

**ASCL; ATL; NAHT; NASUWT; NUT; Voice**

# **SSCC Teachers' Panel**

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## **Response to the Statutory Notice to close Riverside Community BEC.**

The teaching unions continue to be opposed to the closure of Riverside BEC. We regard the City Council's decision to propose closure as short-sighted and damaging to the longer term integrity of local education.

Whilst recognising the financial and educational difficulties that Riverside presents in its current configuration **we do not believe that the LA has adequately explored how secondary education on that site fits into the wider context of educational needs across the city.** In June the teaching unions submitted proposals for a more creative use of the school, extending the current provision at Riverside to become an Inclusion Centre of Excellence with extended sporting facilities. This would have helped to address both the financial issues facing Riverside and the problems of public perception that the council has identified as a key issue. We are disappointed that the LA dismissed these proposals. This was a real opportunity that has now been lost to the same knee jerk mentality that previously saw Mary Linwood school close in 1999 only to be replaced 7 years later by an Academy.

The closure of Riverside will have a particular impact on future education provision in the city. The LA will lose a Community Comprehensive School in 2011, 3 years before secondary rolls start to rise. Given that projections on future numbers have themselves been rising due to the extensive number of new arrivals in the city, we need to recognise that current figures are essentially minimum estimations. The City will, therefore, need the equivalent of at least two large new schools or 3 smaller schools before 2017.

Under current legislation the LA is required to put out to tender all proposals for new schools. Religious organisations, charitable trusts such as Oasis and private business organisations etc all have a right to bid to run these schools alongside any LA proposals for Community Schools. The current government prefers private providers. By closing Riverside the LA is reducing its capacity to retain coherent Community Comprehensive Education provision in the city. That is to be regretted.

Furthermore, in opening up the possibility of a series of private sector and religious providers opening up new schools **the LA runs the serious risk of destabilising all current admissions arrangements and creating what amounts to an education free-for-all in the city.** This would be deeply unhelpful to the work being undertaken across city schools to raise standards and create an unquantifiable dynamic in terms of place preferences with all sorts of unforeseen consequences in terms job loss for staff.

By contrast, retaining secondary education provision on the Riverside site, albeit in a revised configuration to take account of student numbers, would allow the authority to expand that provision as required once student numbers begin to grow. We believe that this is demonstrably in the best interests of education in the city, and in particular education on the West side of the city.

Retaining secondary provision at Riverside also has the advantage of retaining the experience and dedication of a staff which this year successfully improved performance at GCSE to 35% (including Maths and English), successfully taking Riverside out of the national Challenge. Such efforts should be applauded and cherished. The LA should not be frittering away this expertise in piecemeal redeployment offers to a staff facing school closure and redundancy in the context of projected major education cuts and a continuing recession.

The proposals we submitted for an Inclusion Centre of Excellence were, in our view, both coherent and relevant to the challenges facing the city. Leicester has for a lengthy period failed to adequately address the issue of inclusion. Here, it has the opportunity to do so not only in line with government expectations, but also in a creative and innovative way that reflects the LA's commitment to collaborative working.

There have been those within the LA who have suggested that it will still be possible to develop an Inclusion Centre after Riverside has closed. In our view that is to fundamentally misunderstand what we have proposed. **The Inclusion Centre of Excellence was NOT simply another Special School under another name.** Rather, it was a radical integrative proposal that would enable two small schools – Riverside and Ellesmere – to exist as an educational continuum on one site, with students accessing provision wherever was most appropriate, subject by subject. There would, therefore, be real inclusion of pupils who have SEN with mainstream students, but in a suitably the context of a small and caring overall environment.

For these reasons the six teaching unions continue to oppose the closure of Riverside BEC. We urge the City Council to withdraw the proposals and to sit down and talk with staff, unions, governors and the secondary Heads and Principals about alternative solutions to the issues facing the school.

SSCC November 2009.