

**Cabinet 24 November 2017 – Item 4 – Removal (Closure) of Residential Facilities at
Maplewell Hall Special School**

Representation from Mrs. D. Taylor

I have spent a large amount of time looking into the proposal to close the residential facility at this school and I have had the delight of visiting the school and having a tour of the facilities and to find out more about what the school offers.

In a report by the Director of Children and Families Services on the provision of school places in Leicestershire it states that there is a long term trend towards increased demand in special education needs which has necessitated extending capacity in the area special schools. This Council have been allocated £2.1 million capital funding from the Department of Education for the development of SEND provision in Leicestershire for the period till 2020/21. I look forward to some of that money being spent at Maplewell to further enhance the school.

I see this proposal as very short sighted and something that will look good on a spreadsheet. I understand that we have limited budgets, we face tough times, we have to make difficult decisions and we have 3,600 children to consider and all their complex needs. I have tried to find out as much as I can about how we care for all our children with special needs. These children are our most vulnerable residents and we should be looking at supporting them more not less. If we do not support these children to achieve and become independent adults they will become a drain on the Adult Social Care Budget in the future and we will not be making any real savings.

In regard to funding if a child has mild learning difficulties they can be supported in mainstream schools. Children with severe learning difficulties are supported in specialist schools. Children with moderate learning difficulties are left in the middle of this and seem to lack the much needed funding and fall into a bit of a grey area. We are looking today at proposals to reduce funding from this grey area and this is the wrong decision.

I find this report very lacking in information and I will highlight some of my concerns.

The first issue is additional transport costs due to the children not staying for 2 nights per week. I have only received an estimate costing for this additional transport of approx. £5,000 but I suspect this figure will be much higher if it is looked at properly.

The second issue is the take up of residential care. The report states that each child stays 12-14 nights per year but this figure is per half term. The residential experience is offered to Key Stages 3 & 4. The take up is over 50% for this group.

The third issue is the lack of information included in the report about the further revenue costs that may arise to provide any individual support as a consequence of

the removal of facilities, without these figures you are asking us to vote blindfolded. These costs much be explored before a decision is made.

I asked prior to the meeting how the funding of £293,000 for residential facilities is distributed. I have been unable to gain this information. I get the feeling that there has been limited discussions between the school and LCC and I would like to see if there is a way forward to still provide residential facilities, possibly with reduced funding. This also needs to be fully explored as part of a more open review.

Under the Children and Families Act 2014 Part 3 of the SEND reforms the Local Authority has a duty to support the child and his or her parent in order to facilitate the development of the child and to help him or her achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes.

This is exactly what Maplewell Hall is doing and if you would like to read their last OFSTED report completed in September 2016 in all areas the school was considered outstanding. The first sentence of the OFSTED report states 'Young people make exceptional progress academically, socially and emotionally because of the residential experience' It is clear throughout the OFSTED report that the residential facilities offered to pupils enhances their learning and produces their excellent results. They show this school, including the residential facilities is providing the most excellent care for our vulnerable children.

A full service review should be undertaken to determine how we deliver the High Needs Block budget for all of our 3,600 children in the County not just at Maplewell Hall. There is not a one size fits all and we should not be looking at providing the same facilities county wide but looking at the different options available. Special Education is about understanding that all children are different and benefit from different styles of learning and we should be embracing the uniqueness of Maplewell Hall and building on that and not stripping facilities away.

The Education Act 1996 places a statutory duty on the County Council to:

a) 'Ensure a sufficient supply of school places with a view to securing diversity of provision and increasing opportunities for parental choice' and

b) 'Exercise its education functions with a view to promoting high standards'. I think Maplewell Hall and its residential facilities has a big tick in both of those boxes.

In summary, I don't think the huge impact of losing these residential facilities has been looked at and the budget savings has been the whole focus of these proposals. I would like these proposals dropped and a full review undertaken county wide on how we deliver for our 3,600 children with learning difficulties. We must keep in mind that one size does not fit all and embrace the differences each of our special schools bring to the table and offer as much as we can to our special children. I cannot understand how we can propose to close these residential facilities from a school that is providing this county's children with outstanding educational provision.