

Consultation Report on the Proposal for the Amalgamation of Cubitt Town Infant' and Junior Schools

September 1st 2020

Report compiled by Dr Helen Jenner, Independent Consultant, Tower Hamlets Primary Review.

Introduction

This report summarises the planning undertaken to lead to a public consultation, and the responses to that consultation, on whether or not Cubitt Town Infant and Junior Schools should support the Local Authority to formally consult on the amalgamation of the two schools from August 31st 2021. The report aims to support the governors to reach an informed decision during the first half of the Autumn Term to support the proposal

Background

Cubitt Town Infant and Junior Schools' Governing Bodies were both prompted, by the prospective retirement of the Infant School Headteacher, to consider how to make the schools' long term future and quality of education even stronger, ensuring a reduction in the impact of transition between the schools.

The Tower Hamlets Primary Review commissioned an Independent Consultant, Dr Helen Jenner, to work with schools facing significant change in the Borough. As well as working with the schools, Dr Jenner was asked to produce a public report "Future Ambitions"¹ setting out principles for developing school relationships for resilience and excellence. This document was shared with all Headteachers, Unions and Governors in March 2019. Regular updates on the Primary Review have been included in the termly Director's Report for Governors. It included the principle of amalgamating Infant and Junior Schools.

Governors Planning

A small Steering Group consisting of the Headteachers from both schools, supported by the Independent Consultant, and their THEP school improvement partner, has led the work on considering the implications of enhanced partnership for the two schools, including the development of draft papers for governing bodies to consider. This included the consultation papers circulated to staff, parents and other stakeholders.

Governing Body meetings were set up at both schools to discuss partnership[working, including the possibility of moving towards amalgamation in the Spring Term 2020.

Staff Meetings were also held in the Spring Term to ensure all staff were clear and had opportunities to ask any questions. Unions were also advised of the possibility of amalgamation in March 2020.

¹ The Future Ambitions Report is available on the Tower Hamlets Primary Review Website.

Governing bodies considered draft consultation documents (Appendix 1 and 2) in late May/early June and agreed that this should be circulated to staff and parents on June 5th, with the consultation to run from June 8th - July 17th 2020

Information about the consultation was also placed on the schools' websites.

<https://www.cubittown-jun.towerhamlets.sch.uk/viewer/454>

<https://www.cubittowninf.co.uk/school-letters/>

Due to coronavirus it was not possible to hold public meetings regarding the consultation, however, the following options were offered (in line with the Tower Hamlets consultation processes during coronavirus guidance for schools' consultations) :

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

2. A box in the reception of each school where stakeholders could comments, response forms and any questions.

3. The Local Authority consultant, who is supporting the schools with the consultation process was available for 1 to1 socially distanced questions/feedback on Monday 6th July from 9 - 2.30.

4. Virtual meetings were set up on July 6th:

Staff 4pm July 6th

Parents 2.30 pm and 6 pm

5. One to one phone calls were offered.

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

7. Staff meetings regularly updated staff

8. Trade Unions were briefed on the consultation.

Consultation Response

There has been very little formal response to the consultation.

One parent requested a phone call, and 3 staff members attended a zoom meeting. Informal feedback is very positive. Staff, children and parents see the amalgamation as a natural next step for two successful schools.

Staff feedback positive reasons to support Amalgamation. The increased opportunities for staff, greater range of expertise, potential to share resources and reduction in transition anxiety were all seen as possible positive outcomes.

Staff wanted to be clear on whether they may be staffing reductions and, if that is the case, how would they be addressed. They were advised that it was too early to know what staffing structures there might be, but that the amalgamation is not being seen as a cost saving exercise, so there are no immediate staff reductions proposed, and compulsory redundancy is unlikely. If staffing changes are made the agreed School Re-organisation process would be followed (attached Appendix 3)

Professional discussion, and strong engagement from staff, parents and children with the process, puts governors in a strong position to recommend to the Local Authority that they progress to publish a statutory notice proposing the amalgamation of Cubitt Town Infant and Junior Schools from September 2021.

Trade Unions have confirmed that they have received no queries or concerns regarding the proposal.

Governors should consider this report during the first half of the Autumn Term, so that the Council Cabinet can be notified of their response before they consider the possible statutory notices in October or November 2020. A final decision on the proposal would be taken by the Council Cabinet at their meeting on March 3rd 2021.

There is general agreement that amalgamation to become an 3 -11 Primary School will support children's education and enhance the offer for local families and community.

Based on the informal feedback about the proposal, the positive opportunities it brings, and the very low level of concerns raised, I would recommend that the Local Authority move to issue statutory notices, with the support of both Governing Bodies.