

Consultation Feedback Report Redlands School

November 22nd 2019

Report compiled by Dr Helen Jenner, Independent Consultant, Tower Hamlets Primary Review.

Introduction

This report summarises the planning undertaken to lead to a public consultation, and the responses to that consultation, on whether or not Redlands and Smithy Street Schools should support the Local Authority to formally consult on the amalgamation of Redlands and Smithy Street Schools.

Background

Redlands Governing Body and Smithy Street Governing Body were both prompted by the Tower Hamlets Primary Review¹ to consider how to make the schools' long term future and quality of education more robust in a period of falling rolls and tightening funding.

The Tower Hamlets Primary Review commissioned an Independent Consultant, Dr Helen Jenner, to work with schools they had identified as being at risk due to demographic change in the Borough. As well as working with the schools, Dr Jenner was asked to produce a public report "Future Ambitions"² setting out principles for developing school relationships for resilience and excellence. This document was shared with all Headteachers, Unions and Governors in March 2019. Regular updates on the Primary Review have been included in the termly Director's Report for Governors.

Governors Planning

A Steering Group consisting of Chairs, Deputy Chairs and Headteachers from Redlands and Smithy Street schools, supported by the Independent Consultant has led the work on considering the implications of the review for the two schools.

They have met, in various groupings, regularly since the Local Authority first identified the schools as being "in scope" for review, in July 2018. All documents shared with governors, parents and other stakeholders have been signed off by this group, and agreed by the Local Authority.

An Informal Joint Governing Body meeting with Redlands and Smithy Street governors was held on 12th March to discuss the Primary Review, the Future Ambitions Report, and the best responses for the two schools. This Informal Meeting endorsed the work of the steering group and agreed to an Extraordinary Joint Meeting, followed by Individual

¹ Tower Hamlets Primary Review

https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/education_and_learning/schools/Primary_Review_for_parents.aspx

² The Future Ambitions Report is available on the Tower Hamlets Primary Review Website.

Governing Body meetings on 10th June, which would consider whether or not to move to consultation on a proposal to amalgamate the two schools.

The additional Governing Body meeting on 10th June, part of which was held jointly with Smithy Street Governing Body, considered the preferred option presented by the Steering Group. The papers were sent out 7 days previously³. At the meeting, Dr Jenner presented the position for the two schools and the steering group proposal. This was followed by a joint Q and A session. The two governing bodies then met separately to consider the proposals.

Both Governing Bodies agreed to consult, in the first half of the Autumn Term, on whether or not the two schools should consider an amalgamation. This information was shared with parents and staff.

During the Summer Term the Tower Hamlets “Family Matters” newsletter contained information on the Primary Review and at the end of the Summer Term Christine Mac Innes, (Director Education and Partnership Division, Tower Hamlets) asked all schools to circulate a letter about the Review to parents. Redlands and Smithy Street Schools both circulated the letter to parents.

A consultation document⁴ was prepared, and agreed with the Local Authority. This was given in paper copy to all parents, circulated to Tower Hamlets Headteachers, through the Headteacher’s Bulletin; emailed to staffing unions, and the Secretary of State has been notified of potential changes.

Information about the consultation was also placed on the school website.

<http://Redlandsschool1.wixsite.com/Redlandsschool/single-post/2019/09/06/Governing-Body-Consultation-on-the-Proposal-to-Federate>

Questions raised in a range of meetings were recorded and summarized. See Appendix 1

Staff meetings regularly discussed the implications of Amalgamation.

The proposal was explained to children in Assemblies and they were given the opportunity to discuss in their classes.

Staff, children, parents and other stakeholders were all invited to respond to the consultation and to raise questions. A box was provided in the school office so that responses and queries could be easily and anonymously made if people wished.

Governors agreed responses from the different forms of consultation should be summarized in a report for Governors, to be shared with parents at a meeting led by the Local Authority

³ See Governing Body minutes and “Supporting Documents” appendix. These are not included with this report but are available on request to the Headteacher.

⁴ Included in Appendix “Supporting Documents”

on November 21st. A day time meeting was held at Smithy Street School, and an evening meeting at Redlands School. Parents were free to attend either meeting, regardless of which school their children attended, to make sure that working parents were able to attend a consultation meeting.

Consultation Response

The majority of responses, both in meetings and in writing, were very positive.

Notes from meetings, and individual forms, are available from the Headteacher.

Key messages are summarized below:

Parents felt that strong reasons for supporting the move to an amalgamation were – more sustainable finances, increased staff and other resources, increased potential for school improvement and increased play space. They were hopeful that bringing both schools together would also increase the range of specialist skills their children could access - for example there might be a wider range of curriculum experts on the staff.

Their concerns focused on the risk of becoming too large a school, the costs of a new school uniform and the need to maintain a Redmans Road entrance.

Parents were clear that they wanted the impact of changes to be minimized. There are some questions that they would prefer to have answered immediately, for example which building would their children be taught in, would friendship groups be maintained. They do understand that some cannot be addressed until the Local Authority have reached a decision on whether to proceed with the amalgamation.

They have confidence that the leadership of the schools will ensure they are kept well informed and concerns will be addressed.

The importance of maintaining a high standard of education was seen as crucial to any change being successful.

Staff feedback similar positive reasons to support Amalgamation. They are concerned that falling numbers may impact on staffing structures, but feel that governors taking control of the situation, rather than allowing negative drift is positive. They have been enjoying the impact of working more closely and are hopeful for the future. They particularly enjoyed a joint staff meeting where they met other staff and visited both school buildings.

Professional discussion, and strong engagement from staff, parents and children with the process, and the positive feedback received puts both schools in a strong position for responding positively to the proposals, as well as continuing to be mindful of the anxieties change can raise.

Responses to the consultation form are summarized in a PDF⁵ which has been shared with governors. Individual Response Forms are available for viewing on request to the schools. They will be kept for 1 year.

30 parents and 2 staff members returned consultation response forms.

Of those returning forms:

19 parents agreed with the proposal to Amalgamate Redlands and Smithy Street Schools, 11 parents did not.

2 staff members agreed with the proposal, none disagreed.

Although the numbers completing forms were low, and attendance at meetings has not been huge, informal feedback, in the playground, at the school gate, etc. has also been positive. People understand the demographic changes and see the proposal as a positive way to secure strong education.

Through the forms and during the various meetings a number of important points were made, which governors should continue to consider during their considerations. Parents were pleased to hear those that could be addressed in the Nov 21st feedback meetings.

Recommendation

No issues have been raised by staff, parents or children that would suggest that would preclude progressing to issuing statutory notices. Stakeholders are keen to see a decision reached quickly so that, depending on the decision, planning can progress to the next stages.

The publishing of statutory notices as soon as possible is recommended.

⁵ See Appendix "Feedback from Response Form"