

A TIME FOR CHANGE ?!

Parents and Year Six children at all of our local schools are now facing a long period of uncertainty – until March 1st 2024 before being informed by their education authority as to which secondary school is being offered for them to attend in September 2024. And whilst the secondary school in Opendale Road Burnham remains closed – the alternative school places will require a longer journey and probably a significant increase in the costs associated with school transport in most cases payable by parents.

Last month the Opendale Road site was a film set with a magnificent funfair constructed on its playing fields and I was asked by the local press for a comment which went as follows :-

The New School for Burnham Campaign steering group has from the outset in 2019 considered the decision by the Department for Education and Buckinghamshire Council to close Burnham's non-selective secondary school to be unfair and immoral. Burnham remains the only conurbation in Buckinghamshire to have a grammar school and no non-selective secondary school and there was no appropriate consultation undertaken when the decision to close the school was made.

Furthermore, the position adopted by both of the above mentioned authorities is specious in that there will always be school places available somewhere for poorly-served secondary school-age children to attend but they will always be far less attractive and suitable than the provision of a good school within walking distance.

When analysing the transitions made by 394 Year Six children at the start of this Autumn term from the seven most local primary schools to local secondary schools - only 12 elected to attend Bourne End Academy or Pioneer School (in Stoke Poges) and no previous year exceeded this take up - and yet both county and central government authorities have consistently adopted a cloth eared approach and maintained that there remain sufficient places for our local children to attend elsewhere and that there is no need to open a new school.

Local rate-paying families are required to make their own costly arrangements to enable their children to journey to distant secondary schools whilst also grappling with severe hardship in many cases as a result of the challenging economic climate. And it appears to be adding insult to injury to observe this week the third film series to be filmed on the closed Burnham School site thus resulting in a 'phantom school' when the local community campaigns for a real school. And furthermore, this preparedness by Buckinghamshire Council to promote the site as suitable for the film industry denies local groups the opportunity to use the sports ground and gymnasium which was funded in part by the local community.

Any keen observer of the strategic issues associated with education will have observed signs of some significant changes in the political climate. The Ofsted school assessment regime is under challenge as is the efficacy of the academisation process. Furthermore the tracking of Year 12 students at non-selective secondary schools in Buckinghamshire warrants much

closer scrutiny. Few make a transfer into their own school's sixth form – and in the case of Pioneer School none transfer as currently there is no sixth form provision at all.

As I have mentioned in previous updates in Round and About – it seems as if it is grandparents who have expressed the greater concern as to the current closure of the Opendale Road school – but now is the time for parents, who grapple with many more concerns, to no longer tolerate the current situation and demand CHANGE.

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