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To all parents and carers at:
Frome College
Oakfield Academy
Selwood Academy
Critchill School
Trinity First School

Dear Parents and Carers.

You will now be aware that the 3-tier system in the Frome area will remain in place. This means that the schools in Frome will keep their current age ranges. You will also be aware of some of the reasons for this, but I wanted to explain further some of the rationale from the perspective of MNSP Trust.

In essence, the risks posed by the change were too great. The key reasons for not moving forward from the perspective of the Trust were:

1) **Outcomes in MNSP schools are rising quickly (or are already strong).** As such, moving to a 2 tier education structure is not necessary to improve outcomes for children.
    - **Selwood** has improved significantly over the last few years to be well above the national rate for SATS and attendance (in line with MNSP Trust primary school outcomes). It is, In fact, one of the top performing schools in Somerset and in the top 25% nationally. Its recent Ofsted outcome was also very strong.
    - **Oakfield** has also improved significantly and is now in-line with national averages (a rise of 30% in terms of the pass rate in reading, writing and maths in Year 6) and has attendance that has improved significantly, to be better than national. As such, the school is now achieving outcomes well above the Somerset averages. It also has improved and received a positive Ofsted report following two less strong inspection outcomes in the past.
    - **Frome College** is expected to achieve its best outcomes for some time this year. More children are securing higher examination results, helping them have wider choice regarding their next steps.
2) Following various meetings with parents and in the consultation, it became clear that there was much **concern about the transition process** from 3-tiers to 2 tiers. These concerns were shared by me and other experienced colleagues. It was clear that the move to 2 tiers could cause significant disruption for certain year groups, the impact of which would be hard to mitigate entirely.
3) The **cost of building works has become prohibitively expensive** – circa £6 million would now be required for essential building works to adapt schools and add to accommodation at one of

the school sites and adjust others. This has risen by 25% in the last 30 months, as a result of inflation, but also additional extra cost for building materials, etc. This was unfunded by the LA or DFE and would have been the responsibility of the schools and Trusts in Frome. This money is likely better spent on other improvements to help pupils do well in the current schools.

4) **Support in the consultation process was more mixed than first thought**. Clearly, consultation outcomes do not automatically mean a certain pathway is determined, but the outcome suggested that many people in the Frome area supported the 3 tier system.
5) As the 30-month period has progressed, it has become clear that **the need for 2 secondary schools in terms of demand, is simply not there**. The College Year 9 admission numbers received a few weeks ago, would support this. It is likely the College will have a year group with fewer children next year in Year 9. This means that having two secondary schools would result in both being relatively small (national average size for a secondary is approximately 1000 pupils). Whilst small secondaries can be very good schools, they can also be difficult to run and often have lower outcomes at GCSE, etc. The curriculum offer is usually reduced, there are fewer staff to run clubs, less money to develop facilities and so on.
6) **There were significant policy restrictions from the DFE that we were unable to resolve**. In order to achieve a new SEMH SEND school in the town, we had hoped to redesignate Oakfield from a mainstream middle school to a special school. Due to various government policy restrictions, this was not possible. Instead we would have had to close Oakfield and then a national bidding process would have been started to open a new special school. These processes can take years to complete and could have resulted in the loss of the Oakfield buildings to another organisation (which can result in significant legal and accountancy costs). This would also have had an impact on the plans for Trinity First School. Without the ability to use Oakfield buildings, Trinity would have had to shrink to a one form entry primary school on its current site. We did not receive sufficient reassurances from the DFE to protect the interests of both Oakfield and Trinity schools.

As a summary, there were simply too many concerns and unknowns to proceed with the proposal to move to a 2-tier system, with many of them potentially having a negative impact on children. As we said at many public events, our view has always been that it would be helpful to have a 2-tier system, but not essential to bring about improvement to schools – as has been seen in a number of examples. As such, we will continue to focus our efforts on supporting Critchill Special, Trinity First, Leigh-on-Mendip Primary, Oakfield, Selwood and Frome College to be excellent schools. In addition, the discussion over the last 30 or so months has enabled local schools to work more closely. This is to be celebrated and nurtured going forward to ensure all children in Frome can do well in every school and so that transitions are better managed.

What next:

Having explained some of the issues, I am delighted that we have been able to agree to do some really positive things for the Frome school system that MNSP will invest in.

I will shortly be writing and submitting a formal request to **open a specialist provision for SEMH children in the Frome area in existing buildings, as a Resource Base**. This will hopefully result in there

being provision for children with social and emotional challenges. This will mean lots of pupils do not need to travel long distances to receive support needed.

I have also discussed with the Headteachers of MNSP schools in Frome about how we ensure there is **distinction between the offer of Oakfield and Selwood**. We have been piloting at Oakfield a Year 5 and 6 primary model to ease the transition from first to middle school. This means children spend most of their time in school with one teacher and move only to specialist teachers for certain subjects, like PE. Selwood have determined that they will continue to operate a secondary-style model where children move around subjects to specialist teachers, as this has worked well for their pupils and led to strong outcomes. This will result in there being some choice for parents across the middle schools. Both middle schools offer real strength in academic outcomes and pastoral care for children now, but will have some differences in the way children are taught.

The proximity of Trinity First School to Oakfield and the current sharing of some buildings, really helps those parents and pupils who decide to move from Trinity to Oakfield in Year 5. We do **plan to share some staffing and provision across these schools** in response to requests from many parents. I am very pleased we have been able to fund the opening of a nursery on-site at Trinity and I have set aside some funds to invest in facilities at Oakfield. Not all parents at Trinity of course, will choose Oakfield for their children. However, knowing how closely we work with Selwood too, makes both schools a positive option.

Selwood is very close in terms of location to Frome College and therefore **curriculum sharing and systems can easily align**. Dan Jeffries is the Strategic Hub Lead for Frome MNSP schools and is supporting all schools in the MNSP Frome Hub to improve. We have also committed as a Trust to **improve the accommodation at Selwood**. We would like to replace one teaching block that is currently in temporary accommodation and potentially extend the hall to meet rising demand here for places.

At Frome college we intend to widen the Post 16 offer to include more vocational options for students in the town. We will be working closely with the Town Council and local employers on this to ensure that we offer qualifications that local employers feel are necessary to support the town and its economic growth.

I hope this letter serves to help people understand why the decision was taken by the wider group, particularly in the context of the schools in MNSP Trust. I hope too, that people will be pleased to hear about some of the key developments planned as well as the positive working relationships across schools in Frome and the LA.

Yours faithfully,



Alun Williams - CEO