

Below is the actual document sent in by the Webmaster in the initial "consultation".

Personal details have been removed.

You will need to refer to Wigan LEA's original brochure (download the .pdf file from this website).

Some points are no longer valid (eg references to Abram, as they are no longer included).

*Feel free to quote this work, but please **DOUBLE CHECK** first or your arguments will be ignored.*

The Webmaster.

Tuesday, 23 June 2009

**OPPOSITION TO PROPOSED MERGER OF
LOWTON AND GOLBORNE HIGH SCHOOLS**

I am writing in opposition to the proposed merger of Lowton and Golborne high schools.

I have tried to keep my counter-arguments in the same order as yours appear, but some may be mentioned / referred to more than once, so I will try and cross-reference them for your convenience and clarity. Unless explicitly mentioned otherwise, assume all quotes are taken from your own document.

* **Page 2, column 2:**

if pupil numbers are falling, then fewer pupils can be accommodated in fewer buildings. The spare premises can then be used "*by locating other community facilities in the same premises*". This will save you the bother of having to knock down or rebuild either campus - saving millions - as well as achieving another of your aims of placing schools "*at the heart of local communities*" (also p6, p7 and p10), these local communities being in Lowton **and** Golborne.

* **Page 4, column 2:**

"*The Council has worked closely with the schools and its partners to develop the plan*". Clearly, involving parents, the current local communities and the residents of the proposed new site much earlier would have made you realise just how unpopular this was going to be - just look at this week's **Leigh Journal** p5 to see how the people you are planning to help view your "*once in a lifetime transformation*" (p2)!

* **Page 6, column 1:**

"*The national programme was launched in 2004 and the performance of learners at the new schools is already improving*". Really? According to the **Times Educational Supplement (TES)** (2nd Jan 2009), "*First BSF school is 'a failure'*" (<http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=6006664>) - Sandon High, Stoke-On-Trent is in special measures! In the same article, the DCSF were quoted as saying it would take time for the newly built schools to realise their potential. Also, the article points out that "*five out of six*

new-build schools recently inspected by Ofsted received only a "satisfactory" or worse rating". Is this what you want for our current schools? Where is your evidence to back up your sweeping statement?

* **Page 7, column 1:**

"Our vision has been developed through a series of consultations with children and young people; headteachers; school governors..." First, I am glad you acknowledged it as **your** vision, and not that of the communities who elected you. Second, why did you consult "*children and young people*"? They have no idea of the full implications and ramifications that such drastic changes will bring. As I have already mentioned (page 4, column 2), you should have asked parents, the current local communities and the residents of the proposed new site.

* **Page 8, column 2:**

"...secondary schools with less than 600 pupils on roll..." I know from reading later on (specifically, p46) that this applies to Hesketh Fletcher, so why not put this scare tactic in the right section, rather than here, where it gives the impression that is what will happen at Lowton or Golborne? Negative psychology or a genuine mistake? Both schools have significantly more than this figure on roll (Golborne 804 [+34%] and Lowton 1089 [+82%] - source: DCSF) so this cannot be a justification for closing the schools.

* **Page 9, column 1:**

"...a large portion of the academic provision is located at the western edge of the borough." Where is your evidence? Here's mine: your own website (<http://www.wiganschoolsonline.net/schools/index.htm>) breaks the borough into 9 areas with a total of 133 schools. Only "Orrell, Billinge and Winstanley" (10 schools) and "Ashton and Bryn" (12 schools) can be classed as truly West. That's 22 schools; as a percentage of 133 that's 16.5% - ***a large portion***? No. Even if you disingeniously include the whole of "Lowton and Golborne" (11 schools, mainly South), and "Standish, Aspull and Shevington" (12 schools, mainly North), that's only 45 schools, or 33.8%. This still does not support your ludicrous claim. Wigan Central on its own has 32 schools, or 24.1%. Someone in your department needs maths lessons - may I suggest the excellent Lowton high school or the excellent Golborne high school?

"This causes long and difficult journeys for large numbers of learners who travel either across or out of the borough to access education". (I've re-read through this article, and you are going to get fed up seeing this quote). This whole statement is now not only redundant, but was highly opinionated and irrelevant to start with. Parental and pupil choice that **you** are championing (p9, p14) has meant **they choose** to travel to these places. Also, what has people travelling **out** of the borough got to do with any of this? It is just included to help you skew your figures. Biased, deliberate misinformation or another mistake?

The proposed new build is just down the road from the current Lowton high school. This in itself will create “...long and difficult journeys for large numbers of learners... to access education”. Specifically, the 800+ Golborne students (source: DCSF) who will now have to travel much further to get to school, putting even more pressure on the Lane Head junction.(I guess nobody from the Council even knows where that is, or has to travel that way to work. See you there in September).

“Increase the choice of different types of school available.” Surely going from two schools to just one is going from having a choice to having no alternative? This is a decrease in choice, **not** an increase. Again, what about the parental and pupil choice that **you** are championing (p9, p14) ?

“...so that schools are economically and educationally viable.” Now we are getting somewhere! This is what this “consultation” is really all about, isn’t it? **Why not just say so?** None of your arguments so far or after this point have any justification unless it is focussed on cost. **Why not just say so?**

* **Page 10, column 1:**

“...where there are too many school places, we will be... opening one new school on a site to replace two schools that serve the same or adjacent communities”. With reference to this quote and the data you so kindly supplied on page 8, column 2 under “Future student numbers”; does this take into account people of school age who will move onto the massive Plank Lane Marina build, the Leigh Sports Village complex, the Hilton Park build, or those in any houses built on land you would like to free up by knocking down Lowton and Golborne high schools? Surely all these pupils will all be within the new school’s catchment area? Please supply predicted figures, or show where this data has come from.

Again referring to your own figures, student numbers will fall from 19,010 to 17,349 - this is only 1,661 students, or 8.7%. You then say they will go back up again to 18,163, which, if we use the 19,010 figure as the base, is now only a drop of 847 pupils, or 4.5%. Yet on p46 you say “...the Government expects Councils to take action to remove excess capacity of over 25%”. Are you trying to say that Lowton or Golborne are currently running at or near 25% surplus places, or that either or both of these schools are going to suffer from such a catastrophic fall in numbers, making them non-viable as separate entities, that this is justification for a rebuild? Where is your evidence?

Again using your own figures and referring to the map on page 11, the 15 schools will have a maximum intake of 3,617 between them. Assuming **consistent** maximum capacity for all schools, this works out at 18,085, leaving 925 pupils. Will the two 14-19 Centres have around 462 pupils each on average? If not, this means that you will be imposing “...long and difficult journeys... for large numbers of learners who travel...out of the borough to access education” because there won’t be enough places if you close and

merge Lowton and Golborne high schools!

Once again using your figures: the 1,661 students shortfall you predict. If these are spread over the current 20 schools, this would be an average of 83 surplus places per school. If you go ahead and reduce this to 17 schools, this will be an average of more than 97 surplus places! Maths lessons anyone?

According to the latest DCSF figures (http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/performance/tables/schools_08.shtml), Lowton has 1,089 pupils on roll, and Golborne has 804, a current combined total of 1,893. This gives an average of 378 pupils per year. You intend opening the new school with an intake of only 300 per year, so 1,500 maximum. What choice (p9, p14) then, for the other 390? Perhaps “...long and difficult journeys... for large numbers of learners who travel either across or out of the borough to access education” - long and difficult journeys **you** will be creating if this new build goes ahead.

* **Page 10, column 2:**

“All secondary schools that are not involved in Phase 1 will be rebuilt or modernised on current sites and some will alter in size.” (My underline). Obvious, isn’t it? Take the proposed Lowton and Golborne merger **out** of Phase 1 (by popular demand) and you can do what is actually needed - a rebuild or modernisation on **both** the current sites.

“It is not intended to alter the provision of most faith schools in the borough as their admission arrangements are based mainly on faith grounds and reflect demand for places in the communities they serve.” This is not true. All religions are in decline and most parents simply send their children to the nearest school. Does this mean they technically do not have a catchment area comparable with other schools in the area (p12, para 3)? If so, they can and will cherry pick the best students from further away, to the detriment of the students’ actual closest school. Does it not also mean that if these schools have falling or non-viable numbers, they will be able to stay open on religious grounds? This would be discriminatory and likely challenged by schools in the area.

* **Page 12, column 1:**

The first two paragraphs: You are making out BSF will be a saviour to parents who want a local school. It actually comes across as protectionism, reducing parents’ and pupils’ rights to choose (p9, p14) where they go to school (unless they go to a church school of course).

* **Page 14, column 1:**

“...area based Trusts will be created...”. “Trust” is a very contentious word in educational circles, as it conjures up the threat of non-Burgundy Book pay and conditions. Is this the same kind of Trust you are

referring to? Why does it have to be a Trust? Tell me one Trust school where staff have better pay and conditions than an LEA-controlled school in the same area.

Then there is the veiled threat that if schools don't become "foundation schools" they are going to miss out on something. What head teacher is going to do that? They "*are still maintained by the Local Authority but employ their own staff.*" Isn't this a halfway house to becoming a Trust school?

* **Page 23 (map):**

How clever of you (more psychology?) to show the schools as little squares, and the space they are to fit into as huge! Why not show the current outline of each school's premises, as this is the typical area the new builds will have to occupy if there is to be enough space for the high school and primary classrooms, indoor and outdoor sports facilities, playgrounds, parking spaces and access roads, never mind the Children's Centre and the vague reference "*community and leisure*" - will this be separate buildings?

Where does one get a much more detailed outline of what the scale and shape of the buildings will look like, and where they are in relation to each other? This will help people make a more informed choice as to whether actually it is a real good idea or not.

* **Page 24, column 1:**

"...up to 1,500 students... and will admit up to 300 students per year." As already mentioned under page 10 column 1, the current intake exceeds the proposed intake by around 78 pupils per year. The difference in roll (1,893 compared to "up to" 1500) is a drop of 393, or 20%. Are you really saying pupil numbers will drop (collapse?) by this much in 3 years? Where is your evidence?

"...the Local Education Authority has to hold a competition...". No, you don't. As you have already pointed out on p53, there is nothing stopping you putting forward a proposal for it to become a Community school. Are you going to? If not, why not? Why isn't this mentioned? Lowton is already designated as a Community school, so it makes sense to continue with this tried and tested structure.

"...will aid community cohesion." We both now know this isn't true. Please stop deluding yourselves to save a bit of money.

"They would need to be rebuilt..." Completely rebuilt, or merely modernised internally? What exactly is the problem with rebuilding both schools (page 10 column 2)? Is it because they would then stay under LEA control instead of you being able to offload them to a Trust?

“only enough children living in the... areas to support one school...”. Again, I have disproved this many times using easily obtainable evidence and **your own figures**, so why can't you see this?

“... Abram...” I can imagine the conversation: “Let's just drop this in and hope nobody notices.” Is Abram suddenly now part of Golborne or Lowton? Or is it included because it is an “adjacent community” (page 10 column 1)? Or because you suddenly realised there isn't a school to serve the Abram area, so “we'll just send them there”? Where do students from Abram currently go? Guess what? This new build will create *“...long and difficult journeys... for large numbers of learners who travel either across or out of the borough to access education”* - because as already mentioned (page 9, column 1), building it so close to Lowton is going to skew the journey times and put more pressure on **Golborne** and Lowton roads and infrastructure, as students who live in Abram will now have to travel there!

“could take strengths and good practices from both...” Lowton stats are comparable or higher than Wigan's, and Golborne's stats are on the rise (source: DCSF). It would seem clear to me that both schools **already** only have 100% strengths and good practices, as their results are so good, so what exactly are you implying? Some teachers are weak and/or have bad practices? What about your opening, soothing phrase, *“Educational standards are not an issue at either school.”* How many more times are you going to shoot yourself in the foot?

“If the school is co-located with a primary school it would help children in their move to the new secondary school and the usual drop in standards at Year 7 would be minimised.” Where is your evidence to prove that the Y7 drop in standards (which I accept *per se*) “would be minimised” (which I don't) ?

“to see if we can keep some community facilities on the Golborne High site”. How kind of you to finally condescend to talk with the community, the very people who wanted facilities in the Golborne community in the first place because that's where demand was.

* **And finally...**

Moving to one school with a smaller intake will mean redundancies; for example class teachers, senior management and heads of departments, teaching assistants, caretakers, cleaners, crossing patrols, catering staff, midday supervisors and at least one of the head teachers.

Look in the **TES** for a plethora of evidence that large schools do not work for a whole load of reasons (eg pupil anonymity and isolation, unmanageability, daunting, behaviour).

How is the area going to cope with a daily influx and outflux of around 2,000 pupils, hundreds of parents, teachers, other professionals, and their cars? There will be huge problems with traffic, access, parking, noise and other disruption. Also, what exactly do 1,500 pupils do at break time or new lesson swap over?

On a more intrinsic note (no pun intended), where will Wigan Jazz Club, “...*the North of England's premier jazz club, listed in The Independent as one of the top 50 jazz venues in the UK*”, (their website!) be based if their premises are to be demolished?

Also, the Hall is a much-used and essential base for blood donations - where these also?

TES 6th Feb 2009: “*Fifteen of the first 50 schools delivered through the £45 billion secondary schools renewal programme were overdue and nine of those were not opened until a year after originally scheduled*” - there is **no way** the proposed school will get built in a year to RIBA standards

And finally... you have not put forward one argument that I have not convincingly challenged. I do not know the real reason for this proposal, although I guess it is financial. I hope you do the right thing and listen to those who voted you in to represent their interests, and do not build one school, but modernise both schools on their current premises.