

**ST LUKE'S CONSULTATION – PUBLIC MEETING  
ST LUKE'S JUNIOR SCHOOL HALL  
THURSDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2008-09-18  
1830 – 2000HRS**

Introduction by Gil Sweetenham, Assistant Director Central Area & School Support explaining the purpose of the meeting -:

- to present the benefits of the proposed merger of the two schools
- to listen to views and to answer questions
- to reiterate, as per the consultation document, that no decision has been made.

Gil Sweetenham introduced representatives of Brighton & Hove City Council in attendance:

Vanessa Brown	Deputy Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Chair of the Children's Services and Young Peoples Trust Board
Pat Hawkes	Labour Opposition Spokesperson Children's Services & member of the Children's Services and Young People's Trust Board
Mary Ellinger	Senior Primary Schools Adviser
Gillian Churchill	Head of Capital Programme
Marie Chesham	PA to Gil Sweetenham (minutes)

Attendance (parents, teachers and Council staff) approximately 50 people.

**SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION**

The majority of the questions fielded by both parents and those staff who were present focused on why the creation of an all through primary was necessary. Many believed that under the current system of two schools on one site everything worked very well, in particular with regard to the standard of teaching and care offered by the Infant School. The Junior School also received praise, however, there were a number of comments made by parents that highlighted a less than seamless transfer of pupils and a requirement for enhanced communication between the two management administrations.

A number of those who were opposed to the proposal believed Brighton & Hove's true motive was to save money. The Brighton & Hove officers present at the meeting explained that this was not the reason and that the number and level of posts in a new management structure was still to be discussed and agreed. Only one parent raised the issue of the suitability and sustainability of the building structure of St Luke's – a recognised issue.

In conclusion the majority of those present at the meeting were not in favour of the proposal and some asked for the benefits to be better demonstrated.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

<b>Q 1</b>	Parent – Infant School	Why only six days notice? This was the first day for the Reception class and consequently most parents were unable to attend.
<b>A 1</b>	Gil Sweetenham	The school summer holiday partly responsible for delay. Timing was agreed with the schools and it is important to have the meeting as near as possible to the time the document has gone out. It also gives parents more time to respond; hope that those who have attended will pass on the information to those who were unable.
<b>Q2</b>	Parent – Infant School (Richard)	Why is amalgamation appropriate? Two very strong schools. If it is the lack of a headteacher – have BHCC tried to look for a head?
<b>A 2</b>	Gil Sweetenham	There is a shortage of headteachers which is likely to impact on education over the next 15 years. We believe an all through primary offers a better educational option as there is less disruption to the child (no transfer at age 7 yrs). Additionally it allows the flexibility to use teaching staff across the whole of the primary stage rather than Key Stage 1 or 2.
<b>Q 3</b>  <b>Q 3 cont</b>	Parent – Infant and Junior Schools (Daisy)	Child just started in Reception and one just started in the Junior School. There was no disruption in her daughter transferring. Believes disruption is good in a way as there is disruption in the outside world. Believes the consultation document has been written as a fait d’accomplit. The Infant School is so good – how could you possibly offer such good care and attention in a merged school? If it isn’t broke why fix it? My massive suspicion is that has got be about money (there was general agreement from parents and some teachers to this remark). If the majority of parents disagreed – would the merger still go ahead?
<b>A 3</b>	Gil Sweetenham	There is evidence to support that there is disruption to children on transfer. The only saving would be one headteacher’s salary. We would have to set up different management structures for a new school – not necessarily a cost saving. I am happy to provide information to support this but all we are trying to do is make the school even better. The consultation document has tried to balance the case for and against the merger – we cannot say what decision would be made.
<b>Q 4</b>	Parent – Infant School	I have a child in Yr 2 Infants. Is there a limit on the number of pupils you can have on roll. The classrooms are not big enough for a merged school. It is a listed building – why not address the building problems now rather than if there is a merger?

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<b>A 4</b>	Gil Sweetenham Gillian Churchill	There is no limit set by the DCSF but it is your responses that will help Cabinet members make their decision. Gillian Churchill confirmed that we are aware of the issues regarding classroom size, the sustainability and condition of the school (listed building). She suggested that the parent put forward the suggestion of looking at the building issues now – under the Capital Programme we can look at what we can improve.
<b>Q 5</b>	Parent – Junior School	My son will be Yr 2 Junior next year. The school has an excellent Ofsted rating so cannot understand why a merger is needed. Cannot see why it is better for children and for example – having the same INSET days. Why would an all through primary be better. This is a situation where there are clearly two separate buildings. Really cannot see the advantage without a lot of disruptive building work.
<b>A 5</b>	Gil Sweetenham	I believe the opportunity to create an all through primary will benefit children and parents. I accept you may have a different view as you are happy with your child's experience.
<b>Q 6</b>	Parent? Teacher?	Difficulty in appointing new head? Are there problems transferring children in these two schools?
<b>A 6</b>	Gil Sweetenham	All the schools within Brighton are successful. It is an expensive City to move into. We accept and acknowledge your views – what we are proposing is something that will make it better but accept there are some things we will disagree about.
<b>Q 7</b>  <b>Q7 cont</b>	Ex Parent – Infant School	My son was supported very well in the Infants but not supported when he transferred to the Juniors. I was unable to fight for better support and put him in the Steiner school. I think this merger is for the Council's convenience and for the benefit of Jonathan Cooper's CV. I think the schools should be integrated.
<b>A 7</b>	Gil Sweetenham	Thank you for your views.
<b>Q 8</b>	Parent	Looks like you are using a sledge hammer to crack a nut – one policy fits all. Most people have nothing but praise for the Infants School. I still need to be convinced that there is any reason to change the system e.g. greater flexibility. The negatives outweigh the positives. I am more convinced by the statement from the governors of the Infants School – ethos etc.
<b>A 8</b>	Mary Ellinger	An all through primary creates opportunities for career development opportunities.
<b>Q 9</b>	Teacher – Infant School	I am here to be the best infant teacher I can be – this is what I want to do (statement).
<b>A 9</b>	Mary Ellinger Gil Sweetenham	Agreed – that can still be the case.
<b>Q 10</b>	Parent – Infant and Junior School	I have a child in the Infant and a child in the Junior School. I cannot see how the flexibility works because the speciality is what the teacher wants to do. The Juniors is a

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		very good school.
<b>A 10</b>	Gil Sweetenham	I have taught throughout primary and have had 3 headships. I see the benefit of all of these strengths being spread amongst the staff and the all through primary offers better support overall. I agree that the Juniors is a very good school – no one is taking that away. It is a different situation when we are looking at a merger where one school is stronger than the other.
<b>Q 11</b>	Parent – Infant School	I am not clear about the governors' influence on the entire process – can you outline their influence and can we as parents discuss the proposal with governors.
<b>A 11</b>	Gil Sweetenham	It is important you do discuss the proposal with the governors as both governing bodies will listen to the debate and respond at the CM and CMM meetings.
<b>Q 12</b>	Parent – Infant and Junior School	The Infant school is great and we should acknowledge what Kevin (acting headteacher) and his team have done. I cannot see the argument for a merger – small is beautiful. Mr Cooper knows all of the children – this will be lost if the schools merge.
<b>A 12</b>	Gil Sweetenham  Mary Ellinger	As an individual and an educationalist I believe the merger is the right move and the headteachers are here tonight as part of that process. There will be continuity by using the greater staff flexibility gained by being one school
<b>Q 13</b>	Not stated	Why can the issues not be solved by consultation between the two schools and working closely together – rather than spend loads of money and wasting time.
<b>A 13</b>	Gil Sweetenham	That has not happened – for a variety of reasons and this proposal could start the process of closer working. If the proposal does not go ahead we may have created the environment. There are other options to look at eg. a Federation. At this stage we are looking to link two schools.
<b>Q 14</b>		I came with an open mind at the beginning. It is worrying – a man on his own disagreeing with everybody else. It seems to me that you are not deeply involved yet are disagreeing with everyone who is deeply involved.
<b>A 14</b>	Gil Sweetenham  Jonathan Cooper	I am involved with all of the schools and I am not on my own – I am a representative. Across the City we are making representations about moves we believe will benefit all children. I don't accept that I and my colleagues are not closely involved with the school. We are looking at the best interests of the school and the children. We have come in person – two colleagues plus myself plus Councillors; we are deeply committed and have come to listen to you all. I support the proposal and I am deeply involved. I have seen a merger to all through primary in London. I do believe there is disruption. In the Juniors the children have

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		a fabulous education; in the Infants they are new children. We have to make sure support is there for them. There are handovers but not what we would like. We have tried when the previous head was here but it didn't happen due to the day-to-day events focusing our attention rather than working towards an overall vision.
<b>Q 15</b>	Not stated	This will completely change the way the Infants are run and some of us feel very strongly.
<b>A 15</b>	Gil Sweetenham	What we are going to try and do is join together.
<b>Q 16</b>	Parent Governor – Infant School and Junior School	I have a son just started in Reception and a son in Yr2. Broadly speaking I am in favour of an all through primary. I am also a parent governor for the Infant School. My concern is that the consultation documentation doesn't articulate clearly enough the vision of what the new school could be like: the early years philosophy and how it would enrich the Junior school and vice versa. Maybe governors and parents in the Infants would be more in favour if there was more passion about the benefits because I think they are enormous.
<b>A 16</b>	Pat Hawkes	I have been through this with my children and the all through primary created then was fantastic.
<b>Q 17</b>		We want to see more of the positives emphasised – Infant school governors need to be reassured that work will still be there. We need some strong assurances about benefits to the whole site.
<b>A 17</b>	Gil Sweetenham	There is the opportunity to come and talk to governing bodies. There is however a limit as to how much we can produce in text for a large audience. I take your point that we need to sell the proposal more strongly.
<b>Q18</b>	Parent – Junior School	I had a daughter in Yr4. My child had no problem with the transition but I had a problem – I didn't know where the rooms were and the headteacher was not aware of her health problems.
<b>A 18</b>	Gil Sweetenham	We recognise that if it were to move to one, new school that this would give us an opportunity to look at what we want to do. The management structure would need to be reviewed – maybe two deputies to a headteacher or look at different management titles. If the process goes ahead there will be an opportunity to discuss this with the governors.
<b>Q 19</b>	Staff – Infant school	The reason the Infants is so successful is that we put the children first. If we were to close – what reassurance would we have that the ethos will be continued in an all through primary.
<b>A 19</b>	Gil Sweetenham	What we are promoting is the creation of a new school; bringing the staff together and uniting them. It is important that everyone understands that before we make our decision. We will be having a meeting with the staff of both schools to discuss the proposal and how the

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		mechanics of closure would work if the all through primary went ahead.
<b>Q 20</b>	Parent – Junior School	My daughter went from the Infants to the Juniors and there is a communication problem. The Infants feels warm and that you are enveloped totally and nurtured – I have even had a home visit from a teacher. If the school were to become generic I think it would lose all of this.
<b>A 20</b>	Gil Sweetenham	Equally we have had similar comments from the parents of the children in the Juniors. This is of course an opportunity to bring forward things that have not gone well and propose something that will improve matters.
<b>Q 21</b>	Not stated	There is a better way to improve the communication problem than merge the schools.
<b>A 21</b>	Jonathan Cooper	There is not a communication problem – just limited communication time.
<b>Q 22</b>	Parent	I am new to the area and am only concerned with the consultation meeting. How as parents do we find out about the responses. How much money is saved by merging.
<b>A 22</b>	Gil Sweetenham	The information is collated at the end of the consultation period. There is a short gap while the document is printed and sent out to the CMM; it is also sent to the schools. We also prepare a summary of the document and make it available to the public. The consultation is your opportunity to express your view – your responses are your protest (or support). The money saved would be one headteacher’s salary but the merger is not a money saving exercise.
<b>Q 23</b>	Parent (Fairlight School)	My son has just started at Fairlight. What disruption would there be? If all of the parents and the governors were opposed – in your experience of this policy - would the merger still go through.
<b>A 23</b>	Gil Sweetenham	In my experience some mergers have gone ahead and, in Brighton & Hove, some have not. You could argue that those who disagree are more likely to come forward than those who do not.
<b>Q 24</b>	Parent – Infant and Junior Schools	I have children in both schools. The merger protocol has been altered – what pupil number was in the original protocol. If the school was larger than 600 pupils previously stated? but it does not say that now (unlikely if over 600). Views have changed since the original protocol.
<b>A 24</b>	Jonathan Cooper Annette Bell	The Infant school governors sent out an opposing letter to the parents. I thought it was agreed that governors were not going to send out letters – that we would leave it to the parents to make their own decision.

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Gil Sweetenham then proposed that the question session should close at this point and that the CYPT Cabinet Council Members should have an opportunity to address the meeting.

Vanessa Brown:

I can confirm that all of your responses come to my Cabinet. We do take those thoughts into account and the creation of an all through primary is not a “done deal” – no decision has been made. In the past some proposals have been agreed and some have not but the process is open and transparent. In the past I have had reservations but I have done a lot of research and visited schools in Essex e.g. 850 pupils. In this particular school the headteacher knew all the children and this allayed my fears about size. I have also taught in infant schools and all through primaries and everything worked extremely well. Schools that have merged have all become highly successful schools.

Pat Hawkes:

I was Lead Councillor for CYPT up to last year before the Cabinet system came in. I have also been a teacher and in primary and junior schools – I have taught from nursery through to 11 yrs. When you have a common staffroom and teachers share everything there is guarantee that everything will be much more inclusive. The all through primary enhances everything upwards and downwards. One of you mentioned passion – that follows through the rest of the school. I am confident (as with the Admissions Review) that we have listened.

Q: The process has obviously been going on for some time so why is no information available about the management structure.

Rachel Fryer – Ward Councillor and CYPT:

There are strong arguments for a merger but I do have reservations about the size of the school. There is evidence that smaller schools are more successful therefore I am still on the fence. I would like reassurance that if parents/governors do not want the merger it will not happen. It is important that everyone is clear about the argument for both cases and I think that needs to be worked on further.

Gil Sweetenham:

We will now close the meeting. We will make the minutes available and answers to any questions that have not been answered.

Meeting closed at 2000hrs.

