

Corporate Scrutiny Committee – 6 June 2023

Written question from Roisin Mullins-Jacobs of Ryde to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Was standard procedure followed? A lack of investigation/ planning preceded a half term press release on the closure of St. Mary's VA (Ofsted 'Requires Improvement', no closure criteria met), Roman Catholic (19% of UK and separate to CofE), Primary and Preschool, of 212 pupils, (SEN provision), before informing parents and full staff. Possibilities were disregarded; intake reduction, Academy status, relocation or rebuild of fully used site, within the Island's largest town, with the next RC alternative 8.6 miles away, close to developments Puckpool, West Acre Park, and Pennyfeathers, with a rising population and traffic. The faith school had 28/30 places, for Reception 2023, these actions caused distress, and damage to the popular school's reputation (online petition over 1,000) and stability, following return from Covid restrictions / baby boom. This action benefited unpopular / smaller Island schools, as a lack of available Ryde places exist to accommodate siblings and years.

Response

Thank you for your recent question submitted to the Corporate Scrutiny Committee about the primary school place planning paper that was due to be discussed at the Isle of Wight Cabinet on Thursday 8 June 2023.

The Isle of Wight Council's Children's Services Management Team were asked to draft this paper following a discussion on forecast pupil numbers at the September 2022 Policy and Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services, Education and Skills.

However, as the Cabinet has decided that the paper will no longer be presented and therefore the recommendations will not be taken forward for public consultation, a response to your questions is no longer appropriate.

It is important to note that the questions submitted are exactly the type of queries we would have been seeking during the consultation, had the decision been made on 8 June for the consultation to begin. It was intended that officers would have attended public meetings to explore these issues in full. After the consultation the views of all those contributing to the debate would have been shared with Cabinet and fully considered before any final proposals were made for further consultation.

It is our experience that such consultations have been meaningful and have often led to better decision making with proposals being refined before further statutory consultation.

Should Cabinet decide to undertake a consultation in the future I would urge you to contribute with queries such as these to the discussions at that time.