

Statutory Consultation on Proposed New Primary School in Tillydrone Old Aberdeen Area 2016

Riverbank Parent Council Response

Dear Mr Couperwhite,

As Riverbank Parent Council, we wish to make a number of observations regarding the options proposed to address the impending and predicted capacity issues at both St Peters RC and Riverbank Primary Schools. The Parent Council have taken pro-active steps to engage with parents of the school not just at the formal consultation sessions but at additional sessions within the school, to both encourage parents to complete the questionnaires and more broadly to gauge the views of parents. In doing so, the Riverbank Parent Council hopes that this submission will accurately reflect the broad views of our school community.

We feel it is important to note that residents living in Tillydrone have been saturated in a great deal of consultation over the years, from School Closures in 2008, the Third Don Crossing, the closure of Aberdon Care Home, Portal Community Centre, to things like proposals for a new Community Hub. This purpose of this comment is to note that, because of this, it is becoming ever more challenging to effectively engage with parents, but we feel this should not be mistaken for disinterest in the matter within the community. Many residents on social media, have for years, always held the view that following the closure of St Machar Primary School in 2008, the Tillydrone community required a new school build which would address the mistakes of the decisions of 2008, and tackle the capacity issues that Tillydrone has consistently faced since.

The Parent Council took the time to attend the consultation sessions at both schools, to better understand the range of opinions on the proposals. The Parent Council noted the two options proposed as part of the consultation which were:

- To construct a new school building on the site of the former St. Machar School and former Tillydrone School, to relocate St Peter's RC School to this new building, and to create a new shared campus on this site, incorporating St. Peter's RC School, a new one-stream non-denominational school, and early education and childcare facilities
- To create a new primary school zone to be served by the new non-denominational school (as shown in Appendix D), with effect from August 2019
- To amend the existing Riverbank School zone (as shown in Appendix D) to allow for the creation of the new school zone, with effect from August 2019
- The new school building to be operational with effect from 1st January 2020, or as soon as possible thereafter.

Or:

- To construct a new three stream non-denominational school building with early education and childcare facilities on the site of the former St. Machar School and former Tillydrone School, and to relocate Riverbank School to this new building

- To relocate St. Peter's School into the current Riverbank School building
- The new school building and relocated schools to be operational with effect from January 2020, or as soon as possible thereafter.

The Riverbank Parent Council makes the following points:

- Following the formal consultation sessions and, as a result of further discussions with parents, the Riverbank Parent Council would note a strong preference for Option B. Following years of painstaking work and dedication from pupils, parents and staff to make the merger work in 2008, it was felt that this is the only option which would ensure that the Riverbank School community could remain as a whole, by keeping the existing catchment zone. As the only school in the Scotland to have been awarded the Level 2 Rights Respecting School Award from Unicef two years in a row it is fundamental that the pupils are given every opportunity to maintain this fantastic achievement, dividing the children within the school would be detrimental to this.
- Option B is the only option that will fully address the growing capacity issues facing Riverbank Primary School over the next 5 years. Using the projected roll figures provided in the consultation document, by 2022 we will require an additional 219 spaces for pupil intake, this is almost a 50% increase, which at present our building could not provide. Option B also fully deals with the capacity issues of St Peter's School, at present Riverbank building can more than comfortably accommodate their school roll of 256 pupils. Projected figures show the highest increase of pupil intake as 66 further pupils, this would still be well within the capacity of the Riverbank building.
- Option B gives both school communities the opportunity to accommodate capacity for things such as music, art, IT or even a school library which at present neither schools have. By having these additional spaces children can fully engage in these topics and have additional learning time out with the classroom which can help children to realise their potential in these subjects.
- For the reasons stated above, in particular due to the fundamental desire to keep the Tillydrone School community united and to address both the projected capacity challenges as well as the high demand for early years' education through the proposal for a 200 place nursery, the Riverbank Parent Council believe that Option A is, by default, not appropriate.
- The Parent Council would note with great concern the prospect of an unofficial 'Option C', which has been proposed by the St Peters RC Parent Council to create a three stream RC school on the former St Machar Primary school site. The Parent Council do not think this would resolve the initial aim of the consultation, which is to address the capacity issues of both schools. The St Peters RC catchment area covers the entire north of the city of Aberdeen and parts of Aberdeenshire. With the current priority given to Catholics for RC education, this could effectively mean that a child living in Black Dog in the shire could be given a place at a new school in Tillydrone, but a non-Catholic child living across the road on Harris Drive would not.
- If option C were to be supported it would not ultimately address the very real capacity issues of Riverbank Primary school and, in effect, not therefore address the aim set out by the meeting of Full Council on October 6th 2016. We would therefore conclude that Option C should be disregarded.

To summarise the Riverbank Parent Council, on behalf of the school community believe that Option A would not fulfil the longstanding educational requirements to meet the needs of children within Tillydrone. The unofficial Option C, is completely inappropriate as it does not give the majority of local parents the freedom to choose the type of education they wish for their child. Therefore, Option B is the only feasible option that will meet the needs of our children.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank yourself and your staff members for facilitating the consultation events and for the extension given to both Parent Councils to submit their responses. It is with regret that we could not submit a joint response with St Peter's Parent Council but it was felt that we would not be able to fully agree on a response and should therefore be disregarded.