

Eddleston Community Council  
24 October 2008

Mr Glenn Rodger  
Director of Education and Lifelong Learning  
Scottish Borders Council  
Newtown St Boswells  
Melrose  
Scottish Borders  
TD6 0SA

Dear Mr Rodger

We are writing as the Community Council for Eddleston and District in response to SBC's proposals on Transforming Children's Services (TCS).

The village and its surrounding catchment area number around 250 households, many of who send, have sent or will send their children to the village primary school. Very few children of primary age attend a school other than Eddleston Primary. With the closure of the village shop and Post Office, it is impossible to understate the critical role that the school plays as a community hub.

As the Community Council we have an interest in any proposal that potentially affects either the high standing of Eddleston Primary School or the quality of the education it provides for children who live in and around the village. Having discussed SBC's proposal at our latest Community Council meeting (22 October 2008) we wish to make a number comments on the proposal.

The Community Council is extremely concerned at the lack of clarity within elements of the plan, at the lack engagement from officers in the Education department with issues that the Parent Council has tried to raise in person or at the public meeting (indeed the Parent Council tried on a number of occasions to get a response from office on some basic questions) and at the lack of any recognition in the plan or at the open meeting held recently in Peebles that the schools in Tweeddale have key differences that do not lend themselves to a rigid singular approach.

Before turning to our concerns in detail though there is one recommendation within TCS we can actively support: the proposal for the establishment of non-teaching heads. The Parent Council and the Community Council recognise the additional financial burdens that arise from running proportionately more small schools, and further, the pressure this places on recruiting and retaining head teachers. To that end, and guided by the Parent Council, we support the proposal for the introduction of non-teaching heads as a positive step in addressing this particular challenge.

So to the detail of our concerns:

- The SBC plan does not pay any particular or sufficient attention to the circumstances of small rural schools, or the likely consequences for them under this plan – despite SBC’s stated policy of supporting rural schools and the fact that there are a large number of such schools within the Scottish Borders;
- The obvious size differences between some Tweeddale schools and the distances between them mean that we cannot possibly have one policy that suits all situation,
- This is reinforced within the TLC where Eddleston is one of the smallest school in terms of current pupil role, but as a smaller school it is in a minority with many other schools in TLC four or five times as large. To attempt to join it with another smaller school on no other basis than size and convenience with an overarching policy is inappropriate. We strongly believe that the situations of the schools should drive the plan rather than the other way round;
- As such we feel very strongly that their needs to be flexibility within the overall framework to allow each school to identify the best possible solution from within the constraints SBC is bound to work within.

Looking at the options there is the strong possibility of negative outcomes for our school including: the loss of our full-time Head (replaced with a joint headship with Walkerburn) no Deputy Head as part of a joint headship (the other Tweeddale joint headship schools has a deputy on site when the head is absent) and absolutely no guarantee that the school will have a Principal Teacher (PT) under the Plan. While the plan is to have 9 PT for 9 schools in Tweeddale there is no commitment in TCS to each school having a PT - indeed many of the larger Tweeddale schools already have more than one PT and are likely to strongly resist any cuts. We could see a situation where there is no nominated person to take charge of specific emergencies (e.g. fire) or more routine but important actions such as sending outlying pupils home early in case of adverse weather and making contact with SBC officers.

We also see in a small community like ours the value of the wider role played by the head of a school. Having a head on site reinforces our school as a community hub. A dedicated Head walks through the playground at the start and end of the day, is able to attend all school events, plays and school outings, many of which our active PTA help to fund, and this regular routine provides an opportunity for parents to pass on messages or arrange a time to come in to discuss matters of more concern. Without a head on site most days a great deal of the information flow that currently takes place at the start and end of the school teaching day would be lost.

One other significant wider benefit to our community from this continuity of leadership has been the ability of the school to flourish academically building on its success year on year and, as importantly, to provide a strong ethical

and pastoral lead for the pupils - something in which the village can be rightly proud. It is also impossible to downplay the role that a head and their staff play in the community, not only with school events already mentioned, but with their attendance at village events, through the church congregation and active participation in the village's many clubs and societies. A part time head would inevitably have to dilute their input into these events to the detriment of all of the above. In essence, the current set up, with the majority of the members of staff on the one site day in day out, provides a 'glue' that continues to bind our community together.

What you also have in Eddleston is a school that not only acts as a beacon to support and justify SBC's policy on maintaining small rural schools, but one that actually works to attract families from outside the catchment area to the school and brings new families into the area through its well-deserved reputation. All of these help our community thrive. You will all be too well aware that a good performance in a school is not a given; it can be affected and lead to a rapid decline. Further, a village in a location like Eddleston, where there are alternative schooling options close by or further a field in Edinburgh, a downturn could be quite dramatic and final and affect the long term future of the village and in particular community wide activity.

In recognition of all of the above, positive and negative, the Parent Council, in conjunction with the staff, has submitted a proposal as part of their response that removes what we see as the key failings in the current plan for our school, costs no more money or staff resources but crucially allows the school to retain a full time head. As a Community Council we applaud the efforts of the Parent Council to engage constructively with the process, to seek alternatives within the boundaries of the wider SBC policy and to identify ways that the school can continue to thrive in a way that supports village life. The Community Councillors therefore urge SBC Councillors and Departments to look seriously at other options in order to secure the continued success of our village school.

Eddleston Community Council  
24 October 2008

cc:

Councillor N Calvert  
Councillor C Bhatia  
Councillor W Archibald  
Liz Turner Chair of Eddleston Village School Parent Council