



BOTLEY PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Response to the LA proposal to merge Botley Primary School with Elms Rd Nursery School and Children's Centre.

I fully respect the expertise and experience of all staff within both Botley Primary School and Elms Road Nursery School and Children's Centre. I believe that the skills of both schools working together as one can provide an outstanding education and service for the children and families of Botley.

Both schools have been working as a soft federation, with the Elms Road Schools Joint Committee (ERSJC) during the building work on the joint site and then from when the joint building opened in 2007 until present. Despite the ERSJC, too much Headteacher, Senior Leadership and governor time is spent on sorting out the day to day issues of the joint/shared site, rather than on the strategic role and a focus on learning and teaching. In 2009 Ofsted agreed that this causes an extra layer of unnecessary complication and the accountability of F1 staff and children remains unclear.

I list below the on-going frustrations and difficulties of having F1 staff and children in a different school under the day to day management of different Headteacher:

- Energy bills are unable to be isolated into BPS or ERNSCC as no separate meters were installed at the time of building ERNSCC . This leads to complicated calculations having to be done involving significant amounts of time between BPS and ERSCC Heads/ERSJC/both Bursars and CoG's meeting. These issues are on-going and despite several attempts involving OCC to help clarify calculations and provide clear guidance to resolve this it has always been passed back to both sets of school's governors. With a merged school this is instantly solved.
- Increased staffing costs as BPS has a usual pupil admission number of 45, it has to provide 2 teachers plus TA to work within the ERNSCC and are unable to have mixed age classes as it has throughout the rest of the school and historically in 'Reception'. This includes additional costs for covering PPA for the additional teacher. This year we have two classes, one in each site, which causes additional organisation challenges. With a merged school this is instantly solved.
- Currently the cost of a caretaker for the site is met by BPS

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- Increased spending causes budgetary issues for BPS having to contribute to upkeep and running of ERNSCC although it is not included in its own budget allocation from the LA. With a merged school this would be solved.
- The staff employed by BPS but working within ERNSCC have in effect two line managers (Heads of both schools) leading to lack of clarity. It is difficult for them to integrate fully with BPS staff leading to increased pressure to attend staff meetings in both settings and divided loyalty for INSET days. Do they attend INSET within the setting where they work or the INSET whose payroll they are on? Some INSET days are different for ERNSCC and BPS leading to confusion for parents and an inability for F1 teachers to be available for BPS INSET days e.g. Performance Management – ERNSCC do not use the OCC recommended day due to the large number of part time staff at ERNSCC. F1 staff have raised concerns that they do not feel part of the BPS team and feel pressurised to attend meetings and events in both settings. BPS Headteacher is increasingly aware and concerned at the effect this is having on staff morale. With a merged school this would be solved.
- Performance Management of F1 staff is complicated further by F1 staff following ERNSCC SDP priorities therefore not all staff employed by BPS are able to support BPS SDP priorities. Monitoring of pupil progress is hindered by this and creates additional work for both schools in trying to track progress from Early Years to Year 6. With a merged school this would be solved.
- F1 teachers co-ordinate subjects within ERNSCC only as that is the setting where they work and therefore cannot contribute to BPS subject co-ordination. This puts increased pressure on the remaining BPS staff. With a merged school this would be solved.
- Until Sept 2010, F1 children followed ERNSCC start and finish times as they were taught within that setting. This caused problems for parents with siblings in both schools. Now, F1 follow BPS start and finish times, but parents are not allowed to use the ERNSCC main entrance, so nursery parents are not confused about the times. F1 parents have to use the rear entrance from the BPS lower school playground. With a merged school this would be solved.
- F1 children are unable to share the same lunchtime as KS 1 children, as their classroom in ERNSCC is used for serving F2/3 lunches - F1 have to vacate the room earlier than we would like. With one headteacher it could be arranged to allow a system that would suit everyone.
- Parents are often confused about which school their child belongs to. F1 children take home a newsletter from each school and the children often repeat celebrations in both settings eg Harvest & Christmas, which is unnecessary. With one headteacher this could be avoided.
- Inconsistent support for both ERNSCC and BPS, especially when looking at data - One message is given to one headteacher and a different one to the other which causes frustrations on both parts. For example, F1 data differs from that of F2 at ERNSCC as the F1s are made up of different children, 50% do not come from ERNS, but 18 other providers, so over half of the data is not “matched pupils.” With one headteacher pupil tracking of all pupils would be more consistent, leading to more transparent self-evaluation of all the provision across the whole site.

- The Headteacher for the primary school is statutorily responsible for the F1 children; however in this current arrangement, the BPS Headteacher has very limited say about how and what the F1 children are taught. How can the HT of BPS be held to account for something she has very little influence over?

With a merged school, with one Headteacher all these issues, and equally important, the Key Issue from Ofsted is resolved, allowing the staff and children of the current primary school to move on and build on the improvements it has made since the last Ofsted inspection. The Botley Primary School Headteacher, SLT and governors are ambitious and want it to be an "Outstanding School", but while this Key Issue from Ofsted still remains it is preventing us from achieving our ambition.

More recently, as an alternative to merging, both schools considered becoming a hard federation. The two schools researched and discussed this possibility independently and jointly. Claudia Wade led a joint governors meeting and the two HTs and CoGs visited a well-established federation in Thame. The ERNSCC preferred structure of a federation was that two separate Headteachers would remain. As this option would not address the BPS Key Issue from Ofsted or improve on the current working arrangements, BPS decided that merger should go ahead. Also, a hard federation would not allow existing staff to be employed across both settings, only within their original setting, which would put further restrictions on the staffing structure of both schools, preventing flexible deployment of staff where needed.

The F1 accountability issue has been further complicated by the LA request for BPS to take 60 children in F1 in Sept 2010. This has resulted in BPS having F1 classes on both school sites, one F1 class in the BPS building and one F1 class in the ERNSCC building (the ERNSCC building currently only has provision for 45 children). This arrangement is working well but to ensure that both sets of children get a similar experience, a rotation system has been implemented, so both classes get to use the purpose built EYFS facilities in ERNSCC and the quieter classroom time, away from F2 and F3 children in the BPS classroom.

In addition to the above, OCC are seeking to make BPS a two form entry school for several years to come, to take account of the increase in demand for school places within Oxford City. By flexible use of both BPS and the ERNSCC building under one headteacher, the cost of additional building to accommodate the increased numbers of children could be dramatically reduced. Under one headteacher/governing body all resources could be reviewed across the whole site to ensure the most efficient use of the site is made without restriction.

Concerns about the loss of funding by merging have been raised but given that the merged school would lose the cost of one headteacher, I am satisfied that the loss of funding would not be as great as first thought.

The change to nursery funding (pupil led from place led) in April 2011 was also a concern, but this will still be a problem for ERNSCC setting, with or without the merger. I believe that the nursery as part of a larger organisation would be able to overcome this new shortfall in funding more easily than ERNSCC could independently, giving greater job security and could potentially minimise the risk of closure due to lack of funds.

I am also aware that users of the Children's Centre are also anxious about its existence with the proposed merger. I see no reason why merger would alter the excellent provision currently provided by the Children's Centre as long as the Sure Start funding remains.

A revised Leadership Team and staffing structure to take account of Early Years and Children's Centre management would have to be created; taking staffing from across the whole site in to consideration, should merger go ahead. This will enable everyone to share expertise and to maximise opportunities for all. I hope that the high quality support promised to by the LA during the transition period will enable this to happen smoothly and successfully.

I have concerns about articles written about the "Closure of the Nursery" published recently in the Oxford Mail and the Sprout (a local parish magazine) – see attached. The article in the Sprout did not mention that the age range of the primary school was being extended to include 3 yr olds. I believe that this has purposely misinformed people and leading them to believe that there would be no nursery provision in Botley at all, which as we know, is not accurate. This consequently could have an adverse impact on the responses given to the consultation. I believe this negative press could also have a serious impact on the number of parents choosing ERNSCC for their child's nursery place this coming year. This would obviously have a direct impact on funding, putting further pressure on finances, which could have so easily been avoided by complete and honest information being shared in the first place.

To conclude, I support the LA proposal to merge Botley Primary School with Elms Road Nursery School and Children's Centre. One headteacher of a merged school will bring about strong and clear leadership for all staff, children and their families in the Botley area.

Alison Marsh
Headteacher