

**HAMMERSMITH &
FULHAM TEACHERS'
ASSOCIATION**



Our Schools

Making The Right Choice

The Hammersmith & Fulham NUT response
to the Council's proposal to close Sullivan
Primary School.

October 2013

The proposal to close Sullivan Primary School is the most challenging proposal which any administration has made since Hammersmith & Fulham became a local education authority following the abolition of the Inner London Education Authority in 1990.

It is not the first time schools in the Borough have had to face possible closure or amalgamation either individually or as part of a wider reorganisation.

However it is the most challenging because:

1. Sullivan School is offering a high standard of care and education and this is continuing to improve year on year.
2. Sullivan School is a one and a half form entry school which is certainly large enough to be able to offer a broad and balanced curriculum in line with all statutory requirements.
3. The school has sufficient resources to offer additional support to pupils and teachers to enhance the quality of teaching and learning and to widen and enrich the curriculum offer to its children.
4. Sullivan is a growing school. It is popular with all the parents who have experience of it and its reputation has been rising within the local community.
5. There are no problems with finances, safe guarding, health and safety or the quality of the building which *require* action to be taken.

In short, the reason why this is the most challenging proposal the Council has made about any school closure is that there is no educational, financial or other material reason for closing Sullivan School.

The consequences of closing the school will have a damaging impact on the pupils, will fly in the face of parental wishes, will damage the careers of a large team of highly effective professionals and will have repercussions across other primary and secondary schools in the Borough.

All previous reorganisation and closure proposals have had a material and factual basis for being considered and the debate in each case has been about the strength and accuracy of the case for change.

There is no case at all for closing Sullivan School and the Hammersmith & Fulham Teachers' Association completely rejects the proposal.

There are a number of areas of concern which have to be addressed regarding the Council's proposal and actions.

1. There is no educational case for closing Sullivan Primary School.

If the Council believes that a 1½ form entry school is inhibited from delivering a broad, balanced and enriched curriculum then this implies that most of the primary schools in the Borough face the same problem as a majority of them are smaller than Sullivan School. This places the majority of the Borough's primary schools under a cloud.

The level of this concern is evident in the way the majority of primary Headteachers in the Borough have sent messages of support directly to the Headteacher and her staff at Sullivan School and the great interest and concern with which the Borough's teachers have attended consultation meetings, offered support and expressed their own concerns and fears about the implications of the policies behind this proposal.

In terms of outside accountability, the Local Authority grades Sullivan as a Good school and OFSTED and HMI grade it as Good with outstanding features. The SATS results, the achievement of each cohort and category of the pupils and the rate of progress and added value all show that the school is not only "not struggling" but is on a clear journey towards being designated outstanding.

In terms of parental satisfaction with the care, support and education their children receive the evidence confirms the high standard of professionalism and delivery at Sullivan School.

There is no educational case for closure. Therefore the Authority has no right to close Sullivan School.

2. The proposal to close Sullivan School will damage and inhibit the continuing progress of Sullivan's pupils. It will result in two years of unnecessary change and disruption over and above the inevitable impact of the loss of morale amongst the Sullivan community and staff during the rest of the school year if the proposal to close goes ahead.

The Local Authority has shown a very limited understanding of this, has not appreciated the extent of the harm and has little idea about how to mitigate or overcome this damage.

The Local Authority has a duty of care to the staff it employs, it has to take into account the views, choices and opinions of parents **but its final and overriding**

responsibility is to the children in its schools. Their interests have to be the priority. The Authority has put the interests of Sullivan School pupils as secondary to its other priorities and as secondary to the interests of other pupils. This is unacceptable.

In terms of its duty of care to the pupils at Sullivan the Local Authority has no right to close Sullivan School.

3. Sullivan School is a growing school. It is already big enough to be viable and even the most conservative estimates show the school will continue to grow from being well over 80% full to over 90% full in a short space of time.

Furthermore, Sullivan School is increasingly a “school of choice” even by the very narrow interpretation the Council of this measure. It is outstanding in terms of parental satisfaction with the provision.

The growth of Sullivan school is not due on a lack of places elsewhere in the system but is because of a combination of its location and its increasing desirability as a choice for local parents looking for a good school for their child.

In terms of choice and viability there is no case to close Sullivan School.

4. The issue of place planning across Fulham as a whole does need to be considered and the range of options carefully scrutinised. Such scrutiny and planning needs a very high level of professional input from school leaders across Fulham. Only this approach can result in the community being offered properly worked out plans and options, properly informed and able to engage parents, residents and the community in an informed consultation on the best way forward.

The Council has failed to do this and as result its strategy for addressing place planning has been poorly developed, poorly communicated and has been inadequate to the task of allowing an informed and constructive consultation to occur.

The Council has failed to provide the stakeholders and the community with the adequate and professionally informed evidence for such a serious proposal. It does not have the authority to go forward with the closure of Sullivan.

5. Any proposal to close a school must be handled sensitively. Those who will be directly affected by the proposal deserve the support and respect of the Council as it consults on its proposals. This consultation has not been managed in a sensitive way. It has been managed in a way which has been demoralising the

staff and marginalising the parents and carers. Some examples include:

1. The failure of the Authority to inform the Governors and Leadership of Sullivan School of the Council's view that change was required to secure the future of the Sullivan School. The records show that the Governing Body was never presented with a case for change which they could either challenge or implement. The Governing Body therefore continued to support the school on its journey to being outstanding with an increased roll.
2. The lack of care for the staff and Governors at Sullivan in the way the proposals were presented. It was not only hurtful, as these things inevitably are, but it was disempowering. No attempt was made to initiate even the basic processes of talking to staff about their employment situation and circumstances. Staff had to wait almost two months between the announcement and their first meeting with Human Resources.
3. Additionally, the leadership and Governors of Sullivan School were excluded from the organisation and delivery of the consultation on the Council's closure proposal. In the consultation document the voice of the Council, of New Kings School, the Fulham Boys School and the wishes of parents other than Sullivan's were all included. Sullivan's voice was excluded.

In the consultation meetings Sullivan was again excluded with only one opportunity to make a statement at the second meeting being allowed, (described as a "walk on role" by members of the audience). In contrast the Heads of New Kings and the Thomas Schools had plenty of opportunities to make their case and respond to questions and contributions.

4. Finally, the consultation was constructed in such a way that wittingly or unwittingly it invited parents to put their children ahead of other children. It was a serious mistake to offer the prospect that the closure of Sullivan School, regardless of the impact on those children, could be of benefit to another group of people who were looking for a site for their proposed school. This has been divisive within the community.

The siting of the Fulham Boys School is an issue which should have been separated from the case for closing Sullivan School. The demand for the Fulham Boys School is not just a Borough issue as, rather, it is a need being expressed across a number of neighbouring boroughs and the correct

approach would be for the Council to work in partnership with neighbouring boroughs and the LDBS for a pan Borough solution.

It is also the case that no impact assessment has been offered about the siting of the Fulham Boys School so close to Hurlingham & Chelsea school. This will definitely impact upon residents but will also risk undermining Hurlingham & Chelsea school and removing the last offer of a comprehensive, non-selective, non-faith provision in Fulham

The Council has failed to properly assess the impact of its proposals on the children at Sullivan School and has exacerbated this by the way it has marginalised Sullivan School Governors, staff, parents and stake holders and undermined their morale. It has conducted the consultation in way which has made it more difficult support the children through this change, The process has been divisive. In doing so it has obscured the real issues of place planning, future provision and support for all its schools. This is not a basis upon which a school closure can be seriously contemplated.

5. There has been a significant failure of political oversight of the process.

It has become painfully clear to the community and, most importantly to the professional education community of the Borough that the politicians who signed off and allowed the consultation to go ahead were either poorly informed by their Officers or asked the Officers to make a case which was not valid.

Leading Councillors have been unable to answer basic questions about the benefits of this reorganisation for the Sullivan children, the impact on other schools or the likely risks to the children involved.

They have failed to explain to staff why their outstanding commitment to raising standards and caring for their pupils should be so poorly recognised and rewarded. It has not even been possible to answer simple questions about inclusion and accessibility.

We are not in a position to understand how this can have happened but the Council need to reflect upon how they are advised and supported by their Officers.

Responsibility does lie with Councillors however, for their very narrow interpretation of the Schools of Choice agenda. This urgently needs reviewing. It does not seem able to provide a mechanism for incorporating parental satisfaction into the equation. Nor does it address what to do in a situation where parental first choices may initially be lower but the children at the school are receiving excellent care and

education. It certainly does not provide a strategic underpinning for ensuring provision when parental choice, as defined solely by first preferences, is at odds with a school requiring improvement.

It also undermines the confidence that other schools can have about their relationship with the Local Authority Officers and the Council. There is a tremendous undercurrent of concern which has been triggered by the consultation and the proposals.

In short the Council's political leadership of this particular reorganisation has not properly served the needs of its children and is undermining confidence and moral amongst schools and school leaders across the Borough. The Schools of Choice policy at the very least needs to be updated in line with experience. It does not provide a basis for the closure of Sullivan School.

Conclusion

This contribution is meant to complement those which other professionals, which Sullivan School and its community and which other schools have put forward.

The arguments about the state of buildings have been thoroughly addressed elsewhere and do constitute a case for closure.

The future roll and the basis for providing a broad, balanced and enriched curriculum at Sullivan are secure.

The quality of education is good and the capacity to achieve outstanding levels is in place and working towards this goal.

There is no gain in the school being taken over and the children absorbed into an enlarged New Kings School.

The intention for New Kings to become an academy supported by the Thomas Schools is of not relevant for the children at Sullivan and is not seen as having any positive consequences by the parents, carers or professionals involved with the Sullivan children.

Whatever the potential gain for the Fulham Boys School from a closure of Sullivan School this cannot have any bearing on whether or not Sullivan should close.

In the absence of any financial or safeguarding reasons for closure the Authority has no right or reason to close Sullivan.

The NUT is cautious about Sullivan adopting Academy status in partnership with the LDBS and will take part in that consultation at the appropriate time in the best interest of our members and the children at the school. However, until we see any valid reason to reorganise or close Sullivan School we have no choice but to explore every possible strategy to save Sullivan School.

Sullivan School is a school which the Local Authority declared surplus and expendable but which the local community have described elsewhere a “something of a rare beauty”.

In this case the NUT stands firmly on the side of Sullivan School, its children, their parents and carers, their teachers and helpers, the professionals across all the Borough’s schools who are deeply concerned about this and undoubtedly we are on the side of that rare beauty.

Sullivan School cannot be closed.