



Elms Road School and Children's Centre

(incorporating Elms Road Nursery School and Botley School Foundation Stage)

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14.2.11

Headteacher: Alison Brockliss
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Ms Barbara Chillman
School Organisation and Planning
FREEPOST
OCC

Response to the proposed Closure of Elms Road Nursery School and Daycare and Extension of the age range at Botley Primary School.

Dear Ms. Chillman,

I would like to register that I OBJECT to the proposed closure of Elms Rd Nursery School and merger with Botley Primary School.

My reasons are as follows:

. Elms Road Nursery School was recognised by Ofsted as an 'outstanding' school in an inspection of October 2010:

" This is an outstanding nursery where children of all abilities and backgrounds succeed and thrive."

With current OCC challenges in variable primary school standards, closing an 'outstanding' school would be a loss to OCC and the high standards it aspires to.

. One of the reasons being put forward for closure is the 'accountability' issue brought up in an 09 inspection of the 'satisfactory' Botley Primary School. The report found the foundation stage provision to be 'good', but

" In consultation with Elms Rd Nursery school and Children's Centre, the Local Authority and parents, explore ways of making lines of accountability clearer for the Reception provision."

To date, except for the current closure consultation, there have been no meetings between the primary school, local authority advisers and nursery school & children's centre, to explore this issue. In that this liaison has not taken place, 'accountability' cannot be used as a vehicle for the closure of another school.

. If the Nursery School is 'merged' with a primary school, I find it difficult to see how



standards will rise, as the consultation document states. I have taught as a nursery class teacher in a primary school for nearly eleven years, and am very aware of the dilution of the focus on the needs of the youngest children in such a setting, where the majority of work and funding is channelled into the older children with their nationally reportable data. Without a Headteacher and Governing Body leading the Nursery School, 'merging' would very likely result in a dilution of expertise for the 0-5 year olds, and a probable reduction in standards. As such I cannot see how the new merged setting would be 'at least as equal in terms of the quantity and quality of early years provision provided by the nursery school with no loss of expertise and specialism.' (Merger consultation document.)

. There has been little mention of Elms Rd Children's Centre in these deliberations. Vague comments have been made about it 'continuing' under the 'merger', but no details are forthcoming about how it will be led. This has engendered much stress and uncertainty. At present 30% of my salary comes from the Children's Centre budget, and my work, and job description, is divided accordingly. I have recently spent considerable time writing the first draft of the Ofsted Self Evaluation Form, in anticipation of an imminent inspection. The work of leading a Children's Centre is very different from the headship of a school, and I have learnt over many years, from setting it up alone at the beginning, how complex such a setting is. I have striven to make the whole early years setting of nursery school, reception children, daycare and children's centre work as one cohesive whole. From comments made, we feel we have been successful in this, and families have benefitted from this joined up approach. Nursery schools were used as the core of children's centres in OCC, with 6 of the 7 free-standing maintained nursery schools developing their practice in this manner. Adding the leadership of the Children's Centre, Nursery School and Daycare on to the headship of a primary school in a 'merged' setting, would seem to be an unmanageable job.

. Details of finance have not been forthcoming during the process from OCC, which makes it impossible for councillors to make a decision based on the second reason for closure, ie finance. Government guidance states clearly that –
 " the single funding formula should not be used as a vehicle to close, or close by strangulation, good quality maintained nursery school provision. The presumption against the closure of nursery schools remains, even if the method of funding them is changing." As far as Governors have been able to ascertain, from a lack of hard figures, the Nursery school should break even in the financial year 11/12. Governors are already exploring options for addressing future financial challenges.

. Botley Primary School finances are also under pressure, particularly from the recent rise in their reception children numbers to 60 from 45 (the 'public notice' has the wrong admission numbers.) Children have been transported into Botley from across the city, an option not available for a nursery school which may have vacant spaces. Added to these challenges the possible future expenses under a 'merger' :

The rise in salaries of the head and deputy headteacher due to increased size of primary school;

The cost of providing an 'early years' lead';

The cost of a Children's Centre lead;

it is difficult to see that the merged setting will be better off financially. Is OCC proposing

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to support a possible deficit primary school budget indefinitely? I am sure Councillors would not be happy with this situation, nor indeed would taxpayers if they were to be informed.

. There is a Government presumption against the closure of a maintained nursery school if leading a children's centre-

"Local authorities should also consider the existing presumption (in statutory guidance under the Education and Inspections Act 2006) against the closure of maintained nursery schools, where a maintained nursery school forms part of a children's centre."

(Sure Start Children's centre Statutory Guidance 2010)

If the closure of Elms Rd Nursery school goes ahead this statute will be breached.

.The OCC free-standing maintained nursery schools are all 'outstanding' (4) or 'good' (3). As such high quality settings they are currently involved in leading good practice in PVI and maintained settings. Elms Rd Nursery School and Children's Centre has recently been participating in a project with Professor Kathy Sylva, on ensuring the effectiveness of Children's Centre leadership. Elms Rd is about to lead a project on developing boys' literacy, supporting PVI settings in Oxford City and the Vale of the White Horse. If the 'merger' goes ahead, this project is unlikely to take place without my specialist lead.

Having attended the OCC Cabinet meeting on 21.12.10, I sadly realise that any argument to retain the Nursery School, Daycare and Children's Centres as separate entities, distinct from the primary school, appear to be not going to alter what seems to be a predetermined decision to close our setting.

The saddest part of the whole affair is that ultimately it is the youngest children and their families in our community who will ultimately suffer from such a closure and merger. In that 'early intervention' and family support are Government priorities, such a move would seem to be a dangerous, retrograde step.

Yours sincerely,

Mrs Alison Brockliss
Headteacher/Lead of Elms Rd nursery School and Children's Centre



