

## **Appendix 4**

### **Consultation Report Bishop Challoner Boys' and Girls' Catholic Schools' Amalgamation Proposal**

February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023

Report compiled Dr Helen Jenner, Independent Consultant, appointed by Bishop Challoner Federation Governors, to support the Stage One School Consultation Process, and by Tower Hamlets Local Authority to support the Stage Two Statutory Notice Consultation Process.

#### **Introduction**

This report summarises the planning undertaken to lead to two public consultations, and the responses to those consultations, which considered a proposal that Bishop Challoner Boys and Girls Catholic Secondary Schools should amalgamate to become a single mixed school. The proposal to move to consult on this possibility was agreed by governors in July 2022 following extensive discussions during the Summer Term 2022. In November 2022 Tower Hamlets Council Cabinet agreed to move the consultations to the second stage through the publication of a Statutory Notice on January 16<sup>th</sup> (Appendix One in The Report to Cabinet)

The two schools are currently part of a Hard Federation with a single governing body and a single Headteacher, Mr J.P. Morrison.

#### **Background**

Bishop Challoner governors have been aware of the impact of changing demographics on the school's population over several years. Brexit, house prices and COVID have all contributed to a fall in the number of Catholic families attending Catholic Schools. In addition, improvements in the quality of education in neighbouring non-faith schools have increased choices for parents seeking the best school for their child. Bishop Challoner governors were fortunate in recruiting Mr Morrison as Headteacher for the school and he, with governors support, has established a strong school improvement programme ensuring high Catholic moral values and educational expectations are firmly re-established at the centre of the Bishop Challoner culture.

Despite this forward trajectory the financial position of the two schools remains precarious largely due to funding two administrative and leadership structures, one for each school, when numbers across the school would only require one such structure. This detracts funding from front line educational provision for children.

In addition, because the school has run its curriculum as two schools there are occasions when individual boys' and girls' groups, for examination options would be too small to run. The school has increasingly combined boys' and girls' groups in some of these subjects with positive results.

Unusually, for separate schools, the boys and girls are used to mixing as they move around the school and at lunchtime, and teachers work across both schools.

Governors believe that transition to an amalgamated school will help maximise resources that support children's learning, will increase the school's popularity and impact positively on outcomes. They are planning the transition carefully to address any pupil, parent or staff concerns so that changes move forward smoothly, with no loss to the schools' values or Catholic purpose. They consider the amalgamation will support the school improvement journey, leading to higher outcomes for both boys and girls. A mixed school would also better prepare our young people to lead their adult lives in the mixed world they will be joining, encouraging respect, modesty and understanding between the genders.

The Governing Body have considered equalities issues and concluded that there would be no significant impact for any particular group. They are mindful that some children with additional needs or disabilities may need additional support to understand the proposal and the implications. As children in the school already mix there is unlikely to be any difficulty for individual children or vulnerable groups. Some sports and PSHE sessions will remain single sex as will changing facilities. The school has recently introduced headscarves as part of school uniform, this has been a popular change.

The Governing Body for both schools reached the conclusion that to amalgamate the two schools is the best solution to optimise provision and stabilise financial planning.

### **Governors Planning**

Governors began discussions regarding the possibility of moving towards a single amalgamated school at meetings during the academic year 2021/2. The Headteacher also raised the matter with the Local Authority, Tower Hamlets, and Westminster Diocese both of whom were supportive of the school considering consultation about the possibility.

Parents were informed during the Summer Term<sup>1</sup> of the possibility of a consultation during the Autumn Term. The Local Authority Secondary Transition Booklet was updated so that prospective parents were informed of the possibility.

A consultation document<sup>2</sup> was prepared. This was given to all parents, circulated to Tower Hamlets Headteachers, through the Headteacher's Bulletin; emailed to staff unions and

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<sup>1</sup> Website link for letter:

<https://www.bishopchallonerfederation.towerhamlets.sch.uk/attachments/download.asp?file=38&type=pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Website link for consultation document:

<https://www.bishopchallonerfederation.towerhamlets.sch.uk/attachments/download.asp?file=57&type=pdf>

governors, circulated to other stakeholders and the Secretary of State has been notified of potential changes.

Information about the consultation was also placed on the school website. Parents and staff have been sent regular updates about the proposal and meetings they can attend to express their views.

The consultation document explains a variety of ways for parents, staff and other stakeholders to contribute their views on the proposal:

1. A response form (or any other written format) at the end of the consultation document to record views to be emailed, posted, or handed to the school.
2. A special email address was set up at the school for comments [amalgamation@bishop.towerhamlets.sch.uk](mailto:amalgamation@bishop.towerhamlets.sch.uk)
3. A meeting was held for parents on Weds October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022
4. Regular staff briefings were held, and a proposal specific meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> October
5. A “zoom” link meeting was set up in case anyone wanted to talk with the Independent Consultant on 11<sup>th</sup> October.<sup>3</sup>
6. Governors agreed responses from the different forms of consultation should be summarised in a report for Governors, a draft was sent to the Chair of Governors, on 19<sup>th</sup> October. A final draft version was circulated to governors for discussion on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2022.
7. Parents were sent a further reminder of the need to comment on the proposal on Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> October.
8. A copy of the consultation report was sent to Unions, DFE, and local Faith groups. It was circulated to Headteachers and Governors by the Local Authority.

### **Local Authority Processes and Considerations**

At its November Meeting (30.11.2022) Tower Hamlets Cabinet considered the request to move to Statutory Notice, and the response to the Stage One consultation and agreed that the proposal should move to a Statutory Notice.

Councillors requested that as part of the Statutory Notice stakeholders should have the opportunity to ask further questions through a consultation process as well as to be able to submit representations. To facilitate these opportunities Tower Hamlets Council published the Statutory Notice, which was posted in the local paper, and in the local area as well as being shared with all schools and other partners. In addition, two further public meetings were held, so that stakeholders had an opportunity to comment, or to raise questions that

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<sup>3</sup> Bishop Challoner Amalgamation Consultation  
Time: Oct 11, 2022, 05:00 PM London  
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85625470205>  
Meeting ID: 856 2547 0205

had not been previously addressed. A further meeting was held at Bishop Challoner School on DATE and an open “Zoom” meeting was held on DATE

## **Stage One School Consultation Responses**

### **Parents meeting 5<sup>th</sup> October 2022**

The meeting was attended by 48 parents, 5 secondary age young people and 5 primary age children. The Headteacher, Chair of Governors, 3 school staff members and the Independent Consultant attended. Notes were taken by the independent consultant.

Mr Morrison, speaking to a presentation outlined the governors’ rationale in proposing an amalgamation of the two schools. He made three key points

1. The values, morals and outcomes of strong Catholic Education would not be compromised.
2. Bringing the two schools together as one would maximise the amount of funding focused on learning and increase the future financial resilience of the school.
3. Many other schools have changed to become mixed schools because this gives greater opportunity to prepare our young people to develop into men and women who respect and value each other as they share an understanding of how Catholic values and education can positively shape their adult lives.

He stressed the importance of feedback from parents to help the school with its improvement journey and to manage change positively. He invited parents to make comments and responded to them fully. Where further discussion was needed he recommended parents either speak to him after the meeting or contact him separately.

A number of issues raised were not to do with the amalgamation, these have been noted and addressed but are not included in this report.

The key comments made during the meeting were as followed:

Parents welcomed the opportunity to be part of the planning and discussion on this. They recognised that positive new leadership was encouraging more parental involvement.

Parents understood the need for change but asked that time could be put into planning carefully for transition. Mr Morrison thanked them for this and explained that meetings such as this are a good opportunity to hear from parents to help the school with this planning.

Parents were concerned to know how the impact of changes would be monitored. Mr Morrison outlined the role of senior leaders, governors and OFSTED. He reminded parents that the school welcomes feedback from them.

Some parents were concerned that there could be an impact on behaviour and/or modesty. Mr Morrison said standards of behaviour in the schools is already good and improving. There would be no lowering of expectations and, in his experience, co-educational schools can help improve boys' attitudes to learning.

Some parents recognised that mixed classes were working well for their children, others were particularly concerned that quieter children may become even more quiet in mixed classes. Mr Morrison highlighted the fact that much of the school is already mixed and the school caters carefully for all children. Any parent with concerns for their child was encouraged to let the school know so that those concerns can be addressed.

Parents were concerned that class sizes might change, they prefer lower numbers. Mr Morrison outlined class size expectations and finances. Class sizes overall are not expected to increase, the size varies depending on the needs of individual children and the curriculum.

Parents felt that staff wellbeing and support should be considered because keeping good staff is essential for a thriving school. Mr Morrison told parents that staff appeared to be overall in favour of the amalgamation, many had experience of working in mixed schools and support would be offered for those who needed it through the established professional development systems.

Parents asked that children should be involved in discussions and recognised that different age groups might have different views. Mr Morrison said that age appropriate discussions were taking place.

One parent (Year 8) raised that they had accepted a place in a single sex school and felt the changes should not happen whilst their child was at the school. Other parents felt that since the change was beneficial for children this was not a problem. Parents of older children have already experienced mixed classes allowing their children to take A level options that would otherwise not be available. A parent of a Year 7 child pointed out that all their children had been progressing well in mixed classes throughout primary school.

An FAQ feedback form was created, based on questions raised at the meeting, and/or in writing, so that the school community were all able to see responses to these questions whether or not they were able to attend. This was added to the school's website with this report.

### **Staff Briefings**

As well as being briefed in staff meetings before the Summer Holidays and in advance of the public consultation staff were invited to a "question and answer" session with the Headteacher. 19 staff attended the session.

Staff appear to be in favour of the change, which they consider makes educational economic sense.

Due to the falling rolls they are concerned about future roles and the number of staff needed at the school. Both they, and local unions, understand that amalgamation will not cause job losses, and will bring future financial sustainability.

They understand that the current re-structures (which are also being consulted on) are not part of the amalgamation proposal.

### **Emails received to amalgamation email address**

Only one email was received at the amalgamation email address. This was from the parent of a girl who is not in favour of the amalgamation.

The Westminster Diocese also responded to the consultation stating “the Diocese and Trustees have considered this proposal at both their Education Commission Meeting and the September meeting of the Trustees, with both approving the proposal for the establishment of one mixed secondary school from the current federation from September 2023.”

### **Response Forms**

Two consultation response forms were received. Both from parents of boys. One in favour of the amalgamation, the other not in favour.

### **Feedback to stakeholders**

It is recommended that this Consultation Summary, the FAQs be posted on the school website and the link be emailed to parents, staff and other stakeholders, including the Local Authority.

### **Governing Body View following Stage One consultation.**

Bishop Challoner Governing Board discussed the feedback from consultation meetings when they met on 2nd Nov 2022 and confirmed that amalgamation remain the right direction of travel. They agreed they would ask the Local Authority to move to statutory notices for the schools to amalgamate from September 2023. This would be achieved through the formal closure of Bishop Challoner Catholic Boys Secondary School and the expansion and renaming of Bishop Challoner Girls Catholic Secondary School to become Bishop Challoner Mixed Catholic Secondary School. The Governing Board and Headteacher will not change as they are already operational across the two schools and will remain as the Governing Board and Headteacher for the newly amalgamated school.

### **Stage Two Statutory Notice Responses**

#### **School Meeting 31<sup>st</sup> January 2023**

The meeting was attended by 4 parents, 1 pupil. The Headteacher, 2 staff members, 2 Local Authority Officers and the Independent Consultant were in attendance. At the meeting Mr. Morrison re-iterated the governors’ view that the amalgamation would be beneficial for

pupils and provide stability. The Independent Consultant outlined the issues raised in consultation and how these had been addressed and The Local Authority Officer explained the Statutory Notice process.

Parents present were supportive of the change, as long as it was well managed. They were concerned about the cost of new uniform and pleased to hear that the governors would be subsidising this.

### **Zoom Online session 7<sup>th</sup> February 2023**

The online session was attended by 2 families - parents of one pupil, and mother and sibling (ex-pupil) of another. 1 Local Authority Officer was present and the Independent Consultant. The Independent Consultant gave a summary of the presentation from the school-based meeting, including advice on how to make written representation to the Statutory Notice. One family did not raise concerns, the other were supportive of the school but not in favour of the changes, preferring to see the provision maintained as it is. The cost of school uniform was raised.

### **Web Based Opportunities**

Consultation Documents were posted on the Bishop Challoner Federation Schools' website. The website publicized the notice and directed the public to the Council website as well as the organized meetings. There were 1,235 visitors to the website during the consultation period, and 293 visitors to the Council website where the statutory notice and information on making representations could be found.

### **Written Representations**

9 written responses were received.

3 appear to be from local residents concerned that with increased numbers the negative impact of poor behaviour and littering on the local community will increase.

There will be no increase in the published intake to the school.

3 strongly welcome the proposal

2 responses raise the concern that young people may make less progress in mixed classes

1 response simply stated "no"

The leadership, governors and Local Authority have taken these views in to account. The governors at the school are committed to monitoring the impact of the change but remain confident that with strong Senior Leadership outcomes for young people at the school will improve.

### **Overview of the independent consultant**

The schools' governing board and the Local Authority have taken their roles in ensuring fair and thorough consultation seriously and considered all views, and answered all queries raised.

Alongside this report all questions have been logged with the school and issues considered and reported back to individuals, or all parents as appropriate. A Frequently Asked Questions log with responses is available from the school or Local Authority.

Overall, there is a positive response to the proposals. For example, after the parents meeting parents approached the Independent Consultant individually to comment on how positive they felt this change was for the school and that they felt the atmosphere in school was more purposeful under new leadership. 2 were parents of boys, and two of girls. They were held the view that as children mix before after and during school anyway there should not be much distraction.

Parents are clear that the school has been through a lot of change and expect this change to be well managed and carefully monitored. They would like feedback to parents and welcomed face-to-face meetings.

The parents meeting, and written responses show there are some parental concerns about the impact of the changes, senior staff and governors have responded to these and committed to monitoring and responding if there are negative impacts, these are not expected. Parents appear confident to raise their concerns and committed to continuing to do so. Staff and unions have not raised concerns, nor have linked stakeholders. The Diocese of Westminster have discussed, and are supportive of, the proposal.

Governors, School Leaders and the Local Authority have taken careful consideration of key concerns from parents, and equalities impact considerations, and established a clear process for monitoring the effectiveness of the transition to ensure there is no negative impact from the change and to monitor that values, vision and outcomes improve further to guarantee the best possible Catholic Education for the community.

None of the representations made raise any additional points included in the impact sections of the statutory notice. In terms of the impact on the community the concerns raised about increased impact were based on a belief that the school would be increasing in size and would therefore have greater community impact. That is not the case.

The representations received because of the Statutory Notice do not raise issues that would raise significant concern regarding the proposal to amalgamate the schools. The school has made careful plans to minimise disruptions and has provided a clear strategic direction which they believe will impact positively on young people's preparation for adult life.

I can see no reason why the proposal should not be approved.

**Dr Helen Jenner**  
**Independent Consultant**  
**Supporting Bishop Challoner Catholic Federation Governing Body and Tower Hamlets Local Authority**