

**CABINET – 14 MARCH, 2006**

**ROSEBERY PRIMARY SCHOOL, LOUGHBOROUGH**

**REPRESENTATIONS SUBMITTED TO THE EDUCATION SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE ON 27<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2006**

The minutes of the meeting of the Education Scrutiny Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2006, are attached as Appendix J to the report to the Cabinet (Paper 'A').

At its meeting the Education Scrutiny Committee considered the two options for the future of Rosebery Primary School on which the Cabinet had initiated a consultation process. These options were:

Option A – To amalgamate Rosebery Primary School with a neighbouring school

Option B – To close Rosebery Primary School.

In addition to receiving a number of representations from local members under the Sensitive Issues Procedure, which are summarised in the minutes of the meeting, the Committee also received a detailed submission from the "Hands off Rosebery Action Group" and representations from Canon Dr S Cherry.

Copies of these representations are attached.

**THE FUTURE OF ROSEBERY PRIMARY SCHOOL**  
**SUBMISSION TO EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE,**  
**LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**  
**HANDS OFF ROSEBERY ACTION GROUP**

21 February 2006

**SUMMARY**

**We believe that the case for keeping Rosebery County Primary school open is compelling. Our view is based on the following:**

- 1) The conclusions of the Ofsted (Tribal) Inspectors do not correspond with the experience of parents who observe their children on a day-by-day basis.**
- 2) The Ofsted inspection system is intended to identify schools that need special measures in order to help them improve. The proposal to close Rosebery fundamentally contradicts this.**
- 3) The School needs the County Council's support to get it out of special measures.**
- 4) The Report by Director of Children's Services (Designate) to Cabinet (and to the ESC) contains serious weaknesses. Above all it fails to even discuss the option of supporting the school to help it come out of special measures.**
- 5) The children's welfare and well-being are powerful arguments against closing the school which have not been given enough weight.**
- 6) In order to implement its action plan the school needs an effective Head Teacher. To appoint one it needs the support of County Hall.**
- 7) Falling rolls are a national and a county-wide problem but the figures for Rosebery are far from clear cut. In any case it unfair to use an Ofsted report to address this wider issue.**
- 8) Closing Rosebery would contradict the attempts to maintain and revive a community in the area. Local opinion is strongly against the proposed closure.**
- 9) The speed and conduct of the consultation exercise has not been as open as it should have been.**

## **CONCLUSION:**

*The closure of a school is a very serious matter, not to be taken hastily. The point is not that closing a school an “emotive” issue, as officials have stated. This wrongly implies that emotion is the basis of the opposition to closure while officials and politicians have to deal rationally with the real world. Closing a school, disrupting the lives of children and a community is the real world and the educational arguments against taking this drastic step are entirely rational. At the same time, as Councillors have stated, education is a subject about which it is right to feel passionate. As parents we are passionately opposed to the closure of our children’s school. In short, both on rational educational grounds and out of a passionate desire to do the best for our children we appeal to you not to close Rosebery Primary School.*

*Specifically we ask the County Council:*

- *To give the school the support it needs to come out of Special Measures.*
- *To support the appointment of a suitable Head Teacher.*
- *To await the judgements of Her Majesty’s Inspectors, due to be made over the coming year before taking any irreversible decision.*
- *To give Rosebery Primary School a fair chance.*

## **DETAILED SUBMISSION**

### **1) The usefulness of the Ofsted (Tribal) inspection.**

*We believe the usefulness of the Ofsted inspection is limited:*

- *At consultation meetings (February 7) parents repeatedly denied that the Ofsted (Tribal) report matched their own experience and that of their children at Rosebery. We also wish to place on record that the relentlessly negative picture of the school given by County Hall is misleading and inaccurate.*
- *In fact achievement and attainment tables show that the teaching standards rose steadily between 2001 and 2005 and in 2004 were above the Leicestershire average. The recent Ofsted report found i.a. that standards by the end of Year 2 in the national tests in 2005 were broadly average in writing and above average in reading and mathematics. 2005 SATs results published just after inspection showed that Rosebery’s average (26.7%) was above several other Loughborough primary schools.*

## **2) The rationale of Special Measures.**

*Special measures are intended as part of a process of improving a school, not closing it.*

- The proposal to close Rosebery is in fundamental contradiction to the purposes and rationale of Special Measures. Ofsted inspections are intended to discover where a school may be weak or failing *and help it to recover*. In the vast majority of cases the school does precisely that and is allowed to come out of special measures.
- Between 1 September and 31 December 2005 only four primary schools in the UK were closed while in Special Measures. These four had clearly a) been in special measures for a longer period in time than Rosebery is being given and b) they had been inspected under the earlier long inspection regime, i.e. for five rather than two days. It seems clear therefore that *if Rosebery School were to close Leicestershire County Council would be the first to authority in the country to close a primary school on the basis of an inspection which only lasted two days.*

## **3)The County Council's role.**

*The School needs the County Council's support to get it out of special measures.*

- There is no reason why the school's problem areas cannot be addressed – if it is given the necessary backing by the County Council. As Ofsted makes clear, the LEA “shares the responsibility to improve a school.” This is particularly so in respect of the implementation of an effective action plan. Similarly, Leicestershire CC organisation plan states that “most schools can be improved; *closure will rarely be the best option.*” (emphasis added).
- So far Rosebery has not enjoyed adequate LEA support. The decision not to consider a third option after the Ofsted report has set back recovery. As Ofsted notes in the case of a small minority of cases where schools have been placed in special measures: *“Most schools that are or have been subject to reorganisation or closure proposals have made slow or little progress and many find it difficult to focus on the tasks outlined in the school's action plan. The time spent dealing with the proposal has sapped the energy and morale of many staff.”*

## **4) Weaknesses of the Report by Director of Children's Services (Designate) to Cabinet.**

*The report of the DCS (designate) to Cabinet is not an objective discussion of the evidence for and against all possible options but a deployment of evidence in order to achieve one outcome – closure of the school.*

- Most importantly, the report makes no attempt to consider the option of keeping the school open and supporting it to help it get out of special measures. The paper to cabinet stated that it was his duty to discuss

options “*including* closure and amalgamation.” (emphasis added). It did not state why the report was restricted to these two options only.

The implication of the DCS’s statement to Cabinet, that this procedure and an outcome would be highly unusual is untenable. On the contrary, it is the refusal to even consider this option which is highly unusual. *We believe the DCS (designate) had and has a duty to present and discuss the option for maintaining and supporting the school.*

- A second option of amalgamation was added at the wish of four local Councillors who, it is stated “recognised this was not a preferred option” (it is not stated by whom). An option of federation proposed by Councillor Jones was not included, apparently on the grounds that this had been rejected by the governing body. No date was given for this rejection, but it had clearly come before the publication of the Ofsted report. It is unclear why this option should continue to be ruled out under the changed circumstances.
- The paper to Cabinet states that “Ofsted has placed the school in special measures without the capacity to improve.” This statement is misleading. In fact in relation to *the overall effectiveness of the school* the report states (p.2) that “the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.” It then lists “what the school should do to improve further.”
- There is no reason to assume, as does the report to Cabinet, that Rosebery’s deficit will increase. A large part of it is due to a substantial once-off personnel payment. The Ofsted report states that “There is a suitable plan in place to reduce the deficit over the next three years.”
- The school’s support for pupils from minority ethnic groups at the early stages of learning English was described by the Ofsted report as “good.” This received no mention by County Hall officials in either the report to Cabinet or the report to ESC. It was not considered to have any equal opportunities implications. Neither was any mention made of the situation of disabled children at present attending Rosebery. These include a pupil with Cerebral Palsy, whose mother stressed at the consultation meeting that Rosebery had given him a caring learning environment and that any move would cause severe disruption.
- Some of the other inaccuracies in the report may appear trivial (the school is one minute not five minutes; walk from the nearby playing fields, it is not two centuries but 108 years old) but they show a lack of interest and lack of local knowledge which is disturbing. It is even more disturbing that these have not been corrected in the report to the Education Scrutiny Committee. The report’s suggestions that Rosebery’s building is unsuitable for modern education or that its fabric

is in a poor condition are untenable and were comprehensively demolished at the consultations meetings.

#### **5) Children's Welfare.**

*The children's welfare and wellbeing are powerful arguments against closing the school which have not been given enough weight.*

The welfare of the children at present attending Rosebery has not so far been given sufficient (if any) weight. It is well-known that changing a school can be a disruptive even traumatic experience for a young child. In many cases it will mean breaking up friendships as well as the loss of a familiar and comforting environment. It will mean arduous and difficult journeys to a more distant destination twice a day. For many children it has implications for after-school arrangements (after-school clubs etc.) as well. It is impossible to understand how shifting pupils to a new environment, housing them in mobile accommodation will improve either their behavioural or educational standards.

#### **6) The need for improved leadership and management.**

*In order to implement its action plan the school needs an effective Head Teacher. To appoint one it needs the support of County Hall.*

- Ofsted states that a school's recovery may be slowed down due to ineffective leadership *including having only an acting headteacher in place*. Its view that this may have "a destabilising effect on the school because it generates uncertainty" is a good description of the current situation at Rosebery. It is in respect of Leadership and Management that the judgement of the Ofsted report that "the school does not have the capacity to improve" was made.
- In addressing this area the role of County Hall is crucial. We understand that in summer 2005 it advised Rosebery governors not to appoint the candidate who was interviewed for the Headship. We do not know what the reasons for this advice was, but we have learnt that the unsuccessful candidate has since been appointed to a Headship elsewhere.
- County Hall was also responsible, after the school was placed in Special measures, for appointing as Executive Head a local head teacher who left after only a fortnight (contrary to para. 14 of the report to ESC). Last not least, it is now responsible for finding a replacement who can implement an action plan to get the school out of Special Measures.

#### **7) Falling Rolls**

*Falling rolls are a national and a county-wide problem but it is unfair to use an Ofsted report to do address them by the backdoor.*

- The overcapacity in other Loughborough schools has been exaggerated. We understand that at least seven other

Loughborough primary schools (apart from Rosebery) have mobile classrooms in place which hardly suggests overcapacity.

- Some of the shortfall of Rosebery's roll can be explained by the way the Catchment area has been drawn, putting other schools far closer than Rosebery. Most of catchment area pupils whose parents send them to other schools go elsewhere go to the denominational schools (C of E and Roman Catholic).
- It is far from clear that other Loughborough Schools have the capacity to absorb 150 pupils from Rosebery., They certainly cannot all be accepted at Robert Bakewell School, as the report to Cabinet claims, without additional (costly) mobile classrooms and considerable disruption.
- It would be quite unfair to seek to "rationalise" educational provision on the backs of an Ofsted report, to the detriment of the interests of the children at Rosebery school.

**8) The Local Community:** *Closing Rosebery would contradict the attempt to maintain and revive a community in the area. Local opinion is strongly against the proposed closure.*

A local primary school is not only the concern of the pupils who attend it, and their parents, it is also at the heart of a local community. The community around Rosebery has been under pressure from the buy- to-let market for some time but recently there have been moves towards implementing a counter-strategy, including encouraging families to move into the area, building new mixed housing development, restricting student accommodation etc. Closing Rosebery school would completely undermine these efforts and deal the local community a fatal blow. *Local opposition to the closure throughout Loughborough has been overwhelming.*

**9) Openness of consultation.**

*The speed and conduct of the consultation exercise has been unfair.*

- The consultation exercise has been geared towards providing at great speed a desired outcome – closure of the school. The initial failure to make allowance to speakers of second languages, and the attempt to link consultation on the school with pupil allocations for 2006-7 are both examples of this (both were only revised after objections).
- The threat of closure has disturbed parents already led some to remove their children from the school. This outcome must have been anticipated by officials (see report to ESC para 6). It means that a consultation process is in the process of "creating facts". *In our view any statistics for school rolls produced after 24 January cannot be fairly be used in the decision-making process.*

- Leicestershire County Council is committed to “allow 12 weeks for written consultations on the development of policy in order to maximise participation.” The consultation on Rosebery up to 3 March will have lasted less than 5 weeks. No reason been given why it might not have been possible to allow a longer period of consultation.
- While we are grateful for a chance to make a submission to ESC we also note that holding the of the ESC meeting before the consultation period has ended is detrimental to the consultation process. It means that the committee will be unable to address or discuss the educational arguments or other relevant information which may come to light between the date of its meeting and the end of the consultation 3 March. It also appears that the ESC will not be given the details of the consultation meetings held on 7 February. Yet these included several weighty comments by educational professionals, including present and past Head Teachers, all of which were directed against the proposal to close Rosebery School.

### **Comments of Canon Dr S Cherry**

#### Concerns Regarding Possible Closure of Rosebery School

I write these remarks as a parent of two former Rosebery pupils who are currently both at Cambridge University. I am also rector of the neighbouring parish of All Saints with Holy Trinity and as such have a strong sense of the mood of the local community.

The question that exercises people here is whether, given appropriate support and direction, Rosebery might shortly be a viable, attractive school, educating pupils to the highest of standards and adding extra value by maintaining primary education in its neighbourhood.

The answer which local people invariably give to this is 'yes' and for the following reasons:

1. The criticisms of the school in the recent Ofsted were overstated and based on only a two-day inspection.
2. The school has not recently had the continuity of leadership and management needed to allow it to face the challenges of its context and intake.
3. The social trends which have reduced the number of young families in the catchment area are strong but recent and it is too soon to say that they will not be reversed.
4. The facilities at Rosebery are better 'in reality' than they look on paper. The neighbouring park is very close and generations of local people have been

educated very satisfactorily in those classrooms. (Our own son has a hearing problem and did very well in the Rosebery environment with its solid walls and doors.)

In addition to this, while Robert Bakewell school is not a great distance away it is on the other side of the Epinal Way inner by-pass and belongs not to this town centre community but to the area of Thorpe Acre. The schools closest to Rosebery are Church schools which are very well subscribed .

As a result of these factors, the feeling is that Rosebery is not being given a fair chance to redeem its potential as an institution that has been educating local children for over one hundred years. In brief, that more will be lost educationally by closure than by keeping the school open.

My own judgement is that while this is a complicated and in many ways unfortunate set of circumstances there is a strong case for not taking precipitate action here precisely because there is so much to lose, so much potential for something very special yet to emerge. I would therefore urge the committee to look to the medium term advantage of appointing an excellent head to Rosebery who can work with the tremendous groundswell of community energy and feeling and make it the educational flagship that it was only a few years ago.

Stephen Cherry