

TIME FOR SCHOOLS TO WORK TOGETHER

As a senior member of staff at Wulfric School, I have hesitated a long time before putting pen to paper about the proposed reorganisation of post-primary education in the Burton area.

Uppermost in my mind is the belief that the scheme put forward by the authority is likely to be put into practice and that some, at least, of the existing staffs of Wulfric School and the Forest of Needwood High School are going to be colleagues in a few years — so my interest is in understanding and co-operation, not in rivalry; still less angry exchanges. But events of the past week have convinced me that, as a Horninglow resident as well as a member of staff, I should make some comment.

Parents and staff at Wulfric have tried hard to express no animosity towards the "Forest." We felt stunned by the merger proposal, and sorry that either building had to close. In fact the one local school that could survive falling rolls and still be viable is Wulfric.

With an all-round record that is unsurpassed in the area, Wulfric is worth keeping in its present form. But it's obvious that the problem is area-wide and we can't remain in our present form without drastically affecting everyone else; and looking at all the options, most of us have resigned ourselves to the fact that the merger makes the best of a bad job.

JOB SAVINGS

I believe most of us sympathise with the "Forest" staff over the proposed loss of their building, but believe it is more important to realise that

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more jobs could be saved if the two schools merged at Horninglow than if they merged in Rolleston.

A good-sized school in the Wulfric buildings could employ up to 90 of the existing 150 staff in the two schools; a joint school in Rolleston would employ more like 60.

What has caused annoyance has not been the sight of a good school striving to be preserved, but some of the tactics employed by the "Forest" governors, which have not always been as fair and unsensational as has been claimed. This is particularly true of the local headline a few weeks back about the Forest's building's possible use as a prison if the school closed.

The feeling is that the idea has been floated as a scare-mongering tactic based on one reference in a Sunday newspaper. In fact, at the Town Hall meeting the county education spokesman, Mr Alan O'Donnell, made it clear that the "Forest" building would not necessarily be abandoned if the school closed.

It is however, the publication of a proposal by the "Forest" that Wulfric might merge with Paget School on the Paget site that has increased the sense of anger in Horninglow.

The feeling of many at Wulfric is that most of the arguments put forward originally from the "Forest" governors for merging in Rol-

leston instead of Horninglow were out-argued at the public meeting at the Town Hall. Among other things, it was pointed out on that occasion that the "Forest" was not alone in having strong community involvement . . . Wulfric does too; that alternative use of the Forest building should be sought and canvassed, thus preserving youth club, swimming pool and evening institute; and that the split site character of Wulfric was not such a cause of concern to the authority as some people had made out.

Mr O'Donnell also made it clear that the government required considerable "surplus capacity" in school buildings — and this would be provided by a large, newly merged school in the Wulfric premises, but not by such a school in the "Forest" buildings.

TOGETHERNESS

It is felt by many people associated with Wulfric that, with these points having been

made, the two schools need to begin to plan for the future.

But instead "Forest" has now unveiled its "reserve plan" creating hostility and resentment where there needs to be growing co-operation.

Think about the sociological make up of a combined Wulfric/Paget on the one hand and on the other a preserved "Forest" taking just a few pupils from the edge of Burton. A combined Forest/Wulfric in Horninglow drawing from a fair slice of the existing Wulfric catchment area as well as Stretton, Tutbury and Rolleston, would contain a real cross section of the population. A combined school on the "Forest" site wouldn't.

It doesn't make sense either, to merge schools that are four miles apart and have to provide free bus places for all the pupils living north of Victoria Crescent, especially after the "Forest" protested against bussing senior pupils from Tutbury under the authority's scheme.

There is a belief on the Wulfric campus that the "Forest" governors' scheme is so "way out" that probably some people in Rolleston are, at least privately, embarrassed by it. Can't we avoid adding further fuel to the fire that is now burning? Can't we start working together?

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