

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

7 October 2013

Re: Objection to the proposals set out in the Council's consultation document

I write in response to the Council's consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Sullivan and New Kings Primary Schools. This latest consultation essentially contains three related proposals:

1. The closure of Sullivan School;
2. The establishment of a Church of England Boys Free School on the current Sullivan School site;
3. The consultation appears to have been triggered by New Kings School's intention to consult on becoming an Academy with Thomas's Independent School as its sponsor.'

I strongly object to the proposals set out in your consultation document for six substantive and very significant reasons as set out below:

1. The disruption of Primary School education for a large number of pupils

Sullivan School is judged to be a good school. The prospect of moving all children at New Kings to Sullivan and then moving all children at New Kings and Sullivan back to the New Kings site will be highly disruptive to children's education. The fact there will be a likely lack of trust and suspicion amongst staff at both schools further exacerbates the likely destabilisation to both school cohorts of children.

The case for a massively improved educational provision at the end of the exercise is far from convincing - beyond better economies of scale releasing some extra funds. This does not necessarily improve the educational offer. Similarly, I have not heard from the public meetings any specific improvements that will arise from the partnership with Thomas's school.

2. The impact on Hurlingham & Chelsea School and the wider secondary school sector

Apart from a desire for a selective 'Lady Margaret for boys', there is no sound educational argument for a boys free school in Fulham. The only arguments must therefore be political. Firstly, all secondary schools in Hammersmith & Fulham are currently judged good or outstanding. Secondly, the absence of effective pupil place planning in Hammersmith & Fulham has led to a significant increase of secondary school capacity and this in turn has led to significant numbers of surplus places in some schools.

The impact of a free school on the Sullivan site, in such close proximity to our school, would make Hurlingham & Chelsea completely unviable. At the time of the expansion of Lady Margaret, Fulham Cross and the establishment of Hammersmith Academy and the West London Free School, we were assured that this would not have any impact on Hurlingham & Chelsea. Nothing could be further from the truth - we now have a significant number of boys to every girl. By putting a free school on our doorstep the council will effectively be reassigning the boys to the free school and thus empty Hurlingham & Chelsea of our remaining students.

Even if Hurlingham & Chelsea retains a cohort, post the establishment of a free school, we will have great difficulty in hitting the government floor standards due to the significantly skewed nature of the remaining intake of pupils. The equation is simple: fewer children = more spare places = more in-year admissions = more challenging cohort = more children with SEN, EAL and social disadvantage = more difficulty raising standards. In effect the council would render Hurlingham & Chelsea a 'sink school'. Local Authority School Improvement Advisors should be well aware of this fact.

3. The impact on the schools of choice agenda

It is a fact that many parents want coeducational, multi-faith, multiethnic community education for their children. Hurlingham & Chelsea is therefore a school of choice for many parents.

If the proposals are implemented in full, leaving Hurlingham & Chelsea school unviable due the massive number of surplus places in the south of the borough, there will be no mixed school in Hammersmith and Fulham south of Hammersmith Academy. In other words, many parents will be denied their school of choice.

4. The impact on the local geographical area

The impact of a Church of England boys free school within 400 metres of Hurlingham & Chelsea School will place severe strain on the local infrastructure. A conservative estimate shows that in excess of 5000 pupils will attend schools in the immediate vicinity of Parsons Green and South Park. Many of these pupils will travel into the area from outside, causing significant pressure on sports facilities and open spaces such as South Park and Hurlingham Park. The impact of two secondary schools in such close proximity and with two very different cohorts of pupils is highly problematic in any case but could unavoidably cause real problems in the future.

5. The impact on social cohesion

There is no doubt that faith is a proxy for selection in London schools but most notably in Hammersmith and Fulham. Some of the most exclusive selective schools in the country are based in Hammersmith and Fulham. Worryingly, they are selective on the basis of faith and social class., rather than ability alone. The addition of free schools and academies, able to select a proportion of their intake by ability, merely exacerbates this socioeconomic divide. The converse of this picture is that only two schools, Hurlingham and Chelsea and Phoenix High School, are non-selective, mixed, multi-faith, multi-ethnic schools that are truly reflective of the wider London community.

6. The impact on the professional community of Headteachers and the wider community

There is no published overall plan for education in the south of the borough. Piecemeal planning is debilitating and unhelpful. The great sadness of this proposal is the manner in which the Council and its officers have pitted headteacher against headteacher and school against school. A good Local Authority would get its Headteachers together as a group to set out the issues. It would then involve those same professionals in getting agreement on the best overall plan. In the absence of proper consultation, Headteachers have no alternative but to speak at public meetings against the councils proposals. The aim should be to get the best strategic plan that meets the needs of all pupils - not just those from one section of the community. The damage done by undermining the

role of professionals is potentially very detrimental to the Local Authority and its schools. There is no evidence in the consultation document that these proposals have been the subject of any risk assessments by Local authority officers.

I have to seriously question the wisdom of Sullivan School consulting on becoming an Academy sponsored by the Church of England during the consultation period. Firstly, this undermines the concept of a local community, mixed faith primary school. Secondly, it would no doubt become a feeder school to the Church of England boys free school, thus undermining its role as our largest feeder primary school.

I have no doubt that the council's proposals will be implemented in full. This judgement is based on the manner in which councillors and Local Authority officers have responded to my own personal attempts to argue for a better solution that delivers all of the council's imperatives and the manner in which ordinary people who care about their children's education have been treated at the public meetings. In short, the council does not listen and so will ultimately make wrong decisions and end up with a solution that is not in the best interests of all children.

Yours sincerely

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The Federation of Hurlingham & Chelsea Secondary and Langford Primary Schools