

## My Vision

My vision of the school is to have an institution supported by the current parents that holds on to the vision and principles of the original founding parents. For me these include, from a practical point of view,

- The treasuring of a child's character and not spoiling it by rewarding ungodliness; directing the child to do their best because they were loved by God and training them to secretly build treasure in Heaven. We would add here that we believe that this is all done within the context of valuing the child and in an atmosphere of that affirms them in their good choices.
- The careful selection of families and teachers with clearly shared values.
- That teachers should not be overburdened with tasks external to the actual face to face teaching of the children and be rewarded adequately.
- The importance of securing benefactors for the school so that the work will not be a burden to families and that families and family values are supported by the school.

I believe that we need to hold on to the ethos of the school as a Christian community gathered to educate children through Christian values by people active in the wider Christian community. I believe our aim should be to be outstanding in the way we deliver education and in our support and pastoral care. We should be creating a spiritual, emotional and physical environment that enables children to thrive.

I think families should be enabled to send their whole family to the school. I think we should consider very carefully the reintroduction of a school based Early Years

Provision which now includes the Reception Year.

I believe that we have reached a sufficient size as a community of those who have benefited from the school, to actively seek support from this wider community. We also need to attract legacies and bequests and explore the possibility of corporate sponsorship.

## Vision for the number of pupils

On our current site I think that we can accommodate the following classes

Primary Threshold (10 pupils): Reception and Year 1 accommodated in the downstairs of the Recreational Hall

Lower Primary (10 pupils): Years 2 and 3 sharing the accommodation with the Primary Threshold and having a quiet working area on the Recreational Hall mezzanine.

Upper Primary (10 pupils): Years 4 and 5 taught in the Solus Portakabin

Lower Senior transition (10 pupils): Year 6 with specialist subject teaching

Lower Seniors (15 to 20 pupils): Years 7 and 8 with set subject teaching

Upper Senior transition (20 pupils): Year 9 with set subject teaching

Upper Seniors (20 pupils): Year 10 and 11 with set core subject teaching and options.

This would give us a school of 100 pupils maximum but in reality we would probably have a school of around 70. I think reaching 70 will trigger the need to seek an additional or alternative site.

## Vision for the curriculum

I believe that we need to develop a cutting edge small school model for the teaching of children throughout the school. I believe that we should communicate this to be the case in such a way as to make it a school pupils come to because it is good not because they have problems. I believe that the social and

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emotional needs we are able to meet in the school are a significant part of what we offer our locality but we should not be known and sought out only for this.

I feel we need to continue with the family focus of the school so that the curriculum and co-curriculum emphasise the all-age character of the school. I think the fact that all-ages are represented in the school and mix is a strength that should be emphasised and we should not be defensive about the mixing of age groups in our teaching. This is especially the case where we can offer an individual focus in our teaching and group by ability across age ranges.

I think we need to develop our curriculum around what we already offer.

I think that a strength of the threshold and lower primary should be that it educates through play; social interaction and cooperation, and individual attention to what makes a good learner, at a pace which suits the individual.

I think the upper primary group should be receiving teaching that meets each of their individual needs and the Year 6 group should be exploiting the natural creativity of this group to capitalise on the individual attention they have been receiving. I think having the year six as a transition group enables focused attention to preparation for the next stage of their education. It also allows for thorough assessment of each child's needs.

The lower seniors should be characterised by an increasing independence and thoughtfulness in their studies with a developed sense of what is possible. The year9 group should be a group where pupils mature rapidly to understand their potential in the world and be equipped to succeed.

The upper seniors should be a group that capitalises on all the good work that has happened and be prepared to succeed in their external assessments. They should be

directed in their choices so they are able to aspire to do well and pursue their hopes in life.

### Where we are now and how we got here...

Going in to this year we were in a very strong position with a balanced budget and fully staffed. We had welcomed new staff, Alison to teach the lower primary children and Stefanie to teach core skills at KS3, to teach GCSE Product Design and work as an LSA with the upper primary class and lower seniors. We were also building on a successful inter-inspection visit.

A feature of our financial model is that we budget for the regular outgoings and expect most capital expenses to be met from gifts. In this way we hope to allow people of a modest income to attend in the belief that people will give above their fee, in proportion to the income, to provide for the material needs of the school.

The weakness in this system is that it relies on people having a fair assessment of their income and being faithful in their giving. A downside is also that in a small school where the fee is paid by less than thirty families, if a family leaves or does not pay their fees this represents a large proportion of our income.

Our financial model also allows parents to pay over ten months. A consequence of this is that for 2 months of the year no money is being paid to the school, and so if there are problems with fee income the shortfall is only experienced in the last two months. As will be seen, what has happened during this year has put the school's future in jeopardy.

Before the summer holidays were up, we learned that we had lost a Year 6 making a small group very small, with only two pupils. We also lost a Year 11. We decided that we needed to wait to see what might happen but our position was weakened as our budget was now unbalanced.

To begin with the whole primary group worked together as Alison gained experience and as planned, by half term, we were able to move the upper primary group into a new portakabin. We also invested funds into extending the back of the chapel to accommodate more pupils and had improved the art room accommodation for the same purpose.

At this point it became evident that there were major, unexpected problems with families not paying fees. By Christmas time it was evident that we were potentially going to lose families and we were sustaining some bad debt situations with former families failing to pay what they owed.

Christmas was also the time when our boiler had failed. We had already not been able to secure gifts to pay for the classroom changes and siting of the portakabin and there was no choice in whether we changed the boiler or not. This resulted in the fee income being spent on capital projects not anticipated in the budget. The fact is that we continue to receive little or no gifts.

An initiative was set up to raise funds through partnering with a local law firm who would pay their fees to the school as a donation for every will they wrote. This money was needed to replace computers being used in the old portakabin and replace an ailing computer used in the admin office. Unfortunately this initiative did not raise the expected funds and the shortfall was paid out of the fees.

We did lose a family and were put in the position that we had to amalgamate Year7 and Year 8. We also discovered that the planned introduction of the Early Years Foundation Stage would need to be postponed because of a misunderstanding of the new regulations around including Reception children.

We found ourselves going in to the spring half term short of staff in the English department

but with help from a parent, the head covering lessons and employing a past member of staff on a pro rata basis, we are able to cover the classes. This was a serious discouragement.

As a result of all this we are now in a serious financial position that threatens our future.

This is a sad position to be in, because educationally we have never been stronger and can look forward to an Inspection in 2014/15 yielding good results.

Although we have managed to attract interest for next year we are only just replacing with new families the families we are to lose in Year 11. We have also lost two pupils from year 6 which seems to be becoming a trend. A feature of this year has been the interest generated by families wishing to join in Year 9.

We find ourselves having to ask some quite searching questions about sustainability and the community we are to be. We can draw strength from our success in the past but what are we to be? How are we to secure financial viability?

### Future planning

The following priorities have been highlighted from an educational perspective:

- Employ a new full time Senior Teacher to cover the new areas of the curriculum, develop Technology teaching and develop our Core Skills programme
- Respond to new government requirements for the KS4 curriculum (computing, PSHE and citizenship)
- Develop progress measures as required for the new National Curriculum and develop ways of recording and reporting progress.

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Ongoing area for consideration

- Plans for re-introducing "Early Years" into school
- Plans to listen to the experience of new parents

But it is also important that we:

- Make very clear what parental involvement means, including the expectations around financial giving, maintenance and envisioning
- Clarify and modify the fee system
- Make very clear the financial model the school is built on and the responsibilities of the parents in this
- Update promotional material
- Increase the number of trustees

My expectations are that we are going to go far in this meeting and that we are going to receive wisdom. Please feel free to express your ideas without fear and please be diligent in listening and not criticising. Sometimes the strangest ideas can have a nugget of inspiration and after all we started as group of nutty, radical idealists.

So 'long and thanks for the fish...

And this is where I started, reminding us of the past. When we started the school 25 years ago:

- Sue and I were the only ones who were paid and all the other staff worked for free whether they had children or not
- All the cleaning was done by volunteers
- There was no admin staff
- I wore jeans and trainers
- All the building work was done by parents
- We had no technology
- Most of our cars fell to pieces and were gifts

- The church bailed the school out if there were financial problems
- No body earned much

As a parent I have

- Cleaned the school for two hours after finishing work
- For most of the time my children were at school, paid full fees
- Attended nearly every cleaning day
- Helped build nearly every addition to the school, sometimes teaching and then building until late into the night
- Done most of the office work including running the books for two years as well as teaching
- Mowed the grounds for a number of years at the weekend until I fell ill
- Spent days nursing ailing technology

I now do not have children at the school.

I have seen trustees come and go and families leave; people I have sweated with, but never see again; children and parents I have seen brought back from despair and lost contact with. I know I am hated by some and equally loved by many which I am told is a sign of effective leadership but I'm not so sure.

I do not believe we have the commitment we had, and I don't think we understand the hard work that running the school has involved, but I think we are a fantastic group of people with the potential to forge a new way through this.

Maybe, because of the past we don't need to make such huge sacrifices, but if we don't wake up to the need for there to be an alternative, then how will we continue?

I feel my role is to serve the desires of the current parents and hope the pulse of what has happened in the past is the same life giving pulse that will make the school work today and will be the pulse that will make it live in the future. So to continue the picture lets breathe life into today.