

Notes of Public Consultation Meeting concerning Wavell Community Infant and Junior Schools.

Meeting held on 22 June 2023 at Wavell Community Junior School

Present: Elaine Richardson (Co- Chair of the Wavell Community Schools’ Federation Governing Body); Linda Wilson (Co- Chair of the Wavell Community Schools’ Federation Governing Body); Gillian Crouch (Executive Headteacher, Wavell Community Infant and Junior Schools); Cllr Annabel Wilkinson (Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills, North Yorkshire Council (NYC)); Andrew Dixon (Strategic Planning Manager, Children and Young People’s Service (CYPS), NYC); Louise Wilson (Head of School Improvement, CYPS, NYC); Mark Ashton (Strategic Planning Officer, CYPS, NYC); Cllr Kevin Foster (local councillor); School staff, pupils, parents, residents and other interested parties

Apologies: None
19 people were present.

AGENDA

Meeting Opens – Brief welcome	Executive Headteacher
Opening Remarks	Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills
Presentation from NYC and the Governing Body of the Wavell Community Schools Federation on <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The proposal• Background to the proposal• How can people comment	Local Authority Officer and representatives of the Wavell Community Schools Federation
Questions and Answers	Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills
Closing Remarks	Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills
Meeting Closes	

1. Welcome

The Executive Headteacher of Wavell Infant and Junior Schools, Gillian Crouch, opened the public meeting at 6.00 pm and she welcomed those present. Mrs Crouch said that the proposed amalgamation would be the culmination of the two schools’ initial collaboration and subsequent federation. She then introduced the meeting Chair, Councillor Annabel Wilkinson.

2. Executive Member’s Opening Remarks

Cllr Wilkinson, introduced herself as the Executive Member for Education, Learning and Skills at NYC. She then invited the panel from NYC and the Federation to introduce themselves.

Cllr Wilkinson said, between them, Andrew Dixon, of NYC, and the Wavell Community Schools Federation would deliver a presentation on the proposal, and that would be followed by an opportunity to hear people’s views in the question and answer session.

3. Presentation from NYC and the Wavell Community Schools Federation

The presentation drew on the content of the consultation document that had been distributed to stakeholders. The Strategic Planning Manager, NYC, Andrew Dixon explained that the proposal was to amalgamate Wavell Community Junior School and Wavell Community Infant School from 8 April 2024. He said that the purpose of the meeting was to listen to views on the proposal.

Mr Dixon explained the roles and responsibilities in determining the proposal including that the Governing Body can ask the Council to consult on the amalgamation. However, the Council then determines such proposals, and it is not a decision the Governing Body can make.

Mr Dixon outlined the background to the proposal. These included the Infant and Junior schools' contrasting Ofsted judgements and also information on the DfE's extended powers to intervene, through a Directive Academy Order (DAO), when a school is deemed to be 'not making necessary improvements'.

Mr Dixon then explained how the proposal involved the technical closure of the Junior School and the proposed benefits. These included the removal of a transfer between schools during the transition between Key Stages 1 and 2 and how creating an all through primary school would enable the expertise of staff to be better targeted across the full age range to raise standards. Mr Dixon explained the view that that the proposed single school would enable integrated arrangements for the assessment of learning and recording of progress.

Mr Dixon used pupil forecasts to explain the rationale behind the reduction in the school's Published Admission Number (PAN) from 72 to 60 and explained that views on this reduction in PAN to 60 are being asked for as part of this consultation. He illustrated how pupil forecasts (including demand from housing), taken together with the revised net capacity, indicated that there would be sufficient places in the amalgamated school.

Mr Dixon covered capital and revenue funding, including how the loss of the Junior School's lump sum is tempered by the DfE's transitional funding arrangements.

He explained the governance implications in that, if the amalgamation took place, the existing federation and the federated governing body would be disestablished and a new governing body established.

The co-chairs of the Governing Body of the Wavell Community Schools Federation then spoke to the audience. First, Elaine Richardson, the Wavell Federation's Co-Chair of Governors, spoke about the formation of the Wavell Federation.

Mrs Richardson said the schools started with an informal collaboration. They then gradually progressed to a formal federation, which brought together the previous separate governing bodies of the two schools under a single federated governing body and an executive headteacher.

The Executive Headteacher of the Wavell Infant and Junior Schools, Gillian Crouch, then spoke about the numerous transitions for children from service families living on the Garrison, due to postings and the importance of removal of a transition in the proposal. Mrs Crouch then contrasted the current position for a current Wavell child and her vision for a Wavell child in the future, and said that a single point of care and unity was her vision for a child in the amalgamated school.

Linda Wilson, Wavell Federation Co-Chair of Governors, then spoke about the benefits the Federation's governors saw in creating an all through primary school. Mrs Wilson said that the move from two separate schools to a single school would be the culmination of the governing body's work over recent years.

Mr Dixon concluded the presentation by covering the time frame of the public consultation and details on how to respond.

He explained the second consultation and he emphasised that a two-stage consultation process would take place before any decisions on the proposals are taken. All views expressed at this public meeting would form part of the report which is considered when the decision on whether to proceed to the second consultation is taken. The second consultation is a statutory four week period when there is a further opportunity for comments and responses.

4. Questions and Answers – chaired by Cllr Annabel Wilkinson.

Cllr Wilkinson hoped the presentation would help inform responses to the consultation, she invited questions and said the panel would be open to all questions those present might have.

A parent said that they would like to ask what may seem an obvious question. She asked what would happen if things went wrong during the consultation and what would happen if the amalgamation didn't happen.

Cllr Wilkinson replied that officers would then look at the various other options and look for an alternative way forward.

The parent responded by saying that she just asked because she thought it may have already been decided.

Cllr Wilkinson replied that no decision had yet been taken and that the proposal had to follow the due process outlined in the presentation. She said that the responses to the consultation would be presented to the Executive who would consider them before any decision was taken to proceed to the second statutory consultation. She asked Andrew Dixon for further comment.

Mr Dixon added that we do need to recognise this is due process, that people are entitled to make whatever comments they feel appropriate, and that the Executive will listen before making a determination. He said we cannot prejudge that decision and there are two possible outcomes – acceptance or rejection.

The parent responded that she thought the proposal was a good idea but just wondered what the consequences would be in the event the proposal was rejected.

Mr Dixon replied that all he could say about that was that there would have to be reflection on why the proposal wasn't successful. However, listening to the school community he had no sense at all of that happening. He would also have to say that if the amalgamation did not happen and the junior school was continuing as a school, then those Department for Education intervention measures and the possible forced academisation would still be something that the school would have to consider.

The parent responded that they did not want that to happen.

Mr Dixon said that it was not for him to comment on the benefits of academisation. However, he would point to the distinction between a forced academisation and a voluntary process. He said that it would be better for any governing body to freely consider academisation and to choose who they wanted to partner with, rather than being faced with a situation where they are forced to convert and with a particular Trust. He concluded that he would just point to the distinction between voluntary and forced academisation as a consequence of that power of intervention.

A school governor asked, if a school closes, for example if the junior school closes, does that mean that the school has to physically close for a day, for it then to open as an amalgamated school the next day.

Mr Dixon replied that the process of technically closing the junior school one day, then opening the expanded infant school the next day would happen in the school holidays, so pupils would not lose a day in school. In this case, the proposal is for that process to happen during the Easter holidays.

The governor asked if it was therefore a technical change.

Mr Dixon replied that it was, in the sense that it would happen towards the end of the Easter holidays, rather than involve either school closing for pupils.

A school governor commented that having considered all aspects of the proposal, and being strongly in favour of all aspects of it, but particularly its benefit to pupils, the only negative aspect they could see was the financial loss of the lump sum for the junior school.

Mr Dixon agreed that there is a negative aspect to the proposal and that is related to finance and he then asked Mrs Crouch if she wanted to comment further.

The Executive Headteacher responded that, on the one hand, the loss of the lump sum for the junior school was a negative aspect. However, on the other hand, she said there would be additional expenses if the two schools were to separate again and defederate. There would need to be two headteachers again and the federation had moved to a reduced senior management team, with one deputy, which would need unpicking. They now had one office.

The governor said she understood there would be a couple of years grace to plan the reduction in finances.

Mrs Crouch said that the finances were something that the school were aware of and would have to manage, for the benefit of becoming a single primary school. She added that the phased transitional arrangements meant that they could plan for that reduction over three years.

A teacher said that there had been talk of the transition points between the schools and the need to minimise those transitional points for pupils. However, she said that most of the children in the Wavell schools were from service families and that children from military families all experienced multiple transitions as a consequence of parents being posted at regular intervals. She said that these numerous transitions of schools and places were unsettling and that it was a good thing to help reduce transitions for the pupils by bringing the two Wavell schools together.

Mrs Crouch responded by agreeing that the vast majority of Wavell pupils were from military families and had experiences of numerous postings and thus transitions between schools. She agreed that this was certainly a good reason for reducing further stress for the pupils through transitions.

The teacher continued by adding that she was a military parent and had experienced the stress of those postings and transitions. She added that now, as a teacher at the school, she thought if the proposal didn't go ahead and the schools were to defederate, they would be stepping back to the position of trying to manage the additional stress caused by moving schools.

A parent said that continuity was a point they were all emphasising and agreeing on as important for all children. However, they were slightly different in Catterick in being a garrison community and had experienced less continuity through postings. But, she continued, as well as being a garrison community, a significant number of children in the Wavell schools had Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) needs and care plans, and SEND pupils in particular were unsettled by transitions. She said that amalgamation would help to settle the significant number of pupils in the schools with SEND needs and help give them emotional stability.

Mrs Crouch agreed with the parent that a settled and stable school setting helped SEND pupils.

The Chair, Cllr Wilkinson, thanked the parent for expressing her personal experiences in school and asked whether there were any final comments or views on the proposal.

The parent responded by saying that obviously every child is different and has individual needs but if teachers are working across a single primary school they will understand each child and know them through their primary schooling.

A parent said that they thought it would be easier not to have to apply for another school place at the end of Key Stage 1 and admitted she had forgotten to apply for a place for her child at the Junior school until reminded.

Cllr Wilkinson started to draw the meeting to a close, by asking whether there were any final questions.

The parent continued that children in this military community have so much going on in their lives in the background that people don't understand and don't see, and they need that extra bit of care from teachers knowing them in a single school.

Cllr Wilkinson thanked everyone for their thoughtful comments and asked them to respond to the consultation in writing.

5. CLOSING REMARKS

Cllr Wilkinson, drew the meeting to a close by thanking everyone for their thoughtful questions. Cllr Wilkinson said it had been a really helpful meeting and that all the comments about the amalgamation proposal had been really positive. She said that those positive messages were appropriate to close on but asked all those present to respond in writing with their comments.

Cllr Wilkinson assured those present that all of their comments would be included in the meeting record and considered in the final report.

The meeting closed at 6.55 pm