

Stage One Pre-publication Consultation Summary – Feedback on a proposal to open an Integrated SEMH Provision at the Ben Jonson School site.

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This is a report following a Stage 1 (pre-publication) consultation process on the possible opening of an Integrated SEMH provision at the Ben Jonson School site.

The Proposal

Following advice from Tower Hamlets Local Authority, the governors of Cherry Trees School, undertook a consultation process regarding a proposal to close Cherry Trees School, from September 2021. The Local Authority will reach a decision on that closure in March 2021. As part of the proposal the possibility of a new Integrated Provision for the LA was set out.

A review, and full consultation of, the Local Authority Special Educational Needs Strategy, recommended moving to different models of provision, which would better support academic attainment, and the inclusion of children in mainstream provision, whenever possible. In the Summer Term 2020 a primary-age Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) implementation plan was shared with schools and they were invited to comment and to put forward expressions of interest for proposed new provision. The strategy particularly recommends improvements in links to quality mainstream provision, access to the full primary curriculum and a strategic approach which fully includes girls with SEMH needs. It recommended the establishment of new integrated provision with 3 key improvement features

School were invited to submit expressions of interest to run this provision. The Local Authority met with interested parties in September 2020 and accepted a proposal from Bowden House and Ben Jonson Schools to provide an Integrated SEMH provision consisting of 12 pupils placed on the Ben Jonson school roll, and 12 pupils placed on the Bowden House roll. Governance will be through a Steering Group consisting of representatives from both school governing bodies and an LA officer, the Steering Group will report back to both School Governing Bodies.

The provision will be able to meet the needs of any children displaced from Cherry Trees School.

Cherry Trees School is a special school, catering for primary age boys with social, emotional and mental health needs aged 3 to 11 and is part of the educational provision of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The school is located at 68, Campbell Road, London E3 4EA.

In September 2019 OFSTED considered Cherry Trees School to be inadequate in its provision of suitable education. The school is also in financial difficulty, despite

temporarily receiving an income (2018/19) of £54,000 per pupil to help address falling rolls and the need to improve quality of education. In response to this the governing body were required to put together an action plan, and to consider the closure or academisation of the school. Considerable improvements have been made to ensure the school now offers a good quality of education, but these are not financially sustainable longer term.

Cherry Trees School is an SEMH Primary Boys School. All the pupils have EHC Plans and, because of this, individual work to discuss the children's needs as part of their Annual Reviews has been underway over the last year. The families of children attending Cherry Trees School have received individual support to consider how best to improve educational provision for their children, and to support their children's transition to better provision, through reviews of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC Plans), and Christine MacInnes also met with parents and staff in March 2020, to ensure they were aware of the proposals. Parents were very clear that they would expect a suitable alternative to be provided by the Borough.

The consultation with Cherry Trees staff and pupils commenced in September 2020.

Governors and Senior leaders at Ben Jonson and Bowden House have been refining plans since July 2020 and have now reached broad agreement with the Local Authority on a Service Level Agreement. As well as holding Governing Body and Staff meetings they have written to their own parents and staff to inform them of this and to ask for any comments before they move to statutory notices to make the necessary prescribed alterations to their existing schools. The Frequently Asked Questions as a result of their consultation are attached to this report and available on both schools' websites.

This report

This report provides a summary of the Stage 1 pre-consultation responses.

It has been compiled by Dr Helen Jenner, an independent consultant. As well as summarising responses the report also makes suggestions on next steps for the school staff, governors and Local Authority (LA) to consider, to ensure they are responding to any concerns, issues and ideas raised by respondents.

Attached to the report is a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Document. This should be read in partnership with the report.

Copies of written responses received are available at the schools, and should be retained for 12 months.

Stage One : Pre-Statutory notice activities

A Primary SEMH Implementation Plan was shared with all schools and stakeholders in the Summer Term 2021. Positive feedback was returned to the Local Authority, including expressions of interest in leading on providing a new provision to address the identified weaknesses in current LA SEMH Primary provision.

A consultation document was agreed with governors, produced and shared with staff, parents and other stakeholders at Cherry Trees School. Comments and feedback on the documents and proposal were invited between 14th September and 19th October 2020.

The document detailed the following opportunities for staff, parents and carers, and

other stakeholders, to share their views.

1. A response form (or any other written format) to record their views which could be posted to the school, hand delivered or emailed to Consultation@cherrytrees.org
2. A box was provided in the reception of Cherry Trees School where anyone could leave comments, response forms and any questions.
3. Individual meetings were held with parents. Parents were also contacted by the Home-School liaison team, who checked whether parents wanted to meet to discuss the consultation document.
4. A meeting for staff was held on September 30th at 3.30, there will be zoom access if staff cannot attend. There was also the opportunity to feed back to Helen Jenner via zoom, on October 1st at 4pm
5. Two open zoom sessions were available for any stakeholder (parents, staff community, other schools etc.) on October 1st at 3pm and 6pm.
6. School staff will create appropriate ways of consulting with our children on their views as part of their ongoing teaching.
7. Governors have fully discussed the proposals at two governing body meetings (9th September and 21st October)
8. The document was circulated to Headteachers, governors and other stakeholders.

Cherry Trees Written responses

11 written responses were received

3 responses did not indicate the background of the respondent

3 were from parents/foster carers

1 current staff member

2 were from ex-staff members

1 ex – carer

1 local resident

No written respondents were in support of the proposal to close the school and to relocate children to schools that will better meet their needs.

5 respondents confirmed they had seen the SEND Strategy, and 2 further responses indicated familiarity with the document. 4 respondents stated they had not seen the SEND Strategy. Whilst there is recognition of some of the issues identified in the strategy, some people felt it was written by people who did not understand children's needs, or recognize the work of Cherry Trees School and that it may not have been

sufficiently widely consulted on.

Some people were not aware that suitable alternative SEMH provision had been established, and concerned that this could potentially lead to high cost placements in independent provision.

The need to meet the needs of girls, to provide access to the full primary curriculum and a continuum of provision was recognised. Some people felt that a Primary PRU would be the answer.

Since then, there has been further development of the Integrated Provision model and this has been discussed in detail with relevant parents at Cherry Trees, the parents recognize the provision to be suitable, although one boys' family are concerned that he may not find a suitable friendship group at the integrated provision.

In addition, parents, governors and staff at Ben Jonson and Bowden House Schools have been asked their opinion on the proposed Integrated Provision.

Each of the aspects of the pre - publication consultations will feed into Cherry Trees, Ben Jonson and Bowden House Governors' decisions whether to move to Statutory Notices with LA support.

Key Issues raised during the Stage One consultation.

An FAQ document gave a more detailed summary of the issues and concerns of Cherry Trees respondents, the full document is available from Cherry Trees. Elements of particular relevance to the new ISP are attached.

Staff and parents were concerned that although suitable new provision has been identified for most children this has not yet been agreed for every child. The school leadership has been working with parents, local authorities, and other providers to ensure strong placements are available.

The strength of the new provision at Ben Jonson, supported by Bowden House is welcomed by Cherry Trees governors and should re-assure parents and staff that there will be appropriate local provision. Some respondents remain concerned that there may not be sufficient SEMH Primary provision in the Borough.

Most Cherry Trees respondents were keen to ensure the best possible transition for children currently attending Cherry Trees, and to secure new provision that was at least as good as the support they currently receive. It will be important for everyone to work together to ensure EHC Plans are fully able to be delivered at new provisions.

Parents, staff and governors from Ben Jonson and Bowden House raised the following points:

- They were excited by the proposal, and the opportunities it brings to support the Tower Hamlets community, and provide staff development and additional expertise at the existing provision, but concerned to ensure:

That the level of funding per child is sufficient to ensure success;

That funding and advice and development for the new provision should not be at the detriment of existing outstanding provision at either school;

That funding (both revenue and capital) should be available from April 1st 2021 to ensure a strong transition model, particularly for children currently at Cherry Trees.

That funding (revenue and capital) should be fully reviewed in Year 2 as there are concerns that Year 3 funding may be insufficient to meet the needs of children if the provision is full.

- Moving to prescribed alterations must not preclude governors' decisions on agreeing the commissioning SLA and funding proposal.
- That the prescribed alterations must not affect existing pupils at either school, nor should any changes be made to secondary provision at Bowden House
- Parents and staff at Bowden House sought re-assurances that the secondary provision would not be altered.
- Staff raised concerns that the enrolment of any new pupils would be staggered so that their transition could be well supported, and they could be properly helped to understand the expectations, values and vision at Bowden House School and Ben Jonson School.
- As the Ben Jonson element of the provision is a fully integrated model there are concerns that placements may not be appropriate to meet children's needs if there are more than two children in each year group.

Overall Recommendation

Responses show that plans for the ISP are appropriate but there are still a number of concerns from all groups. None of the issues raised would present a reason not to progress to statutory notice, but further communication with all stakeholders will be important to aid understanding of the detail of provision and ensure that governors, parents, staff and children feel well supported.

Early visits to potential new provision would greatly re-assure families.

Each young person should have a clear transition plan before the Local Authority is able to take a final decision on whether, and when Cherry Trees School should close. This will be essential for ensuring the LA meets its statutory SEN duties.

Governors at Ben Jonson and Bowden House met on 4th Jan. They considered an early draft of this report and current feedback. They raised some additional feedback as part of the consultation process.

They agreed that, they wish to progress, with LA support, to the Stage 2 consultation, the publication of a Statutory Notices.

Draft Statutory Notices will be circulated to Ben Jonson and Bowden House governors alongside this report. As parents and staff at Bowden House and Ben Jonson have been given until January 8th to respond governors received updated, final reports on 8th January, so that Chairs of Governors could be assured these have been addressed in the Statutory Notice considerations.

Governors at all 3 schools will not be reaching any decisions on whether they would recommend the Local Authority support the prescribed alterations until they can meet to consider any representations received. The governors at Ben Jonson and Bowden House Schools are also clear that supporting the prescribed alterations is not the same as confirming their agreement to the provision being commissioned, this will be dependent on consideration of the final commissioning SLA and funding agreement.

The statutory notices are necessary because both schools will need to make “prescribed alterations” if they are to deliver the ISP.

As the ISP is being developed in response to the SEND Strategy, the Primary SEMH Implementation Plan and the Cherry Trees possible closure the Local Authority will reach a decision regarding the planned prescribed changes alongside the Cherry Trees closure at its Cabinet meeting on March 3rd.

The Statutory Notices will be published for a 4 week period, and responses to them will be included in a Statutory Notice feedback report, alongside this Stage One consultation report, as part of the papers presented to the Council Cabinet. Governors at Ben Jonson and Bowden House Schools are expecting to consider the Statutory Notices Representations at meeting during the second week of February.