

Public Consultation Meeting on a proposal to close Raine's Foundation School (including plans to expand nearby Oaklands Secondary School, for the transfer of Raine's pupils)

Meeting held in the Hall at Raine's Foundation School on

Wednesday 26 June 2019 at 6pm until 8:20pm

Minutes

In attendance:

Local Authority Officers:

Christine McInnes - Divisional Director Education and Partnership
Terry Bryan – Head of Pupil Services and Pupil Sufficiency
Lindsey Bell – Strategy and Policy Officer
Farhad Ahmed -Training and Business Development Manager Governor Services
Lorraine Feyi-Shonubi - Governor Support Officer

Kate Roskell - London Diocesan Board for Schools (LDBS) Representative and Raine's Foundation Interim Executive Board Member

Raine's Foundation Student, parents and carers

Members of the Public (approximately 48)

Press

** Members in this document refers to members of the public/parents/carers or other unspecified.*

1. Welcome and Introduction of Chair

Patrice Canavan, Executive Headteacher of Raine's Foundation School and Oaklands Secondary School, welcomed those present and introduced Alan Parker the Chair.

2. Chair Opens the Meeting

Alan Parker (AP) stated that he was appointed three weeks ago as an independent Chair of the Joint Raine's/Oaklands Steering Group to manage on the consultation process on the possibility to close Raine's Foundation School (including plans to expand nearby Oaklands Secondary School, for the transfer of Raine's pupils) and provided a short synopsis of his professional background.

AP explained that this was the last of two Public Consultation Meetings and the format would follow last week's meeting.

AP introduced the Panel (CM, TB and KR) and explained that Inigo Woolf, Chief Executive of the London Diocesan Board for Schools and Debbie Jones, Director of Children Services Director (LBTH) could not attend the meeting but had attended the first Public Consultation meeting. He further stated that the meeting was the second of the formal consultation process and there were LA Officers who would be taking a record of the meeting.

AP stated that a presentation outlining the background to proposals was shared at the meeting held last week and some people had suggested that it would not be necessary to present the slide again however if there members who had not been at that meeting or wanted to see it again, then it would be shared for their benefit. Three members of the public expressed interest. AP drew members' attention to the section where parents and the public could give their views.

3. Introduction to the consultation and background information

The presentation slide was shown and CM provided a summary of the presentation and hard copies of the presentation were also made available. The presentation slide can be viewed below.



Raine's Public
Meeting 26-06-19 Pre

In closing the presentation, CM thanked all members for attending today.

CM explained that the consultation would run until the 24th of July 2019 and the Council would consider responses and the outcome of the consultation would inform the decision by Cabinet members on whether or not to issue a statutory notice. If the Cabinet agreed to issue statutory notices, a four week consultation period would be launched and the timeline would be November 2019 with a final decision being made by the Cabinet in the Spring term of 2020.

4. Chair opens the floor to questions

AP invited questions and comments and asked speakers to identify themselves because it was useful to know who they were and helped understand what they were saying (sic). He informed that the press would quote by name however any members who did not wish to be identified needed to make it clear from the outset.

AP stated that a great deal of work had been undertaken by the Parents Steering Group and the LA and as a result of that some particular questions had been identified and a document had been produced to answer those questions. The document can be viewed below:



Raine's FAQ.pdf

AP invited Laura Gibson (LG); a member of the Parents Steering Group to ask pertinent questions in relation to the document that ought to be answered by the panel first at today's meeting.

AP explained that the FAQ document would be updated accordingly following today's meeting.

LP introduced herself and stated that she was a former pupil, ex member of staff and had a child who attended Raine's Foundation School. The Parents Steering Group was petitioning to stop the closure of Raine's Foundation School.

LG asked whether there would be Year 10 from September 2020. TB answered that this was a consultation to close the School however closure would only take place if the Council agreed the proposals. Parents/carers of children in Year 9 would be made aware of a possible closure. TB acknowledged that this was a cause for concern for some parents because their children would be in the middle of their GCSEs.

LG asked why staff members had been told that there would be no Year 10 the following academic year. TB stated that the information had not come from the LA. However, given that a number of parents of pupils in the current Year 9 had chosen to apply for alternative schools, it was likely that the Year 10 group would be very small.

TB was asked whether the LA was encouraging Year 9 students to leave the School? TB emphasised that the LA was not encouraging parents to remove their children from Raine's, but that the School Admissions Team had met with parents, at their request, to explain the options and the risks should the School close at the end of the next academic year.

A member of the public questioned what the intended outcome of the consultation was because TB had mentioned "school closure" when this was a proposal. TB stated that when publishing a proposal the LA is explaining its intended course of action. However, the decision has not pre-determined and the intention in the consultation was to stakeholders/public the opportunity to comment on those proposals and put forward viable alternatives. The LA wanted children to have high standards of education, but it also needs to ensure that the School was sustainable. TB highlighted the downward trajectory in student numbers from 2013 and stated that for Year 7 entry in the 2019-20 academic year, there had been only 29 first preferences. With such a small number for Year 7 and the decline in pupil numbers in other year groups this presented a major problem in terms of the school's resources and its future sustainability.

A question was asked regarding the rewriting of the School's Admissions Policy to encourage applications from students from all world faiths in order to increase student numbers. TB replied that the LA took a number of steps to ensure more student applications, however one of the issues at the time was that the Governing Body did not immediately give approval for these changes, much to the frustration of the headteacher.

A council member commented that the LA had not supported the School because there were other issues, for example, in October 2018, Oaklands Secondary School and Mulberry School were encouraged to take more students than on their published admission numbers (PAN). TB stated that this was not the case and considered that the member had misunderstood the issue. TB stated that he would have a discussion with the member outside the meeting in relation to that point.

A member queried why after there had been no change to the trend of declining student numbers after the LA had stepped in. TB took members through the summary of historical applications on page 4 of the presentation slide. TB stated that this year there had been a total of 133 applications, but only 29 were first preferences. This meant that by National Offer day in March only 36 offers could be made as the vast majority of the 133 applicants were offered places at their higher preference schools. Previously the LA had allocated places at Raine's for pupils who did not get any of their preferences at secondary transfer. However, the majority of these declined the offer at Raine's, preferring to secure places at alternative schools.

Although LA provided substantial support to Raine's, it was also the governing body's responsibility to support the School when student numbers started falling. This included taking action to promote the School in the wider community, through advertising and other such measures to raise the school's profile.

TB also highlighted other issues with the School such as its rising budget deficit of £2.2m (by April, poor GCSE performance, weak leadership and governance that was identified by Ofsted and led to eventual changes to the governing body and subsequent Interim Executive Board. CM added that the LA had worked with the School since 2015 and put in place various methods of support, including peer support, performance reviews and funding to support its improvement plan. However, these actions did not have the desired outcome thus formal intervention was eventually deemed necessary.

A member referred to the School Prospectus that stated that the School had received over 400 applications for a particular year and **sought clarification**. TB explained that the last time the school had received 400 plus applications was back in 2011. He considered that it might have been an administrative error on the part of the School. The actual numbers from the previous year's admissions round are published in the LA's Secondary School brochure.

The Chair (AP) stated that the application system allowed every parent to put up to six school preferences in (first to sixth). The LA was referring to first choice applications and the School Prospectus might have been referring to the number of children who listed the School as a choice thus it was possible that the LA and the School were both right from a different view point.

Clerk's Note: *There was vociferous representation from some members regarding various issues relating to student numbers, lack of support for the School, the previous Governing Body and the School's financial position.*

A member questioned whether it would be possible to keep the School open for a further year to enable Year 10 students to complete their GCSEs. In response, TB stated that the School's financial position would not abate thus it was unlikely. However this could be proposed in response to the consultation. **In answer to a further question** about the LA supporting the School financially, TB stated that the LA relied upon a surplus budgets at other schools to fund those schools in deficit. It therefore needed to strike a balance between using money that could potentially be distributed across the board or using it to sustain a school which could no longer 'stand on its own feet'. Nevertheless, the current position was difficult and the proposal to close Raine's therefore need to be considered. TB further stated that the consultation allowed members to put forward suggestions that would enable the school to continue, bearing in mind that its funding was based on pupil numbers and the current pupil roll was so far away from it should be and there were fixed costs that could not be reasonably reduced.

In response to question 5 (**Where are Raine's 6th form pupils are going to go?**) TB replied that students in Year 12 would continue to Year 13. Those currently in Year 11 who were offered a place in the Raine's Sixth Form had been made aware that cohort in September was likely to be very low .. If this proved to be the case, Raine's may exercise its management powers to provide the education for those students at the site of an alternative school, to enable them to receive a full curriculum.

Members expressed that the Sixth Form was good and results had been good over the years. They **questioned** why it would close. Kate Roskell answered that the Sixth Form had historical good results however the outcomes in the last academic year were not good. A number of members commented that the former Headteacher's foreword in the prospectus stated that the School was doing well. Furthermore, the Prospectus sold the School as an exciting and wonderful place to be, yet the Panel was telling members that the School was failing thus giving false hope to prospective parents.

In answer to a question about moving the Raine's Sixth Form to the Lower Site, TB explained that it was not possible for Raine's to manage its limited resources across two sites as that would mean having more staff than it could reasonably afford.

A member asked why the LA was opening new schools in the Borough yet proposing to close Raine's. In answer TB explained that decisions on plans to open new free schools was a matter for the Department for Education, not the LA. However, when determining applications for new free schools, there is the need to consider, the availability of school sites; the current need and likely demand for the particular area in which the new school is located; parental preference; and the capacity of the provider to provide high quality education.

A member highlighted the positive things about the School's location and considered that the housing plans to build 36 units in the area would generate potential students for the future. Moreover, tax payers' money had been spent on renovating the School and now there were proposals for a closure. Furthermore, there was "nobody" looking to give the families proper support. A number of members agreed with the member's sentiments.

TB stated that Raine's (Bethnal Green), was no longer in an area of the borough with high demand for school places. Although there is some housing development planned this would not result in any significant increase in pupil numbers.

The reality was that families did not want to send their children to the School as evidenced by the decline in student numbers over the last nine year period when there had been a significant growth in the secondary school population. The LA was required to ensure that school places were of high quality thus schools really needed to be Good or Outstanding. Raine's School had been below standard for a while and positives like the School's Sixth Form would difficult to sustain, given that numbers were less than the DFE recommendation of 200. A number of members expressed their anger at the plans to potentially close the School and stated that there were students and members of staff to put into consideration.

A member sought clarification why the IEB comprising of eight members had six members who sat on the previous Governing Body (GB) which was considered weak and not approved rewriting of Admissions Policy early on. CM stated that this was not correct and explained that the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) acting on behalf of the secretary of state had appointed the IEB in consultation with the relevant bodies and in this case, a nomination had been sought from the Raine's Foundation Trust but that was not accepted. The LA submitted two nominations which were accepted thus there was only one member on the IEB who was on the previous GB.

A member asked why the Foundation Trust was not involved with the Joint Steering Group or the process. CM stated that the consultation was open for members to respond in relation to any issues but the Trust was kept informed directly.

A member asked whether anyone had asked students what they wanted. This was followed by an applause from members. Another member expressed an issue of changing information about student number and stated that she had applied to the School to save their child (sic) and the School from closure thus this situation was concerning for parents.

A student commented that the proposals were putting stress on the students. Furthermore, she had three weeks to find a new school because she would not be able to complete her GCSEs at Raine's if the proposals to close the School were agreed. Moreover, she had established friendships for three years and could end up in a school she did not like. There was an applause from members. TB addressed the student directly and stated that he was truly sorry that Raine's had reached the stage, where it had become necessary for the LA and Diocese to consider the School's closure. He understood how upsetting this was for all concerned, but particularly students and staff. He acknowledged that the previous governance and leadership of the school had failed its students and staff and the LA would have wanted to have intervened much sooner. However, it was obstructed from doing so. He further acknowledged that that the School's failure was therefore a collective responsibility of the LA, the GB and the Foundation Trust, given that at crucial times it was evident these agencies were unable to work together to bring about a positive future for the school.

A member asked why her daughter's brother had been offered a scholarship before Christmas if the school would eventually close. TB apologised and said that when the School started recruiting for its Year 7 intake in September 2019, it was not anticipated the LA would need to consider the school's closure. However, the numbers for Year 7 and other year groups were critically to the extent where it has been determined that the School is no longer viable.

A member asked that if few parents had applied why did the LA not decline the applications and not make offers at Raine's. TB replied that with 133 application the LA was optimistic that the final numbers would be reasonable, but it later became apparent that the cohort would be too small when compared to the pupil numbers across the whole school and the extent of the schools budget position.

A lengthy discussion about offering Year 7 places ensued and the Chair stated that the matter was complicated and clarified that regulations were rigid. The LA however could not deny students a place whilst the School was still open which is why offers had been sent and parents were subsequently approached making them aware of potential risk. Some members commented that the LA had not made parents aware of that legal right. **In answer to a question**, AP cautioned that although parents/carers had a legal right and could insist to have their child attend Year 7, however **should** the proposals turn to a formal notice, the LA could apply to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator to vary the PAN and reduce it to zero thus technically there would be no places by March 2020.

Another member commented on the uncertainty of getting a school place at another school and expressed that the waiting list was a changing picture and a place had now been offered a place at Morpeth after being 12th on the waiting list. TB replied that the waiting list can often move quickly and

the LA's School Admissions staff administered arrangements expediently, to ensure that any spare places could be identified and offered at the earliest opportunity.

LG referred to question 12 on the FAQ Document about whether students would get special dispensation for examinations. In answer TB stated that the special consideration could be afforded to students in these circumstances however the decision lay with the examination board and was considered on each individual case but the LA was reviewing whether the situation at Raine's fell within the guidelines agreed by all of the examination boards.

A member asked how long the LA had been considering the proposed closure of the School. TB answered that the thought to close a school would not have been in anybody's mind ordinarily however when it became clear that the School was not sustainable, a decision was reached by the 31st of March 2019.

In response to a question about the School converting to an academy, TB stated that the School needed to satisfy various performance conditions to convert to an academy. Moreover, no Academy Trust would be able to take on Raine's due to its financial position. TB further stated that the chair of the previous GB was the CEO of an academy trust and would therefore have been in a strong position to advise on this option. **A further question was asked** about whether any schools were approached to consider a federation. Kate Roskell stated that a federation with other schools is very difficult particularly in a situation that Raine's is in and it is usually a matter of having a conversation with a potential school in the first instance. Kate Roskell further stated that she would investigate whether any schools were approached and which they were as requested.

A member stated that when she was Chair of the GB the Schools finances were healthy when the GB at the time considered applying for academy status and therefore **sought clarification** on what the barriers were. In answer, Kate Roskell stated that the Diocese would have taken into account the decline in student numbers. When the idea was explored again the financial position would have been considered and it might not have been as strong.

A member commented on the changes to the GB and subsequent appointment of the IEB and **asked** why an ineffective GB would have ratified the IEB. CM clarified that the GB did not ratify the IEB but the IEB came about because the leadership/GB was inadequate and the decision was imposed by the DfE.

A member expressed that she felt that the LA had failed the School by not intervening sooner **and asked** why the LA or the Diocese had not stepped in when the School had started to fail. She further asked where the deficit had come from. TB replied that the deficit happened due to declining pupil roll, which started prior to 2011. TB further explained that during this time, the LA had discussed with the then Headteacher about changing the Admissions Policy to encourage applications from the non-Christian community, but this did not happen until 2015. A member pointed out the Admissions Policy for the School stated that Raine's was a Church of England School **not a multi-faith school**, which was not helpful in attracting pupils.

A member further asked whether TB was blaming the GB for not agreeing to rewrite the Admissions Policy at the time. In answer TB said that he was stating a fact as well as acknowledging that it was the GB's responsibility. Kate Roskell further added that the LA undertook the work to rewrite the

Policy however the Diocese did not support the change at the time. LG stated that in her opinion, the views of the Diocese were not objective at the time. When she joined the School as a member of staff in 2014, the School's position was to welcome to all families to apply but there was a difference between an Admissions Policy and marketing or advertising the School.

A member sought clarification regarding the three different Headteachers over a period of three years. In answer, it was explained that following the outcome of the Ofsted Inspection (second 'Requires Improvement' Judgement), there was a need to strengthen the leadership. An Interim Executive Headteacher was therefore brought in to increase the leadership capacity. December 2018 saw the departure of Rob Hullet (Headteacher). Paul Woods left at the end of the Spring Term and Patrice Canavan was appointed by the LA as the Executive Headteacher to continue.

A member asked whether she could ask questions to members of staff who were present. In answer LG stated that members of staff were not permitted to speak because it constituted a conflict of interest.

LG sought clarification regarding the response to FAQ No.14 regarding "other communities" and referred to the consultation document under Paragraph 3 emphasising the "different communities" in the statement "*The option of amalgamating Raine's with an existing Church of England Secondary School in Tower Hamlets was explored with the Diocese, but this was subsequently deemed not possible, given the distance between the two schools and that they served **different communities.***" KR stated that when looking to potentially amalgamate church schools you would look at different parishes which may be in different geographical locations. LG expressed that the School had students from *different parishes* and suggested that perhaps the wording needed to be changed because it did not sound right. KR acknowledged the point.

A further question was asked in relation to the response in the FAQ No.14 about "equal opportunities". LG asked how the equal opportunity was given to access a high quality local school provision. In answer, it stated that in LBTH, there was Sir John Cass which was CoE school and members replied that it was oversubscribed and questioned which faith school they were supposed to send their children. In response, members were informed that various possibilities had been explored but it had not been possible to have arrangements with the nearest faith school because of the oversubscription at Sir John Cass but the LDBS had made arrangements with the Urswick School that any student at Raine's who met the admissions criteria for the Urswick School (Hackney) would be placed at the top of the waiting list. LG expressed that the Diocese did not seem to answer some questions but assured members that she would pursue some questions with them (Diocese).

A member raised concern regarding the racial and religious abuse to a group of parents and students from Raine's who had been touring Oaklands School and further stated that the students at Oaklands had no regard for their Senior Leaders who were present during the incident. **The member questioned** what type of school the LA was trying to send their children to and added that physical threats were directed at their children and the other option to send their children to a faith school outside the Borough with rising knife crime was scary. CM read out the response sheet which explained the action Oaklands had taken and added that the incident was very unfortunate.

Some members expressed that although action had been taken, it was not good enough because their children had also been mentally assaulted. Furthermore, because of the abuse, many parents

were now trying to move their children from Raine's for Year 9 but there were no real school choices. A member stated that she had made applications to four other schools and was waiting to hear back. LG shared a comment considered negative that had been made by the Headteacher of Raine's in respect to fasting and stated that it was disappointing for a Headteacher of a faith school to make disparaging comments about the faith of students at Raine's. LG further stated that the students at Raine's and Oaklands did not get on. A member agreed and stated that the students had never got on. TB responded by stating that when proposing to close a school, places had to be expanded in another school but unfortunately the qualities of the school mentioned were not attractive to the community. He encouraged parents/carers to talk to him or his colleagues in Pupil Services (Admissions) to explore school options. Moreover, the admissions team were working in conjunction with Raine's offering one to one meetings with parents and talking about vacancies in some schools that could be considered.

A Raine's student expressed that the incident also petrified students and they were worried that the incident at Oaklands could be repeated at another school. She **asked** whether there would be support to move to another school should they suffer abuses or are bullied because that would impact their education and outcomes. TB assured her that there would be transition programmes in place to support the students in their new schools. The schools would make every effort to support the students and help them establish positive relationships to the benefit of their education.

A question was asked whether there was evidence to support the attempt to recruit Parent Governors on a number of occasions (FAQ No.36). CM stated that this would have been evidenced in the GB Minutes of meetings.

A member considered that the School might not have been open about the financial position and **asked** to see the budget in order to understand the deficit. The deficit was stated and AP expressed that they might have been some misinformation however he was respectfully suggesting that the way forward could be to come up with a viable plan to reduce or clear the deficit. A member suggested that the School community could explore crowd funding. Other suggestions from members included selling parts of the School but it was explained that the land was partly owned by the Trust and the LA therefore it was complicated. TB reminded members that in addition to addressing the budget deficit, student numbers needed to be substantially increased. Members were requested to put forward suggestions through the various channels as specified in the consultation document.

5. Other

AP invited Mickey Ambrose to the floor. MA was backing a petition to save the School from closing. He raised the three salient points as follows:

- with regards to the Year 9 visit to Oaklands, there had been four incidents where students have come from one school to Oaklands and have been attacked;
- approximately £23m was invested in the Buildings for School Future so why should the school be closed after it had been expanded and then to be closed three years later;
- oddly, one parent from Oaklands turned up to the Public Consultation Meeting which implied that the Executive Headteacher did not inform the parents about this significant consultation.

MA concluded by stating that funds had been raised and a parent of a child in the School had instructed Irwin Mitchell Solicitors to challenge the flaw in the consultation process and urgent letter before action regarding the consultation to close Raine's Foundation had been submitted to the LA this afternoon and a response was required to respond within three working days. MA concluded by reading a letter from the solicitors.

The Chair thanked everybody for their attendance and closed the meeting.

End of meeting.