

EDUCATION SWANAGE TIMELINE

Nov 2008 - Purbeck Review of Schools initiated by DCC

Jan-Feb 2009 - Initial DCC consultation on review

June 2009 - DCC made in principle decision to move to two tier system of schooling

July 2009 - ES established

Sept 2009 - Swanage Options Forum

Nov 2009 - DCC decision to not consult on secondary education

Dec 2009 - ES meet with DCC education officers in Poundbury

Feb- March 2010 - Second DCC consultation

May 2010 - General Election

August 2010 - Initial free school proposal submitted to the DfE

December 2010 - School's adjudicator upholds two tier system decision

February 2011 - DfE launch new free school application process

July 2011 - Final free school proposal submitted to the DfE

10th Oct 2011 - Proposal accepted, Gove announcement to House of Commons



Sending off free school proposal - July 2011

The story of Education Swanage

The journey to approval

The values of ES emerged throughout the journey to founding the new school and are analysed in relation to their influence in subsequent chapters. Prior to that discussion it is important to understand the contextual background to the work of ES by summarising the story from 2008 when DCC began a review of schools in Purbeck. The following section describes the timeline from the start of the Purbeck Review of Schools to the acceptance by the DfE of the ES free school proposal. The intention is to explain the context that ES were working in, rather than to provide a rationale for the approach of DCC.

The Purbeck Review of Schools

The Purbeck Review of Schools was a consultation process organised by DCC to find a solution to the perceived problem of surplus places at Purbeck Upper School, Wareham, ten miles North West of Swanage. In a report to DCC's Community Overview Committee (COC) in November 2008, education officers presented the key issues:

1. The number of surplus places was perceived as having a significant impact on schooling provision in the Purbeck area and therefore the officers proposed urgent action.
2. A number of schools had already reduced staffing or re-arranged their classes.
3. A number of schools were facing major budget deficits.
4. Schools were put at a significant disadvantage in aiming to provide high quality provision for children and young people, if the situation was not addressed.

Therefore the officers proposed 'for there to be a two-tier pattern of provision; schools would operate as primary or secondary schools' (COC Report, Dorset for You, 2009).

The COC subsequently recommended to the Cabinet of DCC that public consultation should take place during the period January to February 2009 in order to seek stakeholder's views on the proposal. The objective was to close middle schools in Bovington, Wareham, Sandford and Swanage and rationalise the primary sector by reducing the number of first schools as they were reorganised into primaries. Closure of

Swanage Middle School would mean that children would transfer out of the town for schooling at the age of 11, instead of 13.

The Purbeck-wide consultation, led by DCC, acted as a catalyst for the formation of ES, who, by the summer of 2009, had formed as a small community group that opposed the reorganisation of schools on educational, social, economic and environmental grounds. This diverse and disparate faction of parents, school governors, teachers, teaching assistants and interested members of the community began a campaign with the sole aim of opposing the council's plans in order to retain secondary education in Swanage.

Council education officers published consultation papers that were made available to all stakeholders in the Purbeck pyramid.¹ A number of key factors were stated as needing to be taken into account by consultees. First, the officers established that there was a presumption against the closure of rural schools. The consultation paper stated, 'the government recognises the importance of local schools to their community' (Dorset for You, consultation documents, 2012). Second, it was seen as critical that there would be secondary provision of high quality in the area that would be able to offer the enhanced National Curriculum entitlement for this age range. Finally, that schools 'will need to widen their extended services to serve the local community both before and after the school day' (Future School Provision in Purbeck Area, Dorset for You, 2012).

These three factors were a DCC 'own goal' as their rationale did not on the face of it support closing local schools; ES made good use of their flawed thinking in tabling an objection to the review process. Whereas the education officers claimed it was important for rural communities to have high quality provision for education, with extended services supported by local communities, ES believed that by closing schools in Swanage and the surrounding villages the officers contradicted their aim of providing high quality educational provision for all children and young people, locally. ES did not accept that a school ten miles away from Swanage was 'local'.

¹ A pyramid of schools includes all primary and secondary educational provision within a specific catchment area. The Purbeck pyramid included all first schools, middle schools and The Purbeck Upper School, all of which were located on the Isle of Purbeck. The secondary school is considered to be at the top of the pyramid with all of the other schools 'feeding' into it.

However, by June 2009, DCC education officers reported to Cabinet and requested that following the initial consultation they approve an ‘in principle’ decision to change to a two-tier system of schooling on the grounds that ‘this will remove the significant majority of the surplus places and ensure a viable and sustainable school system across the Purbeck area’ (Dorset for You, COC report, June 2009). The only concession to campaigns in Swanage was a second round of consultation to ‘determine the exact pattern of provision within the context of a two-tier pattern of schooling’ (Dorset for You, COC report, June 2009).

The ‘in principle’ decision to move to two-tier was approved by the DCC Cabinet in July 2009 pending the outcome of the second consultation, the structure of which was informed by the outcomes of an ‘options forum’ that allowed all stakeholders to present to county officers their views on the recommendations. The first meeting of ES, held on Monday 20th July 2009, was held to discuss securing a place on the options forum. At this initial meeting ES discussed the case for maintaining secondary education in Swanage based on numbers of children and the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the town. It was decided that the best course of action was to propose the option of a satellite of the Purbeck School in Swanage so that there could be local educational provision offering a broad and balanced curriculum under LA control. The following week ES met with local MP, Jim Knight (Labour), in order to lobby for representation on the options forum, due to be held in September 2009.

The options forum

Having established itself as a formal campaign group ES was permitted to send a representative to the options forum. We proposed the twin campus option, with sites in Wareham and Swanage and requested that the proposal should be included in the forthcoming consultation in March 2010, so that members of the community could voice their opinions on the location and nature of secondary education. The proposal presented by ES stated that a town the size of Swanage (population 10,000), with approximately 600 11-16 year olds, should be properly equipped to educate its children locally and not be obliged to transport them daily to Wareham. ES argued that local secondary provision would remove the need for a fleet of buses travelling up the narrow and congested A351 through Corfe Castle on a 20-mile round-trip and would support DCC's own policies on improving sustainable transport. There would also be positive

implications for children's health and well-being, levels of obesity and access to opportunities for after-school sport, clubs and activities.

Furthermore, ES proposed that a secondary school in Swanage would maintain the appeal of the town to young families. We argued that the loss of all educational facilities in Swanage beyond age eleven would fundamentally undermine the long-term prospects for the town and lead to a loss of young families from the area. Moreover, the lack of secondary provision would be a major disincentive for families and young people considering moving to Swanage. The lack of young people entering the local workforce, undermining both local businesses and essential services, would exacerbate the already ageing demographic profile of the town. Additionally we believed that a secondary school in the town would be more accessible to parents, enabling them to play a full and active part in their child's education.

Aside from representation on the forum ES began working with James Wetz, from HSEM, to ensure the vision for the school was realistic and supported by evidence from examples of small and federated schools in Dorset and the UK. ES believed a twin campus secondary school could offer shared leadership, governance, curriculum and timetabling with 11-16 learning centres in Swanage and Wareham, feeding into a combined 6th Form centre. This model would have the advantage of being environmentally sustainable whilst encouraging children to respect their community. The development of a local campus would help ensure the maintenance of Swanage's appeal to families, economic viability and renewed collaboration with outside agencies.

According to DCC figures the population and demographic trends for Swanage and the nearby village of Langton, would mean that there would be 720 11-16 year olds in 2014, furthermore the population of young people in the area was not expected to fall much below this. Allowing for a percentage who would continue to choose independent or grammar schools, ES proposed that a minimum three form entry secondary campus in Swanage was viable. In terms of surplus places, the original reason for the review, our research showed that 'leakage' of students to other schools away from the Purbeck pyramid was as much to blame for falling rolls as was the ageing demographic of the region. We proposed that by building a school in the community we could begin to address this leakage and attract parents and children back to the town for education.

Furthermore, Dorset Schools' Forum concurred with the values held by ES; that children benefit from attending their local school. They suggested that children are more likely to be able to access the curriculum and any extended school services if their school was local, 'the local secondary school should be able to provide a broad and balanced education with sufficient staff to meet their pastoral needs' (Dorset Schools' Forum, 2012).

The proposal from ES was based on the premise that children in the Swanage area should not be denied access to a genuinely local secondary school and the associated extended services. For example, Herston, an area on the outskirts of Swanage, was recognised as having the highest level of rural deprivation on the Isle of Purbeck. Nevertheless, DCC were proposing, in principle, to remove education that had previously been on the community of Herston's doorstep. On the contrary, ES's proposal recognised that a local school is a successful way of addressing the effects of poverty on educational outcomes, particularly in rural communities.

ES also recognised that Purbeck School was still falling below the expectations of many parents compared to other comprehensive schools nearby, particularly in terms of 'raw' results. At Purbeck School 46% of students gained five GCSE A*-C grades, compared to 53.4% for the national average and 59.4% average for Dorset. Only 9% of students achieved the English Baccalaureate compared to 12% nationally and 21% for Dorset (DfE, School League Tables, 2012). The consensus in the group was that parental and community involvement plus local collaboration would lead to better educational outcomes for children if they were educated in their own town. ES believed that by creating a campus of the Purbeck School in Swanage, the community and parents would be more able to participate in activities and extended services.

Furthermore, parents would be more likely to send their children to a school close to where they live. The case was therefore presented for a secondary campus in Swanage which would raise achievement, raise expectations and inspire community cohesion. Moreover, the curriculum proposal drew on case studies from around the UK to show that with effective timetabling small schools can achieve excellent results whilst managing a broad curriculum (Fairfield High School, 2012).

The outcome of the options forum process was that local stakeholders voted for secondary education to be included in the second round of consultation; however this was not the view of DCC officers who were working on their own overview of secondary school modelling for Purbeck (Dorset for You, 2012). Their report drew on expertise from officers responsible for transport, standards, premises, planning and finance and outlined that for any secondary proposal to be considered by the project team it must aim to create a school system that is efficient, effective and fit for purpose that would enable all children and young people to achieve high standards.

The report did not make recommendations or draw conclusions but stated implications of providing secondary schooling in Swanage. Despite a facade of neutrality it was evident from the way the report was written that DCC would not support a proposal for a school in Swanage. The main implications outlined in the report were based on the argument that small schools, particularly in rural areas, were challenged by the agenda of 14-19 education; according to the officers the twin site model would not be able to support a broad and balanced curriculum. The DCC team assumed that two separate schools in Swanage 11-16 (three form entry) and Wareham 11-18 (four form entry), would provide too great a challenge.

Officers prepared a new report to the COC in November 2009 recommending that there should be no further consultation on secondary provision in Swanage. In a final attempt to persuade DCC to include secondary education in the second round of consultation, ES made strong representation to the COC meeting at County Hall, Dorchester. ES representatives made speeches outlining our response to the newly published Purbeck Review of School Provision report, which included DCC's dismissal of the options forum's preferences. Each councillor and member of the Cabinet was also presented with an ES report, a detailed critique of the education officers' recommendations. We requested of the COC that they overturn their own officers' recommendation which omitted consulting with the Swanage community.

The COC debated the issue and voted to support ES by recommending that the education officers met with us to examine the possibility of secondary provision being included in the forthcoming consultation (Dorset for You, Cabinet reports, 2012). At this point, the education officers had not met with any experts who could present an

alternative view to their arguments. Therefore ES urged them to meet with Wetz so that he could promote the view that schools should be small and that quality of learning is a reflection of how well the students are known by their teachers. Wetz presented the case for the primacy of relationships and their effectiveness in small schools, or small units within larger schools (Wetz, 2009). Despite his views forming a counter balance, no human-scale concepts were later reflected in the officer's recommendations to Cabinet.



Swanage deserves a secondary school protest march 24th November 2009

December meeting 2009

Prior to the DCC Cabinet meeting set for January 2010, ES and the education officers met in late December 2009, as charged by the COC. At the start of the meeting DCC presented four 'show stoppers' that, in their opinion, rendered the discussion of secondary education in Swanage unviable: first, the compromise in terms of curriculum delivery and timetabling would mean that the breadth of provision and quality of teaching were unacceptable. Second, the revenue costs of the twin site proposal were prohibitive. Third, the capital costs could not be met as there was no identifiable site for the school. Finally, splitting provision between Wareham and Swanage would make an impact on all Purbeck children and make the school(s) unsustainable and vulnerable to failure.

The three-hour discussion concluded that colleagues had given their expert opinion and it may be a matter of 'agreeing to disagree'. It was suggested, by the neutral Chair, that it was important not to lose sight of the issues raised and the place of human-scale institutions in the future of curriculum delivery, but there appeared to be no automatically viable way forward within the given constraints. It was suggested that there was a danger of ES continuing to pursue a Swanage secondary school which could

further destabilise education in the pyramid. The Chair recommended that the role for ES should be in articulating a vision for Swanage that fitted with the remit of the review. The meeting ended with him noting that despite the outcome, energy and passion are important and he urged colleagues in ES to respond positively. He suggested that if nothing were to come of the Swanage secondary option ES should work constructively to ensure the success of the single site proposal in Wareham. Needless to say the final report to the DCC Cabinet made no changes to the recommendations of the officers, there would be no consultation on secondary education in Swanage; respondents would only have the opportunity to voice their opinions on primary provision.

At this stage individual members of ES wrote to members of the Cabinet to object. My own correspondence pointed out that the report published for the Cabinet meeting on 20th January 2010 (Dorset for You, Cabinet Papers, 2012) almost totally omitted the concerns raised by ES as representatives for hundreds of others in Swanage who felt that our community and our children's education would suffer if all forms of secondary schooling were removed from the town. I concluded the letter with this plea:

In a final attempt to urge you to go the extra mile in listening to the as yet unheard voices of the Swanage community my request is that you use **your** voices to vote on a full consultation in Swanage to include a question regarding the provision of secondary education in the town. (Private correspondence to Dorset County Councillors, 15th January 2010)

From my perspective and that of ES, the fact that there would be no further consultation on the issue of secondary provision meant that hundreds of voices within the community went unheard. I did not receive a reply from any member of the Cabinet.

Spring 2010

Despite objections from the community and from councillors within the COC, the Cabinet voted in favour of adopting the officers' recommendations to not consult on secondary education. ES decided to focus on opposing the entire review process. We convened a meeting of community representatives in April 2010 to discuss an agreed action plan for a renewed campaign. The strategies included a petition, press releases, requesting an economic impact assessment and lobbying our parliamentary candidates.

However, the general election in May 2010 was a turning point. A period of *purdah*² resulted in a delay to proceedings locally, meanwhile at a national level Conservatives and Liberal Democrats formed a new coalition government, bringing with them the potential of sweeping changes to education. In a speech to the COC an ES representative stated that the change in national government provided the obvious trigger to halt the school review process and reappraise the political and economic environment in which the reorganisation was taking place. However, statutory notices for the closure of the middle schools were served, following the official adjudication process which sided with DCC.

For ES a new journey began, having neither saved the middle school nor persuaded DCC to create a new satellite school in Swanage, a new way forward emerged as Michael Gove, Secretary of State for Education, introduced the coalition government's free school policy (DfE, Free Schools, 2012). Until this point ES was a campaign group, fighting for the maintenance of secondary education in the town, however, by late 2010 we evolved into free school proposers, finding consolation in the adjudicator's report which stated that:

'Free schools' are not subject to the same stringent constraints as maintained schools and it may well be the case that sufficient numbers of parents will support the venture, notwithstanding the more limited curriculum it is likely to be able to offer, to make it a success. I therefore believe the LA is correct to proceed with its own plans without seeking to forestall or inhibit the development of the proposed free school. (Dorset for You, Adjudicator's report, 2010, p.26)

ES believed that the rationale for a free school in Swanage was strong and that we were justified in working towards its establishment. The introduction of the free school policy provided the opportunity to propose a new state-funded school for Swanage, independent of LA control. The aim of the free school policy enabled communities, such as Swanage, to establish schools, either to drive up standards or provide educational provision where there is none; ES had a strong case for both.

² *Purdah* is the time period between an election being announced and a result being published. During this time no new policies are allowed to be announced which could be advantageous to any parties during the election.

Therefore, we made a formal proposal to the DfE in the summer of 2011 which explained the rationale for the school; with the closure of the middle school it was likely that Swanage would become the only town in Dorset without secondary provision and the largest town in the UK to have to send so many children so far to school. However, population projections demonstrated that there would be enough children in the area to warrant a secondary school. ES stated that it is not in the educational or social interests of children and young people to make such lengthy journeys away from their community each day.

The proposal explained that the consequences of the reorganisation were likely to be damaging for Swanage's social, economic and environmental sustainability, a view repeatedly put to members of ES in discussion with planning experts, local families, businesses and residents. ES viewed the reorganisation and the proposed free school as an opportunity to return full secondary education to the town. There was sufficient demand, based upon consultation with parents, to sustain a small but viable school, capable of carefully managed expansion. The proposal outlined a school that would cater for all local young people whilst raising aspirations and challenging other schools in the area to improve their performance. ES aimed to create an intellectually rigorous learning community that would increase choice and competition whilst inspiring greater educational achievement in the area as a whole.

ES also expressed that as Swanage is situated at the eastern end of the Jurassic Coast, the UK's first natural UNESCO World Heritage Site, it is in a desirable location for a school as it is visited by thousands of students from around the world every year (Jurassic Coast, 2012). The town is a recognised centre of heritage, literary and arts activity, alongside the broader tourism and visitor industries. The Swanage School was proposed as a unique legacy for the future, set in the 'best outdoor classroom in the world'. Organisations such as Forest Schools (2012) and The Institute for Outdoor Learning (2013) are examples of educational initiatives that support learning outside the classroom as being intrinsically important to the development of children and young people. A school in Swanage was proposed as a potential centre of excellence for such learning.

Therefore the aim for the school, outlined in our proposal to the DfE, was to encourage greater innovation in educational provision by engaging with and modelling a wider range of approaches to learning. The intention was to provide a value-for-money system of education that focused on intellectual rigour and traditional values that would place the quality of relationships at the heart of the school. The aim was that the self-sustaining educational community created would be at the heart of learning in the local area and over time would become recognised as a centre of innovation and excellence at both a national and international level.

In his speech to parliament on 10th October 2011, Gove announced 55 new free schools had been approved to the pre-opening stage, The Swanage School being one of them. However, the key question ES grappled with was; how could the school be created to integrate the ideals of our proposed vision and values in reality? How could our aspirations be put into practice in the actuality of opening a school? Was it possible to achieve what we claimed in our proposal to the DfE; to improve educational practice in Swanage and influence social transformation in the community as a whole? This was a case of dreaming of a 'possible world' (Bruner, 1986).

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