

Consultation information:

Statutory notice on the proposal for the closure of Shapla Primary School

16 November 2020



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Introduction

On Wednesday 21 October 2020 Tower Hamlets Cabinet approved the recommendation to publish a statutory notice to publish a statutory notice on the proposal to close Shapla Primary School.

Notice is given in accordance with Section 15 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (as amended by the Education Act 2011) and the School Organisation (Establishment and Discontinuance of Schools) Regulations 2013 that Tower Hamlets local authority intends to discontinue Shapla Primary School with effect from 31 August 2021.

Contact details

Name and address of Local authority publishing the proposal:

Tower Hamlets Council, Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent, London E14 2BG.

Name, address and category of school proposed to be closed:

Shapla Primary School, Wellclose Square, Shadwell, London E1 8HY.

Implementation

Date on which it is proposed to close the school:

Tuesday 31 August 2021.

It is proposed to implement the closure as follows:

Following the closure of Shapla Primary School it is proposed for the remaining pupils on roll at that time to transfer to other primary schools in the local area. The local authority has identified sufficient vacancies at local 'Good' or 'Outstanding' primary schools within 0.6 miles from Shapla School, and within 0.7 miles of all current pupils' homes.

There are also vacancies at other schools in the areas to the west of borough, providing Shapla families with a range of options to secure a suitable school for their child. The local authority will endeavour to meet parental preferences for school places, where possible.

The local authority is already undertaking preliminary work with Shapla and other schools in the area on the necessary transition planning for children and families, should the Council decide for the school to close on the date proposed.

Reason for Closure:

The local authority, in partnership with the governing body of Shapla, has reluctantly determined that the school should now close due to a substantial decline in pupil numbers over an extended period and the associated impact on its educational and financial viability.

Pupil numbers in Tower Hamlets schools are currently falling in the west of the borough, where Shapla School is situated. This means that Shapla, along with other schools, has not had enough pupil numbers to fill its classes. The school is now well below its capacity in most of its year groups and this is causing increasing difficulty in maintaining a broad and balanced curriculum with enhanced extra-curricular activities.

The reduction in its pupil numbers has badly affected the school's budget. Protecting the quality of education has now led to Shapla having financial difficulties, with no capacity to repay financial support received from the local authority within the timeframe prescribed by central government.

The local authority is not allowed to continue to fund schools that are not financially viable and, after considering the alternative options available, it was determined that it would be necessary to propose for the school to close (see **Appendix 1** for the stage one consultation).

Pupil numbers and admissions

The numbers for whom provision is currently made at the school:

Shapla School is a co-educational mainstream primary school for pupils aged three to eleven. The school has a published admission number (PAN) of 30 for each year group, giving a total of 240 places (excluding nursery places).

As at 1 September 2020, the school had 142 pupils on roll.

Displaced pupils

From 1 September 2021, the pupils remaining on roll at Shapla Primary School will have the offer of places at other local schools no more than 0.7 miles from their current home address. There will also be opportunity for parents to secure places at schools within the surrounding area.

Current projections for school places indicate that there are enough places for future cohorts following the closure of Shapla Primary School. The local authority will continue to monitor the projected need for future school places and propose changes, if required, to ensure sufficient places are available.

Impact on the community

Shapla Primary School does not currently provide additional services or use of its facilities for the wider community and there are a number of alternative facilities

available for hire at other nearby locations. There will therefore be no loss of any enrichment clubs or programmes for local families in the community.

Rural primary schools

Not applicable.

Balance of denominational provision

Not applicable.

Nursery provision

Children currently attending the nursery provision at Shapla Primary School will be able to continue to do so until end of the current school year (July 2021).

They will then be able to transfer to the nursery provision at other local schools in the area or to the reception year at these schools, if they have reached primary school age.

Sixth Form provision

Not applicable.

Special educational needs provision

Shapla Primary School does not provide educational provision recognised by the local authority as being reserved for children with special educational needs. There are 44 pupils on roll (September 2020) who have been identified as having special educational needs (SEN support) and four pupils with an education health and care plan. The support for special educational needs pupils will continue in their new schools and the necessary transition arrangements will ensure their particular needs are met from the outset.

Travel

The approximate distances for home to school travel for pupils from Nursery to Year 6 currently attending Shapla Primary School ranges from 0.05 to 3.33 miles.

There are enough places at other nearby schools to ensure that the maximum distance any child would travel to school would be no more than 0.7 miles from their home address, unless the families decide to secure places at alternative schools with vacancies further way.

It is anticipated that pupils will walk or use other sustainable modes of travel to alternative schools in the local area and therefore any impact on road traffic would

be minimal. There is also enough local transport provision to cover the routes from home to school of current pupils.

Finances

When a school closes its finances (any surplus or deficit) is returned to the Council. Shapla's deficit balance will transfer to the Council on the School's last business day, Tuesday 31 August 2021.

Procedure for making representations (objections and comments)

Within four weeks from the date of publication of this statutory notice, any person may object to or make comments on the proposal by email or by post.

Closing date for responses is 5pm, Wednesday 16 December 2020

By email: school.organisation@towerhamlets.gov.uk

By post: School Organisation and Place Planning Manager
Pupil Services and School Sufficiency
Tower Hamlets Children and Culture
Town Hall
Mulberry Place
5 Clove Crescent
E14 5BG

We will not be able to consider any responses received after 16 December 2020.

All responses received during the representation period will be published on the Council's website in early January 2021.

The website address is: talk.towerhamlets.gov.uk/statutory-notice-shapla

Appendix 1

Consultation information:

First stage consultation feedback report on the proposal for the closure of Shapla Primary School

28 July 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 Shapla Primary School Governing Body should support the Local authority to formally consult on the closure of Shapla Primary School. The report aims to support the governors' steering group to reach an informed decision at their meeting in September 2020.

Background

Shapla Primary School Governing Body was prompted by the Tower Hamlets Primary Review¹ to consider the sustainability of Shapla Primary School, given its vulnerability to falling rolls, and reluctantly reached the conclusion that to close the school and relocate children to other nearby schools may be the best solution to optimising educational provision in the area.

The Tower Hamlets Primary Review commissioned an independent consultant, Dr Helen Jenner, to work with schools they had identified as being at risk due to demographic change in the borough. As well as working with the schools, Dr Jenner was asked to produce a public report "Future Ambitions²" 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.

Governors planning

A Steering Group consisting of the Chair, staff governor, parent governor and Headteacher from Shapla, supported by the independent consultant has led the work on considering the implications of the review for Shapla.

¹ www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ignl/education_and_learning/schools/Primary_Review_for_parents.aspx

² https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Children-and-families-services/Schools/Primary_Review/Future_Ambitions_report_from_the_independent_consultant_Feb_2019.pdf

Governors and the Headteacher have met, in various groupings, regularly since the local authority first identified the school as being “in scope” for review, in July 2018.

An Informal governing body meeting with governors was held on Monday 10 February to discuss the Primary Review, the Future Ambitions report, and the best responses for the school.

This informal meeting recognised the likelihood of a proposal to close Shapla school. The governing body met again, virtually, on Wednesday 25 March to consider and agree arrangements for informal consultation.

Local Headteachers met (virtually) on Friday 20 March to consider the possible proposal. This same group, and a wider group of Headteachers whose schools might be affected met again on Friday 19 June.

A consultation document³ was prepared and agreed with the local authority. This was given in paper copy to all parents, circulated to Tower Hamlets Headteachers, through the Headteacher’s Bulletin; emailed to staffing unions; and, the Secretary of State has been notified of potential changes.

Information about the consultation was also placed on the school website:

<https://shapla.school/consultation/>

This included a letter to parents and staff from the Chair of Governors, a copy of the consultation document, and three short videos explaining the situation.

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):

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 for comments consult@shapla.school.
3. A box was set up in the playground at Shapla Primary School where people could leave comments, response forms, and any questions.
4. The Local authority consultant was available for one-to-one socially distanced questions/feedback on Monday 13 July 2020 from 10.15am to 2.30pm.
5. Virtual meetings were set up on 13 July for staff (4pm) and parents (9am - this did not go ahead, due to no demand; and 6pm).
6. Personal phone calls were also offered.

Governors agreed that responses from the different forms of consultation should be summarised in a report for governors, to be sent to the Steering Group, by the end of

³ Included in Appendix “Supporting Documents”

July 2020, following which recommendations would be made to the Shapla Governing Body as to whether they should support the local authority's proposal to move to statutory consultation.

Consultation response

Written responses

Fourteen (14) written responses and one email response from a school governor were received. All of which showed that parents feel their children have been well supported by the school. They are sad that there is a consultation regarding the closure of the school.

Six (6) parental responses and one governor response said they did accept the proposal.

Eight (8) parental responses said they did not. One of these eight commented that they did however, understand the reasons for the proposal.

Comments recorded on the forms included:

- Love the school (3)
- Children are happy and settled (3)
- We like the low numbers (2)
- The school is close to home (2)
- We don't think our children will like the disruption (4)
- We need support for transition, particularly special educational needs, and keeping siblings together (5)
- Couldn't we pair with another school (3)

Two (2) emails were received – one returning a response form (included in the information above) and the other requesting to join the Zoom meeting.

Zoom, and one-to-one meetings

Friday 27 March

Tower Hamlets Union's briefing.

Friday 19 June

Headteachers meeting: 12 Headteachers, two Tower Hamlets partnership officers, two local authority officers and the independent consultant 19 June 2020.

Monday 13 July

Parents meeting: Chair of Governors, Headteacher, independent consultant and 15 parents.

Staff meeting: five members of staff met one-to-one with the independent consultant.

Monday 20 July

Tower Hamlets National Education Union (NEU) representative: telephone conversation with the independent consultant.

The following was raised at staff meetings:

- Is this process happening too quickly?
- Is a consultation during Coronavirus appropriate?
- Was amalgamation with another school considered?
- Have all funding avenues been explored?
- Will there be enough places for children?
- How can we be guaranteed places at our first choice of replacement school?
- Staff are not clear what options will be open to them when
- Will staff have to be redeployed
- What are the redundancy and redeployment options?
- Will staff be able to access training next year?
- How should schools respond if parents approach them directly for places?

Verbal responses were given to all the questions raised.

Feedback to stakeholders

It is recommended that this consultation feedback report and frequently asked questions, be posted on the school's website and emailed to parents, staff and other stakeholders.

In consultation with the NEU, and circulated to other unions, a guide to HR processes for staff has been provided, explaining what will happen and when over the next year. This was sent to staff at the end of the Summer Term.

The Headteachers from other schools have requested an update via Zoom meeting in September. This will be set up for Thursday 10 September, 2pm.

Governing body next steps

Shapla governing body will meet in September to consider this feedback report and whether they are recommending that the local authority move to publish statutory notices. A decision will be made regarding the proposal at the Council Cabinet meeting in October 2020.

View of the independent consultant

Whilst parents, staff, pupils, and parents appreciate their school, they recognise that numbers have fallen and understood why this proposal is being made. Many are resigned to the likelihood of closure, and several parents have moved to find alternative places at neighbouring schools.

The majority of the parents and all of the staff and governors are completely committed to a final year together to celebrate the contribution Shapla has made to education and the community, whatever decision is reached in March 2021.

The reflective responses from parents and commitment of staff and governors should be commended.

[ENDS]