

**Harrow Council Consultation on the Future Organisation of
Welldon Park Infant School and Welldon Park Junior School
29 September 2014 to 14 November 2014**

Summary of response forms

51 responses were returned to the Infant School and 43 to the Junior School; a number of forms were not complete. Twenty eight written comments were provided. Appendix 1 provides a detailed analysis of the responses; Appendix 2 provides the key points made at the two parent consultation meetings held in October.

The headlines

- 77 responses were made by parents (30 to the junior and 47 to infant school - about 15% of parents) – this would appear to be low but it would be important to know how this compares to similar consultation exercises in Harrow
- 36% of responses supported the amalgamation proposal; 57% opposed it and 7% were unsure
- 58% supported expansion to 3FE; 26% opposed it and 15% were unsure
- Of the 17 written comments made to the Infants School, 10 were opposed to amalgamation, 6 supported it and one added that more information was needed about the federation option. One referred to the expansion and was opposed to it
- Of the 11 written comments made to the Junior School, 7 opposed amalgamation, 2 supported it and one said that further information was needed about the federation and academy options, the detailed capital funding, the cost benefit analysis and the split site funding factor. One was unsure. Only one commented on the expansion proposal and opposed this
- About 10 parents attended the Junior School consultation evening and about 45 the Infant School one. As these were primarily information sessions, it would not be appropriate to draw any conclusions from these meetings as there were intended to support parents come to a view about the two proposals

The consultation exercise has resulted in a 57% majority opposing amalgamation while at the same time 58% supported expansion.

Of the relatively small number of comments made, most were opposed to amalgamation and almost completely silent on expansion. There are two responses which said that further information was needed, for instance on other options. A key consideration is what implications should be drawn from the fact that about 85% of parents did not respond.

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Appendix 1

Proposal One: Welldon Park Infant and Welldon Park Junior School are joined together to form one combined school on 1 Sept. 2015.

Please tick the relevant box to give your view

	Jun	Inf	Total (94)
I support combining the two schools	16	18	34 (36%)
I want the schools to stay separate	21	33	54 (57%)
I am not sure	5	1	6 (7%)

Proposal Two: To expand the school(s) to three forms of entry (90 places) with effect from 1 September 2015.

Please tick the relevant box to give your view

	Jun	Inf	Total (91)
I support expansion to three forms of entry as either combined or separate schools	25	28	53 (58%)
I do not support expansion to three forms of entry as either combined or separate schools	10	14	24 (26%)
I am not sure	6	8	14 (15%)

*It will assist if you could indicate your interest by ticking **all** applicable boxes*

	Jun	Inf	Total
Infant School parent	6	34	40 (34%)
Junior School parent	20	2	22 (18%)
Parent in both schools	13	13	26 (22%)
Member of staff in Infant School	3	6	9 (8%)
Member of staff in JuniorSchool	13	4	17 (14%)
Other interested stakeholder	3	2	5 (4%)
	58	61	119

Comments made

From responses made to Infant School

1. "the school is very small so will be better to expand as right now there is no dining room for kids to have dinners. I don't see the reason for combining the school; they are already capable of transferring the kids from nursery to junior. Am worried about the financial impact the school going to face if combined" (parent)
2. "I think both schools are doing great, as they are now. So no need to make them one school." (parent)
3. "one of the most special things about WelldonPk Infant Sch is that it is a smaller school/2FE. This makes it a warm, nurturing environment where children feel confident to start their journey through education. It would be very sad to lose this and to become yet another amalgamated school which loses its character and becomes a place that is too crowded and too overwhelming for our children to learn" (parent)
4. "I don't support the combining of schools because it is already separated so there is no point in joining them. It's not reasonable financially as the school are individual each school gets their own funding but if combined that means the other school loses which will affect the children's education and resources as they will be lots of budgeting to do to provide for combined schools." (parent)

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5. "my child feels happy and has settled in well. To change or make any alterations would confuse her and I would not want her or any child to feel unhappy." (parent)
6. "combining the two schools would be the best idea, siblings won't have to be separated" (parent)
7. "I would consider both schools under a federation if more information was included in what actually the federation would consist of. I understand the argument for amalgamation however I do believe that WelldonPk is unique in its location and structure and therefore opposed to both schools combining. It would not benefit as other schools in Harrow enjoy" (parent)
8. "I am personally happy with combing schools or expansion. However there should be additional teaching staff so that child's education is not affected." (parent)
9. "since the schools are on a split site and there is no real advantage to combining I strongly oppose this proposal – I can see only disadvantages (fewer staff, less funding etc). In my opinion one of the best things about the schools are that they are small, friendly schools where children know the majority of other children and staff. Don't change it!" (parent)
10. "I agree in principle with the idea of combining and expanding the schools (though whether this should be at the same time is another matter). This could be a chance to make a big improvement in the schools though it is entirely dependent on who comes in to lead the schools" (parent)
11. "my children are studying both schools so I support (expansion) combining the two schools" (parent)
12. "there is no room for expansion on site; the logistics of building whilst the school is running would be unfeasible; have the council thought about running the school through federation where the two schools can work together" (parent)
13. "to reduce application paperwork" (parent in favour of combining)
14. "concerns about the capacity to hold the additional children expected to join (illegible) is my main concern" (parent)
15. "I would prefer working at the infant school. it has a more caring and friendly atmosphere" (member of staff)
16. "I want the schools to stay separate" (parent)
17. "I have concerns about management (rest is illegible)" (parent in favour of combining)

From responses made to Junior School

1. "the proposal to amalgamate the schools was put forward some 4 years ago and rejected. To my mind there has been no material change since then. As for proposal 2 there is no space to extend the schools. Junior School is already in need of substantial renovation work and further expansion will put even more strain on the buildings and infrastructure. In addition to this, Junior School has had 3 heads in 5 years and this would lead to more upheaval." (parent)
2. "I would like the 2 schools to stay separate because one person cannot supervise both schools at the same time" (parent and member of staff)
3. "I think both schools are doing well enough as separates" (parent)
4. "the reason why I wanted both my children to go to Welldon Park was because it was

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two separate schools, providing much more close knit community. If schools combine that personal feeling and advantages will be lost" (parent)

5. "I want both schools to stay as two schools" (parent and member of staff)
6. " I support combining the two schools because it is good for parents and (illegible)" (parent)
7. "I think both schools are doing very well as they are. so no need to make them one school" (parent)
8. "It is working well and will continue to work well as it is now, if the two schools are combined it will cause chaos, also cost and uncertainty. The school should stay as they are, let's avoid the superhead idea/academy." (member of staff)
9. "the success of the two schools combined is so dependent on finding an excellent experienced headteacher that could manage the amalgamation. As we don't know if we are able to do this I am left unsure as we don't have stability in either school i.e. both schools have acting heads if we fail to appoint" (parent)
10. "I think the split site is a problem but the advantages of amalgamation are significant including: staffing (development and career progression); being a through school is good for pupils; shared resources and budget can be more effectively managed. I would expect a management structure to be put in place to effectively manage the school on a split site if amalgamation takes place – plainly staff cannot dash about between both sites. An executive head supported by an infant and junior head, for example –in the short term. If we amalgamate we can extend the language unit from infant school. I feel very strongly that if there is to be an amalgamation there must be a longer term plan with a committed budget to ultimately bring both schools onto one site – this is partly because the junior school building is not really adequate for purpose and it is not possible to heat and maintain this building in a cost effective way" (parent of child previously at a school which amalgamated but did not expand)

And a detailed email from a Junior School parents which noted the following:

- 11 "the federation and academy options need fuller exploration and further background information is needed about the practical and strategic implications of change. Better cost benefit analysis is needed to inform our opinion.....it is important to know whether capital funding will cover the cost of systems integration and whether the pupil funding formula will take account of split site costs....the (response from) box inviting comments provides no direction or space for meaningful input....I would suggest a revised consultation process that provides more robust information, better response mechanism and an extended timeframe for our input" (parent)

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Appendix 2

Welldon Park Infant and Junior Schools – parent consultation meetings

Meeting 1: JuniorSchool (Monday 13th October)

Attendance: under 10

Key points made by Council Officers:

- Amalgamation is Council policy
- Lots of educational arguments support move to all-through primary schools (as per PPT)
- Acknowledgment of loss of revenue funding but should be offset by achievable savings; agreement to split site allowance but no idea as yet about it might be
- Expansion provides additional resource (in region of £63k per additional class)
- Council approach is for permanent accommodation rather than temporary
- Architectural approach on junior site likely to be to bring buildings together
- Need for accommodation analysis of 3FE school but not yet done – will be done by end of term
- Expectations that there will be a range of options developed; then a planning application
- Likely to be 1 year building programme from summer 2015 for completion by 2016 and in one go
- Government funds exist for expansion
- Schools will remain operational during building programme
- Amalgamation: 1st Sept is a bit of an artificial date because in practice nothing changes – children come to same buildings

Key points made by HT (inf):

- It is difficult for a ht to manage across a split site school; it takes a lot of work and time; and amalgamations take time for the one school dimension to be seen by all
- In the working party's research amalgamations across split site schools had been for specific reasons (e.g. a poor Ofsted report)
- There were unlikely to be sufficient economies of scale which can achieve the £154k of cuts
- There would be likely to be some redundancies
- Children will transfer from one building to another anyway; and good transition arrangements will be needed
- The working party looked at a number of options including federation which would still enable a number of features of amalgamation but would preserve budgets; this could help the schools move towards the amalgamation if seen to be sensible
- If the schools site were developed then the schools could take all of the required additional capacity needed in SW Harrow
- A key issue with expansion will be traffic which is an issue resting primarily with parents; school gives strong encouragement for parents to walk with their children to school (reward system in operation)
- Need to expand to provide places for local children; a number have had to wait months for places; and in some cases, parents are taking children to schools some distance apart which is unfair
- There is a leaflet being circulated about expansion; it is scare mongering – suggestion that parents read it carefully when coming to a view about what is best for the schools

Key points made by act HT (jun):

- Staying as a smaller school is a risk
- The school needs the right kind of building plan to make it work
- Amalgamation may help the schools get the building they need

Questions/comments and responses:

What has happened in secondary sector with regard to expansion?

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Not so pressing an issue as the big bulge in primary hasn't yet worked through but some actions already taken; this includes additional 1 FE at Bentley Wood, extending Whitefriars to all through, a new 6FE sec sch on VH site and a free school on Heathfield site (Council)

Comment that the consultation process felt more like a communication and fait accompli than a genuine exercise

Encouragement for all present to complete the response form and to expand on the reasons for individual responses including thinking about other solutions (Council/HT)

Why not undertake compulsory purchase order (CPO) of the 2 houses in the cul-de-sac and then develop the sites?

CPOs are very difficult to achieve and very expensive and the expansion/basic grant would not cover these costs (Council)

Many secondary schools manage split site arrangements relatively easily – why will it be so difficult to primary schools?

There is a lot more work involved; and staff not yet convinced of the case (HT)

Won't the building work be disruptive?

The building work will be disruptive but will provide a much better resource in the longer term and will be worth it; at present the infant school has oversized classes and expansion should help to make sure this doesn't happen. The infant school has already had experience of managing bulge classes (HT)

What will the schools if expanded look like?

We don't know as the planning work has yet to be done (Council)

Will the proposed work by the Council include integrating the ICT and phone system?

Probably (Council)

Why can't the school be rebuilt on one site?

It is a risk because the Council would need to get permission to use the receipts from one site to use to upgrade and extend the other but it is likely that the DfE would require the vacant site to be allocated to a free school (Council)

How long will the lump sums be preserved for both schools if they amalgamate in Sept 2015?

Two terms (from Sept 15 to March 16) and then in 16-17 the school would both receive 85% of the lump sum; and from 17-18, only one lump sum (Council)

Does a federation option provide a solution?

The working party considered federation and there are some advantages (HT)

Do the benefits of amalgamation outweigh the difficulties?

Of the 24 amalgamated schools, none have said that they regret the move, There were some schools/governing bodies which were originally against the idea such as Belmont and Standburn but in the end both voted for the move (Council)

There was one school (Rocksbourne) where following amalgamation, Ofsted inspection was worse

This was a situation in which one school had been outstanding and another good and inspection indicated that it needed requirement largely because Y6 results were poor one year; last year's results were very good (Council)

What might be compelling reasons not to amalgamate?

It is the strength of the argument presented (Council)

What happens to responses already made to the consultation?

They will be all considered at the end of the consultation process

Meeting 2: Infants School (Tuesday 14th October)

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Attendance: over 45

Key points made by Council Officers (only points noted if additional to 13th Oct mtg):

- Increase in demand is the result of a number of factors including larger families, inward migration and multiply occupied houses
- Building new schools is very difficult; there are few sites – there is a new 2FE primary and the Whitefriars free school
- Expansion brings more resources and teachers
- Need for action planning group
- A lot of focus will be on traffic and how to reduce congestion

Key points made by HT (inf): (only points noted if additional to 13th Oct mtg)

- The working group looked at how split site primaries can make such arrangements work; it also looked at a number of options
- The working party still looking to be convinced about the amalgamation
- No change is not an option; it would not be sensible for the schools to remain as the only separate inf/jun schools in Harrow as the other inf/jun schools combine
- Expansion is sensible as the schools are always oversubscribed
- As over 90% of children live within a mile of the school, then almost all children should be walking to school

When are the schools likely to be next inspected?

The infants school won't be before summer 2015; the junior school anticipates an inspection before end of spring term 2015. Ofsted won't postpone inspections prior to amalgamation but it is usual for it to allow a newly amalgamated school 5 terms before inspecting (HTs/Council)

The expansion proposal threatens a number of key features of the infants school: losing outdoor play space; overcrowding (the school was overcrowded when there was more than one bulge class and the school hall became very crowded at assemblies); what budget is guaranteed; the school is already struggling to provide meals via staggered lunchtimes

The school is proud of what it had achieved in its outdoor play space and would want to preserve this; it would be possible to expand via 2 storey buildings which would save the outdoor space; the school was able to cope in the hall when there were more classes. There is a need to wait for the architect to see what suggestions they come up with (HT)

In other building project such as Whitmore, the costs were much more than expected; how can the funding for the schools be guaranteed?

This overrun did not affect the grant money from the DfE and did not affect expenditure on other schools (Council)

The alleyway via which many parents come to school is already crowded and there is dog mess; it will get even worse if the school expands

The Council will need to note that and see how that can be addressed (Council)

What will happen to the SEN provision (which is cross Borough) if there is expansion

It will be important to preserve this and the architect will need to show how this can be done (HT)

Comments by CoG (Junior)

- The schools were asked whether to amalgamate 5 years ago and said no; and the Council agreed; so what is different now
- The decision is likely to be taken by 1 Cabinet (councillor member); so it may be sensible to ask local councillors to be involved
- It is difficult to consider expansions without seeing the designs first