

Shapla School Public Consultation (1st Stage) Feedback Report - July 28th 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 Shapla School governing body should support the Local Authority to formally consult on the closure of Shapla School. The report aims to support the governors' steering group to reach an informed decision at their meeting in September 2020.

Background

Shapla 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 Ambitions"² 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 .

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 10th Feb 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

¹ Tower Hamlets Primary Review

https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/education_and_learning/schools/Primary_Review_or_parents.aspx

² The Future Ambitions Report is available on the Tower Hamlets Primary Review Website.

Governing Body met again, virtually, on March 25th to consider and agree arrangements for informal consultation.

Local Headteachers met , virtually, on 20th March to consider the possible proposal. This same group, and a wider group of Headteachers whose schools might be affected met again on 19th 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 includes a letter to parents and staff from the Chair of Governors, a copy of the consultation document, and 3 short videos explaining the situation.

Because of coronavirus open meetings were not held, however, a range of ways to feed into the consultation were organized:

The following opportunities were organised for staff, parents and carers to share views.

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 School where people could leave comments, response forms, and any questions.
4. The Local Authority consultant was available for 1 to1 socially distanced questions/feedback on Monday 13th July from 10.15 – 2.30.
5. Virtual meetings were set up on July 13th:

Staff 4pm

Parents 9am (this did not go ahead as there was no demand) and 6pm
5. Personal phone calls were offered.

Governors agreed responses from the different forms of consultation should be summarized in a report for Governors, to be sent to the Steering Group, by the end of July 2020, following which recommendations would be made to the Shapla Governing Body as to

³ Included in Appendix "Supporting Documents"

whether they should support the Local Authority's proposal to move to Statutory Consultation.

Consultation Response

Written Responses

14 written responses and 1 email response 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.

6 parental responses and 1 governor response said they did accept the proposal. 8 parental responses said they did not. One of these 8 commented that they did 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 SEN and keeping siblings together (5)
- Couldn't we pair with another school

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 121 meetings

Headteachers Meeting - 12 Headteachers, 2 Tower Hamlets Partnership officers, 2 Local Authority officers and the Independent Consultant. 19th June.

Parents Meeting – Chair of Governors, Headteacher, Independent Consultant and 15 parents. July 13th.

Staff – 5 members of staff met 1-2-1 with Independent Consultant. July 13th.
Tower Hamlets NEU Rep telephone conversation with Independent Consultant. July 20th.
Tower Hamlets Unions Briefing 27th March
Staff zoom meeting.

The following points were raised:

- 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 Summary and the Frequently Asked Questions document (attached) be posted on the school website and be 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 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 September 10th 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 parents and all of the staff and governors are completely committed to a final year together to celebrate the contribution Shapla School 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.