

## Question to Cabinet 26 July 2022

### 1. Question from Jenny Maraspin – Head teacher at The Swanage School

#### Home to School Policy 2022-23

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

In summary - The key points we are raising are as follows:

- **Climate Change** - 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.
- **Parent Concern** - 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. This is the biggest concern raised in the School's parent survey each year.
- **Discriminates** - 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. The council explained it was implemented to give Swanage parents a choice, a commitment dating back to 2011. Surely 10 years is long enough!
- **Treating All Equally & Fair** – Dorset Council abide by this phrase, yet in this case fail to do so!

Just before the pandemic broke I had a meeting with Mark Blackman who assured her 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 take legal action if the matter is not resolved in the current policy review process.

Question:

**Given the above facts, how can the chamber reconcile the hypocrisy?**

**Response from the Portfolio Holder for Children, Education, Skills and Early Help**

Dorset Council maintains its position that the Swanage School was set up to give the families of Swanage a choice of provision once the 3 tier system was abolished. It was designed to provide a local secondary school to families who did not wish to travel to the larger Purbeck School in Wareham.

On this basis, the Council continues to use the Purbeck catchment area for transport entitlement purposes to that school, while at the same time acknowledging a transport entitlement area for The Swanage School, assisting those families to access that school.

The unilateral extension of The Swanage School catchment area does not require an extension of eligibility to all families in Purbeck to transport to the Swanage School – the free school was set up for Swanage residents as an alternative to the Purbeck School. The Swanage School has raised expectations of families by this action, as well as through their website, suggesting to parents that they should be entitled to transport as the schools 'catchment area' extends across the Purbeck Area.

A removal of transport eligibility would disadvantage families on FSM/PP. They are unlikely to be able to access their own means to transport to Purbeck, and those who can, would make individual car journeys in order to access their preferred school.