

Report on alternative options to the closure of Raine's School

In 2013, the then Chair of Governors of Raine's Foundation school wrote to the Department for Education (DfE) on behalf of the Governing Body with a request to convert the school to an academy. In his response of the 10th January 2014, Dominic Herrington, Director of the Academies Group at the DfE, declined on the basis of the school's attainment being below the national average. At the subsequent governing body meeting of the 22nd of January 2014, it was agreed unanimously to withdraw the application. At this meeting, the headteacher drew the attention of the Governing Body to the

- Inaccurate prediction of GCSE grades for English and maths for 2013
- Over optimistic GCSE predictions for the academic year 2014
- The low number of pupils that has applied to Raine's for September 2014 as their first choice (65 children) and second choice (85 children).

This demonstrates there have been concerns about Raine's school over a number of years and the Governing Body were fully aware of the concerns.

The school was inspected by Ofsted in during November 2015, when was given an overall judgement of Requires Improvement. On the 1st December 2015, the then Interim Director of Children's Services (DCS) wrote to the Chair of Governors outlining concerns about

- Weak governance
- Lack of compliance with statutory requirement on the consultation over changes to admission arrangements
- A serious decline in the school roll over five years
- The financial position of the school.

The DCS indicated an intention to exercise her statutory powers and make an application to the Secretary of State for Education to put an Interim Executive Board in place. Following this, an Extraordinary Meeting of the Governing Body was held on the 10th December 2015, where the Governing Body disbanded itself. Subsequent to this, a new Governing Body chaired by the Bishop of Stepney nominee Liz Wolverson OBE was installed in January 2016.

Ms Wolverson is the Chair of the Board of Directors for the Brightwells Academy Trust and Chief Executive Officer for the London Diocesan Board of Schools Academies Trust and so is both knowledgeable and experienced in the legislation relating to academisation.

During the period September 2016 to June 2018 the Governing Body referenced or discussed

- Soft federation with another London Board of Diocesan school
- Academisation on four occasions

but no action was taken by the Governing Body of Raine's to progress either federation or academisation.

During June/July 2017 the London City (Teaching School) Alliance was asked by the LA to take the lead on providing school improvement support for Raine's. This was because the DfE school improvement funding could only be accessed through a Teaching School Alliance.

The London City Alliance includes two local academy trusts, both of which played a role in supporting Raine's. In the first instance, Graeme Price, Chief Executive of the University Schools Trust took the lead in working with Raine's and arranged for a review of the school which took place during September of 2017.

Subsequent work, which included a successful bid to the DfE for funding, was led by Dr Vanessa Ogden, the Chief Executive of the Mulberry Schools Trust. The DfE funding for Raine's was agreed, dependent on the completion of a full financial review of the school which eventually took place during the autumn of 2018.

At no point did either the Chief Executive of the University Schools Trust or the Chief Executive of the Mulberry Schools Trust express any interest in or desire to enter into a longer lasting or formal relationship with Raine's, which could have resulted in Raine's joining either of the academy trusts. With regard to Raine's Foundation school, the Chair of Governors chose not to take forward any discussion on these options with either of the Chief Executives.

Following the publication of the poor GCSE results in August 2018, the DCS exercised her statutory powers and made an application to the DfE to establish an Interim Executive Board to take over the governance of the school. The Interim Executive Board held its first formal meeting on the 29th October 2018. The role of the IEB was to support the new interim executive headteacher, Mr Paul Woods, substantive headteacher of Sir John Cass Foundation School, in raising standards in the school and this was the focus of their meetings. Mr Woods remained at the school until 31st March 2019.

At no point during Mr Woods seven month tenure at Raine's did the Chair of the Governing Body of the Sir John Cass Foundation school and Mr Woods consider it appropriate for the Governing Body of Sir John Cass to discuss any ongoing or more formal arrangement between the two schools.

Mr Woods informed the LA that he intended to return to his substantive headship at Sir John Cass at a meeting on the 23rd of November 2018 and as a consequence there was a consideration of the potential options for the future of the school.

The academisation of a school is a statutory process which is described in a suite of guidance documents published by the DfE and updated regularly. The publication 'Due Diligence in academies and maintained schools; Best practice guidance for Governing Bodies of maintained schools, local authorities and Academy Trusts' of February 2019 explains

'... The due diligence process is an important element of the risk management of any conversion or transfer, with the findings of the work informing the decision making process of respective stakeholders; the incoming school, the incoming trust and the Department for Education (DfE)...'.

Stage 1 of the required due diligence process provides an overview of the school's educational performance and the financial position of the school, through consideration of factors including:

- Educational Performance
- Ofsted reports
- Financial information
- Admissions
- Capacity, pupil numbers and school demographics, pupil premium.

The LA had formally registered concerns with regard to all of these factors and these concerns had precipitated the use of its statutory powers to intervene in the school. Further to this, standards had fallen further following the DfE's response to the Chair of Governors request that the school become an academy in 2014. These factors made it unlikely that Raine's would be an attractive proposition for any academy trust to consider, even prior to undertaking a due diligence process. This view was confirmed by the lack of interest from the University Schools Trust and the Mulberry Trust in opening a discussion with the Governing Body about Raine's joining their academy trusts.

With regard to federation with another Anglican school, prospective partner schools would be concerned about the potential financial liabilities and the entrenched poor standards they would become responsible for under a hard federation agreement. As described above, Sir John Cass Foundation school expressed no interest in federating with Raine's Foundation school and so there was no benefit to formally pursuing this as an option. During this time the LA supported Raine's prioritised investing its diminishing resources on the provision of school improvement support.

As a consequence, the Raine's Foundation IEB agreed to a feasibility study in January 2019 which considered amalgamation with Oaklands School, as by that point options for the school were limited.