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Cllr Ray Gooding  
Cabinet Member for Education and Lifelong  
Learning  
Essex County Council

Date: 30 August 2013

Dear Councillor Gooding,

**PEOPLE AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: DEANES SCHOOL TASK AND FINISH GROUP FINAL REPORT**

I have pleasure in submitting the report of the Task and Finish Group which was set up to consider the future of the Deanes School in Castle Point. Clearly the enclosed report has been completed to meet the deadline set by yourself in-line with the decision-making process. However, the report will need to be formally ratified by the full People and Families Scrutiny Committee meeting on Thursday, 12 September 2013.

Thank you for your response to the initial draft report which has been considered by the Members of the Group. We have met this morning to consider your response.

Colleagues on the Group have spent some considerable time on this issue and considered evidence given by 45 individuals plus written evidence submitted from Basildon and Southend-on-Sea Borough Councils. The Group is grateful to you and Dr Tim Coulson for giving evidence at the opening and concluding public evidence sessions.

The Group have areas of agreement with you and officers, i.e. if the Deanes School were to remain open it would need to be a smaller school with a school roll of 600 pupils – a figure generally accepted by the Council and the school. The business case of the school has been refined and is now at a point where both the school and officers believe it to be robust. The Group accept this is predicated on the school achieving a roll number of 600. It is clear that Essex County Council officers do not think this is achievable. The Group, however, on the evidence received, is not convinced that the school cannot achieve this, particularly if the school were to be rebuilt given it is rated as a good school with some outstanding features.

Although it is stated that there is spare capacity at schools in Basildon the Group were disappointed not to receive any documentary evidence relating to this, in particular in relation to capacity and Ofsted reports. Members were also disappointed not to receive documentary evidence relating to the initial decision made to co-locate and rebuild the Deanes School and Glenwood School. The Group made it clear, from the outset that it wished to follow the audit trail related to the original decision. This evidence might have assisted the Group in its deliberations.

The Task and Finish Group recognises the decision rests with yourself, as Cabinet Member, and considers it to be an “on-balance” decision. As a scrutiny group we do not have the resources or expertise that you as Cabinet Member have at your disposal, therefore, the Group believes that it is your evidence that should convince us not the scrutiny group’s task to prove otherwise.

The Group is not convinced of the case, beyond all reasonable doubt, to close the Deanes School, a school that is not a failing school and which offers an education that is an alternative to that offered by the other large schools in the area. The Group also feels there is a potential of a greater impact than would normally be the case on the wider community given the sporting and community facilities on offer within the school grounds, as well as the significant outreach activity conducted by the school with local primary schools. The co-location of the Deanes School and Glenwood School should be seen as an opportunity to establish flagship education model led by Essex.

The report will be received by the People and Families Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 12 September for formal ratification. I confirm that the view of the Task and Finish Group is that the case for closing the Deanes School has not been proven.

Yours sincerely,

Councillor Graham Butland

Chairman, People and Families Scrutiny Committee