

## Appendix 5

### Copy of Professor Lori Beckett's Proposal

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#### PRIMROSE HIGH SCHOOL

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#### Introduction

The proposed closure of Primrose High School, deemed a challenging school, requires a considered response because of the complexities of its work serving inner city communities with deep needs: multi-ethnic and multi-lingual families as immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers who have experienced trauma and dislocation, and white working class families, many with experiences of intergenerational unemployment. There are 'demographic pressures' given social and cultural diversity but also marked disadvantage, poverty, deprivation, social inequities and social problems.

Disadvantaged schools are well recognised in the international research literature, which documents the complexities of urban education: the learning needs of disadvantaged students and the impact of poverty on the schools' work, for example, additional learning needs, material poverty, the emotional climate and disturbed behaviour, and reluctant participation.

Leeds City Council has an opportunity to determine the fate of this school, and the fate of City of Leeds High School, but it needs to do so with integrity, taking into account the empirical evidence, including longitudinal evidence, and arguments put by stakeholders and the educational community writ large across the city. When coupled with Ofsted reports, the schools' self evaluations and school improvement plans, this all paints a comprehensive picture of the schools' work, including the complexities and contextual considerations.

These considerations are not evident in the consultation papers and in previous reports published by Education Leeds. Indeed, given the evidence and arguments posited, they do not stand up to scrutiny. They draw on selective data, contravene Ofsted's inspection reports, and ignore the schools' aims and purposes, values and philosophy, intentions and actual achievements. Finally, the consultation papers and previous reports suggest bias in favour of closure, as if it is a *fait accompli*, which in turn raises questions about fair process in regards this consultation.

Primrose High School has been targeted to become an academy. A Memorandum of Understanding has already been drawn up, and negotiations begun with the Cooperative Group of Businesses, whose representative met with the Board of Governors, staff and school-community and attended the public meeting on closure. This suggests an ideological commitment on the part of Education Leeds to marketisation and its belief that the private sector is better at addressing the needs of disadvantaged schools. Yet the proposed sponsor brings no educational credentials to the venture, and there is no evidence of its success in running its two other academy programs.

It was evident at the public meeting that the school community wants to retain Primrose High School as its local community high school, albeit transformed into a C21st school outside the constraining forces of the federation. This in itself is a structural solution, which has compelling reasons.

Leeds City Council needs to make its decision based on consideration of the full gamut of evidence and arguments, which ideally requires a fully informed case study of Primrose High School, done not by appointed officers or inspectors with a narrow brief tied to pre-ordained political agendas, but by commissioned researchers.

### **This submission**

I write this submission as an academic partner to both schools. My initial contact came in 2008 when the TDA-funded initiative 'CPD in schools in challenging circumstances' enabled academics to initiate the 'Side-by-side learning' project and establish a school university partnership.

This project with four teachers and four academic partners went over ten months and witnessed a mentoring program for teachers' action inquiries, high quality teacher research, and a showcase of evidence. This showcase happened locally at the end-of-project teachers' conference, nationally at the British Educational Research Association annual conferences, and internationally at the recent 'Social Inclusion in Education' conference, Sydney, 2009.

Leeds Met's Carnegie Faculty continues to support this school-university partnership work informally as an expression of good will to the two schools, to indicate support for 'challenging schools'. Work is underway in both schools to support teachers' professional learning and development and action-inquiries into issues of concern with academic partners from Leeds Met, which also currently provides a series of 'widening participation' workshops for senior pupils.

I am engaged in on-going discussions with Education Leeds and Leeds City Council to secure funding to continue the school-university partnership work as the 'Leading Learning' project. This is designed to support sustained professional learning and development tied to school development, where academic partners work with schools to forge professional learning communities and develop contextualized school improvement plans, tailored by school Heads and teachers engaged in teacher-led action inquiries with academic support.

As it was put to former Director of Children's Services Rosemary Archer in June, 2009: *The synergy between Leeds city schools and Leeds Met in terms of common aspirations means we can secure quality work in both establishments, which will guarantee a professional workforce at the cutting edge of research and practice improving the learning experience of staff and students in schools and the university, including initial teacher education.*

Consequently, funding was earmarked in the workplace reform budget, but we were overtaken by events although these have not prevented on-going negotiations about the logistics of scaling up the school-university partnership across a number of schools. If plans come to fruition, it will demonstrate that Leeds City Council is prepared to bring the resources of the city to bear on meeting the needs of its local schools, especially the complex needs of these two challenging inner-city schools.

### **Observations**

The observations recorded in this submission, intended to be supplementary to the stakeholders' submissions, can also be described as the observations of an expert witness although I acknowledge the schools' deep knowledge of the challenges they confront.

The schools must be recognised for their location in Leeds, a de-industrialised city colloquially known as the 'immigration capital of the north'. This means the schools are dealing with the impact of globalisation played out locally, a responsibility not to be taken lightly. In fact, these disadvantaged schools have a mandate to educate 'all comers', something not readily done by other schools.

The school Heads, leadership teams and staff are working extraordinarily hard to meet target requirements, but there is an immediacy in the demands that are made on them by disadvantaged pupils and local communities. This means huge 'time pressures' operating on very difficult work, which often involves crisis management.

An irony that I have observed is that the schools have little time to pause and write submissions in reply to these consultations. Yet the staff are more than capable of answering questions about the provision of education, and do not waiver in their commitment to the pupils and local communities.

### **A C21st school**

In what follows, I too confront some of the concerns about Primrose High School, but from the perspective of an academic partner, defining what needs to be done in disadvantaged schools as this is reflected in the international research literature, and addressing the ways things are.

The thrust of my argument is that the school's proposal to be a C21st school should actively involve its partners in a professional learning community to improve the quality of schooling and educational provision, that is, inclusive through-schooling from 0-19 years and beyond, given the university's 'widening participation' initiative.

In doing so, this submission:

- Represents thoughtful and considered analyses of the complexities of urban education including working with adolescents in this specific local setting with attendant high demands on teachers, teacher educators, local authority and civil servants and the wider school-community;
- Draws together our best knowledge about professional learning communities, school development and educational change;

- Promises the commitment of academic partners to provide long-term solutions that are locally owned and professionally led;
- Respects teachers' professional knowledge and the centrality of long-term sustained professional learning and development as we secure improved practice;
- Contests the idea of quick-fix solutions to underachievement in the interests of short-term political gain; and
- Requires considered investment of city-wide resources in the schools to realise their capacity for not only for school renewal but a C21st school.

### **Progress**

Progress as defined by targets and performance criteria is not straightforward in disadvantaged schools, and consideration needs to be given to the school's context, including 'demographic pressures' and 'time pressures'.

The proposal to forge a new professional learning community is an effort to support productive new ways of thinking and learning about progress, tied to authentic changes in teaching practices and pupil learning outcomes.

To be fair, teacher partners in these schools have consistently indicated a willingness to learn not only from similar schools across the country but also internationally, which includes reading the international research literature.

More opportunities will be provided in the 'Leading Learning' project as it foregrounds teachers' action inquiries on concerns like meaningful curriculum and engaging pedagogies, and develops the school's research perspective on working with disadvantaged pupils and communities with deep needs.

### **Performance**

Performance is a similarly problematic benchmark for disadvantaged schools, and it needs a considered approach. For instance, in current work with teacher partners at Primrose High School concentrating on white working class under-achievement, the focus is on improving literacy, engagement, attendance, aspirations and motivation.

The teachers concerned are doing action inquiries, documenting their learning, and working towards General Teaching Council Stage 2 qualifications through its Teaching and Learning Academy.

This requires time for knowledge-building through professional conversations, professional reading, planning and preparation, and a practitioner research base validated in collaboration with other teachers and academic partners.

Learning for all concerned is at the heart of the work to be done in the 'Leading Learning' project. There will be a special focus on pupil learning and improving performance, beginning with ensuring the good work of feeder primary schools is not lost in transition to high school.

Building on the work already done, transition and organisational change in years 5, 6, 7, and 8, will be one area for action-inquiry.

### **Good leadership**

Top-down leadership is not what is required in disadvantaged schools because it needs to be shared, to ensure teachers and their partners have insightful understanding of the relationships between the school, its communities and global society, and to make hope practical.

The 'Leading Learning' project promotes leadership in terms of providing opportunities for everyone in the school to exercise leadership, especially Headteachers and the senior leadership team, subject department/faculty leaders, advanced skills teachers, teachers, pupils and others concerned about learning in the school.

The 'Leading Learning' project promotes dispersed leadership and teacher leadership to promote learning within classrooms but also beyond the individual classroom to subject departments/faculties across the school, with reach into primary schools, further and higher education.

It means creating the learning and work conditions that are conducive to academic learning and social learning for pupils as well as improving practices in all these sites.

It means creating a school culture that values the professional standing of its teachers and staff, encourages knowledge-building, engages professional learning and development, professional reading and professional conversations that have some influence.

School change will only come by giving the professional learning community these opportunities for leadership and knowledge-building, then acting on this work in systematic and coordinated ways.

### **Standards**

Standards are an issue in disadvantaged schools, and it is important to make no excuses for the absence of high quality teaching and learning. Pupils from communities with deep needs need access to powerful knowledge and opportunities to engage in meaningful work.

The 'Leading Learning' project will encourage a developmental approach to standards, which is aimed at giving teachers the opportunity to build standards and improve their teaching as they move through their careers.

The professional learning and development sessions with academic partners will be focussed on meaningful curriculum and engaging pedagogies, especially pedagogies that emphasise intellectual quality, supportive classroom environment, connectedness, and respect and valuing of difference, which is crucial given multi-ethnic and multi-lingual pupils.

In the long term, it is hoped high quality teaching and learning will be reflected in improved classroom practices and assessment so that pupils are party to high standards of academic achievement in the C21<sup>st</sup> school but also in further and higher education.

There needs to be continuity of expectations and practices across these different sites of provision. The long term vision for the city of Leeds is that pupils who come into initial teacher education will have a good sense of meaningful curriculum and engaging pedagogies, so they can learn about the theoretical bases of teaching and learning with some practice in action inquiries, before returning as newly qualified teachers hopefully into these local challenging schools.

### **Achievement**

The focus has got to be on the need for rigorous classroom work to confront the challenges and tensions of teaching in disadvantaged schools.

It is well documented teachers need support to develop teaching competence, particularly in disadvantaged schools. It has been noted that low achievement is not an inevitable consequence in challenging schools, but it is more likely, even with good leadership.

The task is to come together in a learning community to nurture competence and develop new ideas and new strategies to address underachievement. The intention is to learn from one another, so that teachers learn from other teachers in primary and high schools, civil servants and academic partners, who in turn learn from teachers in these disadvantaged schools.

In the long term, the improvements in academic achievements will be embedded and these will show in performance-based assessments. This is particularly important for pupils from traditionally underachieving backgrounds, but the intention is to build towards providing *all* pupils, not only those from aspirational families, with the opportunities to engage in intellectually demanding work so that the school-community can achieve equitable outcomes from schooling.

### **Budget**

Funding needs to be put aside for staff learning and development, and funding released from the workplace reform budget.

As critical friends, academic partners will focus on the work to be done by teachers as professionals, and encourage joint work and problem solving but in a sustained way that encourages professional learning and development.

It is expected teachers will engage in action-inquiries and build a knowledge base twinned with an evidence base of what can be done to improve achievement. This means teachers put together a learning portfolio, with samples of pupils' work, professional readings, and records of what they are learning through their action-inquiries.

In the long term, it is hoped the school will put together a learning portfolio, storing information and professional readings, recording learning, and documenting the authentic changes being made in teaching practice and improved student learning outcomes.

### **Sustained improvement**

Bringing in the National Challenge Advisor and school improvement partner/s are recognised interventions tied to school improvement, but it does not exhaust the possibilities for a range of interventions that could have included academic partners.

I have lobbied for four years for immediate funding support for the school-university partnership. We were lucky to secure TDA funding to launch the 'Side-by-Side learning' project, and we want to continue as the 'Leading Learning' project. Witness the delegations to, and briefing papers written for, Education Leeds.

Its final intervention – the proposal for closure - is the last of numerous replies in as many years, and suggests the local authority has given up on the school.

I have clearly not given up on the school because I believe teachers and pupils need to be given the opportunity, without the constraints of federation, threats of closure and on-going negative media campaigns, to get on and do the job that is required: to build a C21st school that actively involves its academic partners in a professional learning community to improve the quality of schooling and educational provision.

I certainly pledge my support, but the proposed work requires much of the local education community:

- A new Board of Governors prepared to support the endeavours of the school and its academic partners with energy, enthusiasm and active support for children's and young people's through-schooling, vocational, further and higher education;
- Primary school Headteachers prepared to help build collective capacity in the schools as learning organisations, especially when it comes to the transition years 5, 6, 7 and 8, some organisation restructuring, and teacher-led action-inquiries to contribute to knowledge-building and informed evidence-based practices;
- Headteacher Gary Lovelace and the senior leadership team determined to see the C21st school into being with the capability to steer the complicated task of building a productive professional learning culture;
- Teachers and allied staff including union representatives with the required knowledge and skill, time and commitment, intellectual and emotional energy to provide meaningful curriculum and engaging pedagogies, and meet the challenge of high quality teaching;
- Pupils and their 'City Squad' school council with a determination to help make the school succeed through their own efforts, aspirations and wherewithal to engage active learning and achieve to the best of their abilities;
- Parents and carers willing to support the school and become partners in learning and education, agree to home-school contracts on learning and behaviour, communicate with teachers, support staff and extended service partners;

The work of the C21st school also requires much in terms of political will from the city and wider national education community:

- Leeds City Council willing to support and fund local city-wide efforts in school renewal to build a C21st school with improved learning, ring-fencing and distributing its workforce reform budget and the like;
- Education Leeds prepared to acknowledge the complexities of challenging schools' development and invest in the collaborative Trust so that it can embark on purposeful and sustained efforts to build a knowledge base about urban education;
- The DCSF and policy makers prepared to support and fund local initiatives on 'narrowing the gap' for vulnerable groups, especially where this work is on the cutting edge of quality educational research, contributing to the international literature on urban education, school development and policy developments;
- The Secretary of State and a government prepared to acknowledge there have been some erroneous system-wide reforms that ignore local context, which complicates matters still further.

I commend this supplementary submission to you, and trust you will give favourable consideration to Primrose High School as a C21st school with support from academic partners and the 'Leading Learning' project.