

## **Woodfield School / Grove Road amalgamation notes to the Executive.22/02/2022**

I speak to you as one of two councillors for Bilton and Nidd Gorge which includes Woodfield School. It should be noted that I am also a school governor – the governing body supports this amalgamation.

This is written in support of the proposed amalgamation.

We know that the provision of (excellent) Education is the proven cornerstone of moving areas out of poverty and improving the life chances of the children and residents. Woodfield is the most deprived ward in Harrogate and one of the most deprived places in NY.

We must keep a school in this area.

I became involved with Woodfield School in 2018 following it having some challenging moments in the leadership of the School that led to a significant loss of pupils. It's important to note that the School's problems started several years before, culminating in things going seriously wrong in early 2018.

Today the school has outstanding leadership, sadly it is temporary and therefore considered a serious weakness in the eyes of ofsted, the teaching is of the highest quality and a brand new curriculum is now in place (a lack of which contributed to the school going into special measures). I am a lay person but believe the school would pass an ofsted inspection if it were subjected to one now.

I have consistently championed and supported the School at every opportunity, at county council level, at ministerial level and with the Regional Schools Commissioner. We have had and continue to have great support (far too many people to mention) including one term where the acting Head Teacher was the assistant Head at Grove Road at that time.

The children attending are safe, happy and learning.

However, events have conspired over the last few years that school has never had a window where it could confidently recruit and consequently has continued to lose pupils. Pupil numbers are in the 50s now compared to 154 in 2018. Although I am confident of the schools performance, I think it is a tall order for the school to acquire a net 25 pupils a year for the next 5 years in order for its financing to get on to a better footing.

My vision for a school in woodfield

"...serves the community by becoming a thriving, vibrant, safe school where the wellbeing of the pupils is at the centre of everything we do. We provide an ambitious and quality curriculum in a learning environment that gives the children the best possible start in life and equips them for life in modern Britain

The school provides pupils with opportunities to learn outside of the classroom, such as educational visits. These visits are linked closely to enhance learning and the curriculum. Subsidies will be sourced, where necessary, to ensure they are open to all. The School's mantra of INSPIRING: LEARNING: TOGETHER guiding everything we do.

**But a School needs to do more; to be central to the wellbeing of the community**

“That the school becomes a central hub and support for the community by providing preschool nursery facilities; and before and after school activities, in particular breakfast - a best possible start to the day. And enabling the residents of Woodfield to work knowing their children are safe and gainfully occupied.

The facilities of the campus; the school, the library and the green fields provide a healthy environment for learning and play.

It will have an entrance on the greenway allowing pupils to safely access the school by bike or on foot and open the school up to the residents of Claro road.

Outside the school we will have a 20mph speed limit, crossing and zigzags, again reinforcing our safety approach.”

However, vision is not enough. The school has major financial problems and the governors have been seeking solutions to this. Schools are funded based on the number of pupils on roll and since the loss of half its pupils the income has not been sufficient. This has made the school an unattractive option for Academisation.

Woodfield school must evolve according to its circumstances. The school has two options: amalgamation with Grove Road; or carry on as is knowing that it must recruit a minimum of 30 pupils a year – which is not being achieved at the moment and, sadly, there is no reason to believe this will happen despite the fact that the school serves (has a catchment of) 357 pupils excluding the Claro road area.

So how does the amalgamation impact on my vision? Well, I believe it enhances it. More pupils (350) will benefit from the fabulous indoor and outdoor facilities, and better air quality. All pupils will have access to an excellent education. The combined School will also be able to provide before and after school facilities. There may be some short term logistical challenges but I believe that this will be great for pupils, great for parents, great for the area.

I will continue to support Woodfield School as a councillor and governor in whatever guise it exists.