

The Hereford Diocesan Board of Education

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From The Director: The Rev Dr Ian A. Terry

Our DBE vision of what our Church school network is about for the future

1. The DBE and the Diocesan Parochial network exists to serve *all* schools in the Diocese not just Church schools. Maintaining and promoting these Church links between all schools and local worshipping communities is fundamental for us.
2. Most Hereford Diocesan Church schools primarily serve their local community rather than just the Church community.
3. Local Authority and DBE collaboration at SACRE level ensures joint RE and Collective Worship guidelines, and often INSET, shared by Church schools and Community schools, with a common purpose of the attainment of excellence in these central areas of school life.
4. We have a vision of Church schools spread evenly, geographically, throughout Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin and contributing distinctively Christian perspectives on fullness of life for each individual and for each community.
5. We commit ourselves to offering a high quality resource (i) for the Diocesan Church schools network; and (ii) to all schools in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.
6. Our existing networks and resources give us valuable monitoring tools:
 - (i) through the Statutory Inspection of Anglican Schools (SIAS) and interaction with Local Ministry Development Groups.
 - (ii) for the distribution of Locally Co-ordinated Voluntary-Aided Provision (LCVAP) capital funding streams.
7. We are committed to providing DBE representation for ongoing discussions at appropriate Reference Groups about County School Organisation Plans.
8. We would like to discuss in partnership with our senior Local Authority colleagues how the continuing provision of high quality

education is compatible with sustaining local community and with distributing inevitably limited resources in an equitable way.

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Statement to Shropshire C. C. Cabinet meeting on Wed. 30th Jan., 2008, by the Director of Education for the Diocese of Hereford, the Reverend Dr Ian Terry, on behalf of the Church of England Dioceses of Hereford and Lichfield.

1. We care, first and foremost, about the children and the staff involved. Along with all good parents and the Local Authority, **we want only the best possible teaching, learning and care for every child.** We celebrate the highly professional and caring contribution made by all staff, and we care about the contribution each one will continue to be able to make. We are saddened by the extent to which large numbers of children and staff are distressed and destabilised at the moment.
2. Secondly, **we understand the need for a thorough-going rationalisation of school places.** Whilst finance must never be the bottom line in organising children's education, and we know the Local Authority shares that view, nonetheless, County Councils have an unenviable duty to allocate limited funding in a cost-effective way. Inequalities of funding between urban and rural schools presently significantly disadvantage some children in urban schools. We deplore that. So, undoubtedly, something has to be done, and the County Council has been courageous in the extent of its proposals. We support their aspirations.
3. Equally, **we share the disappointment of all school and village communities whose school has been named for closure amalgamation, or reduction of capacity.** The Church offers its **pastoral support** to all schools and communities in that position. These are very painful times for many people. **Some teachers are telling me they have never known their children so collectively angry.**
4. We will want **assurances** that, in each case, **consultative processes are thorough** and are given not just the legal minimum time, but as much time as is needed for parents to be heard ~ in a way that might make a real difference ~ and for local communities, particularly Governing Bodies, to take ownership of what will happen in *their* communities. **Each school's data must be very thoroughly checked and formally agreed with each Governing Body. Security of staff is another very important area** on which we will want assurances. ~ also on the **maintenance and geographical spread of the % of the Church's contribution to education in Shropshire** ~ currently huge! ~ ie ~ **58.9% of the total of Primary Schools in Shropshire are provided by the Church of England.** However, we note that **83.3% of the schools proposed for closure are Church schools; to be precise, out of the 24 schools proposed for closure, 20 are Church schools!**
5. We strongly encourage the Local Authority to take careful account of **general social factors about the sustainability of rural community life**, recognising that

these factors are not determinative, as school revenue is the schools and children, not for communities. However, on the other hand, **the whole point of the Children Act, and the five outcomes of the Every Child Matters agenda, is that all these things do, in fact, interact** ~ and the Local Authorities have 'single pot' budgets precisely in order **to enable the funding of wider social objectives. We would strongly encourage that.**

6. Finally, in the midst of the many strong feelings around, I want to encourage **mutual respect and a calm listening to each other.** I end as I began, with the centrality of the teaching and learning of the children, and care for all staff: these fundamentals must be maintained at all costs.

Response from the Hereford Diocesan Board of Education in relation to school re-organisation proposals in Herefordshire and Shropshire Local Authorities

- ❖ We recognize and understand the need for review and we wish to co-operate with the process. Our vision of the review outcome, as being that which facilitates the best quality teaching and learning for each child or young person, is similar to that of both Herefordshire and Shropshire.
- ❖ We firmly believe that sustaining and improving that high quality of opportunity and outcome for each child must be the core criterion. These **review outcomes** must be determined on educational grounds **not purely on financial criteria.**
- ❖ We accept evidence that high quality education is equally well provided in the 'family-style' mixed age grouping of rural small schools as it is in larger schools where children learn alongside those of their own age.
- ❖ We would, therefore, **question the appropriateness** of a 'rule of thumb' criterion of a **minimum four class size for rural primary schools** being applied to all schools. We do understand that each child's entitlement will be to appropriate schooling within a maximum traveling distance (in Shropshire: 6 miles) and that this will lead to the retention of many small rural primary schools of three or even two classes, nonetheless, we believe that, in deeply rural counties, the 'rule of thumb' of a minimum four class size does not take account of the value that very small schools, of sixty pupils and less, add to the sustainability of sparsely-populated rural communities.

- ❖ We also recognize the pain that small rural communities will experience if their small school turns out to be under threat. We shall stand by these communities and will require that the detail of each school's circumstances be looked at with great care.
- ❖ It is clear that the requirements of the Primary Capital Programme and its timescales impact significantly upon the re-organisation processes. We understand that if Local Authorities are not seen to be carrying out these reviews they will not access PCP funding and their entire fleet of schools, many of which are Church schools, will suffer.
- ❖ We acknowledge that there has been a substantial body of opinion that Shropshire's consultation processes were inadequate in relation to Headteachers and parents. Equally, in Herefordshire, many Headteachers and governors see the consultations, to date, as poor. This does not reflect or promote good quality partnership.
- ❖ Children learn and thrive in all sorts of conditions, but it is clear that they learn and thrive best in sustainable communities. We request that proposals which, if implemented, will inevitably result in some small school amalgamations and closures, should take account of the impact on the sustainability of village life of the closure of its local school. We urge that this is not seen as a separate issue. Children develop holistically within community. We, therefore, ask that priority be given in your considerations to **the role of the school in a sustainable community** - and in particular ask whether there is any research to show what happens to a village after the school is closed. We presume that parents with children of primary school age prefer to live relatively close to centres of education rather than choose to live a bus journey away.
- ❖ The limited research that we are aware of about extended schools presupposes that there are good transport links between the school and outlying communities. After-school clubs etc are certainly desirable in principle but in practice the school transport will have left by then and parents are the only stop-gap. The idea sounds good in theory but in practice some children are dis-advantaged as a result if their parents are unable to cover for transport.

- ❖ The housing figures are based on current housebuilding figures contained in the Regional Spatial Strategy and the County Council's Development Plan. However the National Housing and Planning Advisory Unit has indicated that the **government's earlier projection of housing need was seriously underestimated and that the figures will need to be revised upwards**. The West Midlands will need to accommodate up to 40,000 additional new homes to those already projected and some will be built in rural areas and in Shropshire.
- ❖ Given the national legal expectation that the **LA may not so re-organise as to radically worsen the Church of England provision as a % of the total primary provision in the LA** we look to see parental preference maintained in this respect throughout both Local Authorities, thus maintaining the current balance between Aided and Controlled schools. Our DBE is firmly and fully committed to playing its part in partnership with the LA in supporting and resourcing our schools which we greatly value. We would also want to stress **the buy-in that parents and others give to their local school**. Schools require more than teachers to function. The parental support is both financial and in skills. The school, of course, is also a resource for the rest of the community and this awareness should not be lost in the debate.
- ❖ There is an environmental element lacking in the proposals. Surely one of the principles which preface the document should be that of environmental sustainability in line with the County Councils' overall aims. We would ask you to note that our Diocese shares these aims. In the light of these aims, any changes must be judged on environmental criteria as well as financial, educational and social. We believe that currently about 1 in 5 of all car journeys in the UK is education related, which amounts to a huge negative contribution to climate change. We question how the projected two-way 45 minute car journeys are compatible with the criteria of environmental sustainability shared by both the Local and Diocesan Authorities. We would propose that an environmental assessment including a carbon footprint projection (i.e. present vs proposed) should be mandatory in

the discussion and consultation process, and that corresponding compensation measures must be taken if closures mean that the footprint will rise.

- ❖ Our Diocesan Board of Education will continue to contribute to these review consultations and we trust this will help in informing the nature of the implementation process of whatever policies are ultimately adopted. We value our diocesan partnership with both Shropshire and Herefordshire Local Authorities and share their vision and aims for the highest quality educational provision for each child. This must always be the paramount criterion for any school organisation policy but we would suggest that this is best achieved within a culture of active care for the sustainability of local community. We are committed to extensive and transparent consultation processes, which include parents, children, school staff and local community representatives as the way forward in all these processes and we will gladly play our part, using the Church's deeply-rooted and extensive parochial and school structures, in these consultations.

30th November, 2007.