

## TORRIANO INFANTS SCHOOL

### PARENTS' CONSULTATION MEETING 21 MAY 2015

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

Margaret Harvey welcomed parents to the meeting and introduced panel members. She had been Chair of Governors at Torriano Infants School since March 2015. She explained the purpose of the meeting was to hear the views and answer questions regarding the proposed merger of Torriano Junior and Infants Schools.

Since January the two schools had worked together in a soft federation. However, it was the belief of the governors that the best option for both schools will be to merge. The Infants School will remain on the current site but will be part of a larger primary school. This meeting 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 give their views. The final decision will be taken by Camden Council on 22 July. Should the proposals be approved the implementation date will be 1 September 2015.

Juliette Jackson also welcomed parents and said it might be helpful, before opening the meeting for questions, for her to talk about the background to the proposed merger and her role in the process. She was a trained Ofsted Inspector and had a lot of experience in assisting schools to improve from 'Requires Improvement' status and special measures to achieve 'good' or 'outstanding'. She had been in post for 24 hours and appointed until the end of term to assist with the consultation process.

On 5 May the Infants School Governing Body commissioned a private inspection by a qualified Ofsted inspector. The subsequent report, which had not been placed in the public domain, found that the school still required improvement. If there was a further official Ofsted Inspection, Inspectors would include the report as part of the evidence when reviewing the school.

A speedy solution to the absence of experienced strong leadership was required as another poor Ofsted Inspection could have serious consequences for the school. It was also necessary to attract the appropriate quality of leadership for the school; and, given the current national context, a 'stand-alone' Infants school was unlikely to be able to recruit a suitably experienced Head teacher.

The meeting was then opened up for questions.

Q: The morale of staff at the Infants school is low. What is being done about this?

A: Staff are a school's most important resource, and it was recognised that this is a stressful time for them. In order to help mitigate this and improve morale it was important to listen to staff, communicate with them on a daily basis and discuss issues of concern in a frank and open manner. Staff needed to be supported to behave professionally with the core purpose being the education of the children at the school throughout this process.

Q: If the proposals go ahead, how will the governing body be constituted and who will be the Head teacher?

A: At this stage there are no details of how the new merged governing body will be constituted. However assurance was given that there will be parent representatives from both schools on the new governing body; if necessary by co-option. The process of a merger involves the closing of the infant school and the expansion of the Junior school so the current headteacher of the junior school would be the headteacher of the newly merged school.

Q: The Infant School was currently small with a safe and good teaching environment; and committed teachers. Most Infant school children move to the Juniors and this arguably is one of the reasons the Junior School has an 'outstanding' Ofsted rating. How can this be safeguarded following any merger?

A: It was recognised the benefits to the Junior School of children moving there from the Infants School. However, it needed to be highlighted that parental perception of good could be very different from an Ofsted view. The recent review stated that the school is not yet good. Many primary schools have outstanding Early Years and KS1 so there was no reason high standards in these sectors cannot be maintained and improved. An Outstanding Leader of a Primary School will recognise the importance of these areas for the holistic success of the school.

Q: It was strongly felt by some parents that the documentation produced and the comments of the panel were driving the school in a particular direction, with little or no consideration of alternatives. What were the costs and benefits of the other options and had they been considered e.g. Soft and Hard Federations?

A: Other options had been considered by the governing body. There had been a soft federation in operation since January and both governing bodies and staff had collaborated closely. A hard federation would entail a single governing body and head teacher. However the schools would still be separate entities. After consideration of all options it was believed the current proposal was the best way forward to secure high quality leadership for the whole Torriano school community both now and in the future.

Q: What are the costs and risks of each option? Will the merger result in a funding cut?

A: It was believed that there will be no or little reduction in funding. It was reiterated that the driving force of the merger was not based on cost.

Q: Why wasn't an audit carried out earlier on the Infants School? The last Ofsted Inspection was a year and a quarter ago.

A: The current governing body is relatively new and acted swiftly in commissioning an audit when it recognised urgent action was required.

Q: There was deep concern that parents were being asked to comment on proposals without detailed information. Why was the Infants school allowed to deteriorate for so long? What were the reasons for the poor recent audit? A: In the past there was insufficient collaboration between the Junior and Infants Schools. This has now improved. There is no prior agenda. Governors are open to listening to all views.

Q: How are resources going to be divided between in each year group following the merger?

A: Priorities are agreed over the whole school and resources allocated accordingly. There is no artificial division between Early Years and the other year groups. In the Junior school governors review the previous year's progress and attainment and challenge the Head teacher as necessary at governing body meetings. Areas of improvement are identified and resources allocated.

Q: There was concern that, given Ms Jackson had only just been appointed; there was nobody to speak for the Infants School. There was concern amongst parents that good teachers could leave in the transition period prior to merger.

A: When there is a merger it takes time to embed. However, in this particular context the risk to both schools is low. There is an outstanding school and leadership on the same site. Children and parents are already used to transitioning between the two schools.

Q: There are specific different pedagogical approaches in Early Years and Junior school. In the new structure in the transition period and following merger, what guarantees are there that unsuitable junior school teachers will not be assigned to the Early Years area?

A: Any teacher who did not reach the required standard demanded by the school would be removed. They would not be 'parked' in any area of the school. Moreover, Ofsted were now inspecting Early Years separately and any such policy would be uncovered. There is very little risk of this happening given the track record of the junior school.

Luca Salice left the meeting.

Q: What is the structure of the consultation?

A: There will be further meetings for parents of Infant School pupils. Parents will be informed of the dates. A detailed consultation document will also be sent to all parents by the LA so that they are able to give their views.

Q: Is there someone parents can send emails with any queries or concerns during the consultation process?

A: On the consultation document sent to parents there will be an email address to which they can send questions and concerns.

Q: Can you clarify the new management structure?

A: The new structure has not yet been drawn up but normally in a two form entry school, which the merged school will be; there is a dedicated leader for Infants.

Q: How can one Head manage both schools following a merger?

A: An able and suitably experienced head teacher will be able to effectively manage a school the size of the new merged institution. A two form entry school is just an average sized school.

Q: Will the Acting Headteacher have a role in the school during the period Ms Jackson is Consultant Head?

A: Yes, she will remain as Acting Headteacher and lead on improving the quality of teaching and day to day management of the school.

Q: Why is there only one option (merger) proposed?

A: The governing body needed to take urgent action to rectify the problems in the Infants School. There could be another Ofsted Inspection at any time and a speedy resolution was required. In the long term there is a better prospect of improving the education of children at the school through a merger. The main reason is that a larger merged school should secure outstanding leadership. Sustainability will improve as good leaders build leadership capacity in a school through succession planning.

Q: Why weren't parents given the results of the Inspection Audit of 5 May?

A: This was a private audit commissioned by the Governing Body. There was no requirement to place it in the public domain. However, the governors will be seeking legal advice from Camden to investigate whether the report can be released to parents in part or in full.

Q: Is there a danger the school will have academy status imposed?

A: It is possible that if the school does not improve; it will be forced to become an academy.

Margaret Harvey thanked parents for attending and closed the meeting at 10.45am.