

## Press Release

**Issued By Standards Not Tiers on behalf of Ventnor SOS Action Group - 10<sup>th</sup> September 2008**

Lack of consultation and proposals for schools reorganisation in Ventnor have been slammed as inadequate and inappropriate by the Ventnor SOS team. Spokesperson for the group, Chris Welsford said: *"here in Ventnor it has been long accepted that something needs to be done about the fact that St Margarets and St Boniface Church of England Primary Schools are under utilised. The proposal to amalgamate these schools together with the town's Roman Catholic primary school, made in July, seemed to make sense given the councils decision to close Ventnor Middle School. However, what the consultation booklet did not say was that the new school is to be a voluntary aided school. We should be asking: why not a voluntary controlled arrangement as now and why does it have to be ecumenical? There is no advantage to the local community in joining the two faith options together. In fact by doing so we lose diversity and choice which something that should be lamented. We also end up with a school that is far bigger than we should ideally accept."*

At Mondays consultation meeting the local authority's officer Keith Simmonds, stated, incorrectly, that "small schools are weak schools" and that by combining the three schools together we could create a stronger school. Mervyn Benford of the National Association for Small Schools has written to Mr Simmonds to tell him that evidence from research recently carried out shows that the opposite is true.

The group, who have taken advice on the matter, say that the consultation process leading up to the decision has been completely inadequate and does not comply with the statutory guidelines laid down by the DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families). No attempt has been made by either diocese or the local authority to ascertain the views of the local population, all of whom are affected by any decisions relating to closure of the towns schools. The opinion of the Town Council was not sought. Parents of pre-school children were not consulted and no account has been taken of how pre-schools would operate under the new proposals. Information has been scanty and biased.

Steve Stubbings, a parent governor at St Boniface primary school confirmed that many governors were not aware of the full details of the new school until the 8<sup>th</sup> September, the day of the parents consultation meeting. He said that: *"the fact that the proposal is for a voluntary aided school is something that should have been discussed by governors and in the wider community. In my opinion this is not a suitable style of school for a community such as ours. It is extremely worrying and I am sure that if parents and those in the wider community understood what this means then they would share my concerns"*

Currently Ventnor is served by three primary schools and one middle school. The primary schools are judged as satisfactory by Ofsted. The middle school is consistently judged as good. By closing the middle school and amalgamating the three primary schools into one on the Middle School site, parents in the Ventnor area will have no choice over which school to send their children to, unless they elect to try and obtain a place in a school elsewhere. The Church of England and Roman Catholic Dioceses' and the local Authority have failed to take into account the statutory duty that they have to offer diversity and parental choice. At the moment, parents have a choice of either Roman Catholic or CE primary schools. Many non-faith families are happy to send their children to either one of the CE primary schools as these are both voluntary controlled, which means their governing bodies, admissions policies and curriculum are broadly the same as any other community school. With a Voluntary Aided School, the governing body is appointed by the Church not the local authority. The Church appointees make up the majority of the governors and they not the local authority employ the staff and set the admissions criteria. The Bishops determine the religious education curriculum for the school. Controversy was caused earlier in the year when the government accused many Voluntary Aided schools of forcing parents to make so called voluntary payments and disclose personal details on application, such as income and employment circumstances.

Chris Welsford said: *"Whilst we entirely accept the right of the church to run voluntary aided schools, we do not accept that they should be the sole provider of education for our town on this basis. It is vital that these plans are halted now and alternatives considered. These could involve the merger of the CE schools which would have at least 140 pupils. That would solve the problem of surplus capacity. St Wilfrid's RC primary has a far wider catchment area and could reasonably exist outside this arrangement. In any event the idea of a Voluntary aided school is a non-starter. As a group we keen to explore the possibility of establishing a 4-19 through school which is another alternative that has not been examined."*

Ends.

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For further information editors should contact Chris Welsford, Chairman - Standards-Not-Tiers  
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Notes to Editors:

### **Voluntary-aided schools**

Voluntary-aided schools are mainly religious or 'faith' schools, although anyone can apply for a place. As with foundation schools, the governing body:

- employs the staff
- sets the admissions criteria
- the governing is appointed by the Bishop and community / parent governors are in the minority

School buildings and land are normally owned by a charitable foundation, often a religious organisation. The governing body contributes 10% to building and maintenance costs.

If the school is a voluntary aided school with a religious character, the governing body must give the appropriate diocesan officer the same advisory rights as the CEO.

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A random selection of 570 faith and selective primary and secondary schools in three local authorities - Northamptonshire, Manchester and Barnet in north London -stands accused of breaking the law by demanding that parents make a financial contribution as a condition of admission; 119 voluntary-aided faith and foundation schools received warning letters in which they were accused of alleged infringements of the new statutory school admissions code.

Given that the majority of these schools are voluntary-aided and need to make up their 10 per cent annual budget shortfall somehow, (voluntary) donations are wholly necessary.

From: Voluntary-aided schools are under attack - Telegraph 16 Mar 2008 By Judith Woods

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### **Research:**

Chamberlain, T., Rutt, S. and Fletcher-Campbell, F. (2006). *Admissions: Who Goes Where? Messages from the Statistics* (LGA Research Report 4/06). Slough: NFER:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which schools' populations reflect the profile of the local communities in which they are located, to support the development of policy and debate around school admissions and parental choice. The investigation also aimed to examine the effect that one school's intake has on another local school, by comparing the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) admitted to schools situated within the same communities.

### **Extracted Key findings relevant to VA primary schools**

On the whole, both the voluntary-aided primary and secondary schools were admitting fewer pupils from the local community compared to the other school-types.

The voluntary-aided primary and secondary schools admitted slightly lower proportions of pupils eligible for FSM, compared to the proportions in the local communities. It is possible that these differences could be explained by the wider geographical area that voluntary-aided schools served. However, the proportion of pupils who attended the schools who were eligible for FSM and who lived outside of the local communities was still lower than the proportion of pupils eligible for FSM and living in the local communities. Even by compensating for the wider geographical area that such schools may serve, it does not explain the reason for the lower proportions of pupils eligible for FSM admitted to voluntary-aided schools.