



31st March 2022

Re: Home to School Policy 2022-23 – The Swanage School Clause 1.1.3

I am writing on behalf of The Swanage School to ask you to consider and question the rationale and justification for Clause 1.1.3 in the proposed home to school policy. I am currently the Headteacher and have been part of the senior leadership team from the beginning.

As I'm sure most of you are aware, The Swanage School was opened in Sept 2013 as part of the government free school programme as a response to the closing down of Swanage Middle School. Parents in Swanage wanted a secondary education to remain in the town. Swanage would have been the largest town in the entire country without a secondary school had The Swanage School not opened. Since opening the Swanage School has grown by over 300% in student numbers, enjoyed consistently excellent academic outcomes and has been graded as Good with many outstanding features by OFSTED twice. The Swanage School is now firmly established as a successful academy.

It is fair to say that Dorset strongly opposed the opening of the Swanage School. The senior leadership team from The Swanage School were initially excluded from attending D.A.S.H – The Dorset Secondary Association of Headteachers. We had to fight for our place at the table, looking back it is simply incomprehensible now, I mean imagine if the leadership team from Coombe House School were told they could not attend D.A.S.H meetings or that there would be special transport clauses that would exclude them and their students and this was simply non-negotiable. Ironically, when Mr Hobson, the founding Headteacher, had to retire on medical grounds he was the longest standing member of D.A.S.H and well respected by his peers. My point here is that time has moved on and attitudes have changed and evolved with the times, we are no longer an 'unknown' to be excluded but we are an established good school in Dorset that needs to be supported and included. Our students and parents need to be supported by our local government.

The Swanage School is an excellent school and has been exceptionally successful. The school is truly an asset for the children and parents of Swanage and rural Dorset. It is theretofore puzzling that the Dorset Council Home to School Transport policy continues to discriminate against it.

Finally, and I thank you for your patience. During a Zoom meeting with Rick Perry – Dorset Council Service Manager - Education on Thurs 31st March 2022 he said that the argument that upheld the clause last time was that assurances were made to parents in Swanage at the time The Swanage School opened that they would have the choice to send their children to either Swanage School or The Purbeck school. Our response is the following:

Times Have Changed – What is the cost of this 'choice'?

- There is a climate emergency – we have a social responsibility and obligation to cut emissions not unnecessarily increase them.
 - Cost – This is taxpayers money, could the hundreds of thousands of pounds spent on this choice be better spent elsewhere?
 - We are now an established successful local school with a proven track record – what more do we have to do to be accepted as equal?
 - These assurances have been upheld for nearly 10 years the parents concerned would no longer be affected – you have done what you said you would
 - Times and attitudes have changed – people accept that action on climate change comes at a cost
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In summary - The key points we are raising are as follows:

- Every year, Dorset Council spends a significant amount of money transporting students who live in Swanage, which has its own established and successful secondary school, to a school which is not their nearest secondary school. Contrary to all established national practice and policy. This has a huge detrimental impact on the environment and is an unnecessary, unethical financial burden on the local transport budget, which is only going to get more costly given the huge inflation in fuel costs.
- Parents who live outside Swanage whose children attend The Swanage School are not given the same deal and have to pay for their transport. They correctly argue this is discriminatory. Some have appealed and have been awarded bus passes on these grounds.
- The proposed Dorset transport policy has a 'special clause', 1.1.3 which explicitly discriminates against The Swanage School, disregards its catchment area and is completely contrary to national and local school transport policy. Why is this? Rick explained it was implemented to give Swanage parents a choice, a commitment dating back to 2011. We must ask why parents of Wareham and Bovington are not given the same level of support and choice? We also ask how long should the current arrangement stand? Surely 10 years is long enough!
- The financial and climate emergencies and resulting responsibilities should trump the luxury of choice in this case.

Just before the pandemic broke I had a meeting with Mark Blackman who assured me that moving forward Dorset Council would be addressing this issue on the principle that Dorset Council should only be providing free transport to the nearest school and recognised that the current practice was a very costly luxury that they could no longer afford to fund or continue to try and justify. But then the pandemic broke out and we all had bigger things to worry about.

The current transport policy consultation has brought this issue to the forefront again.

The Swanage School asks for a common-sense approach to this longstanding issue, but also feels the time has come to seek a judicial review if the matter is not resolved in the current policy review process.

Kind regards

Jenny Maraspin

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Head Teacher
