
REPORT OF SCHOOL ORGANISATION COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD ON 18 JANUARY 2005

Chair:	* Councillor Gate	
Councillors:	* Miss Bednell * Branch * Ismail (3)	* Jean Lammiman * Anjana Patel * Ray
Church of England:	* Reverend P Reece	
Roman Catholic Church:	* Mr J Coyle † Mr M Murphy	* Ms M Roe
Learning and Skills Council:	* Mr P Holmes	
Schools (Parent/Secondary):	* Mrs C Millard	
Schools (Parent/Primary):	* Ms J Tushaw	
Schools (Headteachers):	* Mrs M Arnold † Mr D A Jones	* Mr B A Robertson
Schools (Co-optee and Special)	* Mrs P Langdon	
HCRE:	* Mr P Pawar	
Adviser:	* Mr B Leaver	

* Denotes Member present
(3) Denotes category of Reserve Member
† Denotes apologies received

PART I - RECOMMENDATIONS - NIL
PART II - MINUTES
67. Attendance by Reserve Members:

RESOLVED: To note the attendance at this meeting of the following duly appointed Reserve Member:-

<u>Ordinary Member</u>	<u>Reserve Member</u>
Councillor Stephenson	Councillor Ismail

68. Declarations of Interest:

Reverend P Reece, the Church of England representative, informed the Committee that he was a Governor at St John's Middle School and the Chair of Governors at St John's First School, and that he would therefore abstain from voting on the statutory proposal at agenda item 8. It was also clarified that Mr Geoff Edwards was in attendance at the meeting to present the proposal to the Committee and not in his capacity as a Reserve representative of the Church of England.

RESOLVED: To note that the following interests were declared:

<u>Agenda Item</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Nature of Interest</u>
8. St John's First School and St John's Middle School Amalgamation Proposal	Councillor Gate	Declared a personal interest in that he was a practicing Member of the Church of England.

Councillor Miss Bednell Declared a personal interest in that she was a practicing Member of the Church of England and was Councillor for the Stanmore Park ward, where the schools were located. Councillor Miss Bednell added that she was a Governor at Vaughan First and Middle School and Whitmore High School.

69. **Arrangement of Agenda:**

RESOLVED: That all items be considered with the press and public present.

70. **Minutes:**

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 November 2004, having been circulated, be taken as read and signed as a correct record.

71. **Public Questions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no public questions were put at this meeting under the provisions of Committee Procedure Rule 18.

72. **Petitions:**

RESOLVED: To note that no petitions were received at this meeting under the provisions of Committee Procedure Rule 15.

73. **Deputations:**

RESOLVED: To note that no deputations were received at the meeting under the provisions of Committee Procedure Rule 16.

74. **St John's First School and St John's Middle School Amalgamation Proposal:**

The Committee received a report of the London Diocesan Board for Schools (LDBS) and the Governors of St John's First School and St John's Middle School, which detailed a proposal to amalgamate the two schools.

The Chair welcomed Members of the Committee and public to the meeting. Whilst being aware of the Committee's procedures, the Chair stressed the importance of allowing all interested parties an opportunity to express their views. Therefore it was proposed that the two objectors would have an opportunity to ask questions or clarify issues during the course of the meeting with assistance from the Legal Adviser. Members were asked to note that a number of additional papers had been tabled, including further correspondence from the objectors.

Mr Geoff Edwards of the LDBS provided the Committee with a summary of the amalgamation proposal. It was reported that both Governing Bodies had agreed to consider amalgamation following the resignation of the Headteacher of St John's First School in summer 2004, in accordance with the Council's Amalgamation Policy for First and Middle Schools. Having undertaken initial informal consultation with parents, staff and other interested parties, and considered the educational merits of the proposal, both Governing Bodies agreed to proceed with amalgamation. Accordingly, Statutory Notices were published on 25 November 2004 allowing until 6 January 2005 for the receipt of formal objections, of which two were received. Mr Edwards informed the Committee that both Governing Bodies together with the LDBS and the London Borough of Harrow had expressed their support for the proposal.

In response to a query regarding staffing issues, it was clarified that there would not be any redundancies as a result of the proposed amalgamation. It was explained that if the proposal was approved the new school would have a different staffing structure to address the needs of a combined school and would have one Headteacher. There was one substantive Headteacher and one acting Headteacher following the resignation of the First School Headteacher. In addition, it was confirmed that the amalgamation would not result in a reduction of pupil numbers.

The Committee were advised that all parents had been invited to contribute to the consultation process through a number of meetings and a questionnaire that was part of the consultation document. Staff and parents had also been consulted through

meetings and separate 'drop in' surgeries. A 'frequently asked questions' leaflet had been issued to staff and the teaching unions had also been included in the consultation process.

The resource implications of the proposed amalgamation were discussed. It was reported that the Governors had worked with LEA officers in respect of an indicative budget and were assured that, on amalgamation, there would not be a loss of funding because the LMS Formula would provide a new and appropriate budget for a combined school. Transitional funding would be in place in accordance with the Council's amalgamation policy. An officer also confirmed that the amalgamation would not incur a negative impact in terms of securing capital funding.

A Member referred the Committee to page 33 of the agenda and asked the Legal Adviser to provide the Committee with a legal definition of two separate sites. The Legal Adviser was not aware that the DfES had a specific definition. However, it was noted that a school was able to move its site up to two miles without having to publish a Statutory Notice, which it was felt was an appropriate analogy for a definition of a separate site.

Concerns were expressed at the timing of the consultation process over the Christmas holiday period. It was explained that the initial informal consultation undertaken at the end of October had been followed by the formal consultation process, which was initiated with the publication of the Statutory Notices, thereafter allowing a six week period for objections, as set out in legislation.

The Committee were referred to page 27 of the agenda, which reported that the purpose of the meeting for parents held on 13 October 2004 had not been explained in advance. The Legal Adviser to the Committee read the relevant letter, dated 8 October 2004, from the Chairs of Governors to parents and carers. Concern was expressed that the purpose of the meeting had not been revealed. The Church of England representative explained that the decision not to advertise the purpose of the meeting was to ensure that parents did not attend the meeting unduly concerned at the prospect of amalgamation. The issue of amalgamation had been discussed on three previous occasions at the schools. From past experience it had been deemed more appropriate to inform parents of the amalgamation proposal in person, so that parents could consider the proposal with an open mind and therefore avoid 'playground hysteria'. In turn, it was hoped that this would allow the debate to focus on the educational merits of the proposal. The Vice Chair commented that the less transparent a process, the greater the concern this would often cause amongst interested parties.

Whilst affording the objectors an opportunity to prepare further questions, the options available to the Committee were explained. The Committee could accept the proposal, reject the proposal, or accept it with modifications that would not undermine or significantly alter the original proposal. Members were referred to the statutory guidance for decision makers that had been tabled at the meeting and were asked to consider the relevant points.

A further two points were raised by one of the objectors. It was conveyed through the Legal Adviser that the Governors had failed to fully address all aspects of Harrow Council's amalgamation policy. The objector added that the First School staff and parents had been provided with different information from the Governing Bodies. The Church of England representative responded by stating that the Governors and LDBS had sought to provide all appropriate information to both staff and parents.

RESOLVED: That (1) it be agreed unanimously by those groups voting (see Note (2) below), in accordance with paragraph 9 (a) of the Constitution and terms of reference of the School Organisation Committee, to discontinue St John's First School and St John's Middle School; and

(2) it be agreed unanimously by those groups voting, in accordance with paragraph 9 (a) of the Constitution and terms of reference of the School Organisation Committee, to establish an amalgamated St John's First and Middle School.

(Notes: (1) In casting their vote, the Schools Group wished to add that they voted for the proposal on its educational merits but expressed concerns about the consultation process, whilst acknowledging that it was lawful. The Schools Group felt that there were lessons for other schools to learn. A Member of the Local Education Authority Group echoed these sentiments;

(2) the Groups participating in the vote were the Local Education Authority, the Roman Catholic Church, the Schools Group and the Harrow Council for Racial Equality).

(See also Minute 68).

(Note: The meeting, having commenced at 7.33 pm, closed at 8.53 pm).

(Signed) COUNCILLOR B E GATE
Chair