

**Deputation from the school community at Miles Hill Primary to
Leeds City Council Meeting: 19th July 2006**

I am a community governor of Miles Hill Primary and Minister of the local church. I am speaking on behalf of the school community.

At the Executive Board Meeting on 14th June 2006, the proposal, re-submitted by Education Leeds, to close Miles Hill Primary was confirmed. Following this decision I would like to make three points.

1.

The actual proposal is to:

- Close Miles Hill primary
- Close Potternewton Primary
- Re-open a new school on the Potternewton site

Please note that although both schools are to be closed we are not actually talking about any new premises for the proposed new school – we are talking about the existing premises currently used by Potternewton Primary. I have noticed that assumptions are made by many councillors, unfamiliar with the area, that we are actually talking about either a new school or greatly enhanced buildings. This is not the case and it does make a difference – to *both* schools.

2.

Consistently, over the four year period that the school has been under threat of closure we have asked questions concerning community cohesion and trust-building. Yet again the community feels undermined. Miles Hill serves many special needs children. This school is a family which provides much needed stability in a community where stability/security is a scarce commodity. Ofsted and SATS *are* important but in such a community they do not tell the whole story. Some of us may find it hard to understand – but for such families academic excellence cannot be the most important criterion – other needs are paramount.

Governing bodies in such a community do not find it easy. Where do we find professional parents able and willing to take on such a role? And if our governors do not come out of the local community – how do they ever begin to understand it?

Standards in this school *are* rising and parents are increasingly active and confident in the life of the school and in taking responsibility for their children's education. Such development does not happen in such a community overnight. It takes time, patience and consistency. And consistency in this school situation has been sadly lacking. In fact there has been a continuing erosion of resources and support which has led us to this point. An uncertain future does not encourage a school to flourish.

Surestart are now successfully established in the school bungalow and doing excellent work with parents. Even if they are allowed to remain on this site – with no school they will hardly be a focus for parents – another resource set to diminish in the local situation?

All local agencies are working actively on these estates – meeting regularly and supporting one another. One such meeting is that of the Beckhill Implementation Group - established by the North East District Partnership in recognition of the multiple issues the community experiences. Membership includes LNEh, Area Management, Police and other agencies. They state, *'Whilst the partnership recognises the economic factors, Beckhill is a priority neighbourhood for the District Partnership. Because of the geographic difficulties and vulnerability of the community, residents face difficulties in accessing facilities that appear to be close by.'*

Other meetings include those addressing the extended schools agenda. Miles Hill school is ideally situated as a central and much needed focus for this work. It is a natural focus. But in spite of all the right words there has been little help to make this happen. A policy which removes help at the point of need in such a vulnerable community does not appear to encourage the regeneration and cohesion we all seek.

3.

Finally we question the timing and the clarity of this whole process. Leak, rumour, lack of clear fact and process really have not helped either this school community or Education Leeds. Rather they have fostered a lack of trust and confidence – yet another set-back.

We understand that falling roles raise financial challenges but we urge Council yet again to request Education Leeds to re-evaluate the role of smaller schools such as Miles Hill and Potternewton within their local communities.

Revd Angela Hughes, 12th July 2006