

Consultation Feedback Report Smithy Street 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 Smithy Street and Redlands Schools should support the Local Authority to formally consult on the amalgamation of Smithy Street and Redlands Schools.

Background

Smithy Street Governing Body and Redlands 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 Smithy Street and Redlands 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 Smithy Street and Redlands 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 Redlands 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. Smithy Street and Redlands 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://www.smithystreet.org.uk/uploads/6/1/1/5/61157919/consultation_on_proposal_to_amalgamate_redlands_primary_school_and_smithy_street_primary_school.pdf

Meetings were held for staff (30th Sept and 3rd Oct) and parents (24th and 25th September)

Children were given the opportunity to discuss the proposal in Assemblies on 23rd and 30th September.

Notes from these meetings were recorded and summarized. See Appendix 1

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 this report for Governors, and organized a meeting for parents on November 21st for a summary of the consultations to be reported to parents, with Senior LA officers, governors representatives and the Headteachers available to answer questions. Although numbers

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”

attending were low, parents were re-assured to hear that any concerns that had been raised were being addressed. Those attending were supportive of the proposals, and helpfully raised any aspects which they felt may not yet have been addressed.

Consultation Response

The majority of responses, both in meetings and in writing, were positive. Although numbers attending meetings and returning forms were low, the informal feedback, in the playground, staff meetings and at the school gate is positive. Strong communication has meant that there is only low level anxiety about the proposals.

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

23 parents and 5 staff members returned consultation response forms.

Of those returning forms:

20 parents agreed with the proposal to Amalgamate Smithy Street and Redlands Schools, 3 parents did not.

5 staff members agreed with the proposal, none disagreed.

Through the forms and during the various meetings a number of important points were made, which governors should consider during their considerations.

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 specialist expertise through a wider staff team. They would like to see a decision reached quickly so that details can be worked through and there is plenty of time for transition. Joint coffee mornings and parents visits to the Redlands building were suggested. Parents were pleased to hear that there are ideas about how the children can be introduced to each other, but understood that these cannot easily progress until decisions are reached.

Parents concerns focused on the risk of becoming too large a school and the costs of a new school uniform. Some parents were worried that children with special educational needs might find a larger school more difficult to manage, but they also felt that there could be advantages if joining together might me more available finance and access to SEN training.

The importance of maintaining a high standard of education was seen as crucial to any change being successful. Confidence in the school's leadership and governors to manage change positively was expressed.

Increased play space was particularly welcomed by children.

Some children are not certain that all the children in Redlands School are as kind as the children in Smithy Street, others are excited by the prospect of making new friends.

⁵ See Appendix "Feedback from Response Form"

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. Curriculum leaders have been enjoying the impact of working more closely and are hopeful for the future. The staff at both schools enjoyed the joint staff meeting where they had the opportunity to spend time in both buildings.

Professional discussion, and strong engagement from staff, parents and children with the process, put governors in a strong position for considering their proposal in the November Steering Group meeting.

In the light of consultation feedback, the Chairs of Governors will write to the Local Authority in support of the publishing of Statutory Notices.

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.