



Elms Road School and Children's Centre

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

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9th February, 2011

School Organisation and Planning
FREEPOST, Oxfordshire County Council

Merger of Botley Primary School and Elms Road Nursery School & Children's Centre – Statutory Notice

Response from Full Governing Body of Elms Road Nursery School and Children's Centre

Dear Ms Chillman

I am writing on behalf of the Full Governing Body of Elms Road School and Children's Centre. We have read and considered the proposal outlined in the two Statutory Proposals (to close Elms Road Nursery School and Children's Centre and to extend the age range of Botley Primary School) and listened to the views of parents and the community we represent, through various meetings and conversations.

We would like to register that as a governing body we **OBJECT** to the proposed merger of Botley Primary School and Elms Road Nursery School and Children's Centre.

Our reasons are as follows:

- We believe that the quality of education and care for early years education is best served by an independent, dedicated nursery school specialising in early years education. This view is supported by research (eg the EPPE project, cited by Dr Kathy Sylva at the public meeting on 23rd June). The Outstanding judgment recently awarded by Ofsted to Elms Road Nursery School is evidence of the high quality of Early Years education provided at Elms Road.
- Whilst we recognise that Botley Primary School has made good progress over the last few years, the fact remains that a school rated 'Satisfactory' by Ofsted will be taking over the running of a school rated 'Outstanding'. We find it hard to see how the quality of education and care can be improved beyond this grading through this merger, as is asserted in paragraph 25 of the paper which went to Cabinet on 21st December 2010.
- Additionally, we believe that the merger proposal breaches the legal requirement when closing a maintained nursery school to clearly demonstrate that alternative provision will 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*'. Removing the specialist leadership and expertise



of the nursery Headteacher breaches this requirement and whilst the Headteacher of Botley Primary School has some experience of management in a combined primary/nursery setting, by her own admission she does not have the level of expertise in Early Years education that the Headteacher of the nursery school has. No evidence or plan has been provided to demonstrate how the quantity and quality of early years provision will continue – there is simply an assertion in the proposal that this will happen, despite removal of expertise and funding (see below). For these reasons we do not believe that the legal requirement set out above has been satisfied. The Cabinet will no doubt wish to satisfy itself on this point, and to examine any legal advice given in relation to this proposal, before reaching any decision.

- An early example of how provision may change arises from the Statutory notice to extend the Primary School age-range, which states that: “*Nursery places would be organised as 3 hour sessions in the morning and afternoon*”. Currently, sessions are not organised as 3-hour sessions, but as either 3 hour 45 minute sessions or 2 hour 30 minutes, a system which was put in place after consultation with parents and carers and to meet the needs of families in this area. The merger proposal appears to be suggesting a change to this service which will inconvenience families.
- We are also concerned that little account has been taken of the skills and experience required to lead and manage a Children’s Centre, which has a much wider remit than education. The Primary school has no experience of leading and managing such a service, whilst the nursery Headteacher has built up a great deal of knowledge and experience of running and developing the Children’s Centre services which would not be easy to replace.
- We are concerned that combining responsibility for primary education, nursery education, daycare provision and running a Children’s Centre is too great a workload for one Headteacher and management team. This could be detrimental for the school as a whole, and particularly for early years provision.
- We share the concerns of parents about the overall cut in funding for a merged school, cited in the Cabinet paper of 21st December. The expected cut in funding due to the Single Funding Formula will remain, and in addition the merged school will lose £64,000 – a total of £96,000 on top of any existing budget challenges the Primary school may have. The Primary school has said that it wishes to appoint someone to an Early Years lead post – but it is hard to see how this can be achieved given the cut in funding resulting from the merger. This puts at risk the quality of Early Years education and care. We also consider that the full cost of the merger proposal has not been counted – this would include potential redundancy costs (the likely outcome for the nursery school Headteacher) and the cost of renaming the school eg in terms of amalgamating websites, signage, stationery etc.
- We believe that the concern about ‘accountability’ which prompted this proposal, which is to do with simplifying the joint management of F1 (reception) children, should be resolved by supporting the two Headteachers in continuing to develop partnership working. Merging the two schools to resolve issues such as this is disproportionate. There is recent evidence (following a visit from Jo Goodall of OCC) that facilitated discussion involving an OCC expert can result in practical positive changes in ways of working together. Surely this is a more constructive, less damaging and ultimately less expensive way of addressing such concerns.
- Finally, 68% of respondents to the informal consultation disagreed with the proposal. It seems that the majority of people in the community wish to keep the two schools as separate institutions.

We would like to make clear that our objection to the proposed merger is in no way a reflection of a lack of confidence in Botley Primary School Headteacher, staff or governors. We have been pleased to work in partnership with BPS to provide the F1 children with an educational experience



which combines the best of both schools and we look forward to continuing to do so.

Yours faithfully

Anne Winter
Chair of Governors, Elms Road School and Children's Centre
on behalf of the Full Governing Body

