

**CONSULTATION MEETING HELD AT
FILTON AVENUE PRIMARY SCHOOL
ON TUESDAY 5th OCTOBER 2021**

Attendees:

Anne Rutherford, Executive Headteacher
Mark Davies, Chief Executive Officer, Trust in Learning (Academies)
Dan Rodeck, Head of School Lockleaze Road
Komilla Datta, Head of School Orchard Campus
Sue Elliott, Director of Human Resource and Communications, Trust in Learning (Academies)
Drw Cannon, Finance Director, Trust in Learning (Academies)

Parental Attendees = 30

MD outlined the purpose of the meeting and the reasons for the consultation which was to allow everyone to ask any questions which will be answered as fully as they can.

The school was opened nine years ago. MD outlined the consultation process, which will be eight weeks of consultation regarding the provision to move to Lockleaze Road and following that the proposal will then go to the Regional School's Commissioner's Office who will then evaluate the rationale and the outcome of the consultation.

MD explained the situation and explained that every so often there is a change in the numbers in the population and the number of children impact on the provision needed.

The school currently has four forms of entry and is one of the biggest schools in the area. The local authority have issued information and data that the numbers of primary school children will continue to be smaller than the numbers of places available and that it is unlikely to recover until 2026/7. Currently the school is looking at deficit financial positions upwards of £200,000 in order to maintain this provision as it moves forward. That means that every child in the school is subsidising this campus instead of on their education.

We will have a significant problem if we do not carry out this consultation on the proposal. The Trust does have some reserves however to spend those on maintaining the campus would be unsustainable in the long term and the reserves would be depleted rapidly.

Four alternatives were looked at and modelled. Move in one year, run down the school over years, maintain the provision with the deficit in the hope that numbers increase or split the classes.

Questions were then invited from parents:

Q. If there is space for four forms at Lockleaze Road why would you have ever opened this in the first place.

A. At the time there was a local authority resource unit that occupied a number of classrooms, and these have now been vacated.

Q. My child is at school for an education, and this seems to be all about the business and money.

A. This is all about education, I am something called the Accounting Officer for the Trust, which means I have a legal duty to ensure that money from the Government for our children's education is spent in a way which is best for all of our pupils. That is the basis of this decision in order for all of our schools to be in a good financial position to educate children.

Q. Why has my child been put in this position, we love this school it's a one form entry and that's why we chose it, with the best will in the world we all know each other and the children's names that won't happen at Lockleaze Road.

A. We understand that the school is bigger and that the experience will be different, but we can assure you that as it is one school the teaching and the expectation will all be the same.

Q. You're telling us there is enough space to have four forms in every year. I know for a fact that they are struggling with children in corridors, that there is not enough room for our children.

A. We are required to ensure that there is sufficient space, that is part of the consultation exercise and this is a legal requirement and one that the Regional Schools Commissioner will evaluate and ensure meets the recommended space for each child. In the future, what we will be doing is ensuring that the space is developed to ensure that the site is exactly right for all activities. There is sufficient classrooms for all of the children here to be educated at Lockleaze Road.

Q. If my children are going down (to Lockleaze Road) will my children stay in the same class?

A. We haven't gone into that detail yet but I can assure you that we will support the transition for each child, whatever is the best for your child.

Q. Is this really a proposal, or is it a done deal?

A. The Trust Board has submitted the proposal and we are consulting on this and taking your views on this, but if we can demonstrate that there are substantial and justifiable reasons behind the proposal in my experience it is likely that the RSC will support it.

Q. Is there no way that you can close the school slowly in the best interest of children?

A. I have closed a school slowly in the way you describe and it was not in the best interest of those children. From my experience I would not advise this course of action. It has significant mental health issues both for staff and children and what happens is that families decide to leave anyway as the site gets smaller and smaller and again it still presents significant deficit issues.

Q. Is the writing on the wall and we just have to accept it?

A. A decision has been made by the Board in terms of this proposal and in terms of the best interests of all the pupils. We will report on the consultation to the RSC's Office for them to either support it or otherwise.

Q. What will happen to Ms Datta, will she continue to be the headteacher of our children?

A. Ms Datta is a Head of School as is Mr Rodeck (at Lockleaze Road), Mrs Rutherford is the headteacher. There will have to be a restructure of staff to ensure the right people are in the right places. Ms Datta's level of responsibility will be maintained.

Q. I thought you said there would be no redundancies?

A. As far as we can see there will be no forced job losses. A restructure does not mean there will be job losses but there will be a need to be a restructure of positions.

Q. If we move everyone and vacate the site will you stop paying for the site?

A. Yes, we only pay for the number of children who occupy the site, however, the PFI costs are only about 30% of the deficit.

Q. The communication used does not take account of the fact that most people use mobiles as their main form of communication and the website doesn't support reading the information?

A. We will make sure that any future communication can support whatever platforms parents use.

Q. There were only 13 children applied to the OSB site but why not say two classes at Lockleaze Road and one at OSB to maintain the site?

A. A decision was made once we knew numbers for Reception not to run four classes and there were more families who wanted to be based at Lockleaze Road site rather than OSB site. We had to consolidate three classes onto one site splitting them over two sites would not have helped the financial situation.

Q. How is it that I can't get my children into another school, they are full so how can there be spaces?

A. The other schools have smaller PANS and are less likely to have extra space but because of the size of Filton Avenue, it is more likely to take a hit on numbers. Other schools will have spaces in various different year groups.

Q. When you had Covid you were asking us not to send our children in and you couldn't cope then, how are you going to cope with more kids?

A. During Covid the school was restricted by bubbles and movement around the school in line with Government guidance and that is now not the case.

Q. How are you going to support the children to make the move?

A. If the decision goes ahead all the leaders of the school will work directly with you to understand all the children's needs, your concerns and each child will have the support that they require to make the transition.

Q. Can we see the thought process and how the decision was made?

A. There were various papers and business models put together and a proposal to the Trust Board. Some of that is available and I will make that available if requested by individuals.

Q. It looks like you have favoured the Lockleaze Road site when you made the decision to put the Reception classes at Lockleaze Road and if you knew that numbers weren't enough why was a decision not made earlier.

A. The Trust and school have been looking at this problem and working on solutions and have been trying every option to avoid this and it is only become clear very recently that there were no other options. In addition we are consulting on decreasing the Published Admission Number with effect from September 2023.

Q. There is an environmental impact - have you thought about that.

A. Yes. We do appreciate that many families will be travelling further to Lockleaze Road but some will travel less. However, to us it seems unavoidable given the financial situation the school is faced with due to the falling intake numbers.

Q. I have chosen this school as it was the smallest school. You now want me to send my child to the biggest school

A. It is one school and I understand that the environment will be different but it can't be avoided. But I cannot see, and neither can the Board any alternative.

Q. There were rumours last year that the school would close, and we were told that it would not and now it is, I have been told that this school will become a large IT dept for the secondary school.

A. I have never said that it would not close or would remain open. This decision has been made relatively late having seen the projected Local Authority figures as I have indicated earlier. No decisions have been made whatsoever on how this space will be used. It is likely that it offers Orchard School Bristol and the Local Authority more room for secondary places because there is a shortfall in accommodation for secondary at the same time as a surplus for primary. I can guarantee no decisions for example for an IT suite have been made.

Q. On a positive note, how will the children benefit from this and what will the transition look like? Will there be lots of support and will there be more meetings to discuss it?

A. Yes, you will have many meetings and you will be able to input and have your questions answered. The school will plan carefully and support all the children. The school is in a great place and the Ofsted inspection will have a positive outcome at Filton Avenue.

Q. When Ms Datta goes who will take her place.

A. The school are looking at the internal options as we speak.

Q. You have mentioned costs of £200k deficit will that be put back into the school.

A. The deficit spoken is a projected figure if we don't act therefore if we do act the deficit would not be there. No money will be taken from the school as a result of the move.

Q. My son is Year 5 going into Year 6 with SEND. I need to ensure that the provision will suit his needs in time to make a decision and select another school.

A. If you are currently receiving additional support there is no reason that it would change. Ms Datta said that the staff and SENCO will be going over too and that they will have full knowledge of the needs of your child.

Q. I am terrified that my child will not adapt to the larger school and that this will add to the stresses that Covid have bought. It's going to be more expensive for me to transport now that she is not going to be able to walk to school and I can see her play in the playground now.

A. I fully understand that and can empathise with your view but there is very little alternative other than ensuring that the transfer is individually meeting the needs of your child.

Q. I think you should have ensured that every parent got the notification and sent it out on paper in a sealed envelope with the children.

A. This is a very difficult message to communicate in the first instance. We thought through what the best methods would be and I am listening to how you think we can improve our communication.

Q. On 12th November the consultation will be over. Will the school have more money per child if we make this move.

A. It is quite difficult to express the deficit in these terms, however, if you take the deficit figure and divide it by the current pupils, the deficit would be subsidised to approximately £350 per pupil.

Q. Can we have the questions in a FAQ.

A. Yes

Q. Can we improve the communications using mobile technology and can the communications go back to paper.

A. I will ask the senior staff to communicate on paper regularly with an update on progress and in order to help address the issues raised tonight.

POST MEETING NOTE: Senior staff felt it was not the right thing to do to use paper which the school hasn't used for several years so we will ensure that notifications are sent prior to any communication being sent.

Q. I haven't heard anything that that convinces me that the school (Lockleaze Road) is going to be any good.

A. It's the same school with the same leadership and the same quality of education and it is up to us to ensure this transfer is done well for the benefit of you and your children.

Q. How long will that be.

A. The consultation ends on 12th November but I am not sure how long after that the decision will be made, but I will try and identify a timeline and communicate with you once we know.

Q. We feel deceived and it feels like you have made the decisions well before we knew. We need to be bought into the journey about how this is going to take place, we have lost faith in you.

A. There was always going to be a difficult start to this consultation but I want to ensure that the process is completed as soon as possible so you can then be part of the journey to move if the proposal is supported.

Q. Seeing the school now won't give us a picture of what the school will be like with our children there.

A. There is plenty of room and the quality of education is there but there is no argument that it will be a different environment for you children, but our responsibility is to ensure that your children have the best education in the best environment that we can possibly provide.

Q. When you didn't open a Reception class this year, it was a major sign that the school would close, why didn't you know then?

A. We did not have the data predicting the trend, often intake years differ and we weather those fluctuations but when it is a trend predicted to last six to seven years we have to take action to safeguard the education of all pupils.

Q. Are you doing any buddying, making sure that the children are safe?

A. The support has to be individual to each child and if buddying is the right thing then we will do it.

Q. Is there a choice to move before next year if the anxiety for the children is too much?

A. Ms Datta said it would be much more natural for them to move at the end of the year and more likely to go as a class.

Q. I want to see the school in the next couple weeks are we allowed.

A. Yes please contact either Ms Datta or Mr Rodeck. Mr Rodeck added that all were welcome and the children would be welcomed to Lockleaze Road.

Q. The following were a set of questions put forward from a stakeholder.

- I feel disappointed and let down by the school.
- Communication from this school has been poor and recent events including the decision not to run a reception this year and this consultation are examples of this: these were not shared with the parent and carer community in an honest and transparent way.
- At the end of term last school year, I was told “...we don’t want the community thinking the school will close”. Whether or not this proposal was being considered at that time, it still feels like we (the parent/carer community) have been deceived.
- A decision like this is not made on a whim. It requires planning, including reviewing staffing arrangements across both sites and preparation of the consultation itself.
- I am shocked and astounded to have been told during the consultation meeting that the school leadership team were only told about this consultation the night before launch. How are they supposed to have prepared their teams and themselves in time. It is entirely not acceptable to not include them in the planning process of this. They are invested in this school and the children and they are the ones who respond to unhappy parents and carers.
- In addition, to find you wanted to have this meeting on the day of the consultation launch is entirely incomprehensible. This is an important subject. And people need time to process.
- Please tell me how you are going to regain our trust. Not only in what you say, but also what educational journey and experience my children will experience?
- How can we believe this consultation holds any value? The process of consulting is in line with your obligation to consult, however, it seems you have already begun preparing to close the site including not running a reception year, rearranging the staff across both sites and telling the children they are going to move school.
- It feels to me a decision has been made and this consultation is just a process you are legally required to follow.
- The way this consultation has been shared provides further demonstration of the poor communication and lack of respect you have for us and our children.
- You pushed (push notification) the message out that stay and play was cancelled last Tuesday, but not that a consultation regarding the future of our children’s education was launched.
- The school leadership team has still not written to us and this meeting was only shared after I spoke to Mr Pavey telling him I had only heard about it through the playground rumour tree but had no details.
- Finding the consultation response form itself is a challenge, coupled with the corporate and technical language you have used makes the whole thing less than accessible and dehumanising the issue.
- To dehumanise this consultation with corporate syntax undermines your role as an education leader and causes me concern for the future of my children as Filton Avenue Primary School.
- You have lost the faith and trust of a lot of people who are emotionally invested in this matter.
- I want you to actively promote it and for it to be accessible.
- To make steps towards rebuilding my trust, I want communication regarding this whole issue to improve. This is from the language use, the level of engagement and involvement of the parents/cares and children in the decisions made.
- I want to know the details of how things are going to be done, and when, including what messages you are telling the children to how we are going to tackle the environmental impact of more people driving to school.
- You need to ask us our thoughts and opinions. These are our children and our responsibility.

- We want guarantees of how Lockleaze Road will provide the support our children need and have available at the Orchard Campus, along with who is responsible and what action will be taken if these guarantees are not delivered.

A. Ms Datta replied and said my honest response to you at the time was true and I did not deceive you. Sharing the information with pupils was because some children were coming in upset and crying as parents had told them the school was closing. We needed to speak to the pupils to explain what was happening. All parents were sent the letter via parent mail.

MD said that he was sorry if they felt he had deceived them in terms of this proposal and consultation. That was certainly not intended. Any form of communication always has its issues and problems eg paper as very few people use paper to communicate due to environmental costs yet people are saying they would prefer it and sometimes you can't do right for doing wrong in these matters but I do acknowledge that people in this room feel that communication was not as good as they thought it should be whether that is the case or not.

MD advised that the decision was only taken two weeks ago by the Trust Board. A timeline was then developed to ensure that the communication was as swift as possible. We have had to give a certain amount of notice of this meeting which is why there was a week's delay from the letter to this meeting. I am sorry if you felt the letter was officious and I will take it on board. I understand that communication can always be improved.

MD brought the meeting to a close at 9 pm.