

# **Informal Consultation on the proposal to close**

## **Shapla School**

### **The Proposal**

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets, in partnership with the governors of Shapla School, have taken the necessary, but sad, decision to propose the closing of Shapla School from September 2021, and to re-locate the children attending Shapla School to other near-by schools.

### **Why are we proposing this change?**

Pupil numbers in Tower Hamlets schools are currently falling, particularly in the West of the borough where our school is situated. This means that Shapla School, along with other schools, has not had sufficient numbers to fill our classes and, from Year 3 and younger, all have year groups below 20 children.

We are a small school, so as our pupil numbers fell, this affected our budget badly. Protecting quality education led to Shapla having a financial difficulties, with no capacity to repay financial support received from the Local Authority within an acceptable time frame. The Local Authority are not allowed to continue to fund schools that are not financially viable.

Our school already works closely with neighbouring schools, and the Local Authority has identified sufficient vacancies within 0.6 miles from Shapla, and within 0.7 of all current pupils' homes, to accommodate all of the children currently attending Shapla. Across the West of Tower Hamlets there are also vacancies in many other schools.

To support Shapla through this difficult period other school Headteachers have agreed to be proactive in helping transition planning.

### **What would happen to our Headteacher?**

John Musgrave Bolanos, our Headteacher, has made an important positive contribution to Shapla and has worked hard to ensure the quality of education has been strengthened. As with all the staff, he will be supported to consider his future options, and is recognised as a strong local Headteacher. He will continue to be Headteacher at Shapla School until September 2021, unless he is appointed elsewhere.

### **Why close Shapla School?**

It is important to stress that the closure is not a judgement on the quality of education at Shapla School, our excellent staff or our lovely children. It is the sad fact that there are fewer children in Tower Hamlets and one form entry schools, that are not full, are facing financial challenge.

Unfortunately, Shapla School has faced significant financial challenge, requiring funding from the Local Authority which it cannot repay without damaging the quality of education for the children.

Neighbouring schools have capacity for all the Shapla children to be accommodated within schools that are in a stronger financial position. Although provision at Shapla is currently good, there is a risk that the quality of education and the continued access for pupils and their families to extended services and facilities might begin to fall at Shapla, despite the best efforts of the Headteacher and staff and governors.

### **What will it mean for the children?**

The children will be able to stay at Shapla until the end of the Summer Term 2021.

Families will be supported to move to neighbouring schools, during the Summer Term, if the decision to close is agreed.

The Local Authority recommends that the group of schools is fairly small, so as to reduce distances, but also to support children to transition with other children that they know. However, families who wish to consider other schools, closer to their homes, will be supported to do so.

Parents will be able to apply to those schools, and places will be allocated using the usual Tower Hamlets admissions criteria in the Summer Term 2021.

A full programme to support children through this difficult period will be put in place, with the aim of helping them to recognise that moving school presents new opportunities as well as recognising how they have benefitted from their education at Shapla. This will include open days at nearby schools so that parents are able to visit once schools have returned after the Coronavirus epidemic.

Parents who wish can apply for their children to move to other schools before August 2021 through the in-year admissions process.

### **What will it mean for the staff?**

Staff at Shapla School will be supported to find redeployment opportunities at other local schools. They may also have the opportunity to consider voluntary redundancy. Wherever possible Tower Hamlets tries to avoid compulsory redundancy. If the proposal does go ahead staff, and their unions, will be involved in a School Re-organisation staffing process consultation, from March 2021.

### **What happens to the school building?**

At this stage of the proposal there are no specific plans for the building. These will be considered if the proposal progresses to statutory notice later this year. One idea would be to keep the tree area and football pitch to create a Shapla Forest School area, which could be run by St Pauls School and be available for all schools to use - contributing to re-greening the Borough. The main part of the school buildings could be leased for other educational uses.

## **Procedure to achieve the closure**

It is proposed that there will be no further admissions to Shapla School from September 2021.

All responses to this consultation will be put together in a report to governors and the Local Authority. The Local Authority will then decide, at its November 2020 meeting, whether to move to statutory notice - a formal publication of a document explaining the closure and its impact. Stakeholders are then able to make representations to the Local Authority before a final decision is reached early in March 2021.

If the proposal goes ahead and the Local Authority Cabinet does decide to close the school, all the children at Shapla will transition to new schools by September 2021, when Shapla will formally close.

## **Admissions**

Children will continue to be able to go to Shapla School until July 2021. During the Summer Term 2021 the Local Authority Admissions Team will work with the school to allocate places in the nearest to home schools, using a parental preference system, and applying the existing Admission criteria.

If parents are interested in moving their children to a different school before July 2021, they are able to apply using the Tower Hamlets In-Year Admissions process.

[https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/education\\_and\\_learning/schools/school\\_admissions/in-year\\_admissions.aspx](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/education_and_learning/schools/school_admissions/in-year_admissions.aspx)

Children should not move school, other than at the end of the school term.

## **Why are we consulting you?**

We want to consult you to gather your views because you are an essential part of the school community. The governing body of the school and the London Borough of Tower Hamlets cannot simply decide to make changes to schools without first seeking the views of parents and others. There is a legal process which must be followed before changes can be made, and it is important that the governing body and the council hear your views before deciding whether to proceed.

This document will be provided for all parents and staff. It is also on the school website, along with some short videos.

We have organised the following opportunities for parents and carers to share views.

1. You can use the response form (or any other written format) at the end of this document to record your views. It can be posted to the school, or emailed to

consult@shapla.school

2. There is a box in the playground at Shapla School where you can leave your comments,

response forms and any questions.

3. The Local Authority consultant, who is supporting the school with the consultation process, will be available for 1 to1 socially distanced questions/feedback on Monday 13th July from 10.15 - 2.30. You can contact Shapla School to book a 15 minute slot.

4. Virtual meetings will be set up on July 13th:

Staff 4pm

Parents 9am and 6pm

To join them please contact the school and provide your email address so that you can be invited.

5. If you would like someone to phone you so you can discuss your views please let your school office know and provide some times that would suit you and your phone number.

6. The Parental Engagement Team will organize small group “Time to Talk” video sessions later in June, where there will be informal opportunities for parents to talk together.

6. School staff will create age appropriate ways of consulting with our children on their views as part of their on-line teaching.

### **What happens next?**

The informal consultation period starts on 8th June and ends on 17th July 2020 – the last page of this document can be used for you to feedback your view to governors. It should be returned to the school office. Following the consultation process, the governors’ steering group body will review your feedback and use it to make a response to the council, on whether or not to recommend proceeding with the school merger proposal. A report summarizing the feedback on the consultation will be available for staff and parents during the first half of the Autumn Term 2020.

The full governing body of the school will consider your feedback in its representations following the publication of the formal statutory notice, if the Council decide to move to this stage at their Cabinet meeting in November 2020.

If the Council decides to proceed, a public notice (the statutory notice) will specify details of the final proposal and there will be a period of at least four weeks when representations can be made. This will be the final opportunity to make any comments on the proposal. It is then anticipated that a final decision on whether to close the school will be made by the council by March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2021.

### **How can I get more information on the proposal?**

The LA will publish the feedback from the consultation on the council’s website during the

Autumn Term.

If permission is granted to publish a public notice, further details of this proposal will also be available in the Consultation sections of the Council's website, and our school website.

<https://shapla.school>

This has been a sad decision for Shapla governors and the Local Authority. Shapla School was created when there was a sudden influx of children into the West of Tower Hamlets, now the population has changed again and in future, we cannot afford the wonderful education and community you have come to expect at Shapla School. There are not enough children to fill all the schools in the West of the Borough so some have to close, or amalgamate. After careful consideration we think now is the right time to close Shapla and help our children and families join new educational communities so that they can thrive.

We are aware that this is a stressful time for everyone because of the coronavirus challenge, but felt on balance, it was better for this proposal to be shared transparently with you now, rather than wait until schools are fully able to return, particularly as it is not clear when that might be.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our proposal, we look forward to hearing your views.

Mark Campbell

Shapla School Chair of Governors

### Proposal to close Shapla School – Response Form

Our proposal is to close Shapla School, from Sept 1 st 2021, and ensure all children are found places at strong schools within a mile of their homes. We welcome your views on this proposal. Please fill in this response form and return it to the address below no later than July 17th 2020, 3.30pm.

- 1) Do you accept the proposal that it is necessary to close Shapla School, and relocate children to nearby schools?

Please tick as applicable

Yes		No	
-----	--	----	--

- 2) If you accept the proposal, please let us know what we can do to help minimise the disruption for children and families.

- 3) If you do not accept the proposal, please tell us why.

- 4) Any other comments?

If you would like someone to ring you to discuss your views, please let the school know and provide your name and phone number. You can book through the school if you would like to attend any off the virtual or 1 to 1 meetings.

Please let us know whether you are

Parent		Staff		Governor		Other (please specify)	
--------	--	-------	--	----------	--	------------------------	--

(Children are being asked to respond in age appropriate ways.)

Your Name (Optional) \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to Shapla School by 17th July 2020. Feedback from question one will be summarised numerically. Comments will be typed-up and anonymised. This information will be made available to the public (via the school website), but all respondents' comments and information will be anonymised.