To the Head of Education Services

Newport City Council

Civic Centre

Newport

NP20 4UR

School.admissions@newport.gov.uk

25th February 2013

Dear Sirs

We, as Governors of Marshfield Primary School, hereby put forward our formal objections with regards to the current consultation document with regards to changes to the Admission Arrangements for September 2014 in the School Admission Policy.

Our objections are mostly in relation to the removal of the Catchment Guarantee for Secondary Schools and they are as follows:

1. **Time scale and Haste of the proposal**

Newport Council has a period of 6 months from 1st September 2012 to 1st March 2013 to put forward any proposal with regards to any change in the Admissions Arrangements. Yet, the consultation document was sent to us during the half term period in mid February 2013, leaving us a very short amount of time (2 weeks) to respond to your proposals properly.

This proposal hence appears to have been rushed, with no thought and consideration given to the consequences of the removal of the Catchment guarantee for secondary schools to the communities affected and to the effect same will have on the population migration towards ‘desirable’ high school catchments, thereby affecting the children in schools that are furthest away from the High School catchment.

1. **Historical Ties between Marshfield Primary and Bassaleg School and the Effect on the Education of the Children**

Marshfield has had historical ties with Bassaleg (our closest Secondary school and also our secondary school catchment) since before the 1920s when Bassaleg School opened and good relationship between Bassaleg School and Marshfield Primary have led to a smooth transition between the schools. This good relationship has led to a stability that has ensured good levels of education and social success for all of our children. This will however not be the case if the children of Marshfield were to be allocated to different schools across Newport without having a destructive negative impact on both the children and the community.

Moreover, Marshfield school would have to potentially organise transition support between its children and various other high schools within the County (as opposed to only Bassaleg), causing major disruption to the standard of education that will be provided in the crucial year 6 stage. This in turn will cause harm to the stability of the school, the pupils and the community.

1. **Uniqueness of the situation of Marshfield and the resulting uncertainty of school destination**

Marshfield is in a unique position in that it is situated at the extreme westerly edge of the Local Authority. As such, pupils of Marshfield are unable to cross the Local Education Authority (LEA) boundary for Newport and can only go in one direction to attend a secondary school.

The removal of the Catchment Guarantee, especially among the communities that have already been established such as Marshfield, would place the Children in Marshfield at an immediate serious disadvantage as they will be the school furthest away from their secondary school Catchment Area. Removal of the Catchment Guarantee would cause untold prejudice to the children of Marshfield in that the anxiety of being separated from their peers, together with the prospects of having to attend an unknown school of over a 1000 pupils, would be a daunting task for any child, let alone one who is separated from his peers because of the fact that he or she may live a few metres further down the village. This in turn would affect the confidence of the children and would possibly also have a negative impact on their studies. The parents would similarly be worried as they would not be able to provide a certainty to their kids with regards to the continuity of a good education, which the Catchment Guarantee provides.

Should the Catchment Guarantee be removed, being the furthest away from the catchment school, we would also have potential cases where siblings would have to attend different schools across Newport, should the elder sibling not be able to secure a place in Bassaleg and as those children would be in a position where they in turn will be in an out of catchment school, there will again be no guarantee that their youngest siblings will have a place at the same school as they will have no priority according to the distance rule. This would be extremely unfair and harsh to the children as well as to the community.

Furthermore, we will have to ask whether Newport Council have, prior to the proposal that the Secondary School Catchment Guarantee be removed, completed a study into the fairness of distance from school admission policies when comparing schools in the centre of a Local Education Authority as opposed to those on the outskirts. Surely different policies should apply dependant on the school locations within the local authority. Being on the periphery of the border, Marshfield Children can only move east into the county and Bassaleg is our closest secondary school. Having no catchment guarantee would entail the children of Marshfield being transferred to relatively considerable distances all across the county, potentially past suitable schools that would be already oversubscribed.

A blanket proposal like the removal of the Catchment Guarantee, without any thought or consideration to the different layouts and locations of the schools is grossly unfair and prejudicial to the schools on the periphery of the Local Authority border, such as Marshfield Primary.

Marshfield being a village that is along the council boundary would be extremely disadvantaged by the removal of the Catchment Guarantee and this in turn would mean that the LEA at Newport Council would not be in a position to provide an equal opportunity for a good level of education to all the children of Marshfield or indeed an equal policy provision of education for those who only have schools in one direction.

1. **S106 Monies over the years**

Marshfield has contributed a significant amount of s106 Monies into Bassaleg School over the last 25 years to improve the facilities at Bassaleg and to ensure that the increased population with regards to any developments at Marshfield is catered for at Bassaleg. Removal of the Catchment Guarantee would mean that the Children of Marshfield would now potentially not be able to get the benefit of the monies that have been spent into Bassaleg for them.

We will have to ask how Newport Council will aim to rebalance this major and worrying misuse of s106 Monies to continue to support the Children of Marshfield. Newport Council would have to confirm whether the other schools that the children could possibly attend (all across Newport) would have the same or better infrastructure as Bassaleg.

1. **Legal Issues – Compliance with the School Admissions Code 2009 or 2013, as amended**
2. Wording and Spirit of the Code

Newport Council are suggesting that the provision of a secondary school catchment guarantee may be ‘unlawful’ according to the Code. However, having read all the relevant sections of the Code, it is our understanding that the Code provides discretionary guidelines (as opposed to absolute rules) in relation to whether a Local Authority maintains a Catchment Guarantee or not. The provision of a Secondary School Catchment Guarantee in the current School Admissions Policy and indeed in all the previous School Admissions Policy documents for Newport is **not** a departure from the Code.

We would need to question the motivation of Newport Council to make such a change(ie the removal of the Catchment Guarantee) in the School Admissions Policy where the policy that ‘All children living within a Newport Secondary School’s catchment area are entitled to attend that school if parents put it as first choice on the form’ has been in place for more than 25 years and that takes into account the needs and the interests of the community. Newport Council has not taken into account how well the existing arrangements work and how much disruption the proposed admissions arrangements would cause to the communities at large.

1. The suggestion of the Local Authority that they should be in line with other LEAs with regards to their admissions policy is totally irrelevant and immaterial as to how well the Newport LEA should be looking after the best interests of the population of Newport.

The Code says that local circumstances vary widely and that admission authorities are best placed to take the lead in considering how best the needs of parents and children are to be met.

1. Good Practice that currently exists – Catchment Guarantee is a good practice

The code also aims to build on the good practices that already exist. The Catchment Guarantee is a good practice that provides a certainty for both pupils and parents with regards to the good continuity of Education. Removal of the Catchment Guarantee, especially among communities that have already been established like Marshfield, will cause untold prejudice to the children in that the anxiety of being separated from their peers, together with the prospect of having to attend a large secondary school with over 1000 unknown pupils would be a daunting task for any child, let alone one who is separated from his peers because of the fact that he may live a few metres further down the village. The parents would similarly be worried as they would not be able to provide a certainty to their kids as to their future prospects.

1. LEA are saying that the Catchment Guarantee is currently causing oversubscription of some of the high school, notably Bassaleg due to its popularity. (ie people moving into the area to be within the catchment after the usual admission round and hereby causing overcrowding)

Proposal: Rather than remove the Catchment Guarantee altogether, can NCC not give consideration for the policy to be amended to provide a catchment guarantee to all Year 7 Intakes within a catchment area, ie to the feeder school whereby taking into account community needs and not causing any disruption to the current status quo and instead apply a distance rule to any admission or Transfer that happens outside of a normal admissions round.

Attendance at a certain Primary School should guarantee a space at the feeder secondary school, if we live within the catchment area. This would ensure that communities that are already existing (ie Marshfield) are not disrupted and that any new people moving in the area after a normal admissions round would be granted a space at the catchment school only if same is not oversubscribed. This will take into account the needs of the current pupils and the needs of the community.

This could also potentially address the issues of overcrowding in some schools and surplus capacity in other schools. The current consideration of the LEA to ensure a fair distribution of children who arrive after a normal admissions round to the local schools and in this process, go over the subscription criteria to do same, is not a good practice and hence should be looked into again, without causing any detriment to the current established communities and the children therein.

1. **Costs to the Local authority**

We will have to question whether the Newport Council, in proposing the removal of the current catchment guarantee, has taken into account the cost of implementing this policy in 6 years time when birth rate numbers across the West of Newport would indicate that both Bassaleg and Duffryn High School would be oversubscribed.

The following (non exhaustive) would be areas that would increase the cost to the Council:

1. Cost of Transport (Additional buses or taxis to 2+ schools across the County)
2. Cost of Transition to the various secondary schools
3. Costs of potential reduced housing values in Marshfield and the associated reduction in Council Tax and hence the revenues to Newport Council itself.
4. **Alcan development in Rogerstone**

The proposed development at Alcan in Rogestone is likely to substantially increase the number of children at within the Rogestone area. We would need to know what the Council’s plans are with regards to any decision in respect of an allocation of catchment area to the site. Such a decision will of course have to have regard to the current subscription demand for Bassaleg from its own catchment area and should also take into account the fact that Rogestone is situated in an area where there is flexibility of movement with regards to a secondary school, as opposed to Marshfield Primary, which can only move east into Bassaleg (our nearest secondary school).

 Should Bassaleg be the proposed catchment area, this would mean a substantial increase in the number of children at Bassaleg school. Has the Council studied the effect this would have on the catchment areas that are on the outskirts of the school? If the Catchment Guarantee is removed, it would severely disadvantage Marshfield in securing a place in Bassaleg.

The developers also have a responsibility to provide s106 Monies towards local projects and this should include ensuring that those currently within the catchment of Bassaleg are not denied schooling due to the increase in numbers. What is the Newport Council strategy for allocation of any s106 Monies? Will it provide additional spaces for all the new children as well as those who are currently within catchment in Marshfield?

1. **Long term Effect on the Community of Marshfield**
2. Social and Community spirit will disappear:

Marshfield is a thriving village that relies very strongly on its historical links with Bassaleg. The removal of the Catchment Guarantee would mean that some Marshfield Primary children would be in Bassaleg whereas others could potentially be spread to any school with space across Newport County. The close knit Marshfield community has is built around the schools and the relationships that this generates. Removal of the Catchment Guarantee would see this community spirit gradually disappear. We will have to question the reasoning behind why the Newport Council are changing a policy that has worked well for over 25 years with such haste (we barely had a few weeks notice to prepare our submissions to you) and with no substantive evidence to explain the benefits that the removal of the catchment guarantee may bring and no explanation or thought to the negative impact that the removal of the catchment guarantee will bring over the communities that are settled. We will have to ask how Newport Council will plan to minimise the unavoidable division and disruption to our community and our children and our families, should this proposal be put forward.

1. House Prices and Economic Effect:

The removal of the Catchment Guarantee will result in an uncertainty that will be created within Marshfield itself and within the county at large in respect of the secondary school placement and this lack of guarantee of a good education will mean less of a draw for parents looking for stability of education for their children and could force families to potentially move away. Areas could become less desirable and current resident house values could diminish and the wealth currently in the area would potentially reduce. We will have to ask whether the Council has studied the potential effects of the removal of the catchment guarantee beyond the school.

1. Natural Increases in population and development:

How does Newport Council intend to ensure that the designated secondary school (Bassaleg) for Marshfield Primary continue to grow in line with natural population demographics and house developments in order to ensure the security of education for its catchment?

1. **Conclusion**

The removal of the catchment guarantee appears to be a rushed and hasty decision that has been taken by the NCC without any thought or consideration as to how it would affect communities and as such, such a proposal within the school admissions policy should be removed or at least amended to ensure that attendance at a certain primary school (Marshfield) should guarantee a space at the feeder secondary school (Bassaleg), if we live within the catchment area, which we do.