

Ray Sainsbury  
45 Sandymount Avenue  
Stanmore  
Middx  
HA7 4UA

30 December 2004

**By Hand**

Secretary to the School Organisation Committee  
P.O.Box 2  
Civic Centre  
Harrow  
Middlesex  
HA1 2UW

Dear Sir/Madam

**Formal Objection to Proposed Discontinuation of  
St John's C.E. First & Middle Schools & Establishment of Amalgamated School**

I wish to raise a formal objection to the above proposals as presented in the Public Notices issued by yourselves & the St John's Governors' on 19 November 2004.

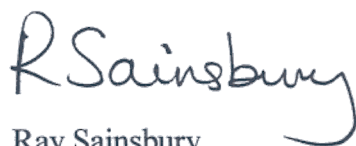
The grounds for my objections are as follows:-

1. There were serious deficiencies with the initial consultation process undertaken by the St John's Governors to seek the views of parents. These deficiencies are outlined in Appendix A, and were brought to the attention of the St John's Governors in my letter dated 21 October 2004 (copy attached). However, to date they have apparently done nothing to address these concerns.
2. The arguments for maintaining separate schools have not been properly considered by the parties involved, as evidenced by the completely biased & unbalanced case put forward by Governors. Following the "300+ man hours" of work undertaken, and summarised in the Governors presentation, only one minor disadvantage was put forward. However, I consider that the points outlined in Appendix B are material or potential arguments against the amalgamation, but which were given no acknowledgement or credence. I question why such apparently obvious disadvantages were not presented as part of an "honest & transparent" consultation. My personal guess is that, based on past experience, the Governors unfairly assumed that many parents would be against the proposal, and therefore either intentionally or unwittingly biased the presentation and all subsequent responses in favour of amalgamation.
3. Parents continue to be effectively excluded from the process, having not been given sufficient information about the Governors' decision to amalgamate, the results of the Parents consultation, notification of this formal Consultation stage or the "next steps" in the amalgamation process. These deficiencies are outlined in Appendix C, and were brought to the attention of the St John's Governors in my letters dated 15 December 2004 (copies attached).

By now, I had hoped to have been confidently engaged in the amalgamation process and feeling that we parents can constructively contribute to the process for the benefit of our children. However, I still feel alienated, "steam-rolled" and ignored by those driving the amalgamation process, as do very many others.

Finally, can you please confirm the date when the School Organisation Committee will sit to consider the results of the Consultation process, and whether or not this meeting will be open to the public. If it is an open meeting, then I would very much like to attend.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "R Sainsbury". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

Ray Sainsbury

## APPENDIX A

### **Deficiencies with Initial Consultation Process ending on 1 November 2004**

There were serious deficiencies with the initial consultation process undertaken by the St John's Governors to seek the views of parents, as outlined below:-

#### Unbalanced and Biased towards Amalgamation

The arguments presented at the 13 October 2004 Consultation meeting were completely biased & unbalanced, which outside the meeting lead to parents expressing comments such as "it's a done deal", "they've already made their minds up", "responding will be a waste of time" etc. The Paper circulated at the meeting is also similarly biased & unbalanced.

#### 2. Parents not given fair chance to attend Consultation Meeting

Since the purpose of the meeting was not presented in advance, this didn't give everyone a fair opportunity to attend the meeting. Furthermore, the visit from the Hatch End School Headteacher further confused the possible reason for holding the meeting. The Governors' rationale of avoiding "possible hysteria" is noted. However, the process could have been managed much better; e.g. holding an advance parents meeting at 3pm on a schoolday to announce that the Governors were obliged to consider the amalgamation proposals & to allay as best as possible any initial fears. This could then have been followed by the formal presentation meeting with "the experts", and at least parents would have had the option to attend, and those opting to attend could be properly prepared for such a meeting.

#### 3. Consultation Period "too short"

The initial timetable set for responses, which included just 7 "school days", was far too tight, particularly for busy working parents and those not able to attend the initial Consultation meeting for the reasons including those detailed above. Furthermore, the consultation period included the Autumn half term break. As a consequence, the process did not fully benefit from all the good ideas & positive contributions that parents were capable of putting forward. It also helped foster fears that the process was being "steam-rolled", and as a result many parents resolved that it was a waste of time to involve themselves in the process.

#### 4. Response Date not appropriate

The response date of Monday 1 November 2004 was set by the Governors, as they wished to work on assessing the results of the consultation during an "inset day". However, it would be more appropriate for such dead-lines to be set at the convenience of the consultees (i.e. the parents), who could much more conveniently have returned their response(s) on Tuesday 2 November 2004 when they returned their children to school.

5. Report on Consultation too “rushed”

Whilst I acknowledge that some work was probably carried out in advance, I still find it difficult to believe that parents’ responses could be fully & properly considered at the 3 November 2004 Governors meeting, when it is considered that the following tasks/activities needed to be completed in 48 hours or less:-

- Consultation papers collected and correlated;
- Draft summary report on consultation results prepared;
- Report checked & approved by appointed Governor(s);
- Independent assessment that report accurately reflects the responses received;
- Reports printed & circulated;
- Governors review & fully consider results of consultation;
- Governors make their informed decision taking due regard of the consultation with parents.

In summary, there was a high probability that parents’ views were not fully & properly represented and presented to the Governors’ meetings with such a rushed timetable.

6. No information on outline Amalgamation Timetable

Parents were told that the consultation period is short, as time is of the essence if the school is to be amalgamated for the 2005/06 school year. I would suggest that an outline timetable would have assisted in supporting the credibility of this assertion, as many parents are anxious that they are being “steam rolled” and don’t understand or comprehend the need to move so quickly.

7. Nursery

The provision of a nursery was presented as a benefit of amalgamation, and I’ve subsequently heard a number of parents make comments along the lines of “the Governors may have already decided, but at least we’ll get a nursery out of it (i.e. amalgamation)”. However, this is a complete “red herring”, which has clearly distorted the view of some parents.

The provision of a nursery is reliant on Year 7 being moved to High School and space then being available in Middle School, with Year 3 then being moved up to make space available in the First School for a Nursery. The provision of a nursery is mainly a matter of making classroom space available, and could be undertaken without amalgamation, as I understand Harrow Council proposed in recent years. I therefore question why the provision of a nursery was presented as an advantage.

## APPENDIX B

### **Potential Disadvantages of Amalgamation**

The arguments for maintaining separate schools have not been properly considered, as evidenced by the completely biased & unbalanced case put forward by Governors. However, I consider that the following points are material or potential arguments against the amalgamation, but which were given no acknowledgement or credence by the St John Governors:-

#### Loss of Negotiating Position for Capital Funding

If it is resolved that the schools can not be properly amalgamated at this time due to the physical constraints and the separate sites, then this may assist future bids for capital funding for building & access improvements to facilitate a “proper” amalgamation on a more unified site. If the amalgamation was progressed at this stage, then the school’s negotiating position for such future capital funding would be weakened.

#### 2. “Small is Beautiful”

Smaller schools have a more intimate and secure feel, which is a positive advantage in the early years in particular. Staff also get to know their children better, as outlined below.

#### 3. Loss of Positive Character Traits

Elements of the unique character of each of the schools, which are currently positive assets, may be lost by the amalgamation.

#### 4. Loss of dedicated Headteacher for First School

Despite the unconvincing claims made at the 13 October 2004 meeting, it surely can’t be disputed that the Headteacher’s knowledge of “double the number” of pupils under their care will be “watered down”, particularly if they’re in the remote site. Mrs Fuggle (the former First School Head) knew our children’s strengths & weaknesses, their personal quirks and what motivated them to learn, and the start made by Mrs Golding (the Acting First School Head) has given parents similar confidence. I am not convinced that a Headteacher covering a “split site” can reach this level of knowledge without it impacting on their other work & duties. I acknowledge that a suitable Management Structure is being proposed in order to mitigate the impact, but it surely can’t be disputed that a Deputy or Site Manger won’t be as well-placed to deal with the full range of matters that can currently be dealt with by the Headteacher. It should also be noted that the Headteacher won’t be around as much to congratulate children on their efforts and achievements. The contact with staff & parents will also be significantly reduced, as will their availability for meetings, functions, appointments etc..

5. Moving to Middle School is a Positive Experience

Moving to Middle School is a very positive experience for many children, who see it as an acknowledgement of their growing maturity and a move away from “the infants”. The experience also helps them when they prepare to make the much bigger step from Middle to High School.

For some of the more “challenging” children, the chance of a “clean slate” with a new Head may also be advantageous for them. Indeed, I’m also sure that this will be relevant for some parents in their relationship(s) with Senior staff.

6. “Big and little children don’t mix well”

In recent years, when working with a school on a Transportation project, I was advised by the Headteacher, who has been knighted for his services to education, and his Deputy Head, who has received an MBE, that I should segregate the accesses for the “big & little children” to keep them separate as they “don’t mix well”.

7. Disruption to Staff & Impact on their Performance

There has been and will be further disruption to staff in taking this process forward. The uncertainty over future roles & responsibilities appears to have caused anxiety amongst many of them. The process will therefore clearly have some negative impact on staff performance, which in turn will impact on the education of our children. As a result of staff time spent on amalgamation issues, their focus on children’s education will be reduced; e.g. time may be spent on the amalgamation process rather than in preparing lessons, sharing “experiences & best practice” etc.

8. Disruption to Headteachers & Impact on other Work Areas

As above, but in respect of the Headteachers. They currently have a fully committed workload and a limited time resource, and therefore any time spent on amalgamation issues will take them away from other essential work areas to the detriment of the current pupils. This issue will also apply to the Senior Management Team.

9. Impact on Clarity of Roles & Responsibilities

The above may also reduce the clarity of roles & responsibilities, with parents potentially not being certain whether to approach the Headteacher or the “remote” site’s Deputy on a particular issue. Again, I acknowledge that a suitable Management Structure is being proposed in order to mitigate the impact, but again it surely can’t be disputed that there is currently no lack of clarity, but that some will be introduced by the changes.

10. Staff may Leave:

From my experience of 10+ reorganisations in local government, it should be noted that some staff may feel they’re rather leave their post than be subjected to the stress of reorganisation, being forced to apply for their own or a different job etc.. This will impact on the children & the continuity of their education if this occurs during the school year.

11. Reduction in Governors' Time for other Work Areas

If the amalgamation is progressed, then the Governor's focus may be taken away from other important or key issues.

12. Cost in Council Officer Time

There will be a cost in Council Officer time in supporting and advising the process (e.g. Education Department Advisors, Human Resources staff). Whilst not necessarily a financial consideration to the school, this is a material issue to parents as Council taxpayers, as it may be that these staff resources could be better targeted at other work areas & priorities.

13. Anxiety Created amongst Parents

Anxiety & uncertainty has already been created amongst parents, which the children may pick up on (to their detriment).

14. Loss of Confidence in Governing Body

Many parents have lost confidence in the Governing Bodies, or at least some of the individual Governors, due to the completely biased and unbalanced manner in which the consultation and decision-making process has been managed, and this has been compounded by the lack of information provided to parents who now feel completely alienated by the process.

In summary, I question why such apparently obvious disadvantages, as detailed above, were not presented as part of an "honest & transparent" consultation. My personal guess is that, based on past experience, the Governors unfairly assumed that many parents would be against the proposal, and therefore either intentionally or unwittingly biased the presentation and all subsequent responses in favour of amalgamation.

## APPENDIX C

### **Parents have been excluded from the Process**

In a joint letter from the Chairs of Governors dated 4 November 2004, it was acknowledged that issues such as “providing information to parents” needed to be addressed. However, in the subsequent 8-week period, irrespective of any positive work that they may have done “behind the scenes”, from the parents’ perspective, they have apparently done absolutely nothing to address this matter and our concerns.

In evidence of this, I wish to confirm the following:-

1. No minutes of either of the Governors’ meetings dated 3 November 2004 have been made available.
2. No summary report of the results of the parents’ consultation have been made publicly available, despite them being “fast-tracked” within 48 hours in early November 2004 for the above “decision-making” meetings.
3. There has been no written or verbal communication from the Governors to address the concerns expressed by parents at the initial consultation stage.
4. I acknowledge that Statutory Notices have been put up by the school entrances in compliance with the basic legal requirements, albeit several days after the actual date of the notices. However, the Governors should be fully aware that not all parents drop-off & collect their children, so I question why haven’t the Governors written to parents “in parallel” advising them that the statutory consultation period had commenced.
5. No information has been provided on the proposed timetable and processes planned to take forward the proposed amalgamation.

The Council’s and the Governors’ aim must be to take as many people as possible on board, and at least leave those unconvinced by the benefits of the amalgamation and the Governors’ decision, that they at least have had a fair hearing.. However, I very much regret to say that, from the parents’ perspective, the Governors have not taken any constructive or positive steps to achieve the above aim, other than giving an unfulfilled commitment in the Governors’ letter dated 4 November 2004.

By now, I had hoped to have been confidently engaged in the amalgamation process and feeling that we parents can constructively contribute to the process for the benefit of our children. However, I still feel alienated, “steam-rolled” and ignored by those driving the amalgamation process, as do very many others.



COPY

Ray Sainsbury  
45 Sandymount Avenue  
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Middx HA7 4UA

**By Hand**

21 October 2004

Dear Governor

**Consultation on Proposed Amalgamation of First & Middle Schools**

I wish to bring to your attention my very serious concerns about the manner in which the above consultation process is being carried out and handled.

Please note that I am currently open-minded about the pros & cons of the proposed amalgamation, and would be pleased to consider a balanced argument for & against taking this proposal forward. However, to date this hasn't happened.

Regrettably I have been extremely disappointed by the way the consultation process has been handled, and by the distorted manner in which the case for amalgamation has been presented. Rather than being engaged and "taken on board" by the process, in my mind it has brought the credibility of the whole consultation process into question.

So far, the case put forward by the Governors' representative(s) has been completely biased towards amalgamation. Furthermore, the stance adopted by those promoting this argument has been defensive rather than conducive to promoting a helpful & informed debate. I find the claim that the consultation process is deemed to be "honest & transparent" is questionable. The arguments presented at the 13/10/04 meeting were completely biased & unbalanced, which outside the meeting led to parents expressing comments such as "it's a done deal", "they've already made their minds up", "responding will be a waste of time" etc.

At this point, may I also clarify that had the Governor's case been similarly biased against the amalgamation, then I personally would have been as similarly incensed, since my main concern is that parents are not being helped or given the opportunity to make an informed judgement based on fair & balanced arguments.

Following the "300+ man hours" of work undertaken, and summarised in the Governors presentation, only one minor disadvantage was put forward. However, I consider that the following points are real or potential arguments against the amalgamation, but which were given no acknowledgement or credence.

**Potential Disadvantages**

• **Loss of Negotiating Position for Capital Funding**

If it is resolved that the schools can not be properly amalgamated at this time due to the physical constraints and the separate sites, then this may assist future bids for capital funding for building & access improvements to facilitate a "proper" amalgamation on a more unified site. If the amalgamation was progressed at this stage, then the school's negotiating position for such future capital funding would be weakened.

2. “Small is Beautiful”  
Smaller schools have a more intimate and secure feel, which is a positive advantage in the early years in particular. Staff also get to know their children better, as outlined above.
3. Loss of Positive Character Traits  
Elements of the unique character of each of the schools, which are currently positive assets, may be lost by the amalgamation.
4. Loss of dedicated Headteacher for First School  
Despite the unconvincing claims made at the 13/10/04 meeting, it surely can't be disputed that the Headteacher's knowledge of “double the number” of pupils under their care will be “watered down”, particularly if they're in the remote site. Mrs Fuggle knew our children's strengths & weaknesses, their personal quirks and what motivated them to learn, and the start made by Mrs Golding gives me similar confidence. I am not convinced that a Headteacher covering a “split site” can reach this level of knowledge without it impacting on their other work & duties. I acknowledge that a suitable Management Structure is being proposed in order to mitigate the impact, but it surely can't be disputed that a Deputy or Site Manger won't be as well-placed to deal with the full range of matters that can currently be dealt with by the Headteacher. It should also be noted that the Headteacher won't be around as much to congratulate children on their efforts and achievements. The contact with staff & parents will also be significantly reduced, as will their availability for meetings, functions, appointments etc..
5. Moving to Middle School is a Positive Experience  
Moving to Middle School is a very positive experience for many children, who see it as an acknowledgement of their growing maturity and a move away from “the infants”. The experience also helps them when they prepare to make the much bigger step from Middle to High School.  
For some of the more “challenging” children, the chance of a “clean slate” with a new Head may also be advantageous for them. Indeed, I'm also sure that this will be relevant for some parents in their relationship(s) with Senior staff.
6. “Big and little children don't mix well”  
In recent years, when working with a school on a Transportation project, I was advised by the Headteacher, who has been knighted for his services to education, and his Deputy Head, who has received an MBE, that I should segregate the accesses for the “big & little children” to keep them separate as they “don't mix well”.
7. Disruption to Staff & Impact on their Performance  
There will be disruption to staff in taking this process forward. The uncertainty over future roles & responsibilities is likely to cause anxiety amongst many of them. The process will therefore clearly have some negative impact on staff performance, which in turn will impact on the education of our children. As a result of staff time spent on amalgamation issues, their focus on children's education will be reduced; e.g. time may be spent on the amalgamation process rather than in preparing lessons, sharing “experiences & best practice” etc.

8. Disruption to Headteachers & Impact on other Work Areas

As above, but in respect of the Headteachers. They currently have a fully committed workload and a limited time resource, and therefore any time spent on amalgamation issues will take them away from other essential work areas to the detriment of the current pupils. This issue will also apply to the Senior Management Team.

9. Impact on Clarity of Roles & Responsibilities

The above may also reduce the clarity of roles & responsibilities, with parents potentially not being certain whether to approach the Headteacher or the “remote” site’s Deputy on a particular issue. Again, I acknowledge that a suitable Management Structure is being proposed in order to mitigate the impact, but again it surely can’t be disputed that there is currently no lack of clarity, but that some may be introduced by the changes.

10. Staff may Leave:

From my experience of 10+ reorganisations in local government, it should be noted that some staff may feel they’re rather leave their post than be subjected to the stress of reorganisation, being forced to apply for their own or a different job etc.. This will impact on the children & the continuity of their education if this occurs during the school year.

1. Reduction in Governors’ Time for other Work Areas

If the amalgamation is progressed, then the Governor’s focus may be taken away from other important or key issues.

12. Cost in Council Officer Time

There will be a cost in Council Officer time in supporting and advising the process (e.g. Education Department Advisors, Human Resources staff). Whilst not necessarily a financial consideration to the school, this is a material issue to parents as Council taxpayers, as it may be that these staff resources could be better targeted at other work areas & priorities.

13. Anxiety Created amongst Parents

Anxiety & uncertainty has already been created amongst parents, which the children may pick up on (to their detriment).

14. Loss of Confidence in Governing Body

There is a very real threat that parent’s confidence in the Governors will be undermined unless the decision-making process is well-managed and acknowledged to be fair & honest. To date, for very many parents that hasn’t been achieved, so this has already become a material concern.

15. Further Issues Requiring Clarification

There are also a number of issues contained below under the heading of “Further Issues Requiring Clarification”, which dependant on the response may result in further disadvantages being identified.

Please note that the above negative impacts may be perceived or real, and if material, they may be significant or not. Furthermore, measures may be possible to avoid or

mitigate their impact. There may even be very significant concerns, but which are outweighed by the advantages. I also recognise that at a strategic level, short term negative impacts may be acceptable if there are medium or long term benefits to be gained by amalgamation. However, the disadvantages need to be recognised and acknowledged, and then duly considered as part of a fair consultation process.

I question why such apparently obvious disadvantages, as detailed above, were not presented as part of an “honest & transparent” consultation. My personal guess is that, based on past experience, the Governors unfairly assumed that many parents would be against the proposal, and therefore either intentionally or unwittingly biased the presentation and all subsequent responses in favour of amalgamation.

### **Deficiencies with Consultation Process**

I would also like to summarise what I consider to be the deficiencies with the consultation process to date:-

#### Unbalanced and Biased towards Amalgamation

As stated above, the arguments presented at the 13/10/04 meeting were completely biased & unbalanced, which outside the meeting lead to parents expressing comments such as “it’s a done deal”, “they’ve already made their minds up”, “responding will be a waste of time” etc. The Paper circulated at the meeting is also similarly biased & unbalanced.

#### Parents not given fair chance to attend Consultation Meeting

Since the purpose of the meeting was not presented in advance, this didn’t give everyone a fair opportunity to attend. Furthermore, the visit from the Hatch End School Headteacher further confused the possible reason for holding the meeting. The Governors’ rationale of avoiding “possible hysteria” is noted. However, the process could have been managed much better; e.g. holding an advance parents meeting at 3pm on a schoolday to announce that the Governors were obliged to consider the amalgamation proposals & to allay as best as possible any initial fears. This could then have been followed by the formal presentation meeting with “the experts”, and at least parents would have had the option to attend, and those opting to attend could be properly prepared for such a meeting.

#### Consultation Period “too short”

The initial timetable set is far too tight, particularly for busy working parents and those not able to attend the initial Consultation meeting for the reasons including those detailed above. As a consequence, the process will not fully benefit from all the good ideas & positive contributions that parents are capable of putting forward. It has also helped foster fears that the process is being “steam-rolled”.

#### Response Date not appropriate

The response date of Monday 1/11/04 was set by the Governors, as they understandably wish to work on assessing the results of the consultation during an “inset day”. However, may I suggest it would be more appropriate for such deadlines to be set at the convenience of the consultees (i.e. the parents), who could much more conveniently have returned their response(s) on Tuesday 2/11/04 when they return their children to school.

### Report on Consultation too “rushed”

Whilst I acknowledge that some work will be carried out in advance, I still find it difficult to believe that parents’ responses can be fully & properly considered at the 3/11/04 Governors meeting, when it is considered that the following tasks/activities will need to be completed in 48 hours or less:-

- Consultation papers collected and correlated;
- Draft summary report on consultation results prepared;
- Report checked & approved by appointed Governor(s);
- Independent assessment that report accurately reflects the responses received;
- Reports printed & circulated;
- Governors review & fully consider results of consultation;
- Governors make their informed decision taking due regard of the consultation with parents.

In summary, there is a real risk that parents’ views will not be fully & properly represented with such a rushed timetable.

### No information on outline Amalgamation Timetable

Parents were told that the consultation period is short, as time is of the essence if the school is to be amalgamated for the 2005/06 school year. I would suggest that an outline timetable would have assisted in supporting the credibility of this assertion, as many parents are anxious that they are being “steam rolled” and don’t understand or comprehend the need to move so quickly.

### Nursery

The provision of a nursery was presented as a benefit of amalgamation, and I’ve subsequently heard a number of parents make comments along the lines of “the Governors may have already decided, but at least we’ll get a nursery out of it (i.e. amalgamation)”. However, this is a complete “red herring”, which has already clearly distorted the view of some parents.

The provision of a nursery is reliant on Year 7 being moved to High School and space then being available in Middle School, with Year 3 then being moved up to make space available in the First School for a Nursery. The provision of a nursery is mainly a matter of making classroom space available, and could be undertaken without amalgamation, as I understand Harrow Council proposed in recent years.

Why was this therefore presented as an advantage?

### **Further Issues Requiring Clarification**

There are also a number of issues which require better or more detailed clarification as part of the consultation process:-

Can the Governors be more precise about how the present arrangements are failing, and please qualify or quantify the exact extent of the problem. I thought we were currently doing well in terms of SATS and OFSTED assessments.

2. Will there be any implications to the funding currently received?
3. Will there be any efficiency or cost savings as a result of the proposal, or if this is not yet known, is there a likelihood that there will be savings?

4. There has been mention of “interim or transitional financial support”. If this has indeed been offered, for how long can it be guaranteed?
5. It’s been repeatedly mentioned that there are currently problems with the two schools working together. However, what are the current barriers to:-
  - (a) improving the smooth transition from First to Middle School?;
  - (b) improving the co-operation between Year 3 (First School) and Year 4 (Middle School) teachers to enhance improved teaching at Key Stage 2?;
  - (c) providing greater opportunities for accessing facilities in the other school?;
  - (d) “streamlining” or removing the Admissions procedures from First to Middle School;and why can’t (or aren’t) these issues being addressed irrespective of the proposed amalgamation? Surely many of the advantages of amalgamation could be achieved through the development of a more collaborative and co-operative working relationship between the First & Middle Schools. Indeed, for the children currently at the schools, this could be a higher priority for the Governors’, Headteachers’ & staff’s time in 2004/05 than progressing an amalgamation.
4. We were advised that the amalgamation was considered in recent times (i.e. 1993 & 1998), and that on these occasions the consensus was against the proposal. We were further advised that the circumstances have changed significantly since then in favour of amalgamation, but no back-up to this statement was provided. Can the changes in circumstances be clarified to parents?
5. One of the stated advantages is that the Key Stage 2 years (Year 3 onwards) will be combined. How will this work in practice if the children are still located in the First School?
6. The physical limitations & constraints of the current site will clearly make it difficult to satisfactorily combine staffrooms, admin etc. Furthermore, has it been considered how much “productive” time will be lost in moving between the remote sites?

Are there any implications of the Disability Discrimination “Access” legislation that needs to be considered or that may affect the amalgamation?
8. How will Assemblies work? With no “Great Hall”, I assume that the Head will only be able to attend assemblies 2 or 3 times a week, or not at all? I note that St John’s Church is an available option, but there are already practical issues in getting the First School children safely to the church for the special events currently held there (i.e. being reliant on the use of volunteer parent helpers, which are often lacking in number).
9. Would children move between schools during the school day?, and if so, are there any security issues?; & how will they be protected from the elements?
10. Has the Council ratified the Amalgamation Policy? I was advised that a draft policy was approved in principle for the purposes of consultation with the consultation period ending in late November 2004. Is this still a Draft Policy?

11. Do the Parent Governors vote in line with the majority view of the parents or do they vote on their own personal assessment & judgement of the issues presented before them?

For the purposes of this initial consultation, due to my serious concerns about the consultation process, regrettably I intend my “view” to be lodged **against the amalgamation** process being commenced. However, I would welcome the opportunity to respond to a subsequent consultation in the near future which puts forward a balanced case for progressing the amalgamation or not.

This is clearly a sensitive issue, and needs to be appropriately managed. However, the above issues & concerns have seriously brought into question my faith in the ability of the Governing Body to take this issue forward without causing unnecessary upset & distress, &/or leaving people feeling cheated out of a fair & balanced decision-making process.

The Governors’ aim must be to take as many people as possible on board, and at least leave those unconvinced by the benefits of the amalgamation, and the Governors’ final decision, that they at least have had a fair hearing.

In summary, I would recommend that at their next meeting the Governors:-

1. Acknowledge the hard work undertaken by all those Governors involved in the initial stage of the consultation, particularly those leading the process;
2. Note the various concerns expressed by parents (& possibly staff) in respect of both amalgamation and the consultation process;
3. Recognise that there were some deficiencies with the initial stage of the consultation process which did not engage all parents, and left a significant number feeling ignored, unimportant &/or aggrieved;
4. Acknowledge that the case presented to date could be construed as unbalanced and biased towards amalgamation, and that this situation needs be addressed;
5. Consider the need to present again the cases for & against amalgamation, in a more balanced and appropriate manner, as part of a second phase of the consultation process;
6. Instruct the Steering Group to prepare a detailed Consultation Strategy and Action Plan that will ensure that all future stages of the process:-
  - (a) Are acknowledged as being “fair, honest & transparent” by all;
  - (b) Engage parents with the process, and either get them on board with the agreed decision(s), or at least enable them to feel that their view(s) were properly considered.

I trust that my comments are both beneficial and constructive, and I trust that the Governors response to the concerns raised regarding the consultation process in particular will help restore my loss of faith.

Yours faithfully



Ray Sainsbury

COPY

Ray Sainsbury  
45 Sandymount Avenue  
Stanmore  
Middx  
HA7 4UA

**By Hand**

15 December 2004

Dear First School Governors

**Proposed Amalgamation of First & Middle Schools**

I refer to my letter dated 21 October 2004, in which I brought to your attention my very serious concerns about the manner in which the consultation process for the proposed amalgamation was being carried out and handled.

I also stated that the way the process had been managed to that stage had undermined my and many other parents' faith in the ability of the Governing Body to take this issue forward without causing unnecessary upset & distress, and/or leaving people feeling cheated out of a fair & balanced process.

In conclusion, I suggested that the Governors' aim must be to take as many people as possible on board, and at least leave those unconvinced by the benefits of the amalgamation and the Governors' decision, that they at least have had a fair hearing.

I was therefore heartened, when in the joint letter from the Chairs of Governors dated 4 November 2004, it was acknowledged that issues such as "providing information to parents" needed to be addressed. However, in the subsequent 6-week period, irrespective of any positive work that you may have done "behind the scenes", from the parents' perspective, you have apparently done absolutely nothing to address this matter and our concerns.

No minutes of the Governors' meetings dated 3 November 2004 have been made available, and no summary report of the results of the parents' consultation have been made publicly available, despite them being "fast-tracked" within 48 hours for the above "decision-making" meetings.

There has been no written or verbal communication from the Governors to address the concerns expressed by parents at the initial consultation stage, and no information provided on the proposed timetable and processes planned to take forward the proposed amalgamation.

I acknowledge that Statutory Notices have been put up by the school entrances in compliance with the basic legal requirements. However, you should be fully aware that not all parents drop-off & collect their children, so why haven't the Governors written to parents "in parallel" advising them that the statutory consultation period has commenced? Furthermore, providing parents with a hard copy of the actual notice would also have assisted those parents who wish to respond to the consultation.



As stated both previously and above, the Governors' aim must be to take as many people as possible on board. However, I very much regret to say that, again irrespective of what you may have done behind closed doors, from the parents' perspective, you have not taken any constructive or positive steps to achieve the above aim, other than giving an unfulfilled commitment in the Governors' letter dated 4 November 2004.

By now, I had hoped to have been confidently engaged in the amalgamation process and feeling that we parents can constructively contribute to the process for the benefit of our children. However, I still feel alienated, "steam-rolled" and ignored by those driving the amalgamation process, as do very many others.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'RS'.

Ray Sainsbury

cc P Golding (Head Teacher)

COPY

Ray Sainsbury  
45 Sandymount Avenue  
Stanmore  
Middx  
HA7 4UA

**By Hand**

15 December 2004

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Ray Sainsbury

cc Mrs Uttley (Head Teacher)