

## TORRIANO JUNIOR SCHOOL

### PARENTS' CONSULTATION MEETING 20 MAY 2015

**Panel:** Luca Salice - Chair of Junior School Governing Body (Panel Chair)  
Margaret Harvey - Chair of Infants School Governing Body  
Bavaani Nanthabalan - Executive Head of Junior School  
Juliette Jackson - Consultant Head of Infants School

Luca Salice welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the Panel members. He explained the purpose of the meeting was to hear the views and answer questions regarding the proposed merger of Torriano Junior and Infants Schools.

This was the start of the initial consultation on the proposals. The formal consultation period will commence on 1 June and will be for a period of 4 weeks. This will include further evidence gathering and the publication of the formal proposals. On the completion of the formal consultation period the governing bodies of both schools will meet separately to decide on the proposal. The decision will be submitted to Camden Council and they will make a decision to ratify the decision on 22 July. Should the proposals be approved the implementation date will be 1 September 2015.

The governors of both schools are open minded regarding the proposals and will listen to the arguments on both sides. There were some governors in the audience to facilitate discussions. At this meeting questions were not allowed regarding HR issues; separate meetings will be organised for school staff.

The format of the meeting will involve breaking into discussion groups to formulate questions for about 10 minutes. The questions will be written on stickers and given to the panel. They will then be discussed and addressed with the meeting as a whole. The format did not preclude individual questions. He then opened the meeting for questions.

Several people expressed concern that there was no explanation on the Question and Answer sheet, which had been previously distributed to parents, regarding the motivation behind the proposals and the evidence to back up the apparent benefits of the propose merger. Initial questions and concerns were as follows:

Q: How transparent was the consultation? Has a decision already been made?

A: No decision has been made. This was the purpose of the consultation process.

Q: What impact will the results of the consultation have on a possible decision by the LA to merge?

A: The results of the consultation will have an impact on their decision.

Q: If evidence is produced that the merger is not a good idea will this be considered?

A: Any evidence produced by parents will be considered by the two governing bodies and the LA.

Q: What external processes had the governors undertaken to find supporting evidence for the merger?

A: The governors had worked closely with the local authority and governors had access to other evidence.

Q: Several people expressed grave concerns that the governors were rushing the consultation without giving parents sufficient time to examine the cost/benefits of the merger and to scrutinise the rationale behind it. There was no time during this period for parents, many of whom had full time jobs, to gather effective evidence to challenge the merger proposal. Why was the consultation being rushed through?

A: There is a degree of urgency to reach a decision given the recent unfavourable Ofsted Inspection of the Infants School and a subsequent review report that concluded that the school is not yet good. However governors will listen to parents' views.

Parents expressed the view that staff have done their utmost to improve the Infants School since the last Ofsted Inspection. A merger should have occurred in 2012 when the Infants School failed the Inspection.

Parents broke into groups to formulate more questions which were written on stickers and handed back to the panel. The questions from the groups were as follows:

Q: Why isn't funding being discussed? What savings will be made?

A: The proposals are not being driven by cost savings but by the needs of the children of both schools. The main need is to secure long term strong leadership across the Torriano school community. There will be some savings from having for example only one governing body and one set of accounts. However the savings will not be substantial. The other drives, in addition to addressing children's needs, are to improve staff development and to make it easier to recruit quality staff. Most primary-age schools now consist of juniors and infants jointly and there are some benefits to this model.

Q: Is there an increased risk of job losses in the Infants school if the schools are merged; won't this affect staff morale and therefore the education of the children?

A: There are no plans to make any compulsory redundancies. School staff will have an opportunity to express their views at separate meetings.

Parents expressed strong feelings that there was insufficient information provided in the documentation sent out by governors so far for them to give meaningful views on the proposals. It was their view that only the advantages of the merger had been outlined and not the possible drawbacks; and therefore the documentation did not present a balanced view.

Q: Why is Ms Jackson the only representative from the Infants School when she has been in post only 24 hours?

A: Juliette Jackson explained her role in the school and in general terms addressed some of the concerns highlighted in the meeting. She had been appointed by the governors to help the school manage the consultation regarding the merger. Her appointment is intended to free up the acting headteacher Ms Clifford so that she can continue to improve the quality of teaching in the school. She will also lead through an Ofsted inspection should there be one before the end of the summer term. In terms of the proposed merger she gave the view that things could have been done differently in the past but it was important now to put the past to one side and look at the opportunities for securing high quality leadership in the short and long term for the Torriano school community.

On 5th May the governors commissioned an independent Ofsted-qualified Inspector to inspect the Infants school. He produced a report which specified that the school was still not yet good and so required improvement. Governors have to decide on balance the best option for the educational needs of the children, given the current situation. The Infants is situated next to an outstanding Junior School; therefore the governors have recommended the best option is to merge the two schools. This will immediately resolve the leadership issue, placing tried and tested excellent leaders in charge of the whole school. There are other benefits to merger such as opportunities for the promotion of staff and the chance for staff who wish to, to gain a wider experience of different age groups. One of the challenges of recruitment to stand alone infant schools is the salary is often too small to attract high quality leaders.

In any major change as is currently being proposed low staff morale is often an issue. The NUT and UNISON will provide support for staff through this consultation process.

Q: Why can't the Infants School be developed into a model of excellence as an Early Years Centre?

A: There is nothing to preclude the school becoming a model of excellence following a merger. The leaders of merged Junior and Infants Schools place enormous importance on the Early Years sector as this is the bedrock for whole school improvement.

Q: Can parents see the mock Ofsted report which was commissioned by the Governing Body, as it is difficult to give coherent opinions if this is not done?

A: There are some legal constraints about releasing the report. It was stressed it is a private report commissioned by the governors and there is a need to maintain confidentiality around staff who may be mentioned in the report. The report had not even been shared with the Junior School. However, they will seek legal advice from Camden on whether the report can be released, either in its entirety or in a redacted form.

Q: Did the Ofsted report suggest the two schools should be merged?

A: The report suggested that urgent action should be taken to remedy the situation.

Q: Were other options considered e.g. Soft Federation, both by the Governing Body and the Ofsted Report, and why weren't these put to the parents? There have been potential candidates who were willing to apply for the headship of the Infants School

A: The two schools have been in a Soft Federation since January; parents were informed of this in February. This option was considered but it was felt that more needed to be done. Although there may have been potential candidates for the Headship of the Infant School, it was necessary to appoint someone with sufficient appropriate experience to move the school from its current 'Requires Improvement' status.

Q: A new consultant head teacher has just been appointed and the proposed merger is being rushed through. Is this wise considering another Ofsted Inspection may be imminent?

A: It is imperative that the governors move quickly to avoid the consequences of another failed Inspection.

Luca Salice thanked parents for attending and closed the meeting at 8.20pm.