

## **THINK SCHOOLS! BURNHAM**

*No man is an island, entire of itself. Everyman is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.*

*John Donne – 1624*

We learned from a press release issued on December 7<sup>th</sup> 2018 of a consultation on the future of Burnham Park E-Act Academy. By the time that you read this article, it is likely that the school's management will be in full discussion with the Academy's 235 pupils and their parents in order to find the most appropriate pathways to take in order to ensure that their future education is assured. The next issue that will need to be considered is to determine the optimum strategy for the next two/three generations of secondary school age pupils living in Burnham and its surrounding area.

The purpose of this article is to try to establish an enabling context within which all those who live, work and/or care about Burnham can start to think and then contribute to the debate as to how best we can optimise primarily secondary school education for young people living in and around Burnham. Your thoughts, concerns and ideas need to be heard.

In order to look forward – it is helpful to start by looking back. Burnham Grammar School opened in 1960 and Burnham Upper School (as it was known then) in 1969. At that time – Slough was part of Bucks and the local education office was located in Slough. As a result of local government reform in 1974, Slough migrated to Berkshire which itself divided into six unitary authorities in 1998.

Bucks. is one of the three counties who have maintained the selective secondary school regime as have Slough whilst Windsor and Maidenhead have all non-selective secondary schools. Looking further to the west – there are two selective schools in Reading but no other in what was previously Berkshire. Looking to the east – there are no grammar schools in local authorities located between Slough and Paddington.

I served as chairman of the Think! Burnham Partnership between 2008 and its closure in 2016 and did research the historical investment in Burnham secondary schools and it was clear to me that Burnham had been relatively poorly served by Bucks. County Council. It is to the great credit of the leadership of Burnham Grammar School that over the past few years they have been able to access funding from the Department for Education to rebuild totally the school and it would be reasonable to start thinking about a plan to rebuild Burnham Park Academy over the next 10 years.

As regards intake – Burnham Grammar School has been working toward and now achieves five form entry in Year 7 increasing to six forms in Year 8 and upwards. However Burnham Park Academy's intake since becoming part of the E-Act Multi Academy Trust in 2012 has been disappointing. It no longer has a

sixth form and for the past three years has struggled to achieve a single form of entry. As the above mentioned press release highlights – pupil numbers were 633 in 2012/13 and are now 235 and would be forecast to fall further in the next academic year.

E-Act itself as a Multi-Academy trust has recently taken over the Bourne End Academy and its web-site refers to being one of 25 E-Act academies whilst E-Act's own web-site refers to 29 academies. A BBC report in 2014 refers to the Department for Education removing 10 schools from E-Act's control reducing their number of academies from 34 to 24.

It is a truism to say that 'school was never like that in the old days!' – some of us might think it was better whilst others might think it was worse – but we can all agree that it is now different. I have been fortunate to follow the progress of my three children and eight grandchildren and access to the internet and social media now impact greatly on the lives of young people. The growth in private tuition is increasing and it is my impression that secondary school age children are now prepared to travel significantly further to their schools. And yet one aspect of happiness of children could be interpreted as having a strong and local friendship group.

Round and About was first published in 1979 and I recently read through all editions to research local sport and I plan to write an account in all future editions detailing our progress in reaching the decision as to the future of Burnham Park Academy. I played a part in responding to the threat from Bucks County Council of closure of Burnham Grammar School in 1986 and I am hopeful that we will find the optimum outcome for the future of Burnham Park Academy. It will require a significant effort from many stakeholders, all our local primary schools, the community at large and a preparedness to work collaboratively with our neighbours within Bucks., Slough and Windsor and Maidenhead.

Viv Nicholas

tel 01628 661887 e-mail [mrviv.nicholas@btinternet.com](mailto:mrviv.nicholas@btinternet.com)