

Claremont Parent Council

Response to Consultation on Future of St John's and Claremont Primary Schools

On 24th February 2011 Claremont Parent Council held an open meeting within the School with all parents / guardians / carers of pupils attending Claremont primary School receiving invitations to attend. The main topic on the agenda was the current consultation on the future provision of primary education in the Alloa West area.

The aim of the meeting was for the Parent Council to obtain the views of parents on the current consultation and draft a response to the Council based on those views.

An overview was given of each Option with the decision taken to concentrate discussion on options 3 – To refurbish and extend Claremont Primary School to accommodate all of St John's pupils and Option 4 – To build a new school for pupils of both schools on a new site. It was agreed that Options 1 and 2 were not worthy of discussion as they essentially meant a 'Do Nothing' approach for Claremont Primary School. It was further noted that for both Options 2 and 4 – the 'different' and 'new' site referred to Redwell playing fields as per the paper to Council.

Discussion focussed on the following main topics;

Funding - It was clear from the paper to Council and associated documentation that currently the only source of external finance from the Scottish Futures Trust was for Option 4 in addition to matched Council funding. All other options would require full financial input from the Council alone.

Condition of Claremont Primary School – it was noted that the school is classed as B for suitability and C for condition. It was accepted that there are other schools in Clackmannanshire that are in a worse condition and Claremont would be unlikely to be the next school to be renewed should the outcome of the current consultation not include Claremont. Some parents suggested that the school is currently in an acceptable condition and that a 'do nothing' approach was a valid option. It was argued that Claremont requires significant work just to maintain a status quo e.g. the heating system is poor and requires replacement. It was accepted that its condition can only deteriorate without major investment and this is unlikely in view of the current and future significant funding cuts for Local Authorities.

Distinctive Ethos of the school – discussion around the balance between the benefits of a new teaching environment and the existing ethos / quality of teaching at the school.

Benefits of a merged school – a number of benefits were discussed including flexible space for cooperative learning / the advantages of two stage schools in relation to year group teachers working together / larger staff allows development of new ideas and staff while sharing the school workload.

Effect of school size – discussion around whether a larger school would deliver better facilities. It was accepted that a design with final classroom numbers was not available but it was stressed that parents / staff / pupils should be involved in the design process to ensure an appropriate balance

between flexible learning areas, classroom sizes and pupil numbers in classes. The difference between a larger school and a larger merged school was discussed with questions of integration. A larger school could provide more options than a smaller school the size of Claremont e.g. more options for dealing with issues, after school and breakfast clubs.

Capacity of a new merged school – the proposed size was discussed and whether the population projections of the Council were accurate given latest figures which show a rise in the numbers aged 0-15 years in Clackmannanshire of 17% by 2033.

Location of proposed new school – comments were made on the loss of green space at the Redwell site and also acknowledged that building a new school on the existing Claremont site would be very disruptive to pupils. A preferred location would be to build a new merged school on the site of the former Alloa Academy – this would remove issues of a school adjoining a railway and A class road. It was accepted that this site was tied to the finance of the new Alloa Academy.

At the end of the meeting the following consensus was reached on points that should be raised to the Council on behalf of Claremont Parent Council. These points are;

- Reluctant acceptance of a new merged school at the Redwell site (preference for a new school at site of former Alloa Academy)
- More advantages for a larger school in terms of educational attainment
- Road safety issues – pupils from the existing Claremont catchment will be forced to cross a very busy major 'A' class road. A suitable and safe method of crossing must be provided to ensure that there is no tragic accident with pupils or indeed parents coming into conflict with moving vehicles. This suitable method of crossing must be suitable for children choosing to cycle to school. It is likely that due to extra distances involved in reaching the school that many parents will drive their children to school. A safe drop off area of suitable size must be provided.
- History of flooding – the site has a long history of flooding. All steps must be made to ensure that all threat of flooding is removed. This flood prevention must be future proof to accommodate predictions of a wetter climate for the area.
- Railway noise / safety – the school will inevitably suffer from noise associated with nearby Alloa – Stirling railway line. The new school should incorporate design and build methods that minimise noise and vibration issues. All steps must be taken to ensure that the railway line presents no dangers to pupils
- The paper to Council states that a new combined school would be constructed for 420 pupils. Projected population publication based on 2008 data from GROS predicts that Clackmannanshire will have a population increase of 24% by 2033 and for children aged 0-15 years the predicted population increase is 16.7%. These figures indicate that a combined pupil roll is likely to increase over the life of the new school and will be above the design capacity.
- Parents, staff and pupils should be involved in the design process.