

ARC Meeting – Amalgamation Process 09 March 2011

Present: Frankie Berry, Liam O’ Dwyer, Regina O’ Connell, Mark O’ Leary, Liz Mc Lafferty, Loretta Wynne, Catherine Troy, Miriam Mc Nally, Laura Behan, Paula Keenan, Janet O’ Shaughnessy, Brenda Egan, June Kiernan, John O’ Brien, (INTO), Maire Collins (ASTI) and Judith King

Apologies: Shirley Wolverson; Barry Glennon and Declan Keane, (Parents representatives).

Agenda:

1. Apologies
2. Agreement on Agenda
3. Notes from Dec 1st Meeting
4. Report from Steering Committee
5. Discussion on 9th Draft of Education Model
6. Review of and feedback from Staff Forum
7. Next Steps
8. AOB
9. Date of next Meeting

Minutes

There was agreement on the agenda and no matters arising from the minutes which were not on the agenda. It was agreed that most of the report from the last Steering Committee was focussed on the Staff Forum Day and the issues were largely incorporated into that. It was agreed therefore to proceed to review the Forum.

Review of Staff Forum

One of the representatives from St. Joseph’s School staff requested that she begin the review by reading a letter from her colleagues in response to the Staff Forum. The letter had been signed by a large number of the school staff. (See attached document for copy of this letter). St. Joseph’s staff raised a number of issues but were most aggrieved by the statement made towards the end of the meeting regarding St. Joseph’s being ‘smeared but the Ryan Report’ and therefore not a ‘suitable site for a new school’. Current Staff were appalled by the association of their reputation and good name with

the 'horrific proceedings reported by Ryan' and judged it 'unacceptable' that such a position be used as negotiation tool. They were also deeply disappointed that such a view was not challenged by CIDP.

Staff were also 'dismayed' that the Patron did not challenge other statements also made at the Forum which suggested that one school was more 'excellent and performed better academically' than the other.

One Member of the Committee stated that Liam, on behalf of CIDP, did challenge the Ryan Report statement. Another member believed that the statement was not intended to slur the good name of current staff and was made at a time when 'emotions were running high'. Judith said it was important to acknowledge the validity of the feelings and responses of the St. Joseph's staff regardless of the intentions of the speaker at the Forum.

Another member said that it would be a great pity to allow the statement made at the end of the Forum to in any way dilute the much increased level of co-operation and interaction that has developed between both staffs on account of the process. She added that any ill-feeling should not take away from the fact that the concerns of both staffs were so similar on the day and that the worries and fears of both are largely shared.

A Member of the CIDP Board was present at the meeting on this occasion and she wished to state her sadness that such a statement was made and her dismay that the staff of both schools seem to feel in some way undermined by CIDP.

On behalf of CIDP Liam stated that 'all Boys Schools' are different from 'all Girls Schools' and some of that had to do with the sexual development process. He suggested that a small number of peer abuse issues in St. Joseph's about two years ago have somehow filtered out and caused concern. This is an issue we need to be 'straight about', he added, but it is not a 'site negotiation issue'. He stressed that CIDP stand over – 100%- both the academic achievements and educational environments of both schools; CIDP also stand over – 100%- the child protection policies and procedures of both schools.

Location Issue

One Member of ARC wished to ask the Union representatives present if it was an unusual situation to have a time lag between an amalgamation decision and a location decision. Which do they believe is first? She asked. She added that she was concerned that such a time lag may be causing dissent.

INTO

John stated that 'every amalgamation is different. There is no template. Many, in fact, are self-organising, a long-seeded idea. Most are about survival. Here, by contrast, my sense is that the amalgamation is part of a big idea – a bit vision for the whole Deaf Community. From a Union perspective location is not too much of a concern for us. Our concern is that members have a proper say regarding the organising of the amalgamation and that their terms and conditions are protected in the transfer. Bricks and mortar are only tools really – an internal thing but I do understand that it can be

one of the hardest things for some schools. Often the choice, if there is one, comes down to health and safety concerns’.

ASTI

Maire said that there are ‘different models of amalgamation. ASTI’s concern would be that the best of everything was preserved and especially that the amalgamation would lead to an improvement for everybody – staff and students alike. ASTI would be at one with CIDP management that the process should not be rushed. There is a big package envisaged here and all the elements need to be carefully considered to make the whole plan work. It is very important to be fully aware of all the difficulties – there must be a sense of contentment among staff’.

Discussion

The ARC Member who asked the question of the Union reps stated in response that she still believed that a location decision would really help the process at this stage. In addition she believes that the onus is on CIDP to make a best location suggestion.

Another ARC representative added that she believed that location was only one of three core concerns the other two being staffing/job losses and a guarantee of improved facilities. She added that so far all our documents are too aspirational.

In response John from the INTO added that it is true that a location decision may allow other decisions to flow. At the moment there are at least two distinct projects possible in the minds of stakeholders. Preferably a decision should be made jointly by staff and management but if an impasse is reached then management need to make it. Sometimes logic decides it, e.g. the availability of a ‘green field site’. Should management make a strategic decision on location it will need to be explained in-depth to all stakeholders so that then the amalgamation can become everyone’s project.

Liam said that from CIDP’s perspective that a decision to amalgamate is the first decision and must be agreed prior to a location decision.

Do the Staff mandate an amalgamation? Another representative asked. Liam replied that staff are only one constituent in the school community and all stakeholders must have a voice but that eventually it is a Patron/management decision.

POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS

Liam then suggested a number of steps that he believes should be taken in order to move the project to the next stage.

1. The Possible Job Losses:

Following some of the discussion at the Staff Forum and given the concerns of many staff Liam wished to meet the union reps to discuss all the options and possibilities particularly the newer panel arrangements which are being negotiated by the ASTI.

2. Meeting the NCSE

Following a preliminary consultation with the Department of Education, CIDP is obliged to bring the Education Model it is proposing for the amalgamated school to the NCSE as the Dept will want their opinion on it. Proposed numbers and pupil / teacher ratio issues will need to be discussed. CIDP will be looking for the support of NCSE at the later consultation stage. It is proposed that both Principals will join Liam for this meeting.

3. Facilities and Location

This is a huge issue as there are three possible sites. Liam would be prepared to bring a full paper on location to the next Steering Group Meeting. He stressed that it is not as simple as choosing one site over another. There are many issues including land ownership and the needs of Department of Education in the bigger picture. If we could meet some of the location needs for other school projects outside of ours, then they may be prepared to fund our plan more fully, even to the extent of a new building.

4. Moving towards Decision Making

- (a) The Steering Committee will discuss and make a recommendation on the location issue
- (b) This recommendation together with a final version of the proposed education model will be brought to the Boards of Management for their consideration on amalgamation

5. CIDP Decision

Although CIDP have already agreed with an amalgamation in principal it will then convene a Board meeting to discuss the recommendations made by ARC and the views of the BOMs and will agree on the final overall plan

6. Approach the Department of Education

CIDP would then approach the Department to begin the formal negotiations

Discussion on these proposed steps

Representatives said that the Staff Forum indicated clearly that staff were not happy that negotiations would begin with the Department at this stage. Will the process go back to the full staff group again for final approval? One asked.

Liam said that this Committee and its Steering Group were the representative bodies but that if either of these believed that a further Staff Forum is required then CIDP will respond positively to that.

On behalf of ASTI Maire said that she believes that the re-deployment issues are way down the line as yet. She says that there is some complexity in that the Primary Branch of the Dept is the paymaster

here. The pupil / teacher ratio piece is therefore crucial. She believes that both staff need to be spoken to about the staffing issues separately before another joint session.

Liam agreed that the potential job losses issue is looming high for staff. At this point Maire challenged what she called Liam's 'detached language' about such job losses. 'These people are part of you, part of CIDP', she continued. 'Therefore they ought to be a huge part of *your* concern'.

Another ARC representative stated that indeed Job Security is one of the biggest issues for staff. However, she added, that teachers do not see the panel and re-deployment as job security. Job security would mean staying on in the Deaf Schools Project.

John from INTO wondered what the NCSE meeting would be about and why would CIDP not approach that meeting with a preparedness to start negotiations with a proposal to retain the full complement of staff. The INTO would want the retention of *all* staff as the first line of negotiation.

Another rep added that the pupil / teacher ratio now is 2.9 and will go up automatically because of retirements and other changes anyway to 3 possible 4:1.

Liam said he respected the INTO position but that he believes it would be unrealistic to enter the negotiation process with a 2.9:1 pupil / teacher ratio. Therefore he believes it would be more realistic to start with a higher pupil / teacher ratio and then negotiate enhanced deals for any staff who wanted to leave early. The straw poll indicated that some staff might welcome this.

Another staff rep suggested a compromise position of starting with a 4:1 pupil / teacher ratio.

SNA CONCERNS

One of the SNA representatives present stated that SNAs were extremely concerned about their jobs. 'they have nothing' the SNA rep continued, 'no quota, no re-deployment options, nothing. SNAs are also extremely annoyed that yet again today their Union rep from IMPACT has failed to turn up at today's meeting.

It was proposed and agreed that the SNA's need to meet on their own about the various issues including the non-involvement of their Union rep. Liam agreed to a request from one IMPACT Union member to contact the Union about their disquiet.

Another SNA asked if re-deployment for SNA's was actually gone? She added that her work here came about because of a re-deployment from elsewhere. Liam agreed to check what the current position is.

Maire from ASTI told SNAs that employment legislation generally would protect staff particularly the Fixed Term Act. She encouraged SNAs to take the legal route if there were any issue.

OTHER NON-TEACHING STAFF

Other non-teaching staff also spoke of their exclusion from a mention when job losses are discussed. Some of these staff are paid directly by CIDP and others are paid by the HSE. There have already been some job losses amongst such staff. They expressed a sense of being excluded in the whole discussion and that the staff whom they represent are losing more and more interest in the amalgamation proposal. One asked if there were 12 admin staff altogether. Liam said he would check the figures.

AGREEMENT ON NEXT STEPS

As the meeting was coming to a conclusion four steps were agreed:

1. Liam would meet with the Unions for more clarification;
2. Liam and the two principals would meet with the NCSE on the basis of a 10th draft of the Education model
3. Liam would have an informal meeting with the Department of Education regarding any of its possible location needs which CIDP might be able to meet and therefore enhance CIDP's proposals for a full enhancement of facilities
4. The Steering Committee would meet in April regarding Facilities and Location on the basis of outcomes of this meeting with the Department

NEXT ARC MEETING

25TH May 9.30-11.00 a.m. Venue to be decided.

The Venue could not be decided as St. Joseph's Hall will not be available. Representatives were asked to be attentive to the Meeting notice and Agenda for confirmation of the proposed venue.

APPENDIX ONE