

Report on HR Organisational change process and support to be provided to school staff

The organisational change procedures underpinning the consultation about St Anne's and Guardian Angels School are the Tower Hamlets Organisational Change Process. Agreed with unions in 2014, and confirmed as still agreed by Tower Hamlets Educational Partnership (THEP) and the Trades Unions.

In paragraph 2.2 the aims of the procedure are set out.

This procedure is intended:

- *To take account of the school's statutory duty to provide for the educational needs of all pupils in line with the National Curriculum;*
- *To minimise the impact of situations involving re-organisations and or staff reductions;*
- *To ensure that organisational change takes place as effectively as possible and avoids unnecessary disruption;*
- *To ensure staff reductions are reached fairly and in accordance with employment law and statutory entitlements; and*
- *To ensure that consultation with staff and the trade unions is commenced at the earliest possible opportunity.*

In September 2019 when Guardian Angels and St Anne's governing bodies began to consider whether amalgamation would be a good way forward it was clear that both schools were likely to need staffing restructures.

Historically, amalgamations in Tower Hamlets have always involved equal status for staff if school staffing structures are likely to be affected, regardless of which school (or schools) is closing. The consultation document, agreed by governors, the LA and Diocese, and published on November 8th, therefore included the following paragraphs.

What will happen to our Headteacher?

Sheila Mouna is an excellent Executive Headteacher for both our schools and has been essential in establishing the partnership between the two schools. The Governing Bodies from Guardian Angels and St. Anne's Schools agree that the headteacher post for the new school is, in effect, not vacant and therefore not subject to advertising or selection requirements.

This would mean that a single Headteacher and a single Governing Body would collectively oversee the running of the merged school. A single primary school would bring both schools together to become one community, which we believe will be the best for the children and their education.

What will it mean for the staff?

A staffing structure will need to be developed as part of the planning if a decision to amalgamate the schools is taken. In both schools, staffing changes already need to be made because of falling numbers of children.

The exact structure for the future cannot be clear until we know whether the schools are amalgamating and the numbers of children and therefore, the numbers of staff required.

If numbers at either school continue to fall, or children do not move to the amalgamated school, this could lead to further staff losses. Staffing structures for September 2020 will be clarified once numbers of children are known, and will, initially, be based on the staff structure required to support the numbers of children from each school.

As part of the consultation process, governors will work with the Local Authority, staff, and their unions, and an HR consultant to determine the best ways to manage any changes needed. The Local Authority, Diocese and governors are committed to avoiding compulsory redundancy.

Consultation meetings for staff will be held during the Autumn Term and throughout any agreed change processes. Amalgamation provides greater protection for staff because more posts will be retained than would be the case if one school closed without being part of an amalgamation.

This was the process discussed with Trade Unions Representatives at both schools. (At Guardian Angels on 13th Nov and at St Anne's on 14th Nov). The same process was described in response to questions at consultation meetings in the Autumn Term. All staff were provided with a copy of the consultation document. No staff or unions raised any concerns about the process. They were very clear that they expected the process to be completed as quickly as possible, and that they were anxious to know whether they had job security.

Unfortunately, the time scales for Cabinet reaching a decision on the amalgamation, achieved through the closure of Guardian Angels and expansion of St Anne's School, changed during the Christmas holidays, with a proposed decision date of April 2020. This would have meant completion of staffing processes by May half term would be impossible and caused great concern for staff. The Local Authority consequently reviewed its processes and the decision will now be taken at Cabinet on March 25th, following statutory consultation from 5th Feb-4th March 2020.

As part of expediting the HR processes in a fair and timely manner the HR consultant has helped draw up a time table and Helen Jenner and Sheila Mouna have held a series of meetings with unions to agree the timetable. The teachers' unions, GMB and Unison have agreed the revised timetable, which allowed for a longer informal consultation on the proposed structure and process to be followed to be shared with staff before Cabinet reach a decision on the proposed amalgamation, and a shorter formal consultation period, immediately after the decision has been reached, so that decisions are made quickly to reduce staff anxiety.

It is now apparent that during the staff meetings held by the LA and Diocese, at staff requests, different information was been given to the two staff teams on the process that should be followed. The Headteacher, HR consultant and Independent Consultant were not at these meetings. The Diocese proposed at the St Anne's meeting that, as Guardian Angels may be closing, all the staff there should be made

redundant. This proposal was not included in the informal consultation period, nor was it addressed in the statutory consultation notices.

Whilst making all Guardian Angels staff redundant could have been an approach, it was not the one agreed at the start of the process for three main reasons

1. Both schools would have needed to consider staffing re-structures if the amalgamation was not happening.
2. There was a desire to support children at Guardian Angels through the transition by having some staff move with them.
3. Staff at Guardian Angels School bring with them expertise that would benefit both schools.
4. This would have increased the likely number of redundancies and staff at the two schools involved in the amalgamation would have been treated inequitably.

It may have been possible to change to a different process, but this would probably have required revisiting the early consultation, or trying to meet again with unions for them to agree a completely new process, and then putting this to the staff.

It was decided that it was important to make sure that staff at both schools had the same information, so the original process has been adhered to. After some discussion, it was agreed to remain with the model previously consulted on for three main reasons-

1. The proposed organisational change model gives equity between the staff at the two schools.
2. If all staff at Guardian Angels were made redundant this would not be in keeping with the principle of reducing redundancies.
3. To change the organisational change model at this stage would require a revisiting of Tower Hamlets agreed processes, and possibly a rerunning of the informal consultation, causing even greater delay and anxiety.

As mentioned previously, there are also clear benefits for children by combining staffing, as the children are benefitting from staff appointed from the expertise pool across the two schools.

In meetings so far, the unions have been pleased with arrangements proposed to ensure decisions for staff are expedited by May half term, with the new school shadow structure available for informal consultation from February 26th. A number of staff at both schools have expressed an interest in early retirement or voluntary redundancy and there are also staff at both schools who would like to stay and join the newly amalgamated school.

A letter was sent to all staff, with a copy of the agreed timetable, following the Steering Group meeting on Thursday 13th Feb. The letter and timetable are attached.

Once Cabinet have reached a decision additional HR support will be made available for the schools, so that one to one meetings can be held quickly, to support staff and ensure that any requests for voluntary redundancy, or early retirement can be considered, to reduce the need for competitive processes and compulsory redundancies. During the one to one meetings, which will be offered to every member of staff at both schools, staff wishes and concerns will be considered. There

will also be the opportunity for staff to raise any additional support or training they think they might need to support them with changes.

Both the Catholic Diocese and Tower Hamlets have agreed that they will provide a supportive process for any staff interested in redeployment at other schools.

As the Unions agreed to early consultation on the change process, staff have been able to see the proposed structures, timescales, job descriptions and a draft job matching list. Additional support has enabled Initial 121 meetings to have been held with a number of staff to provide more detail on their options and answer questions, more are to be arranged. Staff have been invited to request estimates for voluntary severance and early retirement. Counselling support is being arranged for staff who wish to access this support and staff have been advised that redeployment may also be an option for them.

Formal consultation will finish in early May, after which decisions will be made on Early Retirement/Voluntary Redundancy requests and any selection interviews will take place. This will allow for any staff matching processes to be completed in time to allow appeals processes and comply with statutory and contractual notice periods.

Although staff are understandably still anxious, the tighter timescales and early consultation have reduced their concerns.

Joint staff training days have already been put in the diary to allow the staff from the two schools to work together and build the new staff team.

6th March 2020