

Consultation Feedback Report Smithy Street School

October 21st 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. The report aims to support the governors' steering group to reach an informed decision at their meeting on November 7th 2019.

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, Vice 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

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.

group and agreed to an Extraordinary Joint Meeting, followed by Individual 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 seven 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 a report for Governors, to be considered by the Steering Group, on November 7th 2019, following recommendations would be made to the Smithy Street School Governing Body as

³ See Governing Body minutes and "Supporting Documents" appendix.

⁴ Included in Appendix "Supporting Documents"

to whether they should support the Local Authority's proposal to move to Statutory Consultation.

Consultation Response

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

Responses to the consultation form are summarised 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 one year.

23 parents and five staff members returned consultation response forms.

Of those returning forms:

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

Five staff members agreed with the proposal, none disagreed.

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

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.

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

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

Staff fed back similar positive reasons to support Amalgamation. They are concerned that falling numbers, and the changes 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.

Professional discussion, and strong engagement from staff, parents and children with the process, puts governors in a strong position for considering their proposal in the November Steering Group meeting. This should inform the Smithy Street School Governing Body decision on how they would respond to the Local Authority moving to statutory consultation on the two schools amalgamating from September 2020.

⁵ See Appendix "Feedback from Response Form"

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