

Report to: Children and Young People's Panel
Cabinet

Date: 11 September 2008
18 September 2008

Subject: Building Schools for the Future: Review of Mainstream
Secondary Schools - Report on the Stage 3
Consultation on the Proposal to Close PEMBEC -
Pemberton Business and Enterprise College

Report of: Director of Children and Young People's Services

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Purpose / summary: The purpose of the report is to:

- report the results of the stage 3 consultation (Statutory Notice) on the proposal to close PEMBEC; and
- Request that Cabinet make the final decision on the proposal (Stage 4).

Alternative options considered and reason for selecting the one recommended: These are contained within the report.

Recommendation / decision: Cabinet is recommended to approve the proposal to close PEMBEC - Pemberton Business and Enterprise College with effect from 31 August 2011

Key Decision: This report involves a key decision within ground 1.

The decision made as a result of this report will be published within **48 hours** and cannot be actioned until **seven working days** have

elapsed, i.e. before 30 September 2008

This item is included in the Forward Plan.

Risks / Implications:

Financial:	<p>The closure of PEMBEC will result in improved value for money within the Dedicated Schools Budget making approximately £ 410,000 per annum revenue savings.</p> <p>Approximately £1,224,481 of backlog of repairs will be saved from the CYPS Asset Management Plan.</p> <p>Closure may result in an increase in pupil travelling expenses claims for a period of 3 years for the pupils who transfer from PEMBEC to Shevington</p> <p>The financial implications may change if the PEMBEC site is identified for alternative educational use under the Wigan Schools for the Future Programme.</p>
Staffing:	<p>If the school were to close, the permanent staff would be supported in finding alternative employment.</p>
Policy:	<p>Wigan Strategy for School Places and Buildings.</p>
Equal Opportunities - Has a Diversity Impact Assessment been conducted?	<p>Yes</p>
Wards affected:	<p>Pemberton, Shevington</p>

Property Implications – Does the proposal involve a reduction, addition or change to the Council’s asset base or its occupation?

Yes

If yes, have the property implications been agreed with the Corporate Property Officer?

Yes

Does this proposal have significant implications for the Council and the local population?

Yes. A full diversity impact assessment has been undertaken and is attached as an appendix to this report.

Has the Service Director - Borough Solicitor confirmed that the recommendations within this report are lawful and comply with the Council’s Constitution?

Yes / No *

Has the Service Director - Corporate Services confirmed that any

Yes / No *

expenditure referred to within this report is consistent with the Council's budget?

Are any of the recommendations within this report contrary to the Policy Framework of the Council? **No**

For Cabinet reports only :

Categorisation of the report:			
Discussion leading to a decision	x	Discussion	
Monitoring		Decision	
Sharing for corporate understanding		Information	

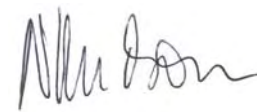
Tracking/Process:

	Consultation	Ward Members	Partners
Panel	Overview & Scrutiny	Cabinet	Council
11/09/08		18/09/08	

List of Background Papers in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972:

Title of document	Which meeting did it go to?	Date of meeting	Copy available from?
Wigan's Strategy for School Places and Buildings			CYPS, Progress House, Westwood Park Drive, Wigan, WN3 4HH

Proper Officer



Date

22nd August 2008

1 Background

1.1 Previous reports relating to the proposal

1.1.1 Children and Young People's Panel and Cabinet have previously considered a number of reports on Building Schools for the Future (BSF), Building Learning Communities (BLC) and the secondary school review;

- August 2003
- October/November 2003
- December 2003/January 2004
- May 2004
- July 2005
- January 2006
- September 2007
- November 2007

BSF will provide the council with capital funds to transform secondary school provision. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is considering giving late start authorities, such as Wigan, the opportunity to have an earlier start.

1.1.2 The earlier start will only be given to authorities that can demonstrate that they are ready to deliver BSF. This includes being able to demonstrate that schools are in the right place and of an appropriate size to deliver the modern curriculum. BSF will not fund excessive surplus places, either borough wide or at individual schools.

1.1.3 On 15 November 2007 Cabinet authorised a public consultation exercise (stage 1) on the proposal to close PEMBEC.

1.1.4 On 29 May 2008 a report gave details of the stage 1 consultation, including a copy of the consultation document, a summary of the responses received and officers' comments on them. Cabinet requested that statutory notices be published (stage 2) and that the representation period (stage 3) be held.

1.2 Decision making powers

1.2.1 A report to Children and Young People's Panel (7 February 2008) and Cabinet (6 March 2008) set out the local authority's new powers in relation to decision making on school organisation proposals.

1.2.2 Cabinet takes the final decision on proposals to close mainstream schools, provided that it does so within 2 months of the end of the stage 3 representation period. The report details the procedures and information that Cabinet must consider prior to making its decision.

1.2.3 If Cabinet does not make a decision within 2 months of the end of the representation period (that is by 30 September 2008 in this instance), the Schools Adjudicator will decide the proposal.

2 Publication of notices and the representation period

- 2.1 The statutory notice to close PEMBEC was published on 19 June 2008. A copy of the notice is attached at Appendix A and a copy of the complete proposal with its appendices is attached at Appendix B
- 2.2 The statutory representation period for proposals to close a school is 6 weeks. The local authority received one letter making comments on the proposal by the closing date of 31 July 2008. This was from the governing body of PEMBEC and is attached at Appendix C. The issues raised and officers' responses to them are set out in Section 3 of this report.

3 Response to the written comments received on the proposal

3.1 The consultation process on the proposal to close PEMBEC

- 3.1.1 The governing body considers that the consultation process has been flawed and has led to pupil numbers falling more quickly than they would otherwise have done.

Response: The consultation process that began on 14 January 2008 has been conducted through adherence to strict legal guidelines. The governing body's concerns relate to issues before stage 1 consultation commenced and the ongoing review of secondary school places which is running parallel to the PEMBEC proposal.

- 3.1.2 The proposal is being considered outside the wider consultation on BSF

Response: The authority has held preliminary discussions on BSF with secondary schools and the wider community. However, pupil numbers at PEMBEC are already low and are predicted to fall beyond a viable level before the authority has a start for BSF

3.2 Education provision

- 3.2.1 The attainment of PEMBEC pupils will be lost in the larger schools as overall GCSE results for schools in Wigan but low attainment figures will be masked.

Response: Both Shevington and Abraham Guest were rated as 'good' schools in their last OFSTED inspections. The local authority is committed to raising the attainment of all pupils. The new 14-19 diplomas will present more opportunities in future for pupils who do not attain through traditional routes to fulfil their potential through vocational study

- 3.2.2 PEMBEC serves the most deprived communities in the borough and achieves outstanding contextual value added results.

Response: This is correct at the moment. However, roll projections indicate that pupil numbers will fall sharply in the future as pupil numbers decline across the borough. In such situations, schools find it impossible to maintain standards because of the impact on budgets and staffing

3.3 Travel

- 3.3.1 The costs of travel and distance to alternative schools will cause difficulties for parents and pupils.

Response: For most of those pupils that access Abraham Guest High School, there will be little difference in the amount of travelling. The local authority will liaise with the travel companies to ensure that appropriate capacity and routes are available for those pupils that travel to Shevington High School.

The current local authority transport policy is that it will reimburse travel costs for pupils who have to travel over 3 miles to their nearest available secondary school, or over 2 miles in the case of families claiming the full amount of Working Tax Credit or whose child is entitled to free school meals. As Shevington High School is almost 4 miles away from PEMBEC, the majority of pupils will be able to claim travelling expenses from the local authority if they go on to attend Shevington High

- 3.3.2 Travel difficulties will have an impact on pupil attendance, punctuality and the ability to take part in extra curricular activities.

Response: This is often a concern of schools serving deprived communities that are being considered for closure. Once the closure goes ahead, it has been found that pupils attend school as usual and attain according to the attainment levels at the receiving school.

It is considered that, in future years, children who live in the PEMBEC area will be able to access places at Abraham Guest High School at Year 7 as the school is moving closer to the area currently served by PEMBEC. Most pupils will be able to walk to school so there should be no change in attendance, punctuality or the ability to take part in extra curricular activities.

3.4 Need for places and admissions

- 3.4.1 More school places need to be removed in the review of secondary provision. If this is to be achieved through lowering admission numbers at some schools, thereby displacing pupils to others and hiding surplus places, the same could have been done to keep PEMBEC open

Response: As secondary pupil numbers fall from around 19,500 at present to just over 17,000 by 2014/2015, there are simply not enough pupils to populate all twenty secondary schools. From the number of children in Wigan primary schools it is clear that at least one school in the west of the borough needs to close in order to stabilise provision and provide viable schools.

Officers are currently working on further secondary school review options that aim to remove more school places in preparation for BSF. This work will be reported to a future meeting of Panel and Cabinet. The options presented must consider current levels of parental preferences for schools unless there are compelling reasons not to, therefore admission numbers at schools that are predicted to be full are unlikely to reduce.

There is a prescribed formula for calculating net capacity and there is little scope for hiding surplus places at schools. Whilst there is some flexibility in the formula, this is applied consistently across all schools

- 3.4.2 If Abraham Guest High School attains foundation status, pupils from the PEMBEC area may not be allocated places in the future.

Response: Although foundation schools set their own admission arrangements, they must adhere to the School Admissions Code of Practice which ensures all admission criteria are fair. The school must consult the local authority on its admission arrangements annually, and the authority can object or refer the arrangements to the Schools Adjudicator if they are considered inappropriate. All schools in the authority are also bound by the Co-ordinated Admission Scheme for the area which is approved by Council and administered by the authority. It is not therefore envisaged pupils from the PEMBEC area will be disadvantaged.

3.5 Alternative options for PEMBEC

- 3.5.1 Governors are concerned that some educational provision is retained at the PEMBEC site, such as Key Stage 4 and 16-19 provision as part of BSF

Response: The local authority recognises that PEMBEC has excellent facilities for vocational training. Under BSF new ways of delivering the 14-19 curriculum must be explored and the use of the PEMBEC site will be an important consideration. However, more detailed discussion cannot take place until the decision on the future of the school has been made.

4 Consideration of the proposals

4.1 DCSF guidance specifies four key issues that must be considered before a decision is made:

- 4.1.1 Has all the necessary information been provided?

Copies of the following have been provided:

- the public notice and the full proposal (which also contains details of the stage 1 consultation) as described at section 2 above; and
- The comments received and the officers' response to these as described at sections 2 and 3 above.

- 4.1.2 Does the published notice comply with statutory requirements?

Officers in Business Support Services Legal and Property Division and the Department for Children Schools and Families were consulted prior to publication to ensure that the notice complied with statutory requirements.

- 4.1.3 Has the statutory consultation been carried out prior to the publication of the notice?

The report to Cabinet on 29 May 2008 and the full proposal (Appendix B sections 3 and 4) cover the stage 1 consultation in detail.

- 4.1.4 Are the proposals related to other published proposals?

The proposal is not linked to any other published proposals.

4.2 DCSF statutory guidance also gives a range of factors that Cabinet should consider when making the decision. These include:

4.2.1 Effect on standards and school improvement (Including the preferences of parents, standards and diversity)

This information is included in the full proposal (appendix B) as follows:

- Section 5: parental preference
- Section 6: standards and diversity

4.2.2 Need for places (Including provision for displaced pupils and surplus places)

This information is included in the full proposal (appendix B) as follows:

- Section 5: surplus places
- Section 8: need for places and displaced pupils
- Section 11: displaced pupils

4.2.3 Impact on community and travel

This information is included in the full proposal (appendix B) as follows:

- Sections 13 and 14: impact on the community
- Sections 15 and 16: travel

4.2.4 Specific age provision issues (Including curriculum and collaboration, particularly for 14-19 provision)

4.2.5 The views of interested parties

These are attached at Appendix 3. Officers' responses to the comments made are given at section 3 above.

5 Recommendations

5.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve the proposal to close Pemberton Business and Enterprise College – PEMBEC with effect from 31 August 2011

Diversity Impact Assessment form

Section: Children and Young People's Services: School Places

Policy/Service Area: Provision of school places

Person Completing Form: Lynn Mappin

Date: April 2008

Do any of the below groups suffer specific disadvantage (please indicate)

	Yes	No		Yes	No
Race		X	Disability		X
Ethnicity		X	Gender		X
Age		X	Religion		X
Class		X	Sexual Orientation		X

Is there evidence of disadvantage or associated problems?

Whilst PEMBEC serves a deprived community as evidenced through entitlement to free school meals and other measures, the school transport policy ensures that those in need will be entitled to refunded travelling expenses (as defined in section of the report

How was the information collected and/or who have you consulted with?

N/A

Action Plan – *What specific actions are planned to tackle any disadvantage identified?*

N/A

Is the policy in line with current equality legislation and relevant codes of practice?

N/A

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Timescale	
Responsibility	
Comments	

Are the actions specified included in any other documents/plans?

Departmental Service Plan	
Section/Team Plan	
Other (Specify)	

Date for further review N/A

Proposal to Discontinue Pemberton Business and Enterprise College - PEMBEC

Notice is given in accordance with section 15(1) of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 that Wigan Council, Children and Young People's Services, Progress House, Westwood Park Drive, Wigan WN3 4HH intends to discontinue Pemberton Business and Enterprise College - PEMBEC Montrose Avenue Pemberton Wigan WN5 9XL on 31 August 2011.

The proposal will be implemented in stages and interim arrangements will be made for pupils as follows:

July 2008	Current Year 11 pupils complete their education at PEMBEC and leave school.
September 2008	Year 7 intake into PEMBEC.
July 2009	Current Year 10 pupils complete their education at PEMBEC and leave school.
September 2009	No Year 7 intake into PEMBEC.
July 2010	Current Year 9 pupils complete their education at PEMBEC and leave school. Current Year 7 pupils complete Key Stage 3 at PEMBEC and transfer to alternative schools in September 2010.
September 2010	No Year 7 intake into PEMBEC.
July 2011	Current Year 8 pupils complete their education at PEMBEC and leave school. Pupils admitted into Year 7 in September 2008 complete Key Stage 3 at PEMBEC and transfer to alternative schools in September 2011.
August 2011	Closure of PEMBEC.

Pupils who will transfer to alternative schools will be offered a place at one of either Abraham Guest or Shevington High Schools according to parental preference and the admission criteria for the schools. Admission may also be sought to other schools which may have places available. It will not be necessary to create additional places to accommodate pupils from Pemberton Business and Enterprise College - PEMBEC.

All applicable statutory requirements to consult in relation to the proposal have been complied with.

Many pupils will be within walking distance of the alternative schools. The walking distance from PEMBEC to Abraham Guest High School (new site) is 1.3 miles and to Shevington High School 6.3 miles. Additional school buses may be provided if necessary to minimise car use. Wigan Council will provide assistance with travelling expenses, if appropriate, in accordance with the transport policy.

Appendix A

This proposal is not related to any other proposals which have been or are about to be published.

This Notice is an extract from the complete proposal. Copies of the complete proposal can be obtained from: Wigan Council, Director of Children and Young People's Services, Progress House, Westwood Park Drive, Wigan, WN3 4HH or www.wigan.gov.uk

Within six weeks from the date of publication of this proposal, that is by 31 July 2008, any person may object to or make comments on the proposal by sending them to Wigan Council, Director of Children and Young People's Services, Progress House, Westwood Park Drive, Wigan, WN3 4HH.

Signed: Nick Hudson, Director of Children and Young People's Services

Date: 19 June 2008

Notes

1. There is a falling secondary school population across the Borough and declining pupil numbers are expected to continue until 2013/14. The decline in pupil numbers has been felt most in the centre of the Borough and the area served by Pemberton Business and Enterprise College – PEMBEC has been particularly affected.
2. Pemberton Business and Enterprise College – PEMBEC has an admission number of 170. For the last three years, the school has received below 90 first preference applications for Y7 admission. There are currently 563 pupils on roll. The net capacity of the school buildings is 850 which means there are over 30% surplus places. There are predicted to be less than 400 pupils on roll at the school by 2012.
3. Abraham Guest High School is being rebuilt on a new site adjacent to Orrell Lamberhead Green Primary School. The new buildings will open in 2009 and will have an admission number of 205. The Local Authority will also review the premises at Shevington High School to ensure the school has the appropriate facilities to cater for any additional pupils. The admission number will remain at 178.
4. The Local Authority will review the admission criteria of neighbouring schools to ensure that primary aged children who would have normally attended Pemberton Business and Enterprise College – PEMBEC have an equal chance of obtaining their preferred secondary school place when compared with other Wigan residents.

Appendix A



**Proposal to discontinue Pemberton Business and
Enterprise College – PEMBEC**

19 June 2008

Children and Young People's Services

Section 15 proposals to discontinue a school

Contact details

1. The name of the local education authority or governing body publishing the proposals, and a contact address, and the name of the school it is proposed that should be discontinued.

Local authority publishing the proposals:

Wigan Council

Local Authority contact address:

Wigan Council

School Places Team

Children and Young People's Services

Progress House

Westwood Park Drive

Wigan

WN3 4HH

School it is proposed should be discontinued:

Pemberton Business and Enterprise College – PEMBEC

Montrose Avenue

Pemberton

Wigan

WN5 9XL

Implementation

2. The date when it is planned that the proposals will be implemented, or where the proposals are to be implemented in stages, information about each stage and the date on which each stage is planned to be implemented.

It is planned that the school will be discontinued on 31 August 2011

This will be implemented in stages as follows:

July 2008	Current Year 11 pupils complete their education at PEMBEC and leave school.
September 2008	Year 7 intake into PEMBEC
July 2009	Current Year 10 pupils complete their education at PEMBEC and leave school
September 2009	No Year 7 intake into PEMBEC
July 2010	Current Year 9 pupils complete their education at PEMBEC and leave school Current Year 7 pupils complete Key Stage 3 at PEMBEC And transfer to alternative schools in September 2010
September 2010	No Year 7 intake into PEMBEC
July 2011	Current Year 8 pupils complete their education at PEMBEC and leave school Pupils admitted into Year 7 at PEMBEC in September 2008 complete Key Stage 3 at PEMBEC and transfer to alternative schools in September 2011
August 2011	Closure of PEMBEC

Consultation

3. A statement to the effect that all applicable statutory requirements to consult in relation to the proposals were complied with.

All applicable statutory requirements to consult in relation to the proposals were complied with as follows:

- adequate time was allowed: 6 weeks outside school holidays;
- sufficient information was provided: in the consultation document and at a public meeting and meetings with the staff and governors of the school;
- it was made clear in the document, on the Wigan Council website and at public meetings how consultees could express their views: in writing (paper or email), by completing the response form in the consultation booklet or by making comments at the meetings;
- all the views expressed were presented within a report to elected members at the Cabinet meeting when they made the decision to publish the proposals;
- all parties specified in the school organisation guidance were consulted; and
- pupils were consulted.

4. Evidence of the consultation before the proposals were published including—

- (a) a list of persons and/or parties who were consulted;
- (b) minutes of all public consultation meetings;
- (c) the views of the persons consulted; and
- (d) copies of all consultation documents and a statement of how these were made available.

Evidence of the Stage 1 consultation which has taken place before the proposals were published:

a) List of persons and parties consulted: appendix 1

b) Minutes of public consultation meeting: appendix 2

Minutes of staff meeting: appendix 3

Minutes of governors meeting: appendix 4

Minutes of the meeting with pupils: appendix 5

c) The views of the persons consulted: appendix 6 (including representations from the Chair of governors and the headteacher)

d) Copy of the consultation document: appendix 7

The document was made available to all those named in Appendix 1 as follows:

- Governors: copies were posted to governors' home addresses
- Parents of pupils at PEMBEC, Abraham Guest High School, Shevington High School, Marsh Green Primary School and Westfield Community Primary School: sufficient copies were sent to the relevant schools and the headteachers asked to send them to parents by 'pupil post'
- School staff at PEMBEC, Abraham Guest High School, Shevington High School, Marsh Green Primary School and Westfield Community Primary School: sufficient copies were sent to the relevant schools and the headteachers asked to distribute them to staff
- Parents of Year 6 pupils who had expressed a preference for PEMBEC at Year 7: copies were posted to parents' home addresses.
- Community groups using PEMBEC premises: the headteacher was asked to distribute copies to these groups.
- Parents of pupils and school staff at Beech Hill Community Primary School, Orrell Lamberhead Green Community Primary School, St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School, St Mark's C E Primary School, St John's C E Primary School: a number of copies were sent to the schools and the headteachers asked to place them where they would be accessible to parents and staff.
- Elected members: all elected members were sent a copy of the document through Wigan Council's internal mail.
- Copies of the documents were posted to all other parties listed in appendix 1.

In total, 3600 documents were distributed. The document was also available on the Wigan Council website for the duration of the consultation period.

Objectives

5. The objectives of the proposal.

The objectives of the proposal are to secure high quality viable educational provision for Wigan children. It is increasingly unlikely that Wigan Council will be able to achieve this unless PEMBEC is discontinued because:

- There is a falling secondary school population across the Borough. Pupil intakes into Year 7 have fallen from 4315 pupils in 2003/2004 to 3716 at present. This fall of around 600 pupils represents three medium sized secondary schools.
- The declining pupil numbers are expected to continue until 2013/2014 when 3300 pupils are expected to be in year 7. Despite an increase in numbers thereafter, they are not anticipated to increase beyond current levels.
- The decline in numbers has been felt most keenly in the centre of the Borough. The area served by PEMBEC has been particularly affected. This has led to recent reorganisations of primary schools in the area where places have been removed from the system as they are no longer needed.
- When pupil numbers fall so quickly, more parents are able to obtain their first choice of school as there are fewer pupils competing for the available places. The result is that some schools experience a very steep decline in first preference applications, whilst others continue to fill up to their admission numbers.
- For the past three years, PEMBEC has received below 90 first preference applications for year 7 admission, though more pupils have been admitted because some could not obtain a place at their first choice school.
- At January 2008 there were 563 pupils on roll at PEMBEC. By 2012 there are predicted to be fewer than 400 pupils on roll because of the decline in pupil numbers and trends in parental preferences.
- As pupil numbers decline the school budget will decline and the school will not be able to attract and retain the range and quality of staff to deliver a high quality education or provide sufficient choice in the curriculum.
- There are currently 34.07% surplus places at PEMBEC and this is predicted to rise to 58.43% by 2012. This represents an inefficient use of public funds and adversely affects all Wigan schools' budgets.

- The Council must review secondary school provision and remove surplus places in order to be considered for major capital investment under the Building Schools for the Future programme. If Wigan Council does not remove surplus places, there is a risk that all secondary schools in the borough will miss out on major investment designed to transform the learning environment. This will result in buildings that are no longer fit to deliver the modern curriculum, a decline in standards and a threat to the future prosperity of Wigan.

Standards and Diversity

6. A statement and supporting evidence indicating how the proposals will impact on the standards, diversity and quality of education in the area.

Standards

The proposals will ensure at least an equally good standard of education in the area.

PEMBEC is situated in one of the most deprived areas of the borough and does not have very good contextual value added scores. However, the numbers of pupils achieving 5+ A*-C at Key Stage 4 is higher at the proposed alternative schools.

Key stage 4 results for 2007 are as follows (percentage of pupils achieving each threshold):

School	5+ A*-C	5+ A*-C (incl. English and Maths)	5+ A*-G
PEMBEC	41	22	94
Abraham Guest	47	35	91
Shevington	73	55	94

Contextual Value Added Key Stage 2 to 4 for 2007

School	CVA measure
PEMBEC	1029.7
Abraham Guest	1011.5
Shevington	1004.5

(national mean 1000)

Diversity

PEMBEC is a community school and pupils will be able to access alternative community school provision at Abraham Guest High School or Shevington High School.

More than 80% of pupils on roll at PEMBEC live in the top 30% most deprived super output areas nationally. The current PEMBEC intake is mainly from the community concentrated around the school. The alternative schools have a more diverse intake from a wider area and different communities providing the PEMBEC pupils access to a wider socio-economic mix of peers.

Quality of Education

It is considered that the proposal will improve the quality of education in the area.

Ofsted Section 5 Inspections have taken place as follows:

PEMBEC

Date: 4 July 2007

Overall Effectiveness: Grade 2 – satisfactory

Abraham Guest Community High School

Date: 20 February 2008

Overall effectiveness: Grade 3 - good

Shevington High School

Date: 17 January 2008

Overall Effectiveness – good

The budget share per pupil at PEMBEC is already over £1000 above the majority of other secondary schools in Wigan. This currently allows the school to offer a range of vocational and non-vocational subjects. However, as a significant proportion of a school's budget is pupil led, the total budget will reflect falling pupil numbers. This will make it more difficult for the school to attract and retain quality staff or to provide a sufficient choice of curriculum.

Provision for 16 -19 year olds

7. Where the school proposed to be discontinued provides sixth form education, how the proposals will impact on—

- (a) the educational or training achievements;
- (b) participation in education or training; and
- (c) the range of educational or training opportunities,

for 16-19 year olds in the area.

Not applicable

Need for places

8. A statement and supporting evidence about the need for places in the area including whether there is sufficient capacity to accommodate displaced pupils

The future need for places

The need for places in the area and the borough as a whole is decreasing due to falling pupil numbers and there are sufficient places in the area if the proposal to discontinue PEMBEC is implemented.

The vast majority of pupils living in the PEMBEC area will be able to access places at Abraham Guest in the future because:

- They will live closer to the new Abraham Guest site than pupils from other areas who may express a preference for the school
- The new Abraham Guest building (opening in 2009) will have a higher capacity than the current building and an admission number of 205 compared to 178 currently.

Projected first preference applications for future year 7 are as follows:

Intake year	PEMBEC	Abraham Guest	Shevington	Total	Total year 7 places available at Abraham Guest (205) and Shevington (178)
2009	73	158	105	336	383
2010	66	156	115	337	383
2011	68	165	113	346	383
2012	64	146	116	326	383

The projections are based on numbers of pupils currently in primary schools, parental preferences (3 year average) and trends of cross border applications.

Places for displaced pupils

There is sufficient capacity to accommodate pupils displaced from PEMBEC.

Because Abraham Guest and Shevington are named as receiving schools, Wigan Council, as admission authority, will guarantee a place at one of these schools for all pupils that want one in the two year groups that will be displaced at the end of Year 9.

With regard to admission numbers, there is a shortfall in the total number of places needed to accommodate the two year groups which will transfer at the end of Year 9 at the two receiving schools as follows:

Current Year 7 pupils transferring in 2010 5 places
 Year 7 in September 2008 transferring in 2011 42 places
 (These figures may reduce before the year of transfer)

Predicted pupil numbers at September 2008

School	PAN 2010/2011	Y7	Y8	Y9	Y 10	Y11	Total
Abraham Guest	205	178	191	176	193	178	916
Shevington	178	166	123	143	135	136	703
PEMBEC	0	81	74	100	91	135	481
Totals	383	425	388				

Key: Shaded year groups are those to transfer in 2010 (Year 8 in September 2008) and 2011 (Year 7 in September 2008)
 PAN is published admission number

Although there is a shortfall in places according to the published admission numbers, the net capacities of the Abraham Guest and Shevington school buildings are adequate for the total number of children who will be admitted and Wigan Council will ensure that the schools' accommodation is appropriate to deliver the curriculum if pupils are admitted beyond the admission numbers that applied in the relevant year group.

The net capacity assessment generates a minimum and maximum figure. If the total number of pupils expected to be admitted to a secondary school (that is the admission number multiplied by five year groups) falls between these two figures, the net capacity defaults to this number. However, the total number of pupils in a school can be increased to the maximum without causing overcrowding.

	Abraham Guest High (new building)	Shevington High
Minimum capacity	988	875
Maximum capacity	1098	973
PAN	205	178
PAN x five year groups	1025	890
Net capacity	1025	890

9. Where the school has a religious character, a statement about the impact of the proposed closure on the balance of denominational provision in the area and the impact on parental choice.

Not applicable

Current School Information

10. Information as to the numbers, age range, sex and special educational needs of pupils (distinguishing between boarding and day pupils) for whom provision is made at the school.

Number of pupils at PEMBEC (at June 2008)

	Year 7	Year 8	Year 9	Year 10	Year 11	Total
Number of pupils	77	102	91	136	142	548

There are 82 pupils due to start Year 7 at PEMBEC in September 2008

Age range of pupils

The age range of pupils is 11-16.

Sex of pupils

The school caters for boys and girls.

Special Educational Needs

PEMBEC does not have any specially resourced provision for special educational needs. There are 33 pupils with statements of special educational needs which name PEMBEC. The needs of these pupils could be met at any mainstream school.

There is no boarding provision at the school.

Displaced pupils

11. Details of the schools or further education colleges which pupils at the school for whom provision is to be discontinued will be offered places, including—

- (d) any interim arrangements;
- (e) where the school included provision that is recognised by the local education authority as reserved for children with special educational needs, the alternative provision to be made for pupils in the school's reserved provision; and
- (f) in the case of special schools, alternative provision made by local education authorities other than the authority which maintains the school.

Pupils currently in years 8, 9, 10 and 11 at PEMBEC will complete their education at the school.

Pupils who need to transfer from PEMBEC will be offered a place at one of either Abraham Guest High School, which will have relocated to Kershaw Street, Lamberhead Green, Wigan or Shevington High School, Shevington Lane, Shevington, Wigan according to parental preference and the admission criteria for the schools.

a) Interim arrangements

Pupils currently in year 7 at PEMBEC

These pupils will complete Key Stage 3 (end of Year 9) at the school and transfer to their alternative schools for Key Stage 4 in September 2010.

Pupils who will start year 7 at PEMBEC in September 2008

These pupils will complete Key Stage 3 (end of Year 9) at the school and transfer to their alternative schools for Key Stage 4 in September 2011

During the Autumn Term of the pupils' Year 9 year, parents will be asked to state their preferred alternative schools in order of preference. Places will be allocated according to the schools' published admission criteria at that time. Whilst Wigan Council is guaranteeing places at either Abraham Guest or Shevington High Schools the school offered may not be the parents' first preference if the school is oversubscribed. Places at Abraham Guest High School and Shevington High School will be held for the year 9 PEMBEC pupils until the start of their Year 10 year.

Some parents may want places at schools other than Abraham Guest or Shevington and they will be able to state these schools as preferences. However, Wigan Council will not be able to hold these places until the pupils are ready to transfer school. Wigan Council officers will discuss the options available to these parents on an individual basis.

The advantages of allocating places at the beginning of the pupil's Year 9 year are:

- it provides certainty about future education provision for those affected;
- the pupils can be introduced to their new school early and preparations made to settle them ready for their Year 10 year; and
- the pupils will be able to choose their Key Stage 4 option subjects at the same time as the other pupils in the receiving schools, meaning they will have an equal choice of the range of subjects on offer.

b) Not applicable

c) Not applicable

12. Details of any other measures proposed to be taken to increase the number of school or further education college places available in consequence of the proposed discontinuance.

Not applicable

Impact on the Community

13. A statement and supporting evidence about the impact on the community and any measures proposed to mitigate any adverse impact.

Abraham Guest is relocating to just over half a mile away from PEMBEC, so this will be the school for the community. Abraham Guest is committed to providing for the wider community.

The new building will have a public library and the school will continue to offer a wide range of adult education and other courses and activities to residents.

Other services to the community will be available at Westfield Community Primary School (details are given in section 14).

It is recognised that the PEMBEC building does have some excellent facilities and the future of these facilities will need to be considered if the proposal to close the school proceeds.

14. Details of extended services the school offered and what it is proposed for these services once the school has discontinued.

PEMBEC offers children, parents and members of the local community access to a range of services as part of the full service extended school model. These services include:

- parenting support;
- breakfast clubs;
- study support activities
- family/adult learning opportunities; and teenage pregnancy/contraception advice and support.

Access to these services will continue as part of the core offer of service provision that must be available from or through every primary and secondary school in Wigan.

Westfield Community Primary School, which serves the same area, is an extended service school that offers:

- parenting support
- literacy and numeracy services
- family learning
- Bookstart
- Job Centre plus
- parent and toddler sessions; and
- Citizen's Advice.

In the case of some specific services, for example the Teenage Pregnancy/Contraception Advice and Support Service, there are currently new models of delivery are being explored.

The relocation of Abraham Guest High School will enable adult and family learning opportunities to be delivered close to the PEMBEC local community.

Travel

15. Details of length and journeys to alternative provision.

The walking distances from the PEMBEC site to the alternative schools are:

- Abraham Guest High School: new site 1.32 miles, current site 1.79 miles
- Shevington High School: 6.33 miles

Currently school buses run via Enfield Street and Ormskirk Road in Pemberton to Abraham Guest High School.

Currently there are no return buses to Shevington High School from the Pemberton area as there has been no demand. There are return school buses from the Beech Hill area to Shevington High School. A number of pupils who currently attend PEMBEC live in the Beech Hill area.

16. The proposed arrangements for travel of displaced pupils to other schools including how they will help to work against increased car use.

For most of the pupils that access Abraham Guest High School there will be little difference in the amount of travelling. It is considered that, in future years, children who live in the PEMBEC area will be able to access places at Abraham Guest High School.

Pupils will be able to walk from the PEMBEC local area to the new Abraham Guest High School site. The new Abraham Guest School will be complete in 2009 which is the first year there will be no intake into PEMBEC. The first transfer of pupils attending PEMBEC to alternative schools will be in 2010.

Wigan Council will liaise with the travel companies to ensure that appropriate bus capacity and routes are available when the result of the proposal and numbers and locations of pupils who will be attending the alternative schools are known.

Wigan Council will refund travelling expenses for secondary pupils who must travel more than three miles their nearest suitable school. This is measured by the shortest walking route.

From 1 September 2008, a child aged 11 to 16 who is entitled to free school meals or whose parents or guardians are entitled to the maximum level of Working Tax Credit will be entitled to free transport to:

- any one of the three nearest suitable schools, where the distance travelled is between two and six miles; or
- the nearest school they have chosen because of their religion or belief, where this is between two and fifteen miles away.

It is therefore considered that car use will be minimised because the majority of pupils will be able to walk to school and school buses will serve those living further away.

Related Proposals.

17. A statement as to whether in the opinion of the local education authority or governing body, the proposals are related to any other proposals which may have been, are, or are about to be published.

The proposals are not related to any other proposals which have been or are about to be published.

Rural Primary Schools

18. Where proposals relate to a rural primary school designated as such by an order made for the purposes of section 15 of the EIA 2006, a statement that the local education authority or the governing body (as the case may be) considered—

- (g) the likely effect of discontinuance of the school on the local community;
- (h) the availability, and likely cost to the local education authority, of transport to other schools;
- (i) any increase in the use of motor vehicles which is likely to result from the discontinuance of the school, and the likely effects of any such increase; and
- (j) any alternatives to the discontinuance of the school,

as required by section 15(4) of the EIA 2006.

Not applicable

Maintained nursery schools

19. Where proposals relate to the discontinuance of a maintained nursery school, a statement setting out—

- (k) the consideration that has been given to developing the school into a children's centre and the grounds for not doing so;
- (l) the local education authority's assessment of the quality and quantity of the alternative provision compared to the school proposed to be discontinued and the proposed arrangements to ensure the expertise and specialism continues to be available; and
- (m) the accessibility and convenience of replacement provision for local parents.

Not applicable

Special educational provision

20. Where existing provision for pupils with special educational needs is being discontinued, a statement as to how the local education authority or the governing body believes the proposal is likely to lead to improvements in the standard, quality and/or range of the educational provision for these children.

Not applicable

Appendix 1

List of persons and parties consulted

Organisation	Distribution
PEMBEC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governors • Parents of pupils attending the school • Parents of Year 6 pupils who had expressed a preference for PEMBEC for Year 7 • Staff at the school • Community groups using the school premises
Abraham Guest High School Shevington High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governors • Parents of pupils attending the schools • Staff at the schools
Local Primary Schools from which the majority of pupils transfer to PEMBEC: Marsh Green Primary School Westfield Community Primary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governors • Parents of pupils attending the schools • Staff at the schools
Local primary schools from which some pupils occasionally transfer to PEMBEC: Beech Hill Community Primary School Orrell Lamberhead Green Community Primary School St Cuthbert's Catholic Primary School St Mark's C E Primary School St John's C E Primary School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governors • Parents of pupils attending the schools • Staff at the schools
Headteachers of all Wigan Secondary Schools	
Elected Members	
Diocesan Authorities	
Trade Unions and Professional Associations	
MP for the area	
The Learning and Skills Council	

Consultation on the proposal to close PEMBEC

Public Meeting

Held on Thursday 31 January 2008 at PEMBEC

The meeting was attended by approximately 60 parents, representatives of the school affected and members of the public.

LA Representatives

Nick Hudson	Director Children and Young People's Services (CYPS)
Cllr Brian Wilson	Champion for Children and Young People
Steve Robertson	Assistant Director CYPS
Stuart Bellerby	Advisor CYPS
Lynn Mappin	Principal Officer CYPS
Chris Parry	Principal Officer CYPS

Introduction

Nick Hudson introduced himself and the other local authority representatives. He explained that:

- Steve Robertson will do a presentation based on the consultation document (made available to people who wanted them)
- this will be followed by questions and answers
- the aim is to finish at 8.30pm
- all should take advantage of this meeting as it is a consultation. Notes will be taken which will be included with the responses to the consultation. There is also response form at back of consultation document.

Introduction

Steve Robertson gave the background to the proposal. The authority has a responsibility to identify where schools are needed and the quality and suitability of the accommodation.

There has been an ongoing review of secondary education and the conclusion is that:

- there are too many places in the secondary sector; and
- the places do not match where the demand is.

The reasons we must take action

- There has been considerable demographic change.
- The decline in number of pupils, which is a nationwide issue, resulting in an increased number of surplus places.
- There is a real question of the long term viability of some schools.
- Falling pupil numbers mean schools have fewer resources as they are funded on the number of pupils on roll.
- We need to reflect parental preferences. Some schools are oversubscribed and some are significantly undersubscribed.
- There have also been changes to curriculum and we need to offer a wider range of provision and a mix of vocational and academic courses.

- We need to ensure we have a good foundation for Building Schools for the Future (BSF) because there will be a significant investment into buildings (over £250 million). We need to spend wisely and to get the provision right.

Secondary School numbers

- There has been a massive, accelerating decline in pupil numbers. The children we are talking about have already been born so the predictions are accurate.
- This fall not evenly spread across schools because of parental preferences. The impact is more significant at schools with less parental preferences.
- Projections show the gap between admission numbers and projected intake will be greatest at a few schools with PEMBEC feeling the greatest impact.
- The projected pupil numbers for PEMBEC show a fall from around 600 to around 300 pupils. It could be said that this would mean more individual attention for pupils but it is impossible to sustain school of 300 because there are fewer resources. There would be less teachers and higher proportion of the school's budget would have to be spent on buildings.

Surplus places

- PEMBEC has thirty-five per cent surplus places now.
- It is projected that it will be less than half full by 2013-14.
- We must advise Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) what we plan to do if the surplus at any school is greater than twenty-five per cent.
- There are falling numbers across the Borough. Parental preferences mean that there will be an increasing surplus so it is questionable whether PEMBEC would be able to sustain its current high standards.
- There is a vicious circle of decline as preferences fall, resources decrease, leading to preferences declining further creating more surplus.

The proposal

- The proposal is for a managed, phased closure of PEMBEC starting in 2009 when there would be no intake.
- All current pupils will continue here to the end of their current key stage.
- Current year 8 to year 11 pupils would therefore continue at this school until they leave at the end of year 11.
- The current year 7 would stay to the end of year 9 and then move to another school
- Next year's year 7 will stay until the end of year 9 and then move to another school.
- There are sufficient places at Abraham Guest and Shevington to accommodate the pupils who will need to move and future pupils.

Benefits of the proposal

- It is better to plan and manage closure than allow the school to close by default as it becomes unsustainable.
- We want to ensure that expertise and resources at the school are retained to benefit the community.
- Educational provision in the area would be stabilised.
- The area would benefit from the state of the art school being built for Abraham Guest.

Alternative schools

- The alternative schools for pupils are Abraham Guest and Shevington.
- We will work to ensure suitable transport.

The proposed timetable

- This is the informal stage of the consultation which continues until the middle of March. All the comments made tonight will be recorded as part of the consultation responses. People can also respond on the forms at the end of the consultation document.
- We will then report to Cabinet in June and elected members will decide if they want to progress to the next stage. They could decide to progress to the formal stage of consultation, to do nothing or to consult on a new option.
- If it is decided to progress to the formal stage, statutory notices will be published
- The final decision will be made in August or September 2008
- There would then be a 12 month planning period before the start of the closure process in 2009.

Map of the area

- The map showing where pupils live demonstrates that the catchments for PEMBEC and Abraham Guest are very similar. A lot of people from this area already choose Abraham Guest. Also Abraham Guest building is moving closer to this community.
- Significant numbers of pupils living in the Beech Hill area already go to Shevington.
- There are not vast numbers of surplus at the alternative schools at the moment. However, admission arrangements are based on geography. Children living in the immediate area of the schools will get in.

Nick Hudson then invited questions and comments

Comment

It sounds like they have already made their minds up. They are already moving Abraham Guest to be closer to PEMBEC. It is a done deal.

Response

Abraham Guest is not moving as result of PEMBEC. We received government one-school pathfinder money to build Abraham Guest but there was not room to rebuild it on the old site. The two things are not linked but we recognise that that might be the perception.

Comment

The Government talk about education, education, education. Kids need smaller classes and groups. My daughter couldn't get into St John Fisher although it is near to home because she was not in the catchment area. She is now at PEMBEC and doing great.

The kids don't matter. If you send them to another school like Shevington the classes are too big. Individual children don't get help there. The bus companies need sorting out. This school has been bad-mouthed for years. The kids from here will drop through the net in a bigger school.

We need to get more classrooms like it was promised. Get the parents to put money in. Why can't the parents run the school?

Comment

This is a good school. Has anyone thought of the kids?

Comment

I question the reliability of the consultation document and the presentation. In section 3.1.8 it says that the recent OFSTED inspection for PEMBEC was 'satisfactory' and Abraham Guest and Shevington were 'good'. When were the OFSTED reports on Abraham guest and Shevington produced?

Response

The reports were done under a different inspection regime.

Question

Why not say that in the presentation?

Response

It is factually correct.

Comment

Shevington and Abraham Guest were inspected in 2004 under the 1991 Act. PEMBEC was inspected in 2007 under the Schools Act 2005. In 2004 PEMBEC was also classed as a 'good' school. The document is factually incorrect and the presentation was incorrect.

Comment

I am ward councillor Paul Prescott. In section 2.2 of the document you refer to pupils being guaranteed place at Abraham Guest or Shevington. Is this based on where they live?

Response

Yes, plus parental preference.

Comment

Parents will not want to travel.

Comment

A letter has been sent to parents at Abraham Guest saying the impact on the school will be limited because they are full in most years. How will you give parents their preference?

Response

The guarantee isn't for whichever you apply for.

Comment

People here live on Worsley Hall, Norley Hall and Marsh Green. Why would they want to go to Shevington?

Response

We are focusing where children would normally go in the future - people from this area will get into Abraham Guest. The transfer of year 9 is different.

Comment

It is first come, first served then?

Response

All applicants will be considered at the same time.

Comment

That is not what the letter says. How will you deal with this problem?

Response

We need to separate out pupils in year 7 at PEMBEC who are guaranteed a place at Shevington or the expanded Abraham Guest from children who are currently in the primary sector. When they are applying for secondary places in future the admission arrangements will mean they will usually get in at Abraham Guest.

Comment

I won't get the answer I want.

Comment

My son is due to start September. You are saying he will start here then have to move after two years. My daughter left here two years ago with outstanding results but when we first moved here from the South she dropped grades because of the disruption and because different schools teach differently. We will also have to pay for another uniform.

Comment

I enquired and was just told that we have to buy a uniform every year anyway. That is not the answer. Who will pick the children up if they are ill? Who will provide financial assistance for uniforms and transport?

Comment

I'm a pensioner and I can't get any help with uniform.

Question

The children should stay in the area. The Children's Plan states that funds should go to deprived areas. Abraham Guest is not in a deprived area whereas the catchment for PEMBEC is Norley Hall, Marsh Green and Worsley Hall. How will the council

address this?

PEMBEC works for twelve months with schools on the transition from primary to secondary. There is also the vocational curriculum which Abraham Guest children come here to access. We also have groups of parents who support other parents. All this is in the Children's Plan. How will you do this at other schools?

Response

There are a few issues there. It will be a managed closure and we will work with schools and families and children affected. We hope to identify any difficulties before the move and work with the new school on option choices, integrating children, identifying friendship groups and so on. It is different from moving one child half way through their education. We don't deny that there is good practice and expertise here and we want to build on that and use it to enhance provision elsewhere.

Question

How can you compare OFSTED reports when we don't do the same curriculum?

Response

There is no suggestion this school is worse than Abraham Guest or Shevington. We are saying that the alternative provision is equally good but there are longer term viability issues here.

Comment

I am a former councillor. In all my political career I have never seen a more biased report on a school closure. You are saying we can't provide high standards. A previous headteacher raised standards with the support of community. A number of schools have the same numbers as PEMBEC. There are a few schools with less than six hundred pupils. Why are they not being closed? Rose Bridge, Hesketh Fletcher and Shevington are examples.

You need to justify the expenditure for the new Abraham Guest replacement school. That is why you are doing this. They call this consultation - it will fall on deaf ears. There is no help for people who can't afford new school uniforms. My grandson comes to this school because he couldn't go to St John Fisher. He is in year 10 and other pupils come here to use the vocational facilities.

The community must become involved. It is unbelievable that we should lose this school. We have not had the report from the staff and governors' meeting that was held earlier. Was this meeting held in secret? Lots of parents won't come as they believe it is a done deal.

Response (governors)

We had a meeting with the governors earlier which lasted from 5.30 p.m. to 6.50 p.m. We don't know the way forward and wanted to see what parents thought but there are many empty chairs. We have seen standards and the number of NVQs we offer rise over the years but what keeps school alive is children coming. We agree about the quality of education here. The community must fight for their children. It is no use the governors fighting on their own. We need to employ a range of staff to provide quality education and we need to bring in enough children. Parents must

vote with their feet.

Comment

I don't want this school to close. All the teachers are fab.

Question

You say it is a proposal but it sounds like you have already made the decision. Is falling numbers the main reason? Is there any point in us fighting? Will the school close anyway if numbers fall?

Response

It is not a done deal. If it were a done deal there would be no point in any of us being here.

Question

Why are you closing PEMBEC? Why not close Abraham Guest instead? The staff here have the skills to teach in a deprived area. This is a newer site than Abraham Guest. You will make millions from selling the Abraham Guest site. Have you ever considered capping the numbers at other schools so that numbers are equally split between the twenty schools?

Response

It comes down to parental preference. The reality is that twice as many people are opting to go to Abraham Guest as here. The Government would not allow us to deny parental preference.

Comment

But our parental preference is for our kids to come here. I came to Wigan a few years ago and I chose this area because of the brand new primary school and this school. One of my children started in PEMBEC in year 11. We came from Telford which had a different curriculum but she passed with A's and A*s. Eight secondary schools are jam-packed and are not getting the same results as here. We want our kids here in the community.

Comment

How can you say people will have parental choice? Abraham Guest say they have no places. Will you pay for the children to go to Shevington on the bus? If you take the school away it will tear the heart out of the community.

Comment

I came to this school but my siblings went to St Peter's. My brothers don't have permanent jobs but I am at university doing teacher training. The Abraham Guest classrooms are too small with too many kids. This school helps people to stay on the rails. It is a real family here.

Comment

I have worked here, I am a parent and have been a governor. If the school closes, standards will go down. Will the children get the same push anywhere else. Abraham Guest is badly placed on the main road. The new site is no better. PEMBEC is in a central position between Upholland High, St Peter's and The Deanery. Why not ask parents if they want any other schools. They don't want Abraham Guest.

Comment

Any problems in this school get sorted immediately. Abraham Guest doesn't solve problems such as bullying. Did you say that getting the money depends on how many schools you knock down?

Response

We must demonstrate a match between the numbers of places and children.

Comment

My son has behaviour difficulties and goes to a special school. When he was here he should have been excluded but the teachers kept him for one and a half years. Another school wouldn't have done this. I have attended parenting courses here which the school sent me on. Another school wouldn't have done this. This school has better relationship with parents than any other.

Comment

Do you think that the pupils here now will do less well in their GCSEs? The teachers will leave because the school is closing and the children will lose enthusiasm. A big school won't give what we get here.

Comment

My son went to Abraham Guest. He was bullied there but it was brushed under the carpet by the school. After one incident I was told by Abraham Guest that there were too many children to look for one child's bag. What about the emotional affects of transferring children. Why have you let the year 7 intake in 2008 go ahead knowing you will be closing?

Comment

My son struggled at first but he is now in year 8 and has come on very well. My older children also came here and have good jobs. I am proud of this school.

Comment

I can't put into words how much they do at this school. They chase up if your child is not in school. There is a wealth of support here. Closure would be unfair to the staff, children and parents.

Comment

The full council were told what wonderful 14-19 facilities this school has. The consultation document doesn't say this though – it is a pack of lies. Why has Abraham Guest gone for foundation status? The governors will choose who will go to the school. What will happen to the kids leaving here?

Comment

The OFSTED report on Shevington says that a large proportion of the pupils expressed concern about behaviour and bullying and also verbal abuse and unfair treatment by teachers. You expect people to send their children to Shevington when they got a report like this?

Comment

My son has dyslexia and has improved so much. I live in Norley Hall and children from Abraham Guest congregate at the back of my house in the evening. They use very bad language. I don't want my children mixing with them. You also expect us to send our children to Shevington when they got that report.

Comment

I don't want this school to close, it's lovely.

Comment

As a governor, I am really proud of where school has moved to in the past years. I am very proud of the vocational centre which is nationally recognised as an example of good practice. Your graph shows six schools with students below the average number. If any have more than twenty-five per cent surplus you must do something. What about the other five?

Comment

Did you prepare for this meeting?

Comment

Why don't you close Shevington?

Comment

Are you frightened of the media being here to hear parents? You are good at putting 'PEMBEC closing' in the press but you have not publicised this meeting.

Comment

Do any of the other five schools have better value-added than ours?

Response

No

Comment

I have provided childcare here for more than twenty years and have run an after school class here for more than eight years. Children come to it from Hope, Montrose and everywhere else. What is going to happen to these children? Where else in the Borough can this service for children with learning difficulties be provided?

Comment

There are a lot of good people in this school and it has a good inclusion policy. Where are the Hope children going to go?

Comment

I want to ask about the after school club. My sister has severe learning difficulties and needs after school care because our parents work. What will happen to others who come here, not just the pupils at the school?

Comment

My son is in year 7 and I have said I will move him at the end of the year. I was advised not to move him as it is not good for his education. I also have a year 6 child and was told that if I wanted to change my preference for them my application would be classed as late because it is after the closing date. You knew about what was going to happen before the closing date.

Comment

That's what a lot of parents have already done.

Comment

The closure was in the paper eighteen months ago.

Question

Why was it in the paper before the staff were told?

Response

Unfortunately it happened during the half term holiday

Question

Why are you stopping the intake in 2009?

Response

This will only happen if the decision is to proceed with closure. The only decision that has been made is to go to informal consultation.

Comments (headteacher)

At the meetings with governors and teachers earlier the authority were told not to close the school as it is at heart of community. It is more than bricks and mortar. We also said the most important thing is what parents say. I feel very emotional about the

things that have been said. Thanks on behalf of the staff and governors.

The decision has not been taken. This meeting is part of the process of consultation. It is very important that you continue to express your feelings and encourage your neighbours to do the same. It is a democratic process and the councillors must listen. What you say does matter.

Comment

The people around here don't worry about their children when they are at this school. They know that they are safe and looked after. We want it to stay open.

Comment

The councillors for Pemberton ward will give full support to the school staying open. It deserves to be here.

Comment

The Tenants' Association is behind the councillors to keep school open.

Nick Hudson

I agree that this has been a very impassioned evening. Thank you all for coming and expressing your views. We have heard very clearly what those views are and everything has been recorded. You need to get your written responses to the consultation in. If you want to, you can take these into school they will make sure they get to us.

This is a genuine consultation and we need to hear from everyone concerned.

Question

Will the minutes be available to the public?

Response

Yes, they will be sent to school.

The meeting closed at 8.35 p.m.

Consultation on the proposal to close PEMBEC

Meeting with staff

Held on Thursday 31 January 2008 at 4.00pm at PEMBEC

The meeting was attended by approximately 60 staff

LA Representatives

Nick Hudson	Director CYPS
Cllr Brian Wilson	Champion for Children and Young People
Steve Robertson	Assistant Director CYPS
Stuart Bellerby	Advisor CYPS
Lynn Mappin	Principal Officer CYPS
Chris Parry	Principal Officer CYPS

Introduction

Nick Hudson (chair) thanked the staff for attending and introduced himself and the other local authority representatives. He explained that:

- we are here to discuss proposal to close PEMBEC.
- Steve Robertson will do a presentation.
- this will be followed by questions and answers

Presentation

Steve Robertson gave a presentation on the proposals as follows:

Background

- There has been an ongoing review of secondary school provision over several years.
- A number of options have been considered.
- The situation has accelerated due to Building Schools for the Future (BSF). This is more than replacing new for old. It is about transformation and the opportunity to replace old building stock and is a once in a lifetime opportunity.
- We need to ensure we have the right number of schools in the right places and that they are fit for twenty-first century education.

Reason for urgent action

- Demographic change - at one time we did have the right number of schools and places but there have been significant changes since the current schools were established.
- A dramatic reduction in the number of primary age pupils. The same thing is happening throughout the country.
- These changes lead to an increase in surplus places.
- We must pay for heating and lighting for buildings with no pupils so a bigger proportion of the school budget has to be spent on this rather than educating pupils.

- The viability of a number of schools in the Borough questionable because their budgets are declining and they will be unable to offer all options (especially at 14-19).
- We need schools where the pupils and parents are.
- We need the correct infrastructure for the long term before we embark on capital investment (£280 million). We must invest wisely and convince the DCSF that we are doing so.

Secondary numbers over the coming years

- There has been a dramatic decline – numbers starting year 7 have fallen from 4000 to around 3400.
- The surplus places are not evenly spread across all schools.
- Projections show that eleven schools will still be more or less full in 2017-18. However the gap between these and other schools widens dramatically with PEMBEC being the worst.
- By 2013-14 the PEMBEC school population will be 300. It is difficult to maintain a school at this level because of the budget which is based on pupils, the fixed costs and the effect on the curriculum.

Why propose to close PEMBEC?

- The context of falling rolls across the borough – the children are not there. This is worse at PEMBEC because of parental preference.
- A significant proportion of parents in the area do not choose this school.
- There are concerns about viability.
- A slow decline and closure is not good for the pupils. A planned, managed closure is better.
- PEMBEC currently has 35% surplus, by 2013/14 this will be 64%
- The Government expect us to take action if any school has over 25% surplus.
- Our BSF plans would be thrown out by the Government if we proposed to maintain a school of this size.

The proposal

- To close PEMBEC on phased basis starting in 2009 and closing in 2011.
- The current years 8 to 11 would stay until closure.
- The current year 7 would move at the end of key stage 3.
- Next year's year7 would move at the end of their key stage 3.
- These proposals would minimise the impact on current and next year's children. It is never an easy process but is better if managed appropriately.
- Pupils applying for admission in 2010-2011 can all be accommodated at Abraham Guest and Shevington. There may be a slight increase in Shevington's admission number from 178 to 190.
- There is a vicious circle: more money spent on premises leads to less spend on staff and resources which impacts on standards and reduces parental preferences leading to a further decline in numbers and so on.
- Abraham Guest will have a new building and this will exacerbate this vicious circle.
- Parental preferences change relatively quickly downwards but relatively slowly upwards.

Why make this proposal?

- A managed closure is better than downward spiral.
- We can provide a better match of the number of pupils and places in the area.

- A large proportion of pupils will access state of the art facilities at Abraham Guest.
- Abraham Guest and Shevington provide a good standard of education.
- Places are guaranteed at Abraham Guest and Shevington.
- Pupils will be able to choose their options at the same time as everyone else.
- We will ensure appropriate transport by liaising with the bus companies.

The proposed timetable for consultation

- There is a response questionnaire in the consultation document.
- The notes of these meetings and a summary of responses will be presented to elected members when they are making their decision. This will be in June 2008.
- If the elected members agree the proposal, there will be a further 6 week statutory notice period.
- Then final decision will be made by Cabinet in Autumn 2008.
- If closure is agreed, we will work with the school to manage the transition over a two to three year period. This will include meetings with staff.

Map with details of where pupils live

- Abraham Guest and PEMBEC serve broadly the same community.
- There is currently an overlap as children from the Beech Hill area attend PEMBEC and Shevington.
- The children who currently go to Abraham Guest from further afield will probably go to schools nearer home in future.

End of presentation

Nick Hudson

I appreciate that this is a difficult proposal for the school community. I encourage you to make use of this meeting to ask questions and give your views and also to submit written comments.

Questions and comments.

Question

The map shows a cohort of children going to Abraham Guest but you made a point previously that they probably won't all get in. They will have to travel further. Where is Abraham Guest on surplus places?

Response

There are relatively few surplus places at present at Abraham Guest. There are more at Shevington. Looking at it in a different way, those who will get places at Abraham Guest are those in the area of Abraham Guest.

Question

What about the admission criteria?

Response

These are usually based on geographic distance.

Question

How do you know what preferences will be in five years time?

Response

We predict on basis of historic patterns.

Comment

They were rising but are low now because of the media cover

Response

Parents made their preferences before closure was announced.

Comment

There were lots of headlines about the school closing due to Abraham Guest. Before that we had increasing intakes.

Response

We don't use just one year's figures.

Comment

I want to comment on a number of overlapping issues:

- Planning – all the secondary headteachers and the director are meeting to plan to 2020. This started two weeks ago. Nothing happened last year. This proposal came out prior to these meetings. It is not part of the overall planning process.
- Schools are being seen as isolated units in this. Co-operation and collaboration have not been taken into account.
- There are courses available here that are not on offer elsewhere (hairdressing, building etc). Abraham Guest and Shevington do not offer these vocational courses.
- It is very simplistic and neat what is happening here. It is not being looked at strategically.

Response

We don't argue with this but there is a short-term and a long-term issue. There is also an issue of timing in the context of BSF and possibly bringing forward funding. From an analysis of the figures PEMBEC won't be around in 2013 to be part of the capital investment. It is not in anyone's interest to keep the school open if it is not viable in the long term.

We don't want re-organisation to result in less opportunity and because of falling rolls opportunities would decline at PEMBEC. We would want to work with you to incorporate the expertise and facilities into the area in another way.

Comment

The way you are going ahead with planning the school will not be here in 2011. We need to look at the transition before we lose the people and expertise.

Response

This is why we want managed, phased process. Although we don't want to pre-empt the outcome of consultation it is better to work towards transition than to sit around waiting for things to happen.

Question

I am concerned at the way you are predicting numbers and parental choice as if we were in a time-warp. It will not remain static.

Comment

All schools are moving on.

Question

I have no opposition to progress. Will Abraham Guest be same thing rebuilt or be different? What is "state of the art"?

Response

It should be a very different school. We are re-thinking the way education is delivered – the Faraday Project is an example. It is about delivering the curriculum in very different ways, looking at different learning styles and personalisation. We are taking a fundamental look at how the curriculum delivered and are questioning 14 – 19 provision at all schools.

Comment

Everything you said is happening here.

Question

Why is the proposal to close PEMBEC and not merge with Abraham Guest?

Response

It was considered but it doesn't solve anything. With pupil numbers as they are, it would have been a take over. The pupils are not there for two schools.

Comment

You have done it in primary

Response

We may have to consider it as a result of the consultation exercise.

Question

Has a proposal like this ever been rejected by the elected members?

Response

It has happened in other local authorities.

Only one secondary school has closed in Wigan in the last fifteen to sixteen years and the governors proposed this.

Elected members have changed proposals for primary schools. For example, Westfield should have been Marsh Green and Scot Lane but it was changed to Scot Lane and Pemberton due to members. Hindley J&I is another example.

Question

Why can't you do the same for Abraham Guest and PEMBEC as Westfield?

Question

Do you take immigration into account in population projections?

Response

No, because this has not been an issue in Wigan. We use local birth rates and factor in known housing. Immigration is totally unpredictable.

Comment

I have an issue with that. It appears the immigrant population is on the way up.

Response

It will only be is only a problem if there is a massive increase in one area. There is still spare capacity in the Borough as a whole. In the absence of empty houses we don't get lots of immigration in one area,

Comment

You are comparing Abraham Guest and Shevington with PEMBEC but the criteria for Ofsted have changed since Abraham Guest and Shevington were inspected. At our previous inspection under the same criteria as Shevington and Abraham Guest we were classed as 'good' the same as them.

Response

We're not saying we're offering something better, just something as good.

Comment

I feel its reads [in the consultation document] that PEMBEC's OFTED is satisfactory and Shevington's is good.

Question

What about Mere Oaks, that closed and it was a secondary school?

Response

Mere Oaks was a special school. I was meaning mainstream secondary schools not special schools.

Comment

The council does know immigration in future and asylum seekers. There are three areas of Wigan – Pemberton, Leigh and Whelley – where there are likely to be hundreds of asylum seekers and immigrants coming in.

Response

The council was asked to take these asylum seekers but pulled out of the contract eighteen months ago and the houses returned. Those asylum seekers moved elsewhere.

Comment

Over the last two years immigration and asylum seeker numbers at this school have doubled.

Response

The number of asylum seekers is reducing but there has been increase in economic migrants.

Comment

They all have to go to school.

Response

If we were cutting the number of places to the bone, there would be a problem. We have 21,000 places and the number of pupils is predicted to go down to 17,500. We are only taking out 900-1000 places so we are still over in the Borough.

Comment

The Observer article in November implied the council was applying for grants to take immigrants.

Comment

About the collaboration between PEMBEC and other schools - our 14-19 premises are important. Many other secondary schools use our facilities, so closure would

also impact on children from other schools.

Response

That's why we talked about retaining expertise.

Question

Do you have any proposals for the site?

Response

There are no proposals to sell off or build on the playing fields. We don't want to pre-empt the decision.

Comment (headteacher)

I have two points to make:

- You talk about working with the school, planning, stability and painless management. I have experienced none of this since I've been here. It is therefore very difficult to have confidence that the process will be managed carefully and in a thought out manner. It has been handled in unfortunate manner but we do want to move forward together.
- I'm very concerned that you're looking at this in terms of numbers. I have genuine concerns whether children will actually go anywhere else. We have five staff members who go out to families to ensure attendance.

Question

What intentions do you have about staff?

Response

We are aware of the implications for staff. Will work together and on individual basis on where people will fit in. We will be able to accommodate most aspirations. Human Resources are experienced in this.

Question

Will this start when the numbers start to fall?

Response

There will be impacts when the budget reduces in retaining key staff but we may be able to make adjustments to finances. We will give advice about early retirement, redeployment etc. Staffing will reduce as numbers fall but not as dramatically as if numbers just fell without a managed process.

Question

I can't believe the Council haven't planned ahead. What will they do with the building and land?

Response

We want to work with school, the LSC and neighbouring schools on what will happen to the site. We have until 2011 to make these decisions. We couldn't start the discussion until the proposal was made. There could be a winning opportunity for the community.

Comment

About the predicted intake - I disagree that parental preference goes down quickly and up slowly. This has not been my experience. Last night we were discussing our current Y11 and we should get best results ever. We are not being given a chance to improve further.

Question

If we are all champions of young people does it make sense to take children away from a caring environment where they know the members of staff? Two thirds of our pupils take vocational courses. Does it make sense to move them to schools where there are very few vocational courses? Does it make sense to move children from a school that is in the top five per cent in the country for value-added to a school with less value-added? This is a Labour council and this is one of the poorest areas in the country.

Comment

It is strange to me that one third of children at Marsh Green will end up going to Shevington. This will become a self-fulfilling prophesy now that you have published these proposals. The Marsh Green children won't get into Abraham Guest on straight line distance. Why no merger? - because Cabinet felt getting Abraham Guest up and running for 2009 was more important.

We could have merged and given our vocational expertise to Abraham Guest. This should have happened before it hit the streets and it became difficult to turn back. We could all have worked together for the benefit of the community.

Question

How can we have confidence if the name of the school is wrong on your map?

Question

How can you tell a child, who is predicted Ds and Es on FFT but who will get Bs and Cs at this school, that it is fair to send them to Abraham Guest where they will get Ds and Es as predicted? What is their CVA?

Comment

The children are what matters and they have been left out of this. I strongly believe that this is not right for children in these wards. I know it could be difficult to organise but who is talking to the pupils? They have been let down badly. You should talk to the year 7s at least.

Response

We do not question the value-added at this school and the impact on children and young people. However, there comes a point when there is a conflict between the

value of an individual school and the overall planning across the system as a whole. We do have an issue with surplus places across Borough and in this part of Borough.

We acknowledge that PEMBEC adds value but there are surplus places and we must do something.

Comment

I have the feeling that this is the most convenient school to close due to demographics. These kids won't go to school and will fall out of the system. There will be problems in five or ten years

Comment

It will impact on Abraham Guest and Shevington. Their results will fall. You are not taking that into account.

Comment

The school caters for a lot of special educational needs. Have you taken into account the effect on the wider community.

Comment

The Council has done nothing to give the staff confidence. This was engineered eighteen months ago. It has been very badly handled. The staff haven't had apology about what happened in the press.

Response

We can't tell the press what to put in paper.

Comment

I am incredulous at this proposal. The school has phenomenal value-added but for eighteen months there has been a drip, drip to the press about closure. I can't understand why, in a Labour Authority, someone is dripping to the press about a school that is doing well for its pupils.

You should look why the school is succeeding and try to spread its good practice elsewhere. Moving these pupils elsewhere will not help and children who could have succeeded won't.

The staff have not been asking about their jobs because they are more concerned that this is not right for the children.

Comment

Twenty-six years ago this was a visionary authority but it is now just cost cutting and has no vision for primary or secondary schools.

I have been through two re-organizations before and we knew what was going on.

The children who leave here are well educated and go onto further education or employment. We are working hard to make citizens for the twenty-first century.

You seem to have made a decision already. Pemberton will miss this school.

The meeting ended at 5.30pm

Consultation on the proposal to close PEMBEC

Notes of the meeting for governors

Held on Thursday 31 January 2008 at 5.30 pm at PEMBEC

The meeting was attended by 8 Governors

Apologies Mark Morris
 Cllr Jeanette Prescott
 Heather Bush

LA Representatives

Nick Hudson	Director CYPS
Cllr Brian Wilson	Champion for Children and Young People
Steve Robertson	Assistant Director CYPS
Stuart Bellerby	Advisor CYPS
Lynn Mappin	Principal Officer CYPS
Chris Parry	Principal Officer CYPS

There was no presentation at the Governors' request. Instead they requested an open discussion which took place as follows:

Governor

Why has no merger of any kind been discussed? How can we open such a discussion and try to find a way forward to maintain CVA and local 14 to 19 options, such as vocational studies, for children in the area? We realise it is a lot to ask to change the proposal now but we want to explore it.

Response

The reason this is not on the agenda is that to merge two schools and create a new school we now have to open up who will run the school to competition. We could have done it easily five years ago but now the legislation has changed.

Governor

What about a total take over by another school?

Response

Federation is alive and active in schools working together.

Governor

There has been significant investment for vocational courses here. We are not worried about semantics. The opportunity to offer the vocational facilities here to other schools deserves exploring. There will be a problem if our pupils have to get buses to access other schools. We should consider super output areas and put community provision in the right place.

Response

In the spirit of problem-solving – can we explain why are people travelling off the estate to other schools?

Governor

Five years ago we were told that we had four schools too many. We needed a plan for the whole Borough. Then St Thomas More closed unexpectedly. It could happen again. Why is there no plan?

Response

We are where we are now.

Governor

We just seem to be hearing a series of apologies. This was announced on the Tuesday of half term in The Observer. The governors were not informed. It is very worrying that the Council works in this way.

Governor

Why do people go to schools off estate? They may have moved here from elsewhere or want a church school.

Governor

When things started to be in the press about St Thomas More PEMBEC was also mentioned. Parents were concerned.

Governor

What is the breakdown of Roman Catholic and Church of England children in this area?

Governor

We agree that we have a small catchment but the CVA demonstrates that we can move youngsters from these super output areas forward. It would be more difficult in another school as they will get lost in the larger numbers. Being practical, where will they fit in? The pupils from Westfield who come here are used to working together. They will lose the comfort of this close connection.

Governor

Last year around seventy per cent of Westfield pupils went to PEMBEC. The transition arrangements are great. The two schools work together with families on attendance and so on. No other secondary school makes this effort to work with Westfield.

Governor

I think it is because if PEMBEC didn't close you would struggle to get the money to build Abraham Guest.

Response

We have already got the money to build Abraham Guest as a secondary pathfinder. It has nothing to do with PEMBEC and is not reliant on a commitment to reduce surplus places.

Response

What is the difference between the seventy per cent of Westfield children who go to PEMBEC and the thirty per cent who go elsewhere?

Work needs to be done on whether the economics of having a small Key Stage 3 provision here stack up. This is a big site. We need to look at the feasibility of partnership or federation or something else so that the school has a presence on the estate. I am open to exploring this but the economics need to be looked at as pupil numbers do have an effect.

Governor

There is significant extra government money for this area as it is very deprived.

Governor

We can moth ball or take out some buildings. We need to talk about the curriculum. We don't want moving around from site to site all day.

We could let out some units for businesses or offices and so on. What can we do together to do something? The schools can work together in unity. How can we use this to provide the best level of education for these pupils? If they don't want to participate they will become NEETs.

Governor

Elected members have been put in very difficult position as they have been advised by officials who don't live in area, don't have a feel for the area and are constantly changing. There are alternative ways of looking at the situation instead of just going out on an option for closure.

Years ago attendance here was only at seventy per cent. The staff improved this by walking the streets and talking to parents. They won't send their children anywhere else.

Response

We have still not answered the question why pupils are going elsewhere.

Governor

One of the reasons is that parents were told five years ago that the school was going to close. That is why parents have sent their children elsewhere and there are now

surplus places. There is a future for a small Key Stage 3 group here. Lets tell parents that and take some space out

The Council must show how much it is spending on such deprived areas. We need to cost out what funding is available for diplomas, bullying initiatives, the 14-19 agenda and so on.

Governor

This would be a wonderful 14-19 facility

Response

Yes that is obvious.

Governor

Federation with a high performing school would work (not Abraham Guest, it is not high performing). Would this be an option?

Response

All these options will depend on economics. Federation is usually about standards and there isn't an issue with standards here. There are just not enough pupils.

Governor

Who would do the economics for us?

Response

There are not enough pupils for two premises of this size. It is not that we need to improve performance.

Governor

There is more than one way to reduce space. Are there any possibilities? A school of 500 to 600 pupils is not considered unviable.

Governor

We have to start with the pupils. There would be a massive loss to pupils and families. That is the central question. You should start there rather than looking at buildings. We need to explore the possibilities.

Response

I don't know answer – I am new to the area and whether or not something will be lost is difficult to assess. I am surprised that the staff didn't talk about their own employment.

Governor

To accommodate all these pupils you would have to put extra numbers into Abraham

Guest.

Governor

Abraham Guest and Shevington have been getting the same A to C results for the past seven years. They are not making any progress. It does not make educational sense to offer PEMBEC pupils this.

Response

We are projecting to 2013-2014. Could the school still offer a valuable service to the community? There is a risk that it will not be able to.

Governor

You see schools as separate units. We need to look at things differently and move forward.

Response

From the pupils' point of view, is there anything that would be a better advantage than either:

- keeping PEMBEC as it is; or
- closing PEMBEC?

If there were, what would it be? Would it be moving between sites, a school with smaller number or something else?

Governor

Operational issues are easier to solve than philosophy.

Response

It is about keeping an educational presence in the area.

Governor

We need to offer parents a really good alternative. Abraham Guest does not.

Governor

The easiest option for merger would be with the nearest school. Could some subjects be taught more effectively here, for example vocational courses?

Response

Key Stage 4 is a much easier proposition. There are good examples already. It is a real strength that Wigan schools have found a way of working collaboratively off site. There are problems elsewhere with the quality of some Key Stage 4 provision off site.

With regard to Key Stage 3, we need more clarity if we are to explore this.

Governor

What is a sustainable number?

Governor

Manchester are building a new school for 600 with a sixth form. It is viable.

Governor

There seems a willingness to look at a model. I am very concerned about pupils disappearing. If we are running 14-19 we need to have staff to provide it. If we offered courses here pupils wouldn't have to move around so much.

Governor

I can see a hard federation with Shevington.

Governor

That implies that the eleven to fourteen year olds will still have to go to Shevington on the bus.

Governor

It would be easier to encourage the younger pupils to go on the bus.

Governor

We are trying to be logical. What will encourage children to go to school in Year 7? Extra-curricula activities add to the vibrancy of the community.

Governor

Will there be something for the community in 2013?

We have a new curriculum for September 2008. If it is successful it will spread to the whole of Key Stage 3. We will start to get other youngsters coming in.

We are on board with specialised diplomas and can see continued progress at Key Stage 4.

Governor

The governors will fight to keep the school open. We are offering something here – a federation for 14-19 - instead of just fighting the closure.

Governor

Can the process be halted so we can have a healthy debate?

Response

You need to persuade the Council. This is the informal stage of consultation. If the Council can be convinced that there is a better viable alternative it will take it.

I cannot see how we will sustain 19 viable secondary schools as numbers go down. We have to be proactive about this.

Governor

Has there been any discussion about closure of other schools?

Response

We will look at the whole of secondary education. PEMBEC is an equal partner in this discussion – the school has not closed. PEMBEC needs to feed into process of discussions with the secondary headteachers.

Do we need to look to including Westfield in the discussions as well? If we are saying that this is about endemic problems in the community, Westfield needs to be part of the strategic plan.

Governor

You should have fed all this into planning before publishing the document about the proposed closure. Parents now feel the school is closing.

Response

There is nothing we can do about that now. We are obliged to carry on with the process. Cabinet could decide not to go on to formal consultation.

Governor

That document [Consultation on proposal to close PEMBEC] means that closure is being fast tracked.

Governor

So to change things we need to work up a solution for this community so that young people attend and achieve. It is up to the Director to convince Cabinet. You need to amend the document to say that we are open for business in 2009. It is a problem for Cabinet that they still need to lose places across the Borough.

Response

I think we are beyond that. We must do something fundamental. Cabinet will look at proposals if they are educationally viable.

Governor

Are you talking about hard federation?

Response

What is the governors' intention?

Governor

The governors are not saying that the school must be kept as it is but that some form of education on this site is good for the kids. There should be somewhere local kids can walk too.

Response

That doesn't need to stop the process of closure. It could happen even if the proposal in the document goes ahead.

But that is not the perception in the community the consultation on alternatives needs to catch up with the consultation on closure.

Governor

The Department must to come up with a solution.

Response

No, we must all come up with the solution.

Governor

One of my worries is the sixty to ninety Key Stage 3 pupils who won't go anywhere else. I haven't seen a better alternative.

The skill centre might help other schools.

Governor

This is not about the status quo and maintaining our positions. My experience of transformation is that people want to see something coming next – this will motivate them - rather than just discussing closure.

Governor

We need to enter into a dialogue with other schools. The publicity did not help. Children and Young People's Services could help with brokering options with other schools.

Response

I agree there is a brokering role. We need to look if this will be helpful and stack up. An option must be credible to go to Cabinet.

Officers can't just go away and sort it out.

Governor

It feels like a fait accompli though

Response

It will be difficult now to manage this with the staff as they have just had their meeting and they feel they can't trust the local authority.

Governor

The staff were given different messages before and after Christmas. I would like to know if the decision on closure will be difficult for elected members.

Response

The elected members may be pleased that there might be an alternative.

Governor

Some schools like The Deanery are oversubscribed and overcrowded. Surely this must fit in somewhere.

Response

There are ongoing discussions between all parties about 14-19. Proposals must be educationally and economically viable. We are looking at areas for collaboration. This isn't going on in secret.

The governing body must put forward a proposal for Cabinet to consider.

Governor

So we need to present a viable alternative to closure.

Governor

Are there targets for areas of deprivation?

Response

The local area agreement does this with the allocation of funds to deprived areas. However, this money can't be devolved into schools budgets.

Governor

We need to get someone to help with the proposal.

Governor

Which schools could we work with? We should be able to make progress if other schools have a similar attitude.

Governor

We are working to a tight timescale.

Response

A key date is the secondary headteachers' meeting on 29 February. If something can be shared there it could form part of the overall package. It doesn't have to be a fully worked up proposal.

It's noted that the headteacher wants to be involved with the planning group for this on 19 February.

Governor

We are trying to be constructive. Let's try to take it forward.

Governor

Don't consult through the local paper.

Governor

Putting things in the press too soon doesn't help. We need to sound out other schools.

Governor

When will the proposal go to Cabinet?

Response

In June.

Governor

If this becomes a 14-19 facility it will come out of school regulations. So you will lose 600-700 school places.

The meeting closed at 6.50 p.m.

Consultation on the proposal to close PEMBEC

Notes of the meeting with pupils

Held on Thursday 28 February 2008 at 9.00 a.m. at PEMBEC

The meeting was attended by 15 members of the Young Chamber

Others present

Gary Evans	Deputy Headteacher PEMBEC
Jacqueline Harrison	PEMBEC
Lynn Mappin	Principal Officer CYPS
Chris Parry	Principal Officer CYPS

Gary Evans opened the meeting and introduced the CYPS officers.

Lynn gave an overview of the proposal including:

- What the proposal is
- Why we are proposing to close PEMBEC
- What would happen to current and future pupils if the school closed

Pupils were invited to ask questions and make comments.

Question

The 'China Gateway' is going to be built in Wigan. There will be Chinese families moving in and they will need school places for their children. What will happen about this?

Response

We already have families moving into Wigan, such as from the Eastern European countries. It is something that is very difficult to predict. The number of families moving is always changing and we will continue to monitor this carefully. We always keep some spare places so there is room for people moving in or moving around.

You may have heard of Building Schools for the Future which will mean we can renew our secondary schools. Other schools might be in the same situation as PEMBEC in the future.

All we can do is make sure we do the figures as carefully as possible.

Question

The teachers here are magnificent. Where will they go?

Response

We will ask the receiving schools and all other schools in Wigan to help. The governing bodies employ the staff at schools so we will ask them if they will consider

any staff from PEMBEC before anyone else. We will try to place the teachers at other Wigan schools.

Question

If the school is closing, teachers will start to leave and we will have substitute teachers. Does this mean we will not do as well in our GCSEs?

Response

This is a realistic concern. Some teachers will choose to stay until the school closes and some will leave. We must make sure that you have quality staff to deliver the curriculum. This will be easier when we know definitely what is happening and have the timescales.

Question

What about the cost of transport to Abraham Guest. For me it would be about £1.40 each day.

Response

Abraham Guest is moving to the same site as Lamberhead Green School so will be a bit closer than it is now. Some families can get help with transport costs. The council would reimburse travel costs if you go to a school more than 3 miles away. If people are entitled to free school meals or working tax credit, they are reimbursed if they have to travel more than 2 miles. Everyone's individual circumstances will be different.

Question

If you have to put extra transport on for us to go to school it will increase pollution. What about the environment?

Response

We will work with the bus companies to make sure we do not have spare capacity on the buses to keep pollution to a minimum.

The Council must also consider transport and the effects on the environment when making the decision about the school.

Question

What about those people who have to pick up their brothers and sisters from Westfield? They won't be in time to pick them up.

Response

Individual families will have to make their own arrangements.

Comment

This school has things that other schools don't have such as the hair and beauty salon, the kitchen and the gym.

Response

We know that this school has very good facilities. The new 14-19 diplomas will soon be introduced and all pupils will be able to access vocational courses all over the borough. Schools will have different specialisms and pupils may have to travel to other schools to do some parts of their diploma.

Question

You said the birth rate has decreased but what will you do if the birth rate increases again?

Response

Numbers are unlikely to increase at the moment. There could be an increase in 10 years time and we would have to look at it again then.

Comment

As someone said, there may be Chinese families moving in. You may need spaces.

Response

The Chinamex buildings are not up yet – this will happen some time in the future. The council has to think about what is good for now.

Question

What about the pupils who may have been bullied at Abraham Guest or Shevington?

Response

This is a concern. Families do make decisions on schools based on what has happened at other schools and they will look at bullying. Parents can opt for any preference of secondary school.

Question

I came here from St Thomas More. I was rubbish at everything there. When I came here all my levels went up. Isn't quality more important than numbers?

Response

It is agreed that there is very good quality education here. The worry is that as the number of pupils declines the school won't be able to purchase quality staff. This can happen quickly if a big year 11 leaves and only a small year 7 comes in. Our fear is that the roll will fall quickly which will be a real worry for the future.

Question

What about best friends possibly being split up if their families choose different schools?

Response

It is sad that this is part of what happens when schools close. Families will have to

take this into account when deciding which schools to go to.

Question

This is a business and enterprise college. Abraham Guest is a specialist sports college. What about the people who want business and not sports?

Response

This will be picked up by the 14-19 diplomas. Pupils may have to travel to alternative schools for part of the week to do parts of their diploma. Things will change for everyone.

Question

Someone has mentioned that travelling by bus to other schools will cause more pollution. The government has also said they are worried about childhood obesity. Will it not also cause more childhood obesity if we can't walk to school?

Response

The council will have to take this into account when they make their decision. There is a council travel plan co-ordinator who will also have to look at this. Abraham Guest will not be so far away but Shevington is further.

Question

What about the pupils from Beech Hill who will have to travel further?

Response

That is one of the arguments to keep the school open.

Comment

The Beech Hill pupils might not go to school.

Response

This might be an issue with the current year 7 who will have to change schools. It is possible in future that the Beech Hill children could access other schools nearer to them as numbers of pupils fall.

Comment

I am in 7X1 at the moment. If I have to move to another school I might have to do the same work over again or might be behind them and go down.

Response

We have staff to help and advise schools about things like this and the curriculum. PEMBEC will also work closely with the other schools. There shouldn't be a massive difference in what people have been taught as we have a national curriculum.

Question

The buses near us are always late.

Response

All we can say is that we will work with the bus companies. People must let the bus companies know if there are problems.

Question

I came here from Telford 3 years ago. My sister came as well and did really well here – we were amazed how well she did. My mum wants the same for me and my little sister. How can that be guaranteed?

Response

This is a difficult question. We don't know how people will do at other schools. We can't look into the future.

Question

You are saying we should go to Abraham Guest or Shevington. Why not send Abraham Guest pupils here instead of building a new school? They could keep the same uniform so it would still be individual schools.

Response

So you are suggesting we could keep all 3 schools open and have some kind of federation between the 3 schools? The council will have to look at the full picture and may consider this when making their decision.

Question

Abraham Guest is the closest school but what if it can't cope with the numbers of pupils who want to go?

Response

All schools have an admission number which is the most pupils they can admit. The admission number for Abraham Guest will be 205 in 2009 which is slightly bigger than it is now. They should be able to cope with the numbers and we won't need to extend it.

Comment

Some pupils will get lost in a bigger school.

Response

The other schools will have to deal with this. That's why it's best to have a managed closure so that there is a whole group of new pupils who can be helped.

Comment

The year 7s will be terrified - they will be in a bigger school and be worried about

bullying and finding their way around.

Response

It can be very difficult for some pupils. It is up to the council to take this into consideration. Also the receiving schools will look after their new pupils to make sure that they settle in.

Question

Why can't you join this school with another like you did when Scot Lane and Pemberton joined to make Westfield?

Response

The numbers here are lower than at the other schools. However, the council may have to look at another option. Westfield was not the original option when we were looking at primary schools.

Comment

If you knocked the school down it would be a building site and the road would be congested with diggers and so on. This would make it difficult for people to get to work.

Response

You have touched on the question of what we do with the building – we would like to ask you about that later.

Question

Are you sure the population will not go back up?

Response

Our job planning school places is never finished. The birth rate does go up and down. There is an 11 year lead in for secondary schools as we know which children have been born who will start in 11 years time. The birth rate is rising slightly but is not nearly as high as it was previously. We know we must do something for the next 11 years.

Question

PEMBEC is in the top 5% for value-added. Wouldn't closing it make the results for all of Wigan go down?

Response

That is a strong reason to keep it open.

Comment

I am on the Worsley Hall committee. This is the only high school in this community. If the school closes you will have people from the community going to different schools.

Response

We have looked at where people live and people from round here will get into Abraham Guest. It's the people who live further away who won't get in to that school in future.

Comment

If the school shuts down the older teachers might not get jobs.

Question

At this school year 7s get free trips once a fortnight which I think is a better way to learn some things. They also buy us the ingredients for Food Tech – we don't have to bring them in. Will other schools do this?

Response

Trips are a very valuable part of school life. Different things happen in different schools.

Question

There are good facilities here. Would it not help if we extended to do A levels?

Response

We already have enough 6th form provision in Wigan but there may be problems with where this is.

You have made an important point and the council must take this into account.

Question

If you decide to close the school can we do a petition?

Response

Yes, it is OK to do a petition. You can also write in individually. When the councillors are making their decision they will get a folder with everything that has been sent in. We will also do a summary and analyse the responses for them. Any responses from students will give a powerful message so get your friends to write in as well.

There were no more questions from pupils.

Lynn asked the young chamber for their comments on the following 2 questions:

1) If PEMBEC does close what do you think we should use this building and the facilities for?

Pupil responses:

- A small college for this area. It has the construction and catering facilities.
- A hospital for the community.

- Keep it for children's use as a social place.
- Children could use it in the evenings to learn how to cook and so on.
- It could be an extra study place for doing GCSE work.
- It could be open at weekends for people to practice hairdressing and construction.
- Use it as a library – it would still be educational.
- You could use it as a training area for the emergency services or the army. It would show people what they do and would encourage people to go into these careers.
- Keep it open as PEMBEC!

2 Can you tell us what you like about PEMBEC – what makes it special?

- The support offered to pupils. This is not just from teachers - all kinds of other people come into school.
- The different choices like hairdressing.
- The headteacher knows everyone's name. They can't in bigger schools.
- The education and teachers here.
- The teachers are very supportive.
- The teachers are great. It's like being part of a big family.
- It's central to Norley Hall, Worsley Hall and Marsh Green.
- People come here with nothing and leave with more than was expected.
- It's the heartbeat of the community.
- All the teachers provide what you need.
- We get involved with things like national charity appeals
- The different facilities we have here.

Lynn thanked everyone for coming and talking to us and explained that:

- This consultation closes on 14 March.
- It is important that as many pupils as possible respond – school will make sure the council gets their responses.
- The council will then decide whether to continue with the proposal.
- If the council do decide to continue there will be another consultation which is more of a legal process but pupils would be able to object again if they want to.

Gary Evans confirmed that school would make sure any written responses get to the council. Pupils could also fill in the response form which is in the consultation document or send an email to the address in the document.

The meeting closed at 9.50 a.m.

Appendix 6

Analysis of consultation responses to the proposal to close PEMBEC – Pemberton Business and Enterprise College

A total of 169 consultation response forms and 6 written responses were received to the consultation exercise. The responses have been analysed according to category of respondent.

1. Parents of children currently attending PEMBEC

A total of 27 responses were received from parents of children at PEMBEC. They completed the consultation response form as follows:

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you think that the booklet clearly explains why the LA is proposing to close PEMBEC?	20	5	2
Do you understand how and when to make your views on the proposal known?	24	3	0
Do you support the proposal to close PEMBEC and offer alternative school places at Abraham Guest and Shevington High Schools?	0	27	0

A wide range of comments were received from parents. These are reported below together with the number of respondents that made the same or a similar comment. The comments have been placed in categories of concern, in so far as this is possible, although some apply to more than one category.

Comment	No of similar comments
Teaching / Learning and Standards	
My child's GCSE results will be effected	1
Closing PEMBEC will put additional pressure on receiving schools	1
Closure will unsettle all children and will effect education	5
There are good educational opportunities	1

available at PEMBEC	
Vocational / 14 – 19	
There is a good choice of vocational qualifications at PEMBEC.	1
There is a lack of 14 - 19 curriculum knowledge	1
I would like sixth form provision at PEMBEC not closure	1
Travel / Transport	
Closing the school will cause travel problems	6
Community	
Closing the school will effect the whole community	1
Miscellaneous	
The school needs support not closure	1
Children enjoy PEMBEC	1
There are too many schools closing in Wigan	1

2. Members of Staff at PEMBEC

A total of 4 consultation response forms were received from members of staff at PEMBEC.

They completed the consultation response forms as follows:

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you think that the booklet clearly explains why the LA is proposing to close PEMBEC?	1	3	0
Do you understand how and when to make your views on the proposal known?	3	1	0

Do you support the proposal to close PEMBEC and offer alternative school places at Abraham Guest and Shevington High Schools?	0	4	0
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A number of comments have been made by the staff from PEMBEC. These have been reported below together with the number of staff that made the same or a similar comment. The comments have been placed in categories of concern, in so far as this is possible, though many apply to more than one category.

Comment	No of similar comments
Teaching / Learning and Standards	
The Business Enterprise has educated disenchanted pupils	1
Children from PEMBEC will receive less individual attention at receiving schools.	2
Standards at receiving schools will be effected	1
PEMBEC nurtures children, the area needs a school	1
The LA is focusing on the negatives not the positive work PEMBEC achieves	1
Vocational / 14 - 19	
Vocational courses are good at PEMBEC. The school should collaborate with other schools and be used as a 14-19 centre instead of closure	1
Travel / Transport	
Closing PEMBEC will cause additional traffic in the area	1
Children will not arrive at receiving	1

schools on time because of the travel involved	
Community	
PEMBEC school serves a deprived community	1
Closure will effect the community, eg drugs and crime in the area will increase	1
Miscellaneous	
Millions of pounds have been poured into the school	1
Can the LA explore the idea of an 'Enterprise Academy' instead of closing the school?	1

3. Governors of PEMBEC

A total of 2 consultation response forms were received from Governors at PEMBEC. They completed the consultation response form as follows:

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you think that the booklet clearly explains why the LA is proposing to close PEMBEC?	0	1	1
Do you understand how and when to make your views on the proposal known?	2	0	0
Do you support the proposal to close PEMBEC and offer alternative school places at Abraham Guest and Shevington High Schools?	0	2	0

A number of comments have been made by the Governors. These have been reported below, together with the number of respondents that made the same or a similar comment. The comments have been placed in categories of concern, in so far as this is possible, though many apply to

more than one category.

Comment	No of similar comments
Teaching / Learning and Standards	
PEMBEC provides support for 'less able and problem' children	1
Attendance	
Attendance methods will not be used in receiving schools	1
Vocational / 14 – 19	
Vocational education is vital for the vulnerable 14-16 year olds in the school	1
The Governors also support vocational education for children who live outside the area	1
Community	
Closing PEMBEC will effect the community by removing a safe and re-assuring place for children who need it the most	1
Miscellaneous	
Children at PEMBEC do not have supportive families. Parents will not attend meetings etc at receiving schools	1
PEMBEC provides diversity and this is vital to the BSF initiative	1
Decision to close PEMBEC was poorly justified by interim director	1
The fall in pupil numbers should be solved with 'simplistic measures'	1

4. Parents whose children attend another school

A total of 25 responses were received from parents of children attending other schools. They completed the consultation response form as follows:

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you think that the booklet clearly explains why the LA is proposing to close PEMBEC?	21	3	1
Do you understand how and when to make your views on the proposal known?	23	2	0
Do you support the proposal to close PEMBEC and offer alternative school places at Abraham Guest and Shevington High Schools?	8	14	3

A wide range of comments were received from parents of children attending other schools. These are reported below together with the number of respondents that made the same or a similar comment. The comments have been placed in categories of concern, in so far as this is possible, though many apply to more than one category.

Comment	No of similar comments
Teaching / Learning and Standards	
Y9 curriculum will not be sustained at receiving schools	1
I have concerns about new class sizes at receiving schools	2
PEMBEC pupils will disrupt children currently attending receiving schools	1
There will be a lack of resources at receiving schools	1
Vocational / 14 – 19	
PEMBEC should specialise in vocational courses and personalised	1

learning	
Community	
PEMBEC offers excellent facilities to the community	4
Buildings / Site	
The LA should reduce the size of the buildings at PEMBEC instead of closing the school	1
Miscellaneous	
The LA should provide additional funding to improve PEMBEC not close it	1
Children from PEMBEC should be allowed to go to any school not only the two receiving schools	5
There is no 'out of school care for children with SLD' at receiving schools	1
PEMBEC children are 'bullies' and will give receiving schools a bad reputation	3
Closing PEMBEC will put pressure on schools places at receiving schools	3
The LA should consider pupils who may move into the area when doing pupil number analysis	1
Staff at PEMBEC will lose their jobs	1

5. Members of staff from other schools

A total of 2 response forms were received from staff from other schools. They completed the consultation response form as follows:

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
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Do you think that the booklet clearly explains why the LA is proposing to close PEMBEC?	1	1	0
Do you understand how and when to make your views on the proposal known?	2	0	0
Do you support the proposal to close PEMBEC and offer alternative school places at Abraham Guest and Shevington High Schools?	1	1	0

The comments below were made by staff from other schools. All are reported below, together with the number of respondents that made the same or a similar comment. The comments have been placed in categories of concern, in so far as this is possible, though many apply to more than one category.

Comments	No of similar comments
Teaching / Learning and Standards	
PEMBEC pupils will not receive the same 'caring education' at receiving schools	1
Attendance	
Closing PEMBEC will create further attendance problems	1
Vocational / 14 -19	
PEMBEC needs more vocational courses / qualifications, not closure	1
Miscellaneous	
PEMBEC should continue with the links to Hope School	1

6. Governors from other schools

1 response form was received from a Governor at another school. Their response to the consultation form is below:

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you think that the booklet clearly explains why the LA is proposing to close PEMBEC?	1	0	0
Do you understand how and when to make your views on the proposal known?	1	0	0
Do you support the proposal to close PEMBEC and offer alternative school places at Abraham Guest and Shevington High Schools?	1	0	0

No comments were made by the Governor.

7. Pupils who attend PEMBEC

A total of 65 responses were received from children who currently attend PEMBEC. The completed the consultation response forms were as follows:

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you think that the booklet clearly explains why the LA is proposing to close PEMBEC?	27	18	20
Do you understand how and when to make your views on the proposal known?	20	45	0
Do you support the proposal to close PEMBEC and offer alternative school places at Abraham Guest and Shevington High Schools?	2	56	7

A wide range of comments were received from pupils. These are reported below together with the number of respondents that made the same or similar comment. The comments have been placed in categories of concern, in so far as this is possible, though many apply to more than one category.

Comments	No of similar comments
Teaching / Learning and Standards	
PEMBEC is a good School	12
Teachers are good and help you get the best grades possible	3
There are good facilities available at PEMBEC	5
Changing schools will disrupt learning	2
I am in the middle of GCSE's	1
Travel / Transport	
It's too far to travel to another school	13
The cost of travel to another school is too much	1
PEMBEC is close to my home	3
Community / Facilities	
The school serves the whole community	2
PEMBEC has good after school clubs	1
Miscellaneous	
I am happy at PEMBEC	4
I want to continue my education at PEMBEC	3
PEMBEC is a popular school	1
There are insufficient places at receiving schools	4
It's a good idea to close PEMBEC	1
My relatives/siblings want to go to PEMBEC	12
The money already spent on the school would be a waste of money	3

I didn't like the way we found out about the proposal	2
I don't want to leave or spilt up with friends	5
I don't want to change schools	1

8. Members of the Community

A total of 31 responses were received from members of the community. They completed the consultation response form as follows:

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you think that the booklet clearly explains why the LA is proposing to close PEMBEC?	13	10	8
Do you understand how and when to make your views on the proposal known?	18	13	0
Do you support the proposal to close PEMBEC and offer alternative school places at Abraham Guest and Shevington High Schools?	1	30	0

A wide range of comments were received from the community. These are reported below together with the number of respondents that made the same or a similar comment. The comments have been placed in categories of concern, in so far as this is possible, though many apply to more than one category.

Comments	No of similar comments
Teaching / Learning and Standards	
Pupils will have to do different lessons at the receiving schools	1
Teachers at PEMBEC are pleasant	1
PEMBEC is a good school and pupils enjoy it	3
Attendance	

Closure will create attendance problems	2
Vocational / 14 – 19	
Vocational courses are available at PEMBEC	2
Transport / Travel	
It's too far to travel to another school and closure will cause transport problems	7
PEMBEC is close to home and I want to send my children there	1
Community	
School buildings are used by voluntary groups	1
The community needs a school	6
Miscellaneous	
PEMBEC needs stronger leadership from HT	1
Closing PEMBEC will increase bullying	1
There are Insufficient school places at other schools	3
There is a lack of parental choice	1
If PEMBEC was to close the funding spent on the school would be a waste	3

9. Other

A total of 12 responses were received from respondents who did not state a category. They completed the consultation response form as follows:

Question	Yes	No	Don't Know
Do you think that the booklet clearly explains why the LA is proposing to close PEMBEC?	3	5	4
Do you understand how and when to make your views on the proposal known?	5	6	1

Do you support the proposal to close PEMBEC and offer alternative school places at Abraham Guest and Shevington High Schools?	1	10	1
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A number of comments were received. These are reported below together with the number of respondents that made the same or a similar comment. The comments have been placed in categories of concern, in so as this is possible, though many apply to more than one category.

Comment	No of similar comments
Teaching / Learning and Standards	
Closure will effect children's education	1
Transport / Travel	
Travelling to other schools will cause problems	1
Community	
The community needs the school	1
Closing the school would increase bullying and crime rates in the area	1
Miscellaneous	
I like the school	2
Staff will lose their jobs	1

Letters and E-mails

A total of 6 written responses were received to the consultation. These included objections against the proposal to close the school from the Governing Body and the Headteacher. These letters have been copied in Appendices 5(a) and (b) respectively. The concerns of the other respondents were as follows:

Comment	No of similar comments
Teaching / Learning and Standards	
Children's education will suffer and	1

will cause bad pupil behaviour	
Smaller schools have a better advantage	1
Buildings / Site	
PEMBEC is in a good location	1
It is a model education site with Westfield Primary School down the road	1
Community	
The Community needs the school	4
Miscellaneous	
Children at receiving schools would not accept PEMBEC pupils	1
PEMBEC should have a sixth form instead of closing the school	1

3 Chorley Road
Standish
Wigan
Lancs.
WN6 0AA

13th March 2008

From – Adrian Hardy – Chair of the Governing Body at PEMBEC

To – Mr Nick Hudson, Director of Children and Young People's Services

Dear Mr Hudson

Proposals to close PEMBEC

I am writing on behalf of the Governing Body of PEMBEC in response to the consultation document that you have circulated around the matter of the closure of PEMBEC in 2011.

As a Governing Body we met with you, Cllr Wilson and others on 31st January 2008, at which time you indicated to us that no final decision had been taken to close the school. Further meetings were to be held between the headteachers of all the secondary schools in Wigan with you and your staff to determine what range of options could be put before the council.

As a Governing Body we were therefore extremely angered to find out that in considering the potential options no account was to be taken of the retention of PEMBEC. How can any credence be given to your assertions that “no decision had yet been taken to close PEMBEC”, when none of the options you were giving consideration to included its retention? Ms Buras-Stubbs raised this matter with your staff on the first occasion, yet by the second meeting at the end of February the position remained unchanged. As Governors and staff we infer from this that from the LA point of view the decision to close PEMBEC would appear to have already been made.

Prospective response the consultation document

Q1 – No – the booklet does not clearly explain why the LA is proposing to close PEMBEC.

Q2 – Yes – we do understand how and when to make our views known on the proposal

Q3 – No - we do not support the proposal to close PEMBEC and offer alternative school places in Abraham Guest and Shevington High Schools

Q4 – If you do not support the proposals please tell us what your concerns are:

- PEMBEC serves the most deprived communities in the borough – the quality of teaching is satisfactory and the CVA is outstanding, the best in the borough. Staff often have to visit and collect pupils from their homes to ensure their attendance in school; this level of attention is not likely to continue when the schools, especially Shevington, are several miles away. At a time when increasing emphasis is being placed by the government on up-skilling people in deprived communities and tackling worklessness, to close down this centre of education that is the in the heart of their community appears to run counter to this policy.
- Pupil punctuality has improved since the school day commenced at 8.30, but even now pupils do come in late. The prospects for pupils getting up earlier in order to catch buses to remote schools must therefore be in doubt. Should the school transport be missed, there is no direct bus service to Shevington from these estates and the costs of the bus fares to send children to Shevington will be considerable, especially for those families seeking to escape from worklessness and not in receipt of support from the council or the state.
- The need to catch school transport home immediately after the school day will militate against pupils from this area participating in extra-curricular activities (sport and drama, or additional lessons for Gifted and Talented pupils), again because of the time and cost associated with the use of public transport.
- PEMBEC's success with pupils is in part the result of the improved pupil to staff ratio that has been possible as a result of additional funding for the school, allied with the ability of staff to monitor all pupils precisely because the school is smaller than average. The Governors are concerned that our pupils, once in other schools, will become the forgotten, lower achieving pupils who will not be stretched as they are now. The LA and government will achieve their target of 30% 5A*-C including English and Maths, by virtue of the fact that the lack of success of these pupils is masked by the success of the larger number of pupils in these schools as a whole. Fisher Family Trust Model D data indicates that achieving 23% 5A*-C including English and Maths is

- One aspect of closure that will be beneficial is the fact that problem pupils, who now appear to be disproportionately sent to PEMBEC, which itself imposes a further brake on the achievement of government and LA targets, will be dispersed among the remaining schools and the PRUs.
- At the present time the only school proposed for closure is PEMBEC, yet more places need to be lost in the secondary provision. It is rumoured that this is to be achieved by increasing the ratio of gross internal floorspace per pupil at other schools, thereby reducing their % under-utilisation. A second route to achieving a balance is said to be a reduction in the standard number of pupils – depending on how this was applied across the borough this could mean that the places at PEMBEC were needed to fulfil the basic demand for places. As the LA have not yet come out clearly to state what their proposals are it is difficult to know how true these rumours are – but if they are correct they could have been used beneficially to keep PEMBEC open.

Q 5 – Have you any other comments to make

- The whole process by which the consultation on closure at PEMBEC has taken place has turned the process into one of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rumours in 2006 about closure discouraged parents then from putting the school down as a first preference. Again in 2007 prior to the return of preference forms from primary schools, inept and untimely comments from the LA about the process made closure look a certainty, so parents again will have put other schools as a first preference. In 2008 parents will not be given the opportunity of even applying for places in the school, so there is no chance of any increase in pupil numbers occurring.
- These inept and untimely comments appearing in the press also brought to a halt initial discussions between PEMBEC and Abraham Guest schools, that were intended to bring about the merger of provision for pupils. This frustrated the local attempt to address the issue that had not been addressed in the selection of Abraham Guest as the school to be rebuilt in the first place, namely “what to do to rationalise provision of secondary places in this part of Wigan”.
- The failure of the LA to even put forward options for secondary re-organisation with the retention of PEMBEC has been seen by staff as a clear indication of the direction the council wish to move in. Not surprisingly the number of staff applying for, and obtaining, employment in other schools has increased dramatically – this will increase the pressure on existing staff to continue to deliver high quality education, and increase the likelihood of parents seeking to

- **If we are to salvage something from this process we need to retain and enhance at least the KS4 NVQ related work. This needs to become an LA priority now, so that staff can be retained and work can begin with other secondary schools to co-ordinate timetable and travel arrangements, and also make the necessary changes to the fabric of the school to broaden the range of NVQs and diplomas on offer. This should enable the facility to provide also for the 16 – 19 age groups in due course.**

The Governors would welcome an early start on discussions regarding the establishment of a Skills Centre to serve the secondary schools in the North West of the borough. Hopefully the LA can facilitate such discussions, thereby restoring some confidence in their ability to plan for the future of educational provision in the borough.

Yours sincerely

Adrian Hardy, Chair of the Governors.

From – Michele Buras-Stubbs – Head Teacher at PEMBEC

To – Mr Nick Hudson, Director of CYPS

Dear Nick

Proposals to close PEMBEC

Firstly, as a member of the Governing Body at PEMBEC I concur totally with

the points made by Adrian Hardy, Chair of Governors, with regard to the closure of PEMBEC.

Additionally I would like to make the following points.

I have been in post at PEMBEC for 15 months. During this time I have attended meetings, taken part in discussions and read reports about the proposed reorganisation of secondary education in Wigan of which the proposed closure of PEMBEC has been part. There has been much emphasis on buildings and numbers, there has been much excitement about funding and procurement, there has been little talk about children, communities and learning.

PEMBEC and PEMBEC's community do not fit into a neat box of 1000. PEMBEC is a school where underperformance has been transformed to a CVA in the top 5% within the country (and by far the best within Wigan), and where attendance has risen from 70% to over 90%. It has done this through strong relationships with its community, through appropriate curriculum provision and learning opportunities and through a pastoral system that works with young people to turn them around - something which has continued despite the regular sequence of press reports and meetings related to the school's potential closure over the last year.

The proposals for alternative educational provision for pupils at PEMBEC do not even consider how the niche curriculum opportunities at PEMBEC will be replicated elsewhere – let alone take into account the transport (and related environmental impact) and social issues of young people from deprived communities being displaced. The proposals merely view the young people as numbers that can neatly and economically fit into another box in another place and who will neatly climb on buses at a designated time to get there. This alone shows how out of touch the writers of the proposal are with the reality on the ground.

If the decision is to close PEMBEC, a view I genuinely believe is most emphatically not within the best interests of the pupils, it would surely make sense to consider the continued use of the very specialised vocational and Business and Enterprise facilities at PEMBEC while there is still a team of highly skilled staff around to plan and deliver learning within these areas. In my view, any proposal for closure, should sensibly also engage with solutions to the obvious 14-19 learning needs within Wigan – including that of NEETs. PEMBEC staff are currently, quite understandably, considering and taking other more secure employment opportunities. It would, in my opinion, be a tragedy to lose highly skilled 14-19 expertise, including in areas of holistic education and support. This will, however, be the inevitable consequence of the current management of the process.

With regard to the fulfilment of the Every Child Matters agenda, the current situation within Wigan appears regrettably to be that although all children ostensibly matter – some children matter more than others - and the children from the most deprived communities within Wigan would appear to matter the least. With the best will in the world and with the most careful planning, the

impact on several cohorts of children at PEMBEC as staff in key areas leave will be significant. These young people have only one chance. It is a tragedy if they become no more than collateral damage.

I remain committed to achieving the best possible provision and out comes for the young people and communities I serve. I respectfully request that their needs are placed at the centre of the decision making process. Not to do so will have an undoubted opportunity cost for the Wigan community long after all current planners, deliverers and decision makers have moved on.

Yours sincerely

Michele M. Buras-Stubbs



Review of Secondary School Places

**Proposal to Close PEMBEC –
Pemberton Business and Enterprise College**

Children and Young People's Services

January 2008

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This booklet explains why the Local Authority (LA) is proposing to close PEMBEC. It tells you how the LA proposes to do this and what effect it is likely to have on pupils at the school, staff, and the local community.
- 1.2 At the end of this booklet you will find a list of events with timescales that the LA will follow in order to make a final decision on the proposal. This includes details of how and when to make your views on the proposal known.

2. Proposal

The proposal is to close PEMBEC on a phased basis from September 2009.

The details of the proposal are as follows:

- 2.1 **PEMBEC will close completely on 31st August 2011.**
- 2.2 **Pupils currently attending PEMBEC will receive their education as follows:**

Y11 (133 pupils)	Pupils will complete key stage 4 and leave in July 2008 as normal
Y10 (136 pupils)	Pupils will complete key stage 4 and leave in July 2009 as normal
Y9 (97 pupils)	Pupils will complete key stages 3 and 4 and leave in July 2010 as normal
Y8 (108 pupils)	Pupils will complete key stages 3 and 4 and leave in July 2011 as normal
Y7 (81 pupils)	Pupils will complete Key Stage 3 at PEMBEC in July 2010. Pupils will then move to a guaranteed place at either Abraham Guest or Shevington High Schools.

- 2.3 **Pupils that have applied for a place at PEMBEC to start in Y7 in September 2008**

These pupils will complete Key Stage 3 at PEMBEC in July 2011 and then move to a guaranteed place at either Abraham Guest or Shevington High Schools.

- 2.4 **Primary age children that live in the area that would normally have gone on to attend PEMBEC**

The LA will review the admission criteria of neighbouring schools to ensure that children living in the area served by PEMBEC have an equal chance of obtaining their preferred secondary school place when compared with other Wigan residents.

3. Reasons for the proposal

- 3.1 The Council is committed to securing the highest quality education provision for all Wigan children. For the reasons set out below, it is increasingly unlikely that the Council will be able to achieve this objective at PEMBEC.
- 3.1.1 There is a falling secondary school population across the Borough. Pupil intakes to Year 7 have fallen from 4,315 pupils in 2003/04 to 3,716 at present. This fall of around 600 pupils represents three medium sized secondary schools.
- 3.1.2 The declining pupil numbers are expected to continue until 2013/14 when just 3,300 pupils are predicted to be in Year 7. Despite an increase in numbers thereafter, they are not anticipated to increase beyond current levels.
- 3.1.3 The decline in numbers has been felt most keenly in the centre of the Borough. The area served by PEMBEC has been particularly affected. This has led to recent reorganisations of primary schools in the area where places have been removed from the system as they are no longer needed.
- 3.1.4 When pupil numbers fall so quickly, more parents are able to obtain their first choice of school as there are fewer pupils competing for the available places. The result is that some schools experience a very steep decline in first preference applications, whilst others continue to fill up to their admission numbers.
- 3.1.5 For the past three years, PEMBEC has received below 90 first preference applications for Year 7 admission, though more pupils have been admitted because some could not obtain a place at their first choice school. This year just 68 first preference applications for the school have been received. The school is built to accommodate up to 850 pupils and has an admission number of 170.
- 3.1.6 At September pupil count there were 556 pupils on roll at PEMBEC. By 2012 there are predicted to be fewer than 400 pupils on roll because of the decline in pupil numbers and trends in parental preferences.
- 3.1.7 Ofsted, the body that inspects schools, has found that secondary schools with less than 600 pupils on roll are less likely to be successful. This is because schools of this size usually find it difficult to provide a sufficient choice of curriculum, particularly at Y10 and Y11.
- 3.1.8 The recent Ofsted Inspection report for PEMBEC graded the

overall effectiveness of the school as **satisfactory**. Most students make good progress from their initial starting points and achieve particularly well in the wide range of vocational and practical subjects that the school provides. It is acknowledged that the school achieves well as reflected in its contextual value added ranking. However, attainment at the end of key stage 4 remains below national standards especially in the core subjects.

3.1.9 The budget share per pupil at PEMBEC is already over £1,000 above the majority of other secondary schools in Wigan. This currently allows the school to offer a range of vocational and non-vocational subjects. However, as a significant proportion of a school's budget is pupil led, the total budget will reduce to reflect falling pupil numbers. This will make it more difficult for the school to attract and retain quality staff, or to provide a sufficient choice in the curriculum.

3.1.10 As pupil numbers decline in any school, the premises become too large for the number of pupils and spending on heating, lighting and maintenance takes up a disproportionate share of the budget. The result is that spending on staff and learning materials has to be reduced, with the inevitable impact on standards. For this reason, the Government expects LAs to take action where schools have more than 25% surplus places. PEMBEC currently has 35% surplus places.

3.2 The Council must review secondary school provision and take out surplus places in order for it to be considered for major capital investment under the Government's Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. One of the actions that the LA must take to demonstrate that it is ready to deliver BSF is to remove surplus school places. If the LA does not do this there is a risk that all secondary schools throughout the Borough will miss out on major investment designed to transform the learning environment. The end result will be buildings that are no longer fit for delivering the modern curriculum; a decline in standards and a threat to the future prosperity of Wigan.

4. Benefits of the proposal

There are several benefits to the proposal, all of which concern the provision of quality education:

4.1 Both Abraham Guest and Shevington High Schools have been judged to be providing a **good** standard of education in their latest Ofsted reports, therefore the receiving schools provide a good alternative as judged by Ofsted.

4.2 Future education provision will be stable, with both receiving schools

having a more predictable long term future. Viable schools have less difficulty in attracting quality staff with the result that standards are capable of being maintained or improved.

- 4.3 Abraham Guest is being rebuilt on a new site adjacent to Lamberhead Green Primary School. The new buildings will open in 2009 and provide state of the art educational facilities. The school already serves much of the same community that is currently being served by PEMBEC. The LA will also review the premises at Shevington High School to ensure that the school has the appropriate facilities to cater for any additional pupils.

5. Implications for parents

- 5.1 Pupils in Years 8 to 11 will be able to stay at PEMBEC even if the proposal to close is approved. The LA will make certain that the school is able to function at its reduced pupil numbers by ensuring the school remains financially viable in the short term. Every effort will be made to ensure that educational standards are maintained for these pupils.
- 5.2 Pupils in year 7 will remain at PEMBEC for three years and transfer to an alternative school at the end of Y9. The note at the end of this booklet tells parents how this will be done. A move at the end of Y9 causes minimum disruption as the pupils will be able to start their key stage 4 courses at the same time as all the other pupils in the schools that they transfer to. The introduction of the 14 – 19 curriculum means that all similar age pupils will be experiencing change at the same time, including greater movement between schools and other education providers. This reflects the agenda for collaboration that all schools are being asked to engage in.
- 5.3 For some pupils it will mean that they need to travel further to school. If the proposals go ahead, the bus companies will be informed so that they can put extra provision in place. The transport policy of the LA is that travelling expenses will be refunded for secondary school pupils who must travel more than three miles to their nearest suitable school. The transport policy is more generous for children in receipt of free school meals or whose parents are entitled to the maximum level of Working Tax Credit.

6. Implications for staff

- 6.1 The long term viability of a number of schools in the Borough has been a cause for concern for some time given the downward trend in pupil numbers. Decisive action by the LA will provide greater clarification for all staff.
- 6.2 The LA will do its utmost to help staff find alternative positions by

brokering agreements with other school governing bodies. When the LA is closing a school, it usually asks the receiving schools, in particular, to consider staff from the closing school for any vacancies. This has the advantage of maximising continued employment for the staff affected and it provides some continuity for pupils as the staff will be known to them.

7. Implications for the community

7.1 PEMBEC offers children, parents and members of the local community access to a range of services as part of the full service extended school model. These services include:

- parenting support;
- breakfast clubs;
- study support activities;
- family/adult learning opportunities; and
- teenage pregnancy/contraception advice and support.

7.2 Access to these services will be able to continue as part of the core offer of service provision that must be available from or through every primary and secondary school in Wigan.

7.3 Westfield Community Primary School, which serves the same area, is an extended service school that offers:

- parenting support;
- literacy and numeracy services;
- family learning;
- Bookstart;
- Job Centre plus;
- parent and toddler sessions; and
- Citizen's Advice.

7.4 New models of delivery are currently being explored for some services and the relocation of Abraham Guest will enable adult and family learning opportunities to be delivered close to the PEMBEC local community.

8. Dates and times of meetings

A series of meetings will be held for those affected by the proposal. These meetings will provide more information and there will be opportunities to ask questions and raise concerns with the LA. Please make every effort to attend these meetings as your views are important:

Meeting venue	Date and time	Who should attend
PEMBEC Montrose Avenue Pemberton Wigan WN5 9XL	Thursday 31st January 2008 at 7 pm	This is a public meeting and is open to everyone, especially parents of pupils currently at PEMBEC and those who have applied for a place next year
PEMBEC	Thursday 31st January 2008 4 pm 5.30 pm	PEMBEC Staff PEMBEC Governors

9. Next steps

- 9.1 Strict legal procedures have to be followed to close a school. Overleaf is a timetable of events which includes periods of consultation and dates when decisions are expected to be taken. If you want to make your views known, it is important that you do so within the consultation dates given and in the ways described. If you make your views known outside these periods, or in any other ways than described, they cannot be taken into account.

10. Proposed timetable

Event	Dates
<p>Consultation – during this time you can make your views known by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attendance at one of the meetings detailed above (notes will be taken) • writing to or emailing the LA or • completing the response form at the end of this booklet. <p>The address for correspondence is given overleaf.</p>	<p>14th January to 14th March 2008</p>
<p>Results of consultation will go to Elected Members and they will decide whether to carry on with the closure proposals.</p>	<p>May/June 2008</p>
<p>Representation period (6 weeks)* – if the LA decides that it wants to carry on with the proposals, statutory notices have to be published. These are public notices that appear in a local newspaper, at the entrance of PEMBEC school and in other public places in the area such as community centres and libraries.</p> <p>You can make your views known at this stage by writing to the LA at the address at the end of this booklet. This address and the date by which written comments must be received will also be given in the public notice.</p>	<p>June/July 2008</p>
<p>The LA takes its final decision on the proposal.</p>	<p>August/September 2008</p>
<p>Current Y7 pupils transfer to Y10 in an alternative school</p>	<p>September 2010</p>
<p>Y7 pupils who joined the school in September 2008 transfer to Y10 in an alternative school</p>	<p>September 2011</p>
<p>PEMBEC closes</p>	<p>31 August 2011</p>

* If written objections are received during the representation period, certain organisations can appeal against the LA's decision. Any such appeals must be received within 4 weeks of the LA's decision and the

schools adjudicator will make the final decision. The organisations that can lodge an appeal are:

The local Church of England Diocese;

The Bishop of the Roman Catholic Diocese; and

The Learning and Skills Council.

Please note that this timetable may alter. The LA, staff and governors of PEMBEC will be able to tell you if this happens and tell you of any new dates that we are working towards.

Address for correspondence

School Places Team
Progress House
Westwood Park Drive
Wigan
WN3 4HH

Email: schoolprovision@wigan.gov.uk

Telephone: 01942 486028 or 01942 486029

This document is also available on the web at:

www.wigan.gov.uk/Services/EducationLearning/Consultations

Note for parents of Y7 pupils
How places will be allocated at alternative secondary schools

If the proposals go ahead, it is only the pupils in current Y7 and those that will be joining the school in September 2008 that will need to transfer schools at the end of Y9.

During the Autumn term of the pupils' Y9 year, parents will be asked to state their preferred alternative schools in order of preference. The LA will allocate places according to the schools' published admission criteria at that time. This means that whilst the LA is guaranteeing places at either Abraham Guest or Shevington, the school offered may not be the parents' first preference if that school is oversubscribed.

The LA will hold places for the Y9 PEMBEC children at Abraham Guest and Shevington until the start of the Y10 year.

Some parents may want places at schools other than Abraham Guest and Shevington and they will be able to state these schools as preferences. However, the LA will not be able to hold these places until the pupils are ready to transfer school. The LA will discuss the options available to these parents on an individual basis.

There are three advantages of allocating places at the beginning of the pupils' Y9 year:

- it provides certainty about future education provision for those affected;
- the pupils can be introduced to their new school early and preparations will be made to settle them ready for their Y10 year; and
- the pupils will be able to choose their key stage 4 option subjects at the same time as all the other pupils in the receiving schools, meaning that they will have an equal choice of the range of subjects on offer.

The introduction of the 14 – 19 curriculum will require all pupils in the Borough to be prepared to move between education providers in order to access their chosen subjects.

Review of Secondary School Places: Proposal to Close PEMBEC

Response form

Please **read the booklet carefully** before making your response below.
Please place a **X** in the box that most closely describes your views

1. Do you think that the booklet clearly explains why the LA is proposing to close PEMBEC?

Yes No Don't know

2. Do you understand how and when to make your views on the proposal known?

Yes No

3. Do you support the proposal to close PEMBEC and offer alternative school places at Abraham Guest and Shevington High Schools?

Yes No Don't know

4. If you do not support the proposal please tell us what your concerns are.

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5. Have you any other comments to make?

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6. Are you

A parent or guardian of a child at PEMBEC

Please state which year group your child is currently in.....

A parent or guardian of a child at another school
please state which school

A member of staff at PEMBEC

A member of staff at another school
please state which school.....

A governor of PEMBEC

A governor at another school
please state which school.....

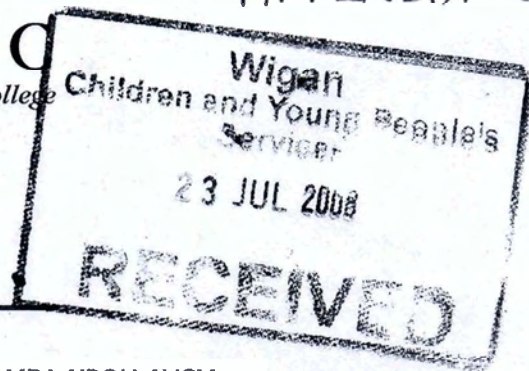
Other member of the community

Please return your completed form by **14 March 2008** to:

School Places Team
Progress House
Westwood Park Drive
Wigan
WN3 4HH

P E M B E C

Pemberton Business & Enterprise College



HEAD Mrs M Buras-Stubbs BA (Hons) MA (Oxon) MBA NPQH AVCM

15th July 2008

Dear Mr Hudson

I am writing on behalf of the Governing Body of PEMBEC in response to the proposals document, dated 19 June 2008, that you have circulated in respect of the closure of PEMBEC in 2011.

The Governing Body met on 30th June 2008 and determined to restate the position made in response to the initial consultation. Whilst this failed to prevent the Cabinet determining to proceed with the closure of the school, we feel that by restating them now they will be included in any final document that you produce in relation to this formal proposal.

As a Governing Body we met with you, Cllr Wilson and others on 31st January 2008, at which time you indicated to us that no final decision had been taken to close the school. Further meetings were to be held between the headteachers of all the secondary schools in Wigan and you and your staff to determine what range of options could be put before the council in respect of the reconfiguration of all secondary education in the borough.

As a Governing Body we were therefore extremely angered to find out that in considering the potential options no account was to be taken of the retention of PEMBEC. How can any credence be given to your assertions that "no decision had yet been taken to close PEMBEC", when none of the options you were giving consideration to included its retention? Ms Buras-Stubbs raised this matter with your staff on the first occasion, yet by the second meeting at the end of February the position remained unchanged. As Governors and staff we infer from this that from the LA point of view the decision to close PEMBEC would appear to have already been made.

It became clear at the Education Conference, held on 4th July 2008 to consider the potential form for delivery of education in Wigan, that the Council has no clear policy or strategy in this area. Whether schools should be set with a capacity of 1000,

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whether popular schools should be allowed to continue with larger numbers should parents so express a preference; should there be more formal linkages with groups of primary schools; should there be groupings of secondary schools with specialist teaching in each, to which the pupils of the others can go because the timetables have been co-ordinated; how should increased diversity in management of schools be achieved – all of these questions remained as unanswered at the end of the day as they were at the start. Therefore any determination to close PEMBEC is being taken in isolation and not as part of a wider reconfiguration of secondary school provision in the borough.

Since the initial consultation process on closing PEMBEC further concerns have arisen in relation to the potential for students to access places at Abraham Guest High School. The Governing Body of that school are now looking to attain Foundation Status, which will give them greater control over the admission criteria for the school. Thus whilst the Closure Proposal notice indicates that places will be reserved at this school, and at Shevington, for those pupils who will be at PEMBEC from 2008 onwards, no mention is made of ensuring that Abraham Guest continues to accept pupils from 2009 onwards. Should it not do so the pupils concerned will be forced to go to Shevington, which is clearly much further away, or other schools which are equally difficult to access. Pupils from this area of Wigan are already among the most disadvantaged in the borough; some guarantee over their access to what should be one of the best secondary schools in the borough needs to be given.

Response regarding the proposed closure

The governors concerns in relation to the closure of PEMBEC are: -

PEMBEC serves the most deprived communities in the borough – the quality of teaching is satisfactory and the CVA is outstanding, the best in the borough. Staff often have to visit and collect pupils from their homes to ensure their attendance in school; this level of attention is not likely to continue when the schools, especially Shevington, are several miles away. At a time when increasing emphasis is being placed by the government on up-skilling people in deprived communities and tackling worklessness, to close down this centre of education that is in the heart of their community appears to run counter to this policy.

- Pupil punctuality has improved since the school day commenced at 8.30, but even now pupils do come in late. The prospects for pupils getting up earlier in order to catch buses to remote schools must therefore be in doubt. Should the school transport be missed, there is no direct bus service to Shevington from these estates and the costs of the bus fares to send children to Shevington will be considerable, especially for those families seeking to escape from worklessness and not in receipt of support from the council or the state.
- The need to catch school transport home immediately after the school day will militate against pupils from this area participating in extra-curricular activities (sport and drama, or additional lessons for Gifted and Talented pupils), again because of the time and cost associated with the use of public transport.

- PEMBEC's success with pupils is in part the result of the improved pupil to staff ratio that has been possible as a result of additional funding for the school, allied with the ability of staff to monitor all pupils precisely because the school is smaller than average. The Governors are concerned that our pupils, once in other schools, will become the forgotten, lower achieving pupils who will not be stretched as they are now. The LA and government will achieve their target of 30% 5A*-C including English and Maths, by virtue of the fact that the lack of success of these pupils is masked by the success of the larger number of pupils in these schools as a whole. Fisher Family Trust Model D data indicates that achieving 23% 5A*-C including English and Maths is itself a stretching target that is currently being achieved at PEMBEC – putting this group of pupils in other schools will not magically increase their collective ability to get to 30%, it will simply hide their failure. The data included in your closure proposal booklet on p7, further reflects this point – the better performance of the other two schools in KS4 exams can be attributed to their more varied socio-economic intake, it clearly is not down to their CVA, since Shevington's is the worst of the three.

One aspect of closure that will be beneficial is the fact that problem pupils, who now appear to be disproportionately sent to PEMBEC, which itself imposes a further brake on the achievement of government and LA targets, will be dispersed among the remaining schools and the PRUs. The governing body see it as unreasonable for any managed moves of pupils into PEMBEC to take place for those year groups that will be moving out to other schools. The reason for this is it would involve those pupils in having to make a third move of school during their secondary education; it would be simpler for them to go directly to either Abraham Guest or Shevington, which is after all where they will have to go in any event.

- At the present time the only school proposed for closure is PEMBEC, yet more places need to be lost in the secondary provision. It is rumoured that this is to be achieved by increasing the ratio of gross internal floorspace per pupil at other schools, thereby reducing their % under-utilisation. A second route to achieving a balance is said to be a reduction in the standard number of pupils – depending on how this was applied across the borough this could mean that the places at PEMBEC were needed to fulfil the basic demand for places. As the LA have not yet come out clearly to state what their proposals are it is difficult to know how true these rumours are – but if they are correct they could have been used beneficially to keep PEMBEC open.

The whole process by which the consultation on closure at PEMBEC has taken place has turned the process into one of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Rumours in 2006 about closure discouraged parents then from putting the school down as a first preference. Again in 2007 prior to the return of preference forms from primary schools, inept and untimely comments from the LA about the process made closure look a certainty, so parents again will have put other schools as a first preference. In 2008 parents will not be given the opportunity of even applying for places in the school, so there is no chance of any increase in pupil numbers occurring.

- These inept and untimely comments appearing in the press also brought to a halt initial discussions between PEMBEC and Abraham Guest schools, that were intended to bring about the merger of provision for pupils. This frustrated the local attempt to address the issue that had not been addressed in the selection of Abraham Guest as the school to be rebuilt in the first place, namely “what to do to rationalise provision of secondary places in this part of Wigan”.
- The failure of the LA to even put forward options for secondary re-organisation with the retention of PEMBEC has been seen by staff as a clear indication of the direction the council wish to move in. Not surprisingly the number of staff applying for, and obtaining, employment in other schools has increased dramatically – this will increase the pressure on existing staff to continue to deliver high quality education, and increase the likelihood of parents seeking to move their children in advance of the 2011 closure date
- ***“If we are to salvage something from this process we need to retain and enhance at least the KS4 NVQ related work. This needs to become an LA priority now, so that staff can be retained and work can begin with other secondary schools to co-ordinate timetable and travel arrangements, and also make the necessary changes to the fabric of the school to broaden the range of NVQs and diplomas on offer. This should enable the facility to provide also for the 16 – 19 age groups in due course”.***

This is a point that we stressed in our initial response, yet the only acknowledgement in the closure proposal on p 13 says “It is recognised that the PEMBEC building does have some excellent facilities and the future of these facilities will need to be considered if the proposal to close the school proceeds” – we had hoped that more definitive proposals could have emerged by now, given the determination of the council to close PEMBEC. Unless such a clear commitment is made in the very near future it will prove increasingly difficult to retain the staff in these key areas of the curriculum.

The Governors would welcome an early start on discussions regarding the establishment of a Skills Centre to serve the secondary schools in the North West of the borough. Hopefully the LA can facilitate such discussions, thereby restoring some confidence in their ability to plan for the future of educational provision in the borough.

Yours sincerely



Adrian Hardy, Chair of the Governors.