

ITEM No 3.3(a)

From: simon.collins
Sent: 22 June 2010 08:32
To: Carmel Riley
Subject: delegation from Holy Rood High School

As representatives of the Parent Council at Holy Rood High School we are writing to request that we may attend the Council Meeting on 24 June 2010 as a delegation to speak on item 9.8 on the agenda, home to school transport. We have prepared a written submission which is attached hereto. We would be obliged if this could be circulated to the Councillors prior to the meeting.

Simon Collins - Holy Rood Parent Council

WRITTEN SUBMISSION
ON BEHALF OF THE PARENT COUNCIL
OF HOLY ROOD RC HIGH SCHOOL

1. Introduction

We are writing on behalf of the parents of Holy Rood High School to voice our serious concerns about the recent changes to the Council's home to school transport policy. We are requesting that the Council reconsider the decision to extend the distance for free travel to school from two to three miles, given the unique and difficult circumstances that apply to Holyrood High School.

As the Council will be aware Holy Rood High School has undergone major changes within the last school year, with the completion of the magnificent new school building, and more recently the completion of landscaping work in the grounds on the site of the former school building. The Council should be extremely proud of the facilities that are now afforded to the pupils, staff and parents of the school, with a learning environment, and a location of the very highest order. The Headteacher, senior staff and teachers have successfully maintained the good ethos of the school, and thanks to their hard work, and the work of the pupils, ensured that the provision of education within the school remains second to none. Holy Rood High School should be seen as a clear example of the high standard that is achievable within our education system.

The Parent Council has always been aware that the provision of education at Holy Rood poses some particular difficulties, owing to the size of the catchment area, the diverse geographical and socio-economic spread of the catchment area and the poor provision of public transport to the school. It was with real anxiety and serious concerns that the Parent Council learned, after the decision had been taken, that large swathes of our catchment area were to lose the right to transport to school. We had neither been consulted about this, nor afforded an opportunity to comment.

The Parent Council appreciate that these are times of fiscal austerity and that cuts require to be made. The impact of the Councils recent decision upon our school will be unique, and disproportionate to the impact upon other schools within the city. As such we believe that an exception to the general rules must be made to allow the school to continue to serve its catchment area.

2. Holy Rood High School catchment area

As the Council will be aware Holy Rood High School serves a vast catchment area, being the only RC High school serving the east of Edinburgh. The Parent Council have always been aware that this presents challenges to the school, and efforts are made to try to involve parents and pupils from the outlying areas in all areas of school life. Unlike most schools in Edinburgh our catchment area spreads well over the two mile radius, and includes areas in excess of three miles from the school. The new provisions will mean that around 200 pupils will find themselves in a position where they have no means of free

transport to their local school, which is between two to three miles from their home. We would stress that the pupils affected are not choosing to attend a school outwith their catchment area. They are simply trying to attend at the local RC high school, having received primary education in one of the feeder primary schools within the catchment area. It has been calculated that to send two children, who fall within the above category, to Holy Rood High School will cost parents around £700 per annum. This is simply unaffordable to the majority of parents within these areas which include some of the more financially disadvantaged areas of Edinburgh. At our recent AGM, attended by representatives of the Council including Councillor Tymkewycz, the strength of feeling was obvious. The Parent Council received and passed on to the Council petitions from several parishes within our catchment area, and parents who attended made it clear that they have no option but to forgo their right to Catholic Education and to attempt to place their children within non-denominational school closer to home. That is, of course, provided that these schools can accommodate them. There will be a knock on effect upon the local RC primaries too, if parents elect to send their children to schools that feed directly into the local non-denominational schools to secure a secondary education place in the High Schools. In short we are concerned that this decision will result in the roll at Holy Rood and at the feeder primaries being decimated.

3. The geographical location of Holy Rood High School

At the Parent Council AGM parents in attendance expressed their concern at the Council's position that there had been identified safe walking routes to and from Holy Rood School for outlying areas. The Council must be aware that Holy Rood sits in a remote, albeit beautiful, location. The lack of regular bus routes serving the school has been raised with the council on more than one occasion, most recently when the new school building was being completed. The Parent council entered into correspondence seeking assistance from the Council in this regard. It cannot come as a surprise to the Council that this issue remains extant. For pupils, for example, from Leith to attend the School using public transport involves two separate bus journeys (the timing of the buses do not coincide with each other and lengthy waits at bus stops are involved) and a significant walk to the school itself. Equally pupils travelling from the Inch require to walk through a Hospital Car Park, and along a remote country style road with no lighting or footpath, before reaching the dangerous Craigmillar junction and proceeding through the poorly lit road into Holy Rood Park. The security and safety of the pupils on this route is a serious concern for parents, and again those attending at the meeting expressed strong views that this would prevent them sending their children to their local RC school.

4. The "equality" question

At our recent AGM councillor Tymkewycz confirmed that to his knowledge no consultation had been undertaken to assess the impact of the Council's decision regarding home to school transport from the perspective of equality. As pointed out above the size and diversity of Holy Rood's catchment area is as a result of its role providing faith based education to the east of Edinburgh. As a RC High School providing education for Catholic families and for others who choose to educate their children within the faith school setting, the impact of these changes will be felt primarily by members of the Catholic community. Has the Council undertaken any investigation into the equality implications of the recent

decision? If as we understand to be the case, no such consideration has been undertaken, does the Council feel that its decision can stand?

5. Moving the goalposts

The difficulties expressed above were raised in strong terms at our AGM. In addition many parents expressed concern that they had chosen to send their children to the school in previous years on the understanding that the transport provisions were in existence. The parents of pupils who have attended over previous years are now learning that they no longer qualify for such home to school transport, and the real prospect remains of them having to relocate their children in the middle of their high school education. The potential for disruption to the education of these pupils, the unsettling effect upon their social and educational development, and the possibility of brothers and sisters finding themselves in different school all cause real concern. Is it right that parents are being forced to change the school that their children attend purely because of financial reasons, rather than educational reasons, or for the benefit of the children?

6. Conclusion

The Parent Council of Holy Rood High School is proud of the achievements and standards of the School. The Parent Council recognises the value of the dedicated and professional teaching and management team. The hard work of all those involved in continuing the ethos of Holy Rood into the new era presented by our new school building is something of which the Council should be immensely proud. It is extremely regrettable, therefore, that the very foundations of the school should be threatened by what we believe to be an ill conceived and ill considered cost cutting exercise on the part of the Council. What is the purpose of a local school if not to serve its local community? The Council's decision will mean that the provision of education within an RC school is simply outwith the finance of families within our catchment area. Instead of celebrating the achievement of Holy Rood with pride, the Council will be called upon to answer to the shame of a half empty school, and large areas of Edinburgh where parents are deprived of their right to free education within their faith school.

"Edinburgh is recognised as a leading centre for education, knowledge and research. The City of Edinburgh Council provides learning opportunities of the highest quality to assist children, young people and adults in reaching their full potential."

A quote lifted directly from the Council's web site. How will that be redrafted to address the issue of parents who cannot afford to send their children to their local school?

Holy Rood is a truly exceptional school, in terms of achievement, in terms of catchment area, in terms of location, and in terms of services provided to it. That must be recognised, and the school treated as an exception to the home to school transport changes.