

**BOTLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Elms Road

Botley

Oxford OX2 9JZ

Tel. 01865 248573

Fax. 01865 244127

e-mail: office.2569@botley.oxon.sch.uk

Headteacher: Miss Alison Marsh

Deputy Headteacher: Mr Simon Jackson

15th February 2011

Dear Barbara,

Botley Primary School Governors' response to the LA proposed merger of Botley Primary School and Elms Road Nursery School and Children's Centre

Botley Primary School Governors wish to ensure the best possible education for all children within the community regardless of age. We therefore support the proposal to merge Botley Primary School and Elms Road Nursery School & Children's Centre. We recognise the excellent practice and hard work of the Headteacher and staff of the Nursery School and Children's Centre. It would be our intention to embrace this and continue to offer the same standard of care and support to children and families.

We support merger on a number of grounds.

Firstly, the June 2009 Ofsted Inspection report highlighted a fundamental deficiency in the school's Leadership and Management, particularly relating to the Foundation Stage. According to that report, there was an unnecessary layer of complication to management and governance, and a great deal of time and effort was therefore being spent to bring about close co-operation between Botley Primary School and Elms Road Nursery School. The report called for all parties involved to explore ways of making lines of accountability clearer for F1 children. Despite everyone's best efforts, this has not been successful.

Secondly, merger will lead to more effective use of the Botley Primary School Headteacher's and Senior Leadership Team's time. This, in turn, will enable staff to focus more on their key priority - learning and teaching - rather than on the administration and management of two sites. While some progress has been made recently, it must be stressed that it has been difficult over several years to reconcile these two management streams and we believe that a single management structure will benefit children throughout the school but particularly those in F1.

Governors believe that they have explored every avenue open to them both formally and informally which would allow both schools to continue operating independently. They consider that this unresolved Key Issue of Accountability is a major stumbling block to the School's future success, taking too much time away from teaching and learning for the

CA8

Headteacher, Senior Leadership Team and Governors. While this key issue remains, Botley Primary School cannot move forward and continue to improve standards. In June 2009 our grading was Satisfactory – we are ambitious and want to become an Outstanding school.

Thirdly, we believe that a single leadership structure will improve the quality of education offered to our children by providing coherent strategic leadership and coexistent operational direction. Since 2007 we have been working to all intents and purposes within a soft federation with Elms Road Nursery School & children's Centre. However, this arrangement has failed to deal with many issues that have affected the performance of F1 pupils or allowed the effective use of Botley Primary school resources. Members of the School Improvement and Early Years Teams are already fully aware of these issues and have been working closely with the school for several years. Even with the Local Authority's full support and expertise the accountability for F1 children and staff has failed to be resolved and this situation cannot be allowed to continue any longer

Consequently, merger should be supported for a number of reasons:

- To resolve F1 issues
- To allow greater flexibility and effective use of resources in increasingly difficult financial conditions
- To improve the quality of education for Botley Children across all age ranges

No other option adequately fulfills the above criteria. All of the other options have major flaws. The present system is untenable.

Additionally, it should be noted that Botley Primary School is currently under increasing pressure to take additional pupils and to become a two form entry school with effect from September 2011. We have already agreed to take 60 pupils into F1 this year, causing us to have two groups of children taught in the two different settings. This means the two groups of children are receiving different experiences. We foresee that running the Nursery as part of a larger organisation will allow extra flexibility and capacity in coping with

- (a) The new pupil-led funding scheme being introduced to education in nursery settings.
- (b) The resulting changes in funding as pupil numbers increase over the school year

Parents have consistently expressed confusion about which setting their children belong to and about how the two settings communicate with one another and externally. Merger will allow for more coherent and synchronised staff development, creating a critical mass for the deployment of staff expertise. Children in all age groups will have a better sense of belonging and transition from one phase to the next will be smoother

We have recently organised some small group parent Q&A sessions so that parents have the opportunity to talk to us directly about their concerns. The over-riding theme has been concern over the funding and the loss of £64K year on year – Governors are also concerned about this but feel that in order to make progress we have to make difficult decisions and that this will drive us to make the new merged school the most successful we can and to become an outstanding school to which everyone wants to send their children (whatever age) to. The management structure of the proposed new school has also been a concern and we are committed to extending our Senior Leadership Team to embrace all age groups and extended school facilities.

It is our belief that we cannot move on without merger going ahead. The transition will be complex and sometimes difficult but long term gains will vastly outweigh very short term issues. Botley Primary School Governors are confident that not only will the current standards of education be maintained but that both Schools will now have the ability to develop to their full potential.

Yours sincerely,

Annette Ahern
Chair of Governors
On Behalf of the Governing Body