

THINK SCHOOLS! BURNHAM

Viv Nicholas continues his discussion on the future of secondary education in Burnham

E-Act's senior management team have now completed their commitment to hold three public meetings to discuss their proposal to close Burnham Park Academy.

From the outset, E-Act's position has been clear in that they will be recommending to central government that they cease providing teaching input to the school at the end of this academic year. This approach has been accepted by all those who have attended the three consultative meetings. E-Act will be submitting their proposal to central government in April and we should aim for a swift formal acceptance from central government.

There was a meeting of the Burnham Beeches Local Area Forum in Burnham Park Hall on March 6th and the County Council assured the meeting that it is clearly of the mind to re-open Burnham's non-selective, secondary school anticipating the approximate number on roll would be similar to that prior to E-Act taking on responsibility for the school. This would indicate at least four forms of entry and the opportunity to review provision for a sixth form.

This period of uncertainty obviously impacts most dramatically on two sets of parents and children :-

- those who are already or would have become students at Burnham Park Academy
- Those currently in Year 5 in local primary schools who are now starting to consider which non-selective secondary school they would like to express a preference for and will commence their secondary school education in September 2020.

Clearly the key concern at the moment is to focus on supporting all the existing and new students who would have been expecting to continue or start their education at Burnham Park Academy in September 2019. E-Act have taken over the management and teaching at Bourne End Academy from September 2018 - the start of this academic year. They have offered to supply new school uniforms where appropriate and provide free transport to Bourne End. This transport provision would also be extended to future siblings who also wished to attend Bourne End Academy and would continue for the students' duration at Bourne End Academy.

Burnham Park Academy students and parents are in the process of visiting Bourne End Academy to explore their options and it is understandably not yet clear as to what will be the take-up of this pathway.

As regards those parents and Year 5 children attending local primary schools who would be prepared to consider attending a new secondary school in Burnham in September 2020 – we are all under considerable time pressure to determine the best possible course of action. It is obviously in everybody's interest to reach an outcome which enables as many local children as possible to have the opportunity to attend Burnham Grammar School or a newly established secondary school in Burnham thus avoiding any requirement to travel any great distance to alternative school.

I would urge all readers of this article to start to become much more active in expressing their ideas and expectations as to the manner in which education is provided in Burnham and its hinterland. It was noticeable that far more community members attended the third meeting in comparison to the first two consultative meetings and far more passion and concern was expressed.

Do not leave this issue to someone else to sort out – it is far too important! Talk to your family and friends and make sure that your voice is heard. Write to your local county councillor and Member of Parliament and please do send me a copy.

Currently the 'baton for change' has been in the hands of E-Act whose aim is to withdraw from Burnham. The baton now passes to the County Council who will undertake a further consultation to assess the type of provision that would be most appropriate in Burnham and its surrounding area for the short, mid and long term. Look out for the consultation documents and meetings which will be held by the County Council and make sure that your views are heard.

Burnham is blessed with many good and capable people who care and contribute to its future and a network is starting to develop who are well-placed to tackle the challenge of enhancing education provision in Burnham. But they will need your energy and involvement to make it happen. Some actions will take time – but it is imperative, in my view, that there are new, Year 7 secondary school places available in Burnham in September 2020.

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