

Dear Sir,

I am writing about the plan to change the existing transport arrangements for schoolchildren in Herefordshire. As a teacher at John Masefield High School in Ledbury, Herefordshire, I am greatly concerned for the well-being of the students who currently attend and how the proposed changes will adversely affect them. I believe that the suggested plan is divisive and lacking in financial sense.

Financially speaking, the proposed changes will be more expensive, not less. The cost modeling seems at best woolly and unsure and it seems very unlikely that the full cost impact of the decision to change existing arrangements has been considered in any detail. For example, current students in Y10-Y13 who live in Cradley and Mathon, and other eligible students, would still have to be bused into JMHS. However, other students would need to be bused to Dyson Perrins in Worcestershire. Thus there would be two buses paid for by the Council not one. Part of Colwall, a nearby village, is nearest to The Chase School in Malvern and part is closer to JMHS. Again, the Council will therefore have to pay for two buses instead of one. Furthermore, if the Chase School was full (and Worcestershire have already indicated that they will not be making any changes to their admissions criteria) a third bus may be required to transport students from the village to yet another school.

In addition, the Council's own report states that *the actual financial savings are hard to forecast precisely*. However, one thing is quite easy to forecast: we have calculated that the long term effects of the change would move approximately 250 secondary aged children from Herefordshire Schools into Worcestershire or Gloucestershire schools costing almost a million pounds per year. Even if the alleged savings were achieved in full, four times this amount will disappear from schools' budgets. How is this justified and what attempts have been made to consider a more coherent and holistic view of funding? Has Jo Davidson, the Director for People's Services, clearly communicated the considerable damage this would cause to Herefordshire schools to all councillors?

Moving on to the personal cost to individual students, the proposed changes would undoubtedly affect numbers of our students adversely in terms of their educational and social progress. With academies free to design and teach their own curriculum rather than following the national curriculum, students moving school after Year 7,8,9 would face particular disadvantages. They could have missed out considerable chunks of learning or forced to study the same topics twice. What account has been taken of educational disadvantage to Herefordshire children in these calculations? There is also considerable research evidence that children who move secondary school after they have started do less well. What account has been taken of this?

The Ledbury Cluster of schools have worked extremely hard to create an effective transition programme with younger students enjoying many visits and activities in JMHS, close liaison between heads, governors, teachers and support staff to help with continuity of education, which is crucial to a good start at high school. The proposed transport changes will lead to the abandonment of traditional catchment areas and makes this work much harder. Is this what the Council wishes to achieve? Furthermore, has account been taken of young people making less progress and being unhappier as a result of this?

This policy would force middle income parents who live in Herefordshire to choose a school out of the county. Herefordshire Council have spent considerable sums of money on creating a Children and Young People's Partnership whose vision - the 'Yes, We can' plan - sets out their aims for children living in Herefordshire and promotes collaboration with different organisations to make things better for children. We would question whether the 'Yes We Can' team have been consulted for their views on the proposed changes to school transport? And if not, why not?

A key part of the coalition government's philosophy on education is based on parents being able to choose a good school for their children. The decision to transport to nearest school is inequitable in that it only provides choice for the better off who can afford the bus fares. How do Councillors square this with the political views the parties they represent espouse about education? It is also important to ask if any account being taken of students with SEN at School Action or School Action Plus for whom moving school will create discontinuity of support and damage their progress and learning? This is equally true of pre- and post-16 SEN students.

My final point is that the decision has a disproportionate effect on families with more than one child. In fact, it seems to actively penalize these families. If a parent was desperate to keep their children at their current secondary school and had two or three children in Y7-Y9, could they be given any financial help? If so how could this be achieved in a way that is equitable and fair to all parents? Has due consideration been given to the prospect of splitting children in the same family and forcing them to attend separate schools? Costs to parents could include extra child care provision to meet the different term dates, the inability to pass on school uniform to siblings, the inability to take family holidays at certain times of the year and the sheer impossibility of having two or three children attending schools in adjacent counties. Furthermore, families unable to support this additional cost have not been given the notice they need to amend their school choice for the September 2014 intake. We are, frankly, horrified that Herefordshire did not make their intentions clear to parents of current Year 6 students before requiring them to make their preferred choice of secondary school. It is further noted that our adjoining authorities (Gloucestershire, Monmouthshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire) would not permit any changes to parental preferences after the official closing date of 31 October 2013. This severely disadvantages residents of Herefordshire and their children.

In conclusion, these sweeping changes seem ill-thought out, damaging to families and the education of our young people, socially divisive, and not cost-effective in the slightest: in fact, the opposite of cost-effective. I ask most strongly that the students in the county of Herefordshire should not be so adversely affected.

Yours,



Dyslexia Specialist at a Secondary School in Herefordshire.