

Parents, pupils speak out over Abbeydale Grange closure

Our reporters

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A *World Socialist Web Site* reporting team spoke to a number of those on the demonstration to oppose the closure of Abbeydale Grange school in Sheffield on November 21.

Dean Morton is a parent of a pupil at the school. He said, “I’ve got a child at the school in year seven. If the school closes it will be the saddest day in Sheffield’s history. He has to get a bus and tram into the school as he comes from the other side of the city.

“When we were looking for a school, Abbeydale Grange was the only one that welcomed us. I can’t work out why they are closing it. The reasons they have given don’t warrant its closure. There is money available, but they are just deciding to spend it on something else. Abbeydale Grange should be kept open and not just Abbeydale. Where we live it is Wisewood and Myers Grove schools. I went to Myers Grove. They are now going to close both schools and set up a new one. It has been a big campaign there, but all the organisers have given up really.

“So the irony is if Abbeydale closes and I have to send my boy to our local school, then that is closing too. To me the bottom line is that the land the school sits on is worth a fortune and they want that money.

“I know a person who works for the council and his job is to sell off council land and that is what he has been doing full-time for 20 years. They are selling it all off, including all the things we need. They have sold all the swimming pools off.”

Emma Cryan is a journalism and French student at the University of Sheffield. She said, “This issue is of interest to everyone. It’s not just in terms of education. There are a lot of community activities that happen in and around the school. It would be a great loss if it was to close.

“Abbeydale Grange should have the £14 million that

it has been denied. One of the problems is that the school can’t achieve the same grades in English, for example, because they have a lot of children who have English as a second language.”

John Baker said, “I’ve had four sons who have either left or been through the school and still have one son there. I am also an ex-teacher myself.

“I have seen these closures repeated up and down the country. Looking at the main political parties here in Sheffield, they are all pursuing the same neo-liberal policies which result in situations like the closure of Abbeydale.”

Hannah Smith said, “I’m a learning mentor at Springfield Primary school, which feeds children into Abbeydale Grange. It would be tragic for Abbeydale Grange to close. What the school does really well is that it focuses on the whole child. There is all this pressure for academic attainment that a lot of children cannot achieve. The environment that this school provides means that children can have success in a wide range of things. Every child has got a right to an education and it’s the government’s job to provide that.”

Tony Tigwell is a teacher at Abbeydale Grange and has worked there for 18 years. He said, “We have a real case to keep the school open and I don’t think the council should ignore it. The problem is that the Liberal Democrats who are in power in this city have to save money and the school is sitting on a big parcel of land that they could sell off.”

Adam said, “I am a former pupil at the school, and I go back now and again as a drama technician. I am involved in the campaign whenever I can be.

“The council has already made their mind up on this closure. They keep saying that all the options are back on the table, but they never gave us any options to start

with. They are just paying us lip service really.

“I agree with what you say about the main political parties. They basically just argue amongst each other about the same things. What we need is a party for us that just stands up and says what it believes in.

“Most of the people I know agree with keeping Abbeydale Grange open and think that it’s just a cost-saving exercise. It’s cheaper to keep fewer schools as far as the council are concerned.”

Rachel Atkinson is a year 11 student at Abbeydale Grange. She said, “I’ve tried to get involved in the campaign as much as I can and have also been to a couple of the consultation meetings a few weeks ago. It’s an absolute travesty that they are trying to close the school. A lot of people from other schools that I know are supporting Abbeydale and trying to keep it open.”

Thomas Rice, a student at Abbeydale Grange school said, “The problems that face our school every day face every school. People are listening. We are putting forward strong arguments.”

Asked about the future of the campaign Thomas said, “I think the campaign needs to be broadened out because the same thing is happening to other schools. We are no different from them.”

Angela Reading is a local parent of two small children at a feeder school to Abbeydale Grange School.

“I am here because I don’t want Abbeydale Grange to close. I hope it is not a futile exercise. The consultation was not a consultation. I saw that planning permission has been given for a care-home on the site in *The Star* newspaper. I wanted my child to go to the local school. I don’t want her friendships to be broken up. I don’t want her to travel too far to school. Bullying can happen on buses. The school day is getting longer and longer.

“The reality at Abbeydale is very different to the reputation. The challenges they face are greater than at other schools and they don’t get thanked for that.”

Maugham Pearce is a parent of two young children.

She said, “I hope my kids go to my local school. Everyone says that community is important and that it is the answer to some social problems. The school is at the centre of the community. There seems to be a pattern of closing schools. It seems the only answer of the government to schools it says are failing is to close them. If you close the local school the community is

broken. The children are dispersed and have to travel very far to school. It makes the working day for a child almost as long as for an adult.

“Some journeys can be risky for children. You are putting them in a very vulnerable position. I know this from personal experience. I had a long school journey as a child in Coventry and I was bullied. I am hoping to go back to work when my children are a little older. Not having a local school will make this difficult.

“I think this is a national issue. Parents and children and teachers must stand together and tell the government that we don’t want these enormous schools. We want community schooling.”



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