

Supplementary Information in Respect of Agenda Item No. 4

Dear Scrutiny Committee,

As Chair of Governors of Cogan Nursery School (which Estyn graded as excellent in all categories as a stand alone school), I have significant concerns on the decision making, transparency and legality of the process to date.

In my opinion the proposal report does not appear to take into account the research in the advantages of stand alone nurseries but is dismissed as biased opinion. Why?

I am concerned with the lack of effective communication about the process, developments and sudden change of dates. This only serves to frustrate any process of objection, stress to staff and therefore is unfair.

I understand that of the seven strong committee, two voting members have a conflict of interest in that they are Governors of the other nursery school Bute Cottage undergoing this process. I also understand that one of these committee members is a councillor who has publicly and avidly supported the merger process and whose opinion may be construed as bias and not a suitable arbiter.

I have serious concerns that any and all responses to the original proposal were collated by part of the Vale governance that originally proposed the merge. Effectively this is marking your own homework. Having read the report, all the valid concerns expressed have been in my opinion ignored or diluted in the response and neither adequately or reasonably addressed. Why? It has been mooted that any merge would save £75,000. Where is the evidence? In addition when the percentages of the public response to the mergers were published they were listed at 20% in favour; this only represents two responses. This hardly an overwhelming mandate and may be evidence on how difficult it has been to submit any response.

Finally, overwhelming response to the public consultation was against the merger (even though the data set is minimal) why has public opinion not been considered? This whole process appears to be a foregone conclusion and is being undertaken to satisfy some paper trail policy and not what is best for the children.

I am wholeheartedly against the merger proposal. But more worryingly I have serious concerns about the efficacy of this process. I have recently learned that the process is to be split so each school and linked nursery will be dealt with individually. Why?

I submit these questions and observations for your attention, perusal and action.

Jacqueline Griffiths, Chair of Governors Cogan Nursery
On behalf of Children, Parents and Staff.



Written Statement from Cogan Primary School

Many thanks for the opportunity to present our views from Cogan Primary School. We are delighted with the councillors' consideration of the proposal for the amalgamation of Cogan Nursery and Cogan Primary School.

We have only positive views to put forward. Having given this proposal careful consideration, having discussions with staff at both the Nursery School and Primary School, consulting parents and other members of the community, the majority share very positive views and are welcoming the change of Leadership and Governance moving to Cogan Primary.

We are in support because:

- It is best for the children to be part of the wider school family of Cogan, having a shared identity and connection with family members and friends within the community of Cogan.
- There will be earlier opportunities to build relationships straight away with parents/carers, being a community from day one.
- There will be clear communication with parents and carers and all stakeholders in the Cogan community.
- There will be more opportunities to share and celebrate exciting moments together.
- There will be joined up thinking, aligned aims and objectives, as well as shared training opportunities.
- Joint Inset days, sports days, concerts etc... will ensure that it will be less disruptive for parents who have children of different ages.
- There will be a broader outlook from where they start on their journey in education to when they transfer to secondary school.
- Early identification of Additional Learning Needs will ensure provision is put in place sooner and continues with better relationships being established earlier.
- Safeguarding issues will be flagged up earlier and monitored in a more joined up and continuous way.
- It will strengthen the expertise of all teachers and Learning Support Assistants to broaden the age range from 3 years onwards across the primary phase 3-11.
- Cogan Primary has a strong governing body who can ably support the staff from all phases.

- Combining the excellence in both the nursery and the primary will be even better for the children.
- Transition will be smoother and seamless as there will be better knowledge of the children and families. Parents will be familiar with one set of policies and communication systems.
- There is a strong focus on child development, the early years and the Foundation Phase as part of the Llais Curriculum at Cogan Primary. To extend the age range will provide more exciting projects and collaboration which will impact even further on learning and teaching across all phases
- Uniting funds will allow for best use of the budget and further getting best value for money.

We recognise that some of the staff at the Nursery are feeling unsettled at the moment and we believe a swift decision will achieve closure for them and allow us all to work together, looking forward to September 2022.

We can offer assurances that:

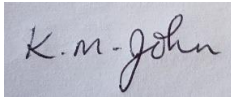
- The excellent practice will be continued and the facilities currently available should continue to be used fully. Cogan Nursery has a successful reputation, this we recognise and if the consultation succeeds, we look forward to welcoming the nursery staff and celebrating their excellent practice in the early years. It will be exciting to share this across all phases.
- The day to day running of the nursery will probably remain very similar, under the leadership of Cogan Primary School.
- The leadership team at the Primary School will provide strength for the nursery setting, there is a proven record of strong leadership judged as 'Excellent' by Estyn 2018, the senior management team remains the same as then.
- Recognise that the nursery has had some changes in staffing recently and therefore, it is a good time to take a measured look and build the team.
- Decisions regarding the deployment of staff will depend on their skills and expertise, it is likely that should the reconfiguration be granted that nursery staff will remain in their physical setting, although it will provide possibilities for staff to extend their skills if appropriate, where it benefits the children.
- There will be further opportunities for nursery staff to enhance their Continuous Professional Development.
- On a personal level, the staff will have opportunities to develop a wider network and positive relationships with a recognised excellent team.

There are many similarities within in each school's prospectus:

- 'Every child is valued as an individual'.
- Encourage Effort: Celebrate Success' (Cogan Primary) is in line with to 'Challenge and Stimulate towards Excellence' (Cogan Nursery).
- As settings, the 'holistic development of each child' is considered.

- We provide a 'caring community' and a 'supportive ethos'.
- The Foundation Phase practice is very strong, giving consideration to each stage of a child's development, teaching them the skills they need.
- Respect for the individual child, family and culture.
- Children's physical development and their personal development along with their communication skills are seen as crucial interacting elements supporting intellectual development.
- Emphasis is placed on doing, providing first hand experiences, learning through play and active involvement. Building on fascination and wonder of the world.

With shared aims and values, our joined up thinking will result in outstanding provision for the community of Cogan. The Cogan family will grow and highly qualified and experienced colleagues across all phases will ensure the children of Cogan receive the best education, we firmly believe we will be stronger together!

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K.M. John".

Kath John

Chair of Governors

From the Chair of Governors
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*Always being our best,
for ourselves
and for each other*

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10th February 2022

Re: Evenlode Primary School and Bute Cottage Nursery School Amalgamation

Dear Vale of Glamorgan Council,

I am writing this letter on behalf of the Governing Body at Evenlode Primary School. This is the school's formal response to the Vale of Glamorgan Council's Consultation on its plans to amalgamate our school with Bute Cottage Nursery School.

We believe that the needs of children are best met when schools and teachers collaborate and are able to maintain close links with the communities they serve, and that we can build on the already strong collaboration between both schools for the benefit of all the children in the two communities. We are aware that each setting has its own unique identity, and we strongly believe that this can be maintained with a shared ethos. The proposed amalgamation would enable the transition between Nursery and Reception to be seamless, enhancing provision and experiences for all children in both school communities. It will also impact positively on the wellbeing and emotional development of all our learners.

We are aware that one of the major concerns with this proposal is that the individual identity of Bute Cottage Nursery would be lost through the amalgamation process. As the governors at Evenlode Primary, we feel strongly that each setting is unique and should be celebrated as such. There is no 'one size fits all'.

We are emphatic that formal collaborations work and impact positively on school communities. In our headteacher's previous role (Headteacher and Trust Leader), her school was in a formal partnership with four other schools and a nursery setting, all very different in context. This formal partnership and collaboration strengthened and enhanced practice and provision within her school and this impact was mirrored in the other settings. This experience tells us that no individual school identities would be lost through this current proposal: in practice, the uniqueness of each setting would be strengthened through the collaboration: sharing, celebrating, and refining each school's individual context.

As school leaders, our experience is that formal structures of working together enhance professional development for individual members of staff and strengthens leadership. If this proposal were to be successful, distributed leadership, supported by strong governance, would ensure that the leadership team has a carefully considered strategic balance and range of specialisms, to reflect the philosophies and effective pedagogies at different phases of school life.

Ultimately, it is the experiences and outcomes of the children of the communities that we serve that matters most. We believe that the proposal for a more formalised structure and partnership of the two settings would give extra breadth and depth to the already excellent experiences that children in both settings have.

We would like to highlight the excellent work that already goes on between staff at both schools to ensure the transition of pupils between nursery and primary school is as smooth as possible. This collaborative approach enables staff at both schools to prepare children in the best possible way to enrol at Evenlode each year.

As we understand it, the current proposals, if implemented, include the nursery remaining on its current site at Bute Cottage and with its current capacity. Although this would become part of Evenlode Primary School, there are no plans for any staff redundancies, or to change any personnel between sites. The governors at Evenlode recognise the specialist provision and expertise of the staff at Bute Cottage Nursery.

Educational benefits

It is our view that the amalgamation of Bute Cottage Nursery and Evenlode Primary School would have the following educational benefits:

- By being part of the same school community from the day they start Nursery provision, learners will benefit from an even stronger transition process and allow nursery pupils to build bonds with staff and other children. The amalgamation would provide more strategic opportunities for joint working to support the transition from the nursery site into the reception classrooms on the primary site. Staff knowing children from the start of their learning journey will enhance understanding of each child and their individual strengths and needs.
- Enhancing professional development of staff - deeper collaboration and the sharing of specialist expertise and knowledge of early years provision. This will enhance even further the early years provision, and opportunities for learning and development for the children in these communities.
- With the statutory implementation of the Curriculum for Wales in September 2022, the proposed amalgamation would be timely in ensuring the curriculum approaches of both settings dovetail and complement each other to ensure that all learners have a firm and consistent grounding at the start of their academic journey.
- Partnership with Parents will be strengthened further. By being part of the same community from the day children start Nursery provision, Parents and Carers will be able to build relationships with staff across both settings more easily.
- Governance of both settings will be strengthened, with the amalgamated governing bodies working together to ensure the best provision for children from Nursery to Year Six.

Wider community benefits

We strongly believe there are many opportunities for community improvement under the proposals.

These include:

- Better communication with members of both school communities, which naturally have a large crossover of membership between the two schools given their close geographical proximity and shared parent members.
- Better coordination surrounding school drop off and collection arrangements with parents, carers, and wrap-around care facilities.
- Development of wrap around care facilities for Parents, for example access to 'Saplings' out of hours club.
- Increased use of school facilities across a wider community membership
- Improved opportunities for professional development across all phases of primary education for staff looking to develop their careers further.
- Although not expected to be significant we even believe that local business links and transport will be improved with a larger coordinated approach to these areas.

Relocating nursery provision

As governors we recognise the unique setting that is offered at Bute Cottage Nursery School. There are many strengths and important features that have been developed over the years on site that make it the ideal teaching and learning environment.

A very public campaign to “Save Bute Cottage” has drawn on the emotions of the local community and garnered lots of support publicly. We also recognise that this is misleading the public because there are no plans under this consultation process or plans to change any of these buildings, locations or features that are so loved by so many.

At this stage, we just want to add that it is our intention, under any subsequent plan to relocate the nursery provision onto the Evenlode site, that we will do everything we can to transfer all these strengths onto our site. We truly believe that Evenlode has its own unique setting within our extensive, peaceful grounds and that there is plenty of space to accommodate everything currently on offer to the nursery children when the time comes to move home in the future. By supporting this proposed amalgamation we believe we are truly “Saving Bute Cottage.”

Financial observations

It is our general view that by amalgamating our schools there will be general efficiencies and shared purchasing that will result in some financial savings. However, we are not sure that many of these will be realised with the school operating across a split site.

As there are no plans to make any redundancies and we are expected to continue to operate the Bute Cottage site as it currently exists, we cannot see where the council can find the identified £70,000.00 savings from within the existing school budgets, without putting pressure on already limited classroom resources.

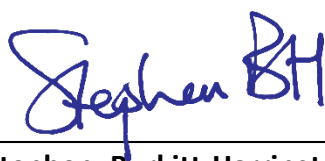
Savings identified in the consultation document for site maintenance for example are unlikely to be able to be procured as one contract due to the different locations for works needing to be carried out across the two sites. Site maintenance contracts are also more likely to be procured by the Council from other capital maintenance or environmental development budgets and it may be that it is planned that the savings will be made from these areas and not as identified from the existing school budgets.

We believe the savings will be much smaller initially until the resulting school is embedded and administration systems are established and efficient. In fact we would ask the council to consider maintaining the budgets allocated to both schools initially at their current levels at least until the amalgamation has been established and we become more aware of the costs involved in the running of the nursery site. This will ensure that at this time we are able to allocate additional resources needed to embed the new curriculum and to put additional resources in place to counter any pandemic gaps that may have emerged over the past two years.

We certainly support the principal that savings can be identified as part of this process and that they may be realised as part of any longer-term strategic aim to co-locate the nursery onto the Evenlode site in any future process.

As a governing body we commend this proposal and ask members of the council to support its progress. We are prepared to work together with the council and governors of Bute Cottage Nursery School to develop a comprehensive transition plan. As Governors, we also promise to exercise our responsibility to challenge and support this process fully and fairly as it is developed in the coming year. As always, our decisions are made in the best interests of the children and staff in our school community.

Yours sincerely,



Stephen Burkitt-Harrington
Cadeirydd y Llywodraethwyr
Chair of Governors