

My name is Phil Heath – I am chair of governors at Chew Valley School, which is a large comprehensive school about 4 miles from the airport. Many of the pupils live close to the airport. Many have their sleep spoiled by noise from the aeroplanes. Many cannot cycle along the country lanes which are used as rat-runs to get to the airport. Many are terrified at the prospects of climate change. And yet the children struggle to have their voices heard.

At Chew Valley School we have a set of core values, that form the basis by which the school is run. Those values include things like “respect for others” and “taking personal responsibility.” I’d like to draw your attention to three areas that the pupils are taught about, and contrast them with Bristol Airport’s Statement of Case.

Firstly, the pupils are taught that individual actions count, that personal responsibility counts. At para 7.4 of their statement of case, Bristol Airport seem to take the position that because the pollution from the airport is a small part of the UK total, it can be ignored. That’s like a pupil at the school saying it was ok for them to misbehave because everyone else was misbehaving. That does not count as taking personal responsibility.

Secondly, pupils are taught that democracy matters – that elected representatives make the decisions that affect their lives. Bristol Airport seems to dispute that – much of its Statement of Case is predicated on the idea that the Council did not follow the recommendation of the planning officers – see for example para 1.2. The corollary of that is that there is no situation where a council can overturn a recommendation from a planning officer – in which case why bother to have the council involved at all? To raise a new generation that understands and believes in democracy, the children need to be able to see that decisions taken by elected representatives are respected.

Thirdly, in English lessons the pupils are taught about persuasive writing, they are taught how to be media-savvy, and to recognise glib marketing. In this respect, I’d actually recommend they read Bristol Airport’s Statement as an admirable example of how to argue an untenable position – how to selectively present facts and arguments to support a self-serving case – how to greenwash an application to emit millions of tonnes of CO₂. Bristol Airport has some highly skilled advisors. They’re paid to wriggle their way through a complex, arcane system and will argue that black is white if it suits their case.

Back to the pupils at Chew Valley School –

- they are taught to respect democracy and democratic decisions

- they are taught to act responsibly even when it is difficult to do so.

- they are taught to look at the reality behind glib proposals that are too good to be true

Bristol Airport could follow their example.

Phil Heath

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