

Annexe A

Future Organisation of West Lodge First School and West Lodge Middle School

Consultation analysis

Contents

Statutory consultation	page 1
Consultation papers	page 2
Consultation response form	page 2
Consultation meetings	page 3
Pupil participation	page 3
Summary of views	page 4
Summary of comments	page 4
Appendix 1	List of interested parties that were sent the consultation documents
Appendix 2	High level reporting of views
Appendix 3	High level reporting of comments by themes

Statutory consultation

1. On 17 January 2008, Cabinet considered a report on the Amalgamation of First and Middle Schools, which included information about parental representations about the future organisation of the two West Lodge schools. Cabinet resolved to undertake a statutory consultation about the future organisation of West Lodge First School and West Lodge Middle School, the outcome of which would be reported to Cabinet.
2. The Future Organisation of West Lodge Schools Steering Group was established to undertake the consultation and to make recommendations to Cabinet. The membership of the steering group comprised three members from each of the schools representing parents, staff and governors, and three local authority members (a Ward Councillor, a chair of governors, and an officer). An independent chair was appointed by the local authority. The primary consideration of the steering group at all times has been the welfare and future of each and every child at the schools.
3. The Future Organisation of West Lodge Schools Steering Group has met five times in order to undertake its task. The Steering Group accepted the remit to gather evidence together to make a recommendation to Cabinet, and agreed its Code of Conduct and Business. The group agreed to maintain a clear focus only on the best interests of children at both schools. The group agreed to try for consensus in its decision making, and to trust each other to work together and to have confidence in each other.
4. The steering group organised the consultation from Monday 17 March until Friday 4 April 2008. The steering group agreed the processes and arrangements for the consultation. The steering group have had regard to the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) School Organisation Unit guidance on closing and making changes to schools. The following sections outline the consultation activity and the analysis of views and comments received.

Consultation papers

5. The steering group developed a range of consultation materials for distribution to key stakeholders and interested parties. These papers were discussed and designed at steering group meetings, and many members of the steering group provided comments and worked together on the drafts and final versions that were distributed.
- A short two page Consultation Paper
 - A short two page Executive Summary of the feasibility study
 - A ten page Detailed Feasibility Information document
- The consultation papers were posted from Friday 14 March 2008.
6. The short two page Consultation Paper was sent to all interested parties in accordance with the DCSF School Organisation Unit guidance on closing and making changes to schools. The cover letters explained how Harrow's Amalgamation Policy and the Feasibility Study agreed by the Future Organisation of West Lodge Schools Steering Group could be accessed via the Harrow Council website or on request. Recipients were given an address to which they could forward comments.
7. All three consultation documents (Consultation Paper, Executive Summary, and Detailed Feasibility Information) were posted on Friday 14 March 2008 to all parents, carers, members of staff and governors. The consultation papers were designed to be three inter-connecting documents that contained all the relevant information in a format that is simple for parents to access to the level of detail they wish. The cover letter gave information about: members of the steering group; details of the consultation meetings on 27 March at the schools; notification that a consultation response form would be distributed prior to 27 March; contacting the school offices should there be translation needs.

Consultation response form

8. The steering group developed a consultation response form in order for parents, carers, staff and governors to be able to state their views and comments. The purpose of the consultation response form was to gather views, and it was not a ballot. The principles agreed by the steering group included:
- It is one strand of the evidence the group will consider. It is not a vote
 - One family, one view
 - Staff and governors to complete one questionnaire only
 - To assist the group when evaluating the responses, parents would be asked to indicate the year group of their child(ren), and staff and governors to indicate the school(s) they are associated with
 - Forms to be numbered to avoid potential for duplicate submissions, and distributed in a way that ensures anonymity
9. Recipients were asked to state whether - 'I agree'; 'I disagree'; 'I don't know' – to the following statement: "West Lodge First School and West Lodge Middle School should become a combined first and middle school as detailed in the consultation proposal". Recipients were invited to assist the steering group by indicating their interest as parent/carer, staff and governor in relation to either or both of the schools. Space was given for recipients to add any further comments.
10. The consultation response forms were posted to families, and sent to the schools for distribution to staff and governors, on 25 March 2008. West Lodge First School provided

council officers with labels of families that have children attending the First School only. West Lodge Middle School did not make address labels available to officers for this purpose, and a council database was used for distribution the forms to families with children attending the Middle School or both schools. Distribution of the consultation response forms to staff and governors of the schools was organised by the staff representatives on the steering group. 579 consultation response forms were distributed.

11. Recipients were asked to return the questionnaire by Noon on Friday 4 April 2008 to either of the school offices, or to the Civic Centre. All forms delivered to the school offices were forwarded to the Civic Centre by the end of Friday 4 April. Two late completed forms were received at the Civic Centre after the closing date - one was in sufficient time to be included in the analysis for completeness; the other was too late to be included in the analysis for the steering group to consider. 291 consultation response forms were returned completed (one response form did not express a view, though it did contain some comments).

Consultation meetings

12. The steering group arranged three consultation meetings that were held on Thursday 27 March 2008 at the schools. The meetings were held as joint meetings of both schools. There were meetings for parents at 9.00am and 7.30pm, and a meeting at 4.00pm for staff. The steering group decided that there would not be a separate meeting for governors, and that they would be able to attend any of the consultation meetings. The chair of the steering group led the consultation meetings, and the members of the steering group were present to answer questions.
13. At the consultation meetings, the chair of the steering group emphasised that the steering group was concerned only with the welfare and potential of each child without prejudice. The meetings followed similar formats, and attenders were able to ask questions that were responded to by steering group members. At the two parents meetings the steering group parent representatives gave a presentation. The two representatives asked the audience to keep in mind that the objective of the consultation is to consider what is best for their children now and in the years to come and that the presentation was based upon the best available information at the time of the research and was not biased.
14. The meetings were well attended by parents and staff, and the steering group felt positive about how the day went. Chairing the meetings was very challenging because of the strong views and some of the behaviours. Notes were taken at the meetings, and a Frequently Asked Questions format was published on the Council website to provide a more accessible record.

Pupil participation

15. Consultation was undertaken with pupils at the two schools in earlier consultation processes, and the views of the children from the earlier consultation are available. The steering group gave careful consideration as to whether there should be further consultation undertaken with the children. The steering group had regard to the DCSF guidance 'Working together: Giving children and young people a say'.
16. The group decided not to specifically canvass the views of the children as this had already been undertaken (see section 19 below). The children were included in earlier processes, and have already expressed their opinions and there was a vote. It was felt that children are very easily swayed by other views. Consulting children twice, especially very young

children, is a big thing. The children are aware of what is going on, and the view of the steering group is that the issue is for the adults to sort out now. The steering group believe the children will cope admirably whatever the outcome is.

Summary of views

17. The steering group decided how the analysis of views and comments would be undertaken. In accordance with the approach agreed by the steering group, council officers have processed the completed forms and have prepared the initial analysis. To ensure anonymity, council officers have typed the views and comments written on completed consultation response forms separately onto Excel and Word documents. This approach has been adopted because concerns were expressed at the staff consultation meeting about the confidentiality of responses. The chair of the steering group gave assurances that safeguards would be made to ensure confidentiality and anonymity for staff. This approach enables there to be openness and transparency whilst ensuring the safeguards sought.
18. High level reporting of the views given on the consultation response forms is given below. Please see Appendix 2 for more detail and analysis by school interest.
- 579 response forms were distributed, and 291 completed response forms were received. The overall response rate was therefore just over 50%.
 - 205 (71%) of all respondents agreed with the consultation proposal that the two schools should become a combined first and middle school. 71 (24%) respondents disagreed with the consultation proposal, and 14 (5%) stated they did not know.
 - 75% of families agreed with the consultation proposal.
 - 57%-60% of staff and governors agreed with the consultation proposal.

There are variations beneath these high level figures in the analysis by school interest, which are shown in Appendix 2.

19. The views of pupils at the two schools were sought in earlier consultation processes. A member of the original Amalgamation Options Steering Group (AOSG) met with both the school pupil councils. He explained why amalgamation was being considered and gave some possible benefits and some disadvantages. The children asked lots of very sensible questions. The Middle School children had been asked to vote within their classes. This vote showed Middle School children were not keen on amalgamation. First School children were not asked to vote, but their response was largely positive. It was difficult, however, for the children in the First School, as they have not experienced Middle School yet. The AOSG agreed that a vote by the children is not necessarily a good thing: they are easily swayed by such things as peer pressure; as the discussions had taken place within the classes it could not be verified that all children had been told the same things. The maturity and enthusiasm of the children convinced the AOSG that they would cope admirably with whatever happens in the school.

Summary of comments

20. The comments made on the consultation response forms have been typed onto a Word document, and all identifiers removed to preserve anonymity. 153 (52.5%) of the 291 returned consultation response forms contained comments. Also included in the analysis

are comments received from two interested parties who wrote in response to the consultation. Some comments were very detailed and others were brief, and many contained a number of points. As far as practicable, all the points made have been included in the analysis.

21. Out of the 153 consultation response forms with comments, 101 agreed with amalgamation, 45 disagreed, 6 were unsure, and 1 did not express an opinion. 51 were from families of children in the first school, 33 were from families of children in the middle school, 32 were from families of children in both schools, and 37 from staff/governors without children at the school.
22. The steering group decided that comments would be clustered so they could be attributed, to stakeholder group and to the view expressed, if necessary to assist the steering group's considerations. The steering group also decided that officers would collate the comments into themes to assist analysis and consideration by the steering group. This is because it was anticipated there would be commonality and repetition.
23. High level reporting of the themes from the comments made is in Appendix 3, together with the numbers of respondents who make similar points in their comments. Eight theme areas have been identified and are summarised below. The themes have been ranked in the order of the number of points made within each theme, starting with the theme with the numerically highest number of points made. Transcripts of the comments made on the consultation response forms are available as background papers.
24. **Operational issues of a combined school.** The numerically largest numbers of comments made by respondents are about operational issues to do with a combined school. The majority of points are made by those agreeing with the proposals, and a third are made by those disagreeing:
 - Most of the points made by those disagreeing with the proposals were about the large size of a combined school and about funding.
 - Almost all the points made about the size of a combined school viewed this as problematic.
 - The majority of points made about funding expressed concerns about the impact on school budgets and a lack of resources from the Council
 - However, many points made about funding identified benefits, including better use of finances, and about a smaller first school not being financially viable.
 - A large majority of the remainder of points made about the sharing of facilities in a combined school were made by those agreeing with the proposals and identified benefits and opportunities.
25. **Process issues.** Many points were made about the processes that have been undertaken concerning whether to amalgamate the two schools, and asked that a decision be made quickly one way or the other and be upheld by all whatever the outcome. The majority of points are made by those agreeing with the proposals, and just under a third are made by those disagreeing:
 - Concerns about the length of time and the amount of money spent on the whole process
 - Concern about the negative impact on relationships between the schools
 - Concern that issues have not been properly researched, and that there are motives behind the process

- Strong plea that a decision be made quickly so things can move on
- There is criticism of the approach of the steering group, though a majority support the role

26. **Children.** Many points were made about the implications of the proposals for the children. Almost three quarters of points are made by those agreeing with the proposals, and just under a quarter are made by those disagreeing:

- Almost three quarters of the points made view the proposals as positive for the children
- All the points made about transition processes are made by those agreeing with the proposals
- Points were made by those agreeing with the proposals about how the children enjoy and benefit from the growing up experience of the move to middle school

27. **Education results.** Many points were made about the effect of the proposals on the education of the children in general, and the points were almost equally spread between those agreeing and those disagreeing with the proposals:

- Two thirds of the points made about education results in general were made by those disagreeing with the proposals
- All the points made about the benefits of curriculum continuity were made by those agreeing with the proposals

28. **Leadership.** The vast majority of points made about leadership were made by those agreeing with the proposals:

- Many points were made about the need for strong leadership
- Concern was expressed about the need for leadership of the middle school
- Many points were made about the leadership qualities of the first school headteacher

29. **Concerns about relations between the two schools.** The majority of points were made by those agreeing with the proposals:

- Concern was expressed about the extent of the rift between the schools by both those agreeing and disagreeing with the proposals
- Statements of complaint were made about the behaviour of both governing bodies, or of elements of them

30. **Retain separate schools.** The vast majority of points were made by those disagreeing with the proposals:

- The majority of points made stated that the schools are successful as they are, and that this should not be put at risk by change
- Concern was expressed about the disruption for the children of the process of amalgamation

31. **Change in age of transfer.** Two thirds of the points were made by those agreeing with the proposals.

- The majority of points made were that amalgamation will happen sooner or later
- Comments were made that the change in age of transfer should not be a factor until it is implemented in Harrow

