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The Governors of Botley School have asked me to respond on their behalf to the Consultation on the Change to the Admission Number to 60 from 45.

Governors have discussed this thoroughly at committee and Full Governing Body level over the last three years – since OCC asked the School to take additional children in the F1 year in the academic year 2009/10.

We were initially pleased to be able to be of assistance to the Local Authority as they had too many children for the number of places available in the City Schools. However, although we were allocated significantly higher numbers of children than before the reality was that these children did not attend the school. We assume this was because they were able to find a school place nearer to their home. We know that some schools within the city were able to offer school places at the last minute due to temporary expansion being permitted. We also recognize that some schools within the city are making permanent arrangements to take increased numbers.

We were approached again for the following two years (the last one of which will be September 2012). One year group currently has fewer than 45 children in it and one has 58. Over many years we have had fluctuating year groups ranging from 32 to 45 pupils which has made it very difficult for us to plan for the future in terms of not only class sizes but number of teachers and support staff required. We hoped that increasing our admission number to 60 (even temporarily) would help us to overcome this problem. However, we have yet to experience a steady admission number which leads us to be very concerned about the long term future of admitting 60 pupils.

We took the view that it was better to work with the Local Authority to prepare the school for the possibility that these numbers would increase and that there would be a steady rise in numbers. We are pleased to say that we have been encouraged by the work that has already taken place in planning for the possible change.

Governors have recently received the end of year statistical information from the Senior Leadership Team of the School and are concerned that those children who are attending from across the City appear to be making slower progress than those who are from the locality.

We are concerned that the Local Authority have yet to commit, by way of having plans approved by the Vale of White Horse Planning Department, to permanent additional classrooms. We would

strongly object to having temporary classrooms on site as we feel that they are particularly unsuited to F1 children. As these classrooms would be sited nearer to the A34 we feel that they would be very noisy. Permanent classrooms whilst in the same area could be designed to reduce noise more effectively.

Some Governors were involved in the process for the addition of the Nursery building and replacement classrooms for Botley School which was completed in 2007. However, this had taken over eight years to reach this stage and had faltered several times along the way including major changes being made to the plans due to lack of funding. The additional workload that the building work and preparations over many years had on both Headteachers was significant and we believe had a detrimental effect on Botley children's education. Our remit as Governors is to ensure that this does not happen again, currently we have been reassured that timescales are different and the type of work required is such that delays should not occur.

We recognize that the Local Authority has much better access to numbers of children within the city and also what local building plans are happening which will affect the number of families and children in the immediate locality.

At our recent public meeting many comments were made about the number of children arriving from across the city and the disruption that this causes to the access to the school in the morning and afternoon. Staff have been particularly concerned about the trauma very young children suffer when travelling across the city without a carer. It is true that for most this takes a few weeks for them to adapt but for others it can be on-going. Concern was also raised about the difficulty that these children and families have in becoming part of our school community. However, it was suggested by the Local Authority that with the increased housing within the area these numbers would be reduced as local children would be a higher priority when school places were allocated.

Parents, staff and governors have raised concern about places being available within the school in the future once local housing is completed – families will not be moving into the area with only F1 aged children so we would hope that we would be able to have further discussions with the Admissions Department were we in a position to have to refuse the admission of a local child whilst spaces were being taken by children from across the City.

Governors have also investigated the possibility that further expansion following the merger in September 2011 with the Elms Road Nursery School and taking on responsibility for the Elms Road Children's Centre would cause additional difficulties for staff. We feel confident that the existing staff will be able to adjust to the changes – we have had a fluctuating roll for many years and being able to be adaptable is one of the features of the school. Leadership was recognised by Ofsted in November 2011 as 'Good' and we feel that there is good capacity to continue to improve and take on new challenges. Naturally, with additional children on the school roll there will be the need to recruit additional teachers and we are confident that we can accommodate new staff and expand the teaching teams as necessary.

Governors have responsibility for ensuring standards of education and discussions have taken place around whether the proposed change to the admission number and the required changes to the building will benefit children. We have raised concerns about the size of classroom proposed and with regard to the alterations to the current classrooms. We have been advised that the classrooms sizes are sufficient for the numbers of children. However, we currently have spacious classrooms which enable interventions for SEN pupils or those with EAL to be accommodated easily. We experience few behavioural problems and those that do occur can be dealt with because we have spacious classrooms. Staff and Governors are concerned that behaviour may deteriorate in the future.

Our canteen building has recently failed in our Health & Safety Audit to reach the required standard. This building has been of concern for many years and has far exceeded its estimated life. We would like any discussions around alterations to the main building and new classrooms to include provision for hot school lunches which are a feature of our school and we feel provide an essential service for some of the disadvantaged children that attend Botley School meaning that they are able to concentrate during the afternoon and achieve more. Our recently opened breakfast club provides a similar service which is becoming more popular.

In summary governors feel the benefits are as follows:

- if numbers increase to 60 there would be no need to teach in mixed age classes but this would not happen until there were 60 children in adjoining year groups.
- We feel that the growth of the school is positive and sends a positive message to our local community which is itself going through change with additional housing being built and proposed changes to the nearby shopping centre.
- Governors know that additional children will bring additional funding which in turn will necessarily have to be spent on staffing but can also create opportunities for spending on resources for children.
- We know that funds are made available to the Local Authority through Section 106 for improvements to the local infrastructure when new housing is built. We would like to see that money being spent on educating children by providing a school that is prepared for an increase in families and can provide the best possible start for young children.
- The Elms Road Children's Centre is also one of our responsibilities and we would like to see the continuation of the excellent work that has been established in the last four years for young children and families by ensuring that the Children's Centre continues to have a place within our school buildings.

In conclusion, Governors would like to feel confident that additional numbers of children will continue to arrive at the school and ideally from the local area. It is not ideal that there are children attending from many parts of the city that makes it difficult for families and staff to engage with each other but we continue to strive to be inclusive and always welcome new families to our community. Our role as Governors is to look at the way in which the school is developing in a strategic way and although we have challenged the Local Authority with regard to the numbers we accept that those people with a better understanding of demographics have to give us the best advice possible.

Yours sincerely,

Annette Ahern  
Chair of Governors