

Sir,

One school of 2,100 or 3 schools of 700? That is the next question.

Listen to the profession we are told.

“It seems to me that the Board have sought to promote a course of action that achieves two of their long standing and well publicised objectives, regardless of the outcomes of any consultation and in the complete absence of any real consideration as to how they may be implemented. These aims appear to be:

1. The removal of selection at age 11.
2. The rebuild of La Mare de Carteret Schools.”

That is the view of one experienced, senior school leader, who goes on:

“Having worked on the Federation curriculum offer from the day that the secondary schools were told they must operate such an offer, I have had serious reservations about the practicalities, effectiveness (in terms of educational outcomes) and value for money of this way of working. To commit the education service to the expansion of such a way

of working and to actually rely on this as a prerequisite of the new structure, before there has even been any evaluation of the effectiveness of the current federation provision, is, in my opinion, very high-risk, inefficient and educationally flawed.”

This experience with federation is backed up by one parent who wrote to me:

“My son is in year 10 at La Mare and is ...doing one of the federation classes. He has chosen to do computer science at St Sampsons and I have to say the idea of it is great, but in reality not so much. He receives 2 lessons on the Tuesday, as does everyone; the only problem is that the children that attend that school, they receive a further lesson on a Friday, which all the other children do not. Our children are given a free lesson instead on the Friday, which they are supposed to do something towards the computer science lesson which they can't do, as they need to be in the classroom at St Sampsons with their computers. So he is being taught a 3rd less over the course of a year. When we attended parents evening his teacher explained that, ‘yes’, it is a major flaw

and that all these children have to play catch up every week which puts them at an unfair disadvantage.”

Our experienced, senior school leader continues “However, I do believe that the removal of selection is simply incompatible with any 4 school model (with or without a federated approach). In order to provide the best possible curriculum provision, differentiated learning and additional support for a comprehensive intake, I believe we would need an absolute minimum school size of 600 and an ideal size of 720 or 840.

“In order to provide the projected 2,400 secondary school places, we could quite easily expand on the existing three sites and remove any need for the rebuild of a secondary school on La Mare site. Furthermore it is likely to be achievable within the same timeframe as the proposed secondary rebuild and will provide the La Mare catchment area pupils with the facilities and resources to which they are entitled and overdue.”

The 4 site model, he says “is almost certain to be both **ineffective from an educational perspective** and unfeasibly inefficient in economic terms.”

So, “very high-risk, inefficient and educationally flawed... **ineffective from an educational perspective.**” This is strong stuff. Not from me. Not from Treasury. But from one of our school leaders. He is not alone.

Here is another from a school leader: “the Education Board’s preferred solution, would in practice be educationally ineffective e.g. requiring a federated approach in order to provide a broad and balanced curriculum which meets the needs of all learners simply because the 4 schools would be too small to provide this individually.....as their proposed solution demonstrates, a compromise is far from ideal and would result in both an ineffectiveness and inefficiency.”

“Educationally ineffective.” These aren’t my words. These aren’t Treasury’s words. These are the words of a senior teaching professional. That is what they think of the one school model. That does not bode well does it?

Even the policy letter and consultation feedback says: “senior educational service leaders also pointed out broader opportunities that could more easily and cost effectively be achieved through moving from four to three schools.”

Here is another from a long-standing teacher: “I am fully behind you in questioning the need for 4 schools...if La Mare is rebuilt, one school needs to close.”

One school leader told me that the heads had all agreed that only 3 schools were needed - but that had advice not been accepted by the Grange.

The pupil numbers simply do not support the need for 4 sites. Chris Nicholls and his team identified that a year ago in their report. The only way Education can ensure a broad, rich curriculum for all students, is to create this nonsense concept of a ‘hard’ federation. That never existed before this policy letter was published. We had already been told the schools were in a federation – it is on their letterhead - but only now are we told that it is ‘soft.’ Multiple sources of evidence – including the Institute of Education quoted in the policy letter – tell us that the ideal size for a secondary school

is between 600 and 1000; but with a 4 site model, we will have a single school with 2,100 and whilst each site will have a **capacity** of 600, only St. Sampson's will actually have students exceeding that number. It's madness. So let's get this right. We are going to create a single school larger than that recommended by any of the evidence and then split it up into units smaller than that recommended by any of the evidence. And you call that evidence based decision making? No wonder the profession describe it as 'educationally ineffective.' No wonder they describe it as 'incoherent.'

Sir, can I just remind members of some of the key numbers, rounded. There are 2,100 students in the secondary system today. Education are proposing that we build to a capacity of 2,600. We expect numbers to peak at 2,300 in 2026. Grammar is built for 600 and is operating with 443 this year; Beaucamps was built for 660 – it has never operated close to that and is operating with 497 this. This September, when year 11 leaves and new year 7 arrives, numbers at La Mare are likely to fall below 400 to around 375 pupils. The

arithmetic is so stark, we shouldn't even need to have this debate. Let's face the harsh reality, if La Mare was burnt down tomorrow or was flooded - in the absence of its flood bund - we could accommodate all its current students in the other 3 schools the day after tomorrow. We have 2,000 places available – but actually probably have nearer 2,300 desks and chairs, given classrooms built for up to 30, even though the policy is for a smaller number per classroom. An additional 200 places across all three other schools will be sufficient until 2022. In short, we have plenty of time to build the extra capacity to meet the peak in 2026 – and can more flexibly respond if population numbers alter from projections.

Beaucamps cannot be extended we were told. But paragraph 9.1 of the policy letter concedes that it can be. In fact, if you look back, Education proposed a school for 850 on that site in 2001 as part of – wait for it – a three school estate; in 2002, they proposed a school of 720 as part of a four school estate, and only reduced this in 2009 to 660 because pupil projections had dropped. Topographically it is obviously a difficult site, but that does not make it

impossible. The Director of States Property Services has advised me in the following terms: “I would not go as far as to say that it is simply not possible, but it would not be possible to do it simply.” That seems to me to be a very fair summary.

Would three schools of around 700-800 each be too large? No, of course they wouldn't. We have already got St Sampsons at 720 – and it operated at 774 in 2009/10; the Grammar School site is designed for 1,100 and is currently operating at 880.

Before I go further, I should say that the whole La Mare community must be congratulated on the fantastic evaluation they received in their recent independent inspection. It is a real tribute to them all – especially the leadership. It is also a testament to what we all know, that teachers have far more to do with educational outcomes than buildings. But I am afraid that the La Mare rebuild is a story of the emperor's new clothes. Like the little boy in the crowd, someone has to say so – and today it falls to me to do

just that. I know that will be deeply unpopular with some. Weren't La Mare promised a rebuild 15 years ago? Yes, they were – but that was before all the underpinning assumptions on pupil numbers turned out to be wrong. Don't they deserve the same facilities as their peers in other schools? The management committee of La Mare wrote: "What is quite clear is that pupils and staff of La Mare de Carteret deserve the same standard of premises afforded to other schools on the Island regardless of the outcome of the debate in the forthcoming States Meeting." Yes, they absolutely do, but that does not require us to spend £64m for a dwindling number on the pupil roll to provide them those facilities on that site. The most effective and quickest way we can improve their conditions, is to close their school and move them to the other schools. Given that they are also the smallest secondary school, this will be the least disruptive solution for the system as a whole.

But the public don't want 3 schools do they? They told us so in the consultation, didn't they? Well, they certainly don't want one school of 2,100 – and they weren't even asked about that. Neither in question 14 of the consultation were

the asked their views on schools of 720-840? That bracket was missed out – so we don't know what they think of that do we? Perhaps we could add that question to voting slips on April 27th? Neither were they told when asked the question, that the schools would be under-utilised? If they knew that, would they still want to spend £64m? I very much doubt it.

But surely not building La Mare would waste the £2.3m or so spent so far on the project? Yes, it would – but not nearly as much as wasting a whole lot more on a school we don't need and then having to run it for the next 50 years. How on earth have we got to this place? On the verge of spending millions of pounds on a project that isn't required. That may be a question for the Public Accounts Committee to look at. Part of it is of course the delivery of the Education Development Plan, committed to by the States although those years ago, even though the environment has changed; part of it I suspect is because we have an Education Development office whose *raison d'être* is, development – their role is in the name. We have created a monster and it needs feeding.

But what about all the other facilities planned for that site – the primary school, the pre-school, and particularly the autism unit and so on. If the amendment for 3 schools succeeds, I would move a consequential amendment to direct that these areas are considered and also to provide funding from the capital reserve, under delegated authority to allow these to progress as appropriate.

But won't we lose teachers? Why? If the decision is made, there won't be any uncertainty. We didn't lose any when St Peter Port School was closed – redeployments were managed in the normal way.

But the Department tells us in paragraph 2.13 that they are worried about their capacity to manage change. We can fix that. Again, if the amendment for 3 schools succeeds, I would move a consequential amendment to direct that funding from the transformation and transition fund to ensure that there are sufficient resources made available under delegated to successfully manage this transformation in the education service.

But surely we will need to spend millions on extending the other 3 schools? Yes, of course, some extensions will be necessary. Education have estimated £12m for an extra 240 spaces. So a working estimate for adding the 360 spaces between Grammar, St. Sampsons and Beaucamps needed before our peak in 2026 would be £18m. So we will have a lot of change out of £64m. These three smaller projects could also be better spaced out. This will be better for our local construction industry, than one huge project which is going to suck in so many off island labour, contractors sub-contractors to support it – especially at a time that the industry is getting busy again with the Guernsey Brewery site and Leale’s Yard. This decision could also settle the future of the College of Further Education and so enabling that project team to crack on with the design of the College consolidated on the Les Ozouets site. Once again, if the amendment for 3 schools succeeds, I would move as part of the required consequential amendment, delegated authority to provide funding from the capital reserve to allow these projects to progress immediately.

I am sorry to say, but the only logical solution, the only obvious solution, the only sensible solution is to close La Mare. I have said very little about the financial case for 3 schools and not building La Mare. This is mainly because the case has already been made on the educational arguments alone. But the financial savings are obvious: the avoidance of the £0.5m costs each year for an executive head and transport for four sites; the avoidance of the capital costs for transport in 2022; the ability to speed the transition to Education's own pupil:teacher ratio of 1:15 from its current 1:12.6, at an estimated saving of £2m each year. These numbers cannot be ignored, particularly in the context of the statement I gave this morning about our fiscal position overall. And then of course, there are the massive capital savings that can be made, releasing capital for the other parts of the educational estate, including the College of FE - and no doubt the refurb of the Grammar School which is going to be needed before too long - but also for other projects in other Departments. We spent several hours debating the unavailability of a few tens of thousand for the biodiversity strategy and yet we can contemplate spending

millions on an avoidable redevelopment and locking us into an inefficient, educationally flawed model for a generation or more. I would ask those such as the Alderney Representatives and Deputies Paint and Quin who would normally be the first to remind us of the need to be fiscally prudent, to really contemplate their positions on this matter – as support for the La Mare project is totally inconsistent with fiscal prudence.

But I know, we know that value for money is not about the cheapest solution. It is about getting the best educational outcomes for the money spent. That is where these proposals fall down too. Educational outcomes are being compromised and constrained by obtaining such poor value for money – what I mean by that is, we could ploughing more into front line teaching – where it will be most effective - if we were not wasting it on an inefficient 1 school, 4 site model.

Sir, loyalty is a great virtue. The Education Board have shown great strength and are to be commended in their loyalty to

each other, in sticking by these proposals. So in that context, I am particularly grateful to Deputy Le Lievre for seconding this amendment. As the Deputy Minister for Education, he was very closely associated with this project - and spent many hours arguing on its behalf to me and my Treasury colleagues. I know he has found it painful to change his position, with the accompanying feeling of disloyalty to his former colleagues on the Education Board. We all know that he is a man of principle. We all know that he is not a man who would be won around by the fiscal arguments alone. He has only done so because he has concluded that it is the right thing to do educationally. So my final plea – even if it falls on deaf ears - is to members of the Education board to climb out of their bunker and change their mind. There will be no loss of face. There will be respect. In particular, I want to address through you Sir, Deputy Sherbourne. Forget the financials. He knows in his heart of hearts that the 4 site model is educationally sub-optimal. He knows that it is an unsatisfactory compromise. He knows that his colleagues still in the profession, who describe these proposals as ‘educationally flawed’ and ‘educationally ineffective,’ are

right. He knows that three broadly comparably sized secondary schools will offer a better educational service. I ask to him back the educationally more robust 3 school model – not for me – not for the financial savings - but for the constituency, the children he has devoted his entire career to, and for the future generations of children who will pass through our education system, long after his Education Board have left office in 6 weeks time.

Sir, it dawned on me the other day, that this is probably my most important speech in 4 years. There is so much at stake – financially and educationally. We are on the verge of committing - wilfully squandering, actually - millions of pounds of taxpayers money to a create a one school, four site behemoth; to a one school, four site model the public does not understand; to a one school, four site model the profession tells us, they do not want; and, worst of all, to a one school, four site model which is educationally sub-optimal. If the Assembly approves these proposals at the end of this term, it will undoubtedly be my lowest point; I will

be ashamed to have been associated with such poor quality decision making. We should do what is educationally right, which is to have three, broadly comparably sized secondary schools and give them – and St. Anne’s in Alderney - local management - just as we were promised, and just as they were promised in the Vision for Education, which this Assembly adopted in 2013. Education’s proposals are financially irresponsible on a monumental scale; and they are educationally illiterate. They need to be amended by the adoption of the 3 school solution.