Dear MP Joy Morrissey

Our working group has carefully studied and undertaken considerable research in order to respond in detail to the correspondence you received from Anita Cranmer, Ref MPE 1866922 Case Ref: JM11295, dated 14th June 2022.

We are also mindful that much of the decision-making associated with the future of the non-selective secondary school in Burnham occurred prior to your election and we will make reference to a few earlier events as and when appropriate.

The decision to close any secondary school is a matter of very serious concern and our understanding is that there has been no such closure of any secondary school in South Bucks, Slough or Windsor and Maidenhead since 1989 when the non-selective Evreham School closed in Iver.  This school closure resulted in their only being two non-selective secondary schools in what was previously South Bucks namely Beaconsfield Secondary School and Burnham Upper until the somewhat controversial opening of Khalsa Academy in 2012.

The previously constituted Bucks County Council did make a proposal to close Burnham Grammar School in 1986 but this was rejected by Ken Clarke, the Secretary of State for Education, in 1988, primarily because the proposal did not give due weight to the number of children attending the School from the neighbouring local authority Slough which begins a few yards from the Burnham Grammar School site.

One of our strongest contentions is that Bucks Council again failed to give due weight to the number of children in Slough attending a good non-selective secondary school in Burnham; their residence may have been in Slough but the school site was very much local to them and part of their immediate local community. Bucks Council did not use this information in any of their discussions with the Secretary of State for Education and our working group has never had the opportunity to have sight of any correspondence relating to this matter.

The correspondence you received on June 14th 2022 makes a number of references to matters relating to Wycombe whilst the working group has completed detailed research referring to our local Burnham geography. What is the relevance of Wycombe to us; it is quite far away and we do not share our regular use of amenities with them. There is a big population south of Wycombe and the M40 which Bucks Council appear to circumvent in many of their plans.

We have information on admissions to Burnham Grammar School for three academic years commencing September 2020 – 2022.  Whilst pupils over this three year period attracted admissions from 88 schools in total, there were only 24 schools that sent pupils in each of the three years and they constituted 79% of the total intake.

Focusing more closely on the top 21 primary schools that will be sending pupils to Burnham Grammar School in September 2022 – they comprise of 133 pupils of the total of 180 (74%).

87 (65%) pupils are from Slough Schools and 46 (35%) from Bucks Schools. These numbers are logical for an area if you ignore the road in the middle that divides the County lines of Bucks and Slough; we are on the border with Slough and we present ourselves as a local area community.

We have recent data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and it tracks births from 2020 back to 2004 in the two Burnham County Wards - Burnham Beeches and Cliveden and one Slough Ward – Haymill and Lynch Hill.

Whilst the birth rate profiles of the above geographic area display some similar characteristics to that for total England births; the predicted decline in children of school age is not as great for the local area and in fact notably shows a significant spike in numbers of children born in 2016 which is even greater than the spike in 2011.  In conclusion, the concerns raised by the Cabinet Member Education & Children’s Services Bucks Council Education regarding significant falls in pupil numbers is incorrect in our local area of Burnham whilst also noting that the birth rate in Slough using ONS data is 50% higher than that for both Bucks and Windsor and Maidenhead.

The correspondence you received also makes reference to the population in Burnham decreasing which again is not supported by the recent ONS data :-

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **ONS data  ‘000** | **2001** | **2011** | **2021** |
|  |  |  |  |
| **Bucks** | 479 | 505 | 547 |
| **Index** | 100 | 105 | 114 |
|  |   |   |   |
| **Burnham County Wards** | 13.8 | 14.1 | 14.7 |
| **Index** | 100 | 102 | 107 |
|  |   |   |   |
| **Slough** | 119 | 140 | 150 |
| **Index** | 100 | 118 | 126 |

There are several other matters raised in the correspondence which we could revisit but we will only briefly refer now to four other matters.

The working group will issue guidance to the community to use the (ministers@education.gov.uk) email address in future correspondence but the flux in ministerial appointments has been recently a concern for us all.  **(1) Would you please offer us some guidance and support in meeting the appropriate minister in the Department for Education at the earliest?**

The proposal to offer local parents with children in Year Six free transport only to their nearest secondary school – be it Pioneer or Bourne End Academy – looks to be, at best, clumsy and inept.  We would welcome further discussion on this matter and question the appropriateness of nominating Pioneer Academy as a viable option from the outset. **(2) Is a faith school a fair single option for families by Bucks Council?**

The sentiment – *the movement of pupils from the Burnham area to Maidenhead schools is a long-standing trend and predates any issues with the former Burnham Upper School* – also warrants further consideration.  Whilst this option has indeed been available for over 30 years, it became a flood once it became apparent that E-Act Burnham Academy was a failing school.  When E-Act took over responsibility for the school in 2012, Ofsted assessed the school as requiring making improvement having been in special measures.  The school was oversubscribed in 2013 only to fall away in a startling manner from 2014 onwards with the departure of not one, but two headteachers, and a new Ofsted rating of ‘requires improvement’ which was downgraded to ‘inadequate’ in both 2016 and 2018 before its closure in 2019.

And finally, the underlined assertion of the need for sufficient surplus demand for school places again warrants very serious further consideration.  We are living in a time where the absence of resilience in far too many areas of our lives – be it energy, water, hospital beds, and more also applies to school places.  How would our local community in and around Burnham respond to an unforeseen event?  And we now understand that the demand for places at Westgate School in Cippenham, Slough is now so great that despite having grown to an eight-form entry school, local children are being offered places in Wexham School which is as far away as possible in terms of a journey across Slough.

**(3) Would you please facilitate an urgent meeting with the Bucks Council Education department with us in the working group to discuss this matter further?**

We would very much appreciate it if you would please assist us in responding to our three questions highlighted in bold.

Thank you very much for your time, support and attention on this important matter for your constituents south of the M40.

Yours sincerely,

Cllr Ekta Kaur Ross & Viv Nicholas (on behalf of the Working Group)