

# Sutton upon Derwent Parish Council

Clerk: Yvonne Eggleston, Windrush, Main Street, Sutton upon Derwent, YORK, YO41 4BN  
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## Wolds Learning Partnership

By email: [office@wlp.education](mailto:office@wlp.education)

15 January 2023

## Response to Woldgate School's proposed admissions policy 2024-2025

Dear Sir / Madam,

The Parish Council of Sutton upon Derwent is writing in response to the proposed changes to the Woldgate School admissions arrangements, which we believe would have a severe and detrimental impact on the children and families of our parish.

Our primary concern is that the proposed admissions policy would in effect downgrade the priority for catchment that has historically been in place, and which has led to a long-standing "feeder" relationship between our school – Sutton upon Derwent Church of England Primary School – and Woldgate. In our opinion, the proposed changes are manifestly inequitable and wholly unfair.

Our concerns can be summarised against five key areas.

### **1. The endangerment of our local school**

For many years, Sutton upon Derwent Primary School has "fed" Woldgate School. Our parish is not in any other secondary catchment area, and therefore has a greater reliance upon admission to Woldgate than perhaps other local schools.

If this reliable path to a local secondary were to be jeopardised – as it would be by downgrading our parish school in Woldgate's admissions order – we risk parents making the decision to leave the parish in order to secure this. Our local school is already fighting hard to maintain and increase low school numbers, and the change in admissions would endanger the school's future.

We understand that the Wolds Learning Partnership is at the "heart of the community it serves". The proposed policy as it stands would indubitably harm the heart of ours. Without families staying in or moving into the Sutton upon Derwent parish, the nature of our home would change for the worse. The possible closure of our school, valued by so many, would be catastrophic.

### **2. Concern for our children's experience of secondary education**

As noted above, Woldgate is the only school within our catchment area. This raises three issues:

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- 1) The reduction in priority for our children increases the likelihood of being assigned a secondary school that is distant from our homes. This means long commutes to schools, impacting both parents' and children's wellbeing.
- 2) Today, as per the existing feeder relationship with Woldgate, the children know students already in the school. Moving from a small local primary such as ours to a larger school can be a difficult experience, but it is one that is made far easier by having familiar faces from our area. With the proposed change in admissions priority, it is likely that some if not most of our parish's children will be assigned to distant schools where there are not those familiar faces.
- 3) Given the proposed policy, it is quite possible that siblings from our parish may no longer be able to attend the same school. This places an undue burden upon parents taking children to and from school, but also will have a real impact upon the children's sense of wellbeing and familiarity.

The commonly referenced *Annual Report of the Office of the Schools Adjudicator for 2016-2017* sets out the fairness of admission arrangements depending on whether or not an actual unfairness would be caused. It states in Paragraph 18 of this document the following:

"If the giving of priority by a secondary school to children from certain feeder primaries means that other children will face a significantly longer or more difficult journey to different schools as a result, then the arrangements are likely to be found to be unfair. If such children will, on the other hand, have reasonable access to another school, then the arrangements are more likely to be found to be fair and comply with the Code."

We believe this text sets out the terms that need to be addressed with regard to Sutton upon Derwent Primary's prioritisation. That is to say the reasonableness of likely access to alternative suitable schools for those that are unsuccessful in securing a place at Woldgate.

Given the PAN expectations for Woldgate (PAN 208), and the proposed new prioritisation, the data suggests that after Pocklington, Stamford Bridge and Melbourne schools are accounted for, there would be ~59 places left. Warter may account for ~20 places, Wilberfoss perhaps ~30, leaving ~9 between Bishop Wilton, Barmby Moor, Bugthorpe, Fangfoss and Sutton upon Derwent. That approximation would suggest that there is a high likelihood that most of our parish's children will be unsuccessful in securing a place, and long commutes will be necessary without assurance of siblings attending the same school.

That means the policy is highly likely to cause the detriment mentioned in the points above. With Woldgate being the only school in our catchment area – versus other schools that may not be so limited – our parishioners' families would be unfairly impacted. With this in mind, we would question how this policy has been signed off by WLP, and what factors WLP assessed to give it the necessary comfort that it was not breaching paragraph 1.15 of the Admission Code that "oversubscription criterion must be transparent and made on reasonable grounds".

The other factor to consider is whether the other schools in the admissions proposal would be equally affected. We appreciate that the point of the over-subscription policy must necessarily place

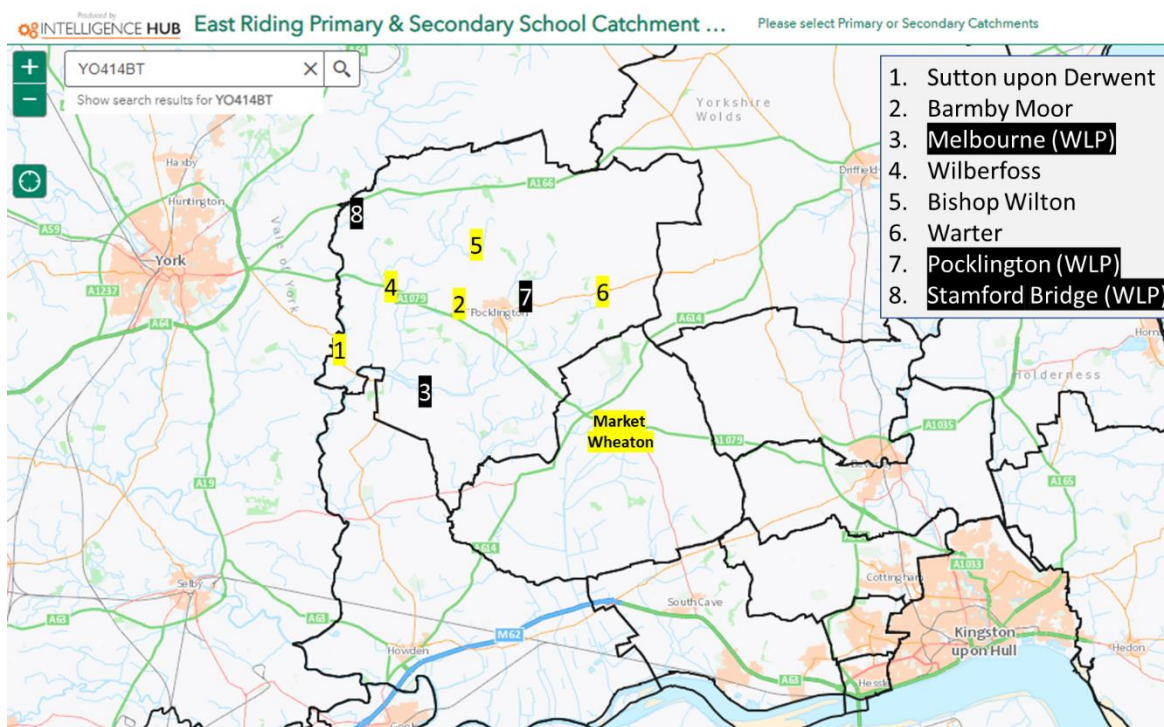
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some schools above and below others in order for it to work. With that in mind, we have examined the geographical impact of finding alternative schools within East Riding.

In the diagram below, our parish is indicated in yellow by (1), with those schools in black already being part of the WLP trust. To get to Market Weighton – the closest alternative secondary school – would be a significant journey. However, it is clearly apparent that children from Melbourne and Pocklington (WLP schools) would have shorter journeys to the alternative secondary, should there be a case of oversubscription. The proposed order of selection fails to take this into account, and indeed suggests that prioritisation has been based upon whether or not the school is already part of the academy group. This is contrary to the Head's Forum that acknowledge there is no need for schools to academise, and there should be no pressure for schools to join trusts such as WLP. On that basis, the distance calculation again points to Sutton upon Derwent parish being treated unfairly given the alternatives. Similar logic still applies to the more distant Howden alternative.



### 3. The risk of religious discrimination, contrary to the Equality Act of 2010

We note that Wolds Learning Partnership has taken the Equality Act of 2010 to heart in its policy making in previous years. Indeed, your Single Equality Plan states that it is the foundation of all your other policies, including your admissions policy (bolded in the document on your website).

We also note that the feeder schools affected are, without exception, Church of England Primary Schools:

- Barmby Moor CE Primary School;
- Bishop Wilton CE VC Primary School;

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- Bugthorpe CE VC Primary School;
- Fangfoss St. Martin's CE Primary School;
- **Sutton upon Derwent CE VC Primary School;**
- Warter CE Primary School; and
- Wilberfoss CE VC Primary School.

The beneficiaries of the change in admissions policy are, without exception, the trust schools. At first blush, this could be interpreted as a means of forcing local independent schools to join the Multi-Academy Trust, and of targeting Church of England schools such as our own. Secondly, it could be interpreted as indirectly discriminating against the children of our faith school on the basis of religion or belief and that this fails to comply with PSED responsibilities. These responsibilities are to consider whether existing / proposed admission arrangements advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not share it.

The parents of our parish would be very disappointed if the choice to send a child to a CofE primary school has a negative impact upon their secondary school options. Indeed, the impact of the proposed policy may mean a choice for some parents of our parish between sending their children to Sutton CofE Primary as a reflection of their faith, or to a school that would enable them to have a high chance of getting their preferred secondary school choice (Woldgate).

We argue that the governing body and trustees of WLP have insufficiently taken into account religious belief as a protected characteristic under the Equalities Act, with consequent reputational risk for WLP besides the legal risk.

#### **4. Basis of prioritisation: Trust school over feeder schools**

Our understanding is that the School Admissions Code (paragraph 1.9) states that admission authorities must not take account of any previous schools attended, unless the school is a named feeder school. "It is for admission authorities to formulate their admission arrangements, but they **must not...** (b) take into account any previous schools attended, unless it is a named feeder school." The Parish Council views the proposed admissions policy to be in clear contradiction to this code. The proposed policy sets trust status above feeder status, giving priority to: "children who have attended a named WLP trust school (a primary or junior school that is part of the Wolds Learning Partnership".

We therefore believe the proposal is unreasonable and unfair.

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## **5. Taxpayer investment into the major redevelopment of Woldgate**

We understand that the school has received significant government funding to support a major redevelopment of the school. This has presumably been in response to the housing developments in Pocklington and Stamford Bridge, and to improve the school's condition in order to meet this new need. We are surprised that this anticipated growth will not seemingly result in more places being available, which would have rendered a change in policy to be unnecessary.

We also observe Woldgate's own newsletter (Issue 255, October 2021) stating that the rebuild would "allow a slight increase in numbers to ensure it can continue to serve its community and to help meet the demands from prospective pupils and families." What has happened to this expectation?

### **Request for further information**

We would hope that the provision of the information and challenge above causes WLP to revisit its draft admissions policy. As it stands, we believe the proposed policy unfairly disadvantages our parish's children, with considerations including choice of faith, children's wellbeing, and distance.

Should WLP still intend to apply this policy, we would request that we be provided with the information that the Trust and governing body considered in their assessment of the impacts noted here. Secondly, we would request a response to each of the points raised. This would then enable us to take further response as appropriate.

Yours faithfully,

Sutton upon Derwent Parish Council

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