

Southampton Schools Forum

20 September 2021

Dear Councillors

Expansion of Hope Free school to Two Forms of Entry

I'm writing on behalf of Southampton Schools Forum in my capacity as chair, following a decision to do so at our most recent meeting (15th September).

A number of concerns were raised at the meeting, which we would like to be reassured will be fully considered before any final decision to go ahead with this project is made.

Firstly, we all recognise and support the importance of Hope having a school building for its children which is fit for purpose. If funding can be accessed to make this a reality, then that is a wonderful development for the children of the school and the wider city.

However, with a declining birth rate, and numbers of Reception children projected to decline into the foreseeable future, the doubling in size of Hope presents a number of challenges, both to Hope itself, and the other schools and children of the city. These are to do with the negative effects of having excessive excess places on school finance. These concerns are:

- Ten schools have already reduced their Planned Admission Number: There are 312 fewer places for Reception children than there were a year ago, yet still there are schools with surplus places. Doubling the intake for Hope will exacerbate this problem.
- School funding is based on number on roll- school become unviable when they have a large proportion of unfilled spaces. There is a view that one form entry schools are not viable- this is not true: there are plenty of examples across the city that one form entry forms thrive both economically and in terms of outcomes. What is clearly true is that an under-subscribed school of any size quickly becomes unsustainable.
- As a result of declining numbers, a number of schools in the city have already had to have staffing restructures and make redundancies. For maintained schools, it is the council that funds these redundancies.
- Whilst there is a surplus of primary places in the city, there is a desperate shortage of both secondary and special educational places. It seems illogical to be exacerbating the shortage whilst ignoring the need of the city.

A number of headteachers of schools close to Hope are very disappointed that despite working openly, collaboratively and transparently with SCC- in many cases reducing the size of their own schools for the greater good of the children of the city, they have not been consulted about this proposed doubling in size of Hope.

We hope that these issues will be given serious consideration during the planned commissioning of primary school places.

Sincerely

J Draper (Chair- on behalf of Southampton Schools Forum)