

Davigdor Infant School: Public Consultation Meeting on proposed amalgamation with Somerhill Junior School, 7.00pm to 8.30pm, 21st January 2015 at Davigdor Infant School

Attendees: Ged Cotton – Headteacher of Davigdor (GC),
Di Gare - Chair of Governors, Davigdor Infants
Shaun Collins - Headteacher of Somerhill Juniors (SC),
Claire Roberts – Chair of Governors – Somerhill Juniors (CR)
Michael Nix – Head of Education Planning and Contracts, Brighton and Hove City Council (MN),
Gillian Churchill – Head of Capital Strategic and Development Planning, Brighton and Hove City Council (GCh),
Approximately 15 members of public

Di Gare gave introductions and stated that the governors recognise the need for change in light of the resignation of their head teacher. However they want to be sure that the ethos and education offered by the school is not lost. The Governors will finalise their views at the end of the consultation period.

MN gave a short presentation outlining the process and why the LA was making the proposal. He also stated that this is a genuine consultation, no decision has yet been made and that the final decision will be made by elected members, not by officers. All responses to the consultation will be seen by members before the decision is made.

The floor was then opened to questions

1. What is the compelling reason for change? Especially in light of recent disruption caused by the provision of bulge classes at the school?

The proposal to amalgamate will afford greater continuity for children from 4 – 11. It also removes uncertainty of transaction from infant to junior and provides developmental opportunity for staff. The Local Authority believes that there are good reasons to promote all through primary schools and these are shown in the consultation document. The disruption experienced by children will be minimal given that the two schools already operate from one site and currently work closely together. The resignation of the head teacher was the trigger for consideration of merging the two schools.

2. Why were the two schools separate in the first place?

It is believed that it is because the two schools were not opened at the same time. Somerhill Junior School was opened in the mid 1970's and Davigdor Infant relocated to this site sometime in the 1980's when the previous building needed to be rebuilt.

3. Is the head strong enough to manage the larger school?

SC said that it is a very daunting proposition but that he is excited by the challenge. The most recent Ofsted inspection at Somerhill showed outstanding leadership and management and therefore there is no reason to assume that this would change.

4. Will education levels drop as a result of this merger?

The teachers at both schools know their jobs and since there is no intention to change the teachers as part of this proposal there is no reason to think that education levels will drop as

a result of this proposal. There has been a considerable amount of joint working between the schools to ensure continuity of approach. The proposed merger will enhance and strengthen this.

5. How will children and staff be supported through this time of change?

Staff will have regular meetings and events to support them through the change. Once the decision has been made and if the decision is to amalgamate, there will be considerable joint working.

6. What are the views of the staff?

Several options were put to the staff and the majority response to options was for an element of change, although there was also a significant group of staff who would prefer no change. This represented the fact that there are some 'threats' associated with change but some considerable opportunities too. More detailed consultation is being undertaken with the staff and unions.

7. Concern about the loss of a key person. How will this be addressed?

SC advised he will look to schools who have gone through this process to see how best to structure the school's senior leadership team. A larger school may also attract new staff who are looking for new opportunities.

8. Concern about the size of the school and the fact that Reception age pupils will be mixing with year 6 pupils – loss of separate space for younger children.

There will continue to be a safe environment for all children. In addition there will be the opportunity for mentoring by older children which provides benefits for both age groups.

9. Will the children remain in current parts of school?

Initially yes because the physical environment suggests this is sensible (size of toilets etc.).

10. Proposal says 4FE school. What about the bulge classes?

The bulge classes will move through the school(s) regardless of the decision on this proposal.

11. How involved will current infant head teacher be involved in the amalgamation?

The level of his involvement will be a decision for any joint governing body that is created. It is expected that his expertise will be made good use of.

12. Is this a cost cutting exercise?

Any saving made from this exercise would be from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Therefore if there are any savings made (from the lump sum) this remains within DSG and has to be spent on schools. Funding for schools includes a lump sum per school of £150K. If the schools merge this will reduce the budget by one lump sum after a transition period. It is not anticipated that this will cause future budget problems for the school – it has not presented problems where schools have merged elsewhere in the city.

13. Will the friends of Davigdor cease to exist upon merger?

The group already undertakes joint projects to fundraise and there is no reason why this should change as a result of this proposal.

14. What happens to Ofsted rating?

At the present time it will be the Ofsted rating for Somerhill which would be the determining factor – although obviously government policy can change.

15. Doesn't the timeframe leave very little time to recruit a new head to Davigdor if the proposal was not to proceed?

It is something that has been considered and if this was the case interim arrangements would be made.

16. Who makes the decision?

The final decision will be made by the Children and Young People Committee. The decision to proceed with the consultation has been made by the Executive Director of Childr3en's Services having consulted with the Chair of the Children & Young People Committee and the lead Children's Services Members for the other two party groups.

17. What about name, uniform etc.?

This is something that will be decided following consultation with parents, pupils and staff.

Meeting ended 8.15pm.

