Ofsted inspection of the newly formed Penhill Primary School, an inspector remarked that it would take 6 years for improvements to be securely rooted in the school as the job was like 'turning around the Titanic'. The graph above shows that and although we are very close to the 65% floor targets, we are not consistently achieving them. The School Improvement Partner's Annual Report to Governors (July 08), states that "the school is likely to need a reduced amount of local authority support from September 2008". It also states that "school self-evaluation is strongly focused on pupil progress but it also reflects a broader picture of the school's effectiveness across the 5 Every Child matters outcomes" and that "there are robust tracking procedures in place to monitor the progress of individual pupils, classes and cohorts".

These are all indications that its additional creative and innovative solutions that are required. During all the discussions that have been held with the local authority in the past 18 months, on addressing the 65% issue, there has been no mention of working in partnerships with any other Swindon school, no suggestions of collaboration with other Headteachers, and no drawing on the wealth of expertise that exists in Swindon. This is why the Governors turned to the Trust status option because it would facilitate partnerships which would create synergy and launch us forward.

I am not convinced that Swindon Academy is yet in the position to meet Penhill Primary's needs. I am disappointed that the local authority has only considered this option and feels that it is appropriate to close our school in the middle of an academic year. I am puzzled that despite our Ofsted inspection last year contributing to the claim that 'no Swindon schools are in special measures', we have been made to feel like a failing school.

Linda Rankin
Headteacher