

**Somerhill/Davigdor Proposed Merger Public Meeting
19th January 2015
Somerhill Junior School
7.00pm to 8.30pm**

Attendees: Shaun Collins - Headteacher of Somerhill Juniors (SC)
Euan Hanington – Deputy of Somerhill Juniors (EH)
Claire Roberts – Chair of Governor – Somerhill Juniors (CR)
Ged Cotton – Headteacher of Davigdor (GC)
Michael Nix – Head of Education Planning and Contracts, Brighton and Hove City Council (MN),
Gillian Churchill – Head of Capital Strategic and Development Planning, Brighton and Hove City Council (GCh),
5 governors of Somerhill Juniors
3 Governors of Davigdor Infants
Approximately 17 members of public

Claire Roberts gave introductions and stated that the governors recognise the need for change and are keen to explore the options that a merger would provide. The Governors will finalise their views at the end of the consultation period.

MN gave a short presentation outlining the process and why the LA was making the proposal. He also stated that this is a genuine consultation, no decision has yet been made and that the final decision will be made by elected members, not by officers. All responses to the consultation will be seen by members before the decision is made.

The floor was then opened to questions

1. Will the bulge classes continue for Somerhill regardless of whether this proposal progresses or not?

Yes.

2. If the schools amalgamate what are the indicators for a positive outcome? What are the staff feeling? Where amalgamations have not gone ahead, why not? What are the views of GC and SC?

SC said that change is very daunting particularly a change of this magnitude. He knows that the previous time a merger of the two schools was proposed it did not progress. He believes that it didn't happen five years ago as the schools were not ready. In other cases where mergers of this nature have not progressed it is because there are logistical difficulties such as the two schools being on separate sites. SC stated that he believes primary model is the best for educational outcomes.

3. What about loss of expertise that currently exists? Will the same level of support be available from the LA?

SC said he cannot comment specifically on how this will be addressed but leadership structures will be examined in similar sized schools and all evidence available will be assembled and interrogated. He said that he currently runs an appraisal process which allows him to appraise key SMT members with other members of staff being appraised by them. It is not felt that the proposed merger will result in any loss of expertise (other than that of the retiring head teacher which would have happened in any case).

GC and SC also both mentioned the shortage of school leaders which has left some schools with an uncertainty over leadership. CR would look to at least maintain the current level of leadership.

The level of support from the LA would not alter as a result of this proposal. In addition to this there are strong school partnerships – schools supporting schools - which will also remain.

4. Will the finance levels of the merged school change? Will there be significant changes to staff?

Any saving made from this exercise would be from the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Therefore if there are any savings made (from the lump sum) this remains within DSG and has to be spent on schools. Funding for schools includes a lump sum per school of £150K. If the schools merge this will reduce the budget by one lump sum after a transition period. It is not anticipated that this will cause future budget problems for the school.

Staffing levels would be looked at and unions are being consulted. It is anticipated that majority of staff would retain their jobs (assuming they wanted this). In terms of redundancy there are no obvious immediate redundancies.

5. Continuity of two schools and policies – currently differences between cultures and ethos in two schools – how has this been managed in other schools?

CR said that this would be a main focus of the new governing body. They would look at how previous mergers were handled such as St Luke's and make use of the best practice. This would include how they involved the pupils and parents in the process. It will also be important to use the expertise that already exists in both Somerhill and Davigdor schools.

6. Would the school be renamed?

CR advised that this is something to consider and that the school community would be involved in any proposed changes.

7. Is it possible to create a school within a school – children like the small school feeling.

CR advised joint working between the schools already exists. Whole range of structures will be explored to ensure appropriate collegiate structures are put in place. There will always be key stage 1 and 2 which naturally have their differences but they will be linked by golden threads between the two schools. Each individual child's experience will be expanded as and when they are ready.

8. Overall a good idea but feel there is more detail needed to enable a decision to be made.

9. Is the £150K lump sum referred to earlier the extent of loss of funding?

Yes this lump sum is provided to ensure sufficient sum available to meet management costs. Remainder of funding calculated based on number and nature of pupils. This proposal is not being made for cost saving reasons, it is about school re-organisation. There will be no savings to LA as a result of proposal.

10. If there are two good schools why change it?

The opportunity to merge has arisen as a result of the resignation of the head teacher at Davigdor. This has meant that there will have to be change of some sort, even if it is only a new head at Davigdor. CR said that she feels that if merged the schools have the opportunity to build from strength.

11. Could process undermine success of schools, would staff have to reapply for their own post etc.?

It is considered unlikely that the process to merge would undermine the success of the two schools. It is not thought that there would be any reason for staff to re-apply for their own jobs.

12. Will schools give their thoughts on process and whether they support proposals in a less formal environment?

EH said that staff believe that this proposal represents a good opportunity for the school, its staff and pupils.

Meeting ended 8.30pm.

