

Dalry School Council

Outgoing Chair's Report

May 2022

It has been a privilege to play a small part in supporting the work of Dalry School. My son is coming to the end of four very happy years at the secondary, which I believe to be an excellent school in all respects, with enthusiastic staff, a strong culture of learning and superb pastoral care.

During my term the partnership with CDHS has developed well in many areas, with CD pupils at Dalry for Spanish and Computer Science a common sight. It would be nice to see more joint extracurricular activities. These have obviously not been possible for the past two years

Unfortunately, the secondary in particular faces both external and internal threats.

When the council proposed a £3m cut to the education budget, shortly before lockdown, Dalry secondary stood out as an easy target for savings. By the council's figures, closure would – once transport and additional staffing costs at CDHS were taken into account – have saved £500k per annum. Closure was not actually proposed at that stage, but the cuts were to be progressive and by now I suspect pressure would be mounting. Luckily the cuts were cancelled and even reluctantly agreed targets like the instrumental tuition service were reprieved, but times are getting tougher. It is almost impossible for a school to be closed without parental agreement, so if the people of the Glenkens want a secondary school in the area they will have enormous power over what happens.

The internal threat is simply the large number of children choosing CDHS instead of Dalry, either straight after primary or during S1 – S4. It looks as if S4 at Dalry may be tiny in 2022-23; how parents react to the proposed solution is not up to me. If all Glenkens children spent S1-4 in Dalry the secondary school would have a very healthy, though not huge roll. COVID-19 wrecked plans to distribute prospectuses produced by Sarah Ade for the PC to local primary schools and to possible sources of placing requests (Crossmichael, Castle Douglas primary, perhaps others) but I hope this can now go ahead.

When the issue of school management came up some years ago – resulting in the primary partnership with Kells and Carsphairn (RIP?) and the secondary partnership with CDHS, the council's preferred route was to teach S1-3 (the Broad General Education phase) only at Dalry with S4 onwards (senior phase) at CDHS. That suggestion may arise again and is worth considering. However, I know that teachers like teaching more advanced classes, and that even the lack of highers at Dalry has made recruitment difficult in the past. Without N5 either I suspect that many current staff would be understandably very unhappy.

The primary is, I think, probably safe for now, as long as there are more children between Dalry and Kells than could be accommodated in either school. Both schools, on council figures, cost less than the average per head for primary education, so there is little financial point in changing things. If rolls fall possible merger might be raised, but Dalry would require enormous expenditure to bring the buildings to a long-term acceptable standard (they are a disgrace now) and Kells is small and has very poor access for the buses which would be needed.

Overall, though, as long as the schools are wanted and supported by the local community I am optimistic that they will survive as inspiring, caring and positive places for our children.

I would like thank all the PC members I have worked with over the years and also Mr Scrimshaw, Mr Smith and Mrs Gillies for their consistent help and support. I would also like to thank all the secondary staff for making my son's time there so consistent happy.

Ian Johnston

PS I still don't understand the secondary progress reports