

ST MARY'S GOVERNORS' NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2013

DEAR PARENTS & CARERS,

Proposed Expansion.

The issue of whether the school should move to two forms of entry has been on the Governors' agenda for a considerable period of time. We went to consultation in 2009 but at that time the

for offices. Since 2009 there has been a growing need for places in the central part of Hounslow.

At St Mary's we have long felt that our status as a 1 form entry primary is not



Local Authority chose to expand Isleworth Town and reuse Smallberry Green's 2 Form Entry capacity which had been used by Hounslow

tenable.

There are 3 main reasons for our thinking:

GOVERNING BODY

There are a number of vacancies on the GB for parent and foundation governors.

If you are interested in joining the GB please speak to Mr. Marsh

- **Mr. F. Marsh (Headteacher) -**
- **Mrs. C. Kissinger (Elected Teacher Governor)**
- **Mrs. J. Corley, (Foundation Governor – Chair)**
- **Mr. D Alison (Parent Elected Governor)**
- **Mr. C. Lucas (Foundation Governor)**
- **Dr Jim Park (LEA Governor)**
- **Fr. S. Hasker (Foundation Governor)**

The first is that we are not able to offer places to the majority of the Catholic children living in the 3 parishes that we serve. We have regularly had over 100 Catholic applicants for our 30 places. This leads to Catholic children attending community schools often against their parents' wishes. Catholic schools are part of

the Church and as Governors we are very aware that we are currently not able to do all that we can in building God's Kingdom by providing good quality Catholic education to all children of Catholic families.

Our second reason is one of staff development and training. It is very difficult to grow and support staff in a 1FE school because there is no parallel teacher. Having more than 1 teacher in each year group enables them to work together for the benefit of the children. Teachers with different skills can work together in the same year group to bring the best out in each other. In this way children make better progress and learning improves.

Finance, **our third reason**, is becoming more and more of an issue under the new (from April 2013) funding formulae. It is a simple fact that without expansion we do not think that we will be able to operate without drastic cuts. In April new budget arrangements come into

force which mean a loss of funding for us. We expect further cuts in future years once the national funding formula is introduced.

Working with other schools who are involved in the expansion process, notably The Blue, we have put together this question and answer sheet. We hope that you will find it useful and we offer it to you in the hope that it will answer many of your questions.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1) Will the move to two forms or three forms of entry undermine the ethos and general feeling of the school? Our sense of community is one of the greatest strengths of the school and I would not like that to change.

A1) The above question we believe is one of the most important issues that needs to be addressed. Having spent considerable time meeting Headteachers who have already gone through

this process, it appears that if there is a commitment to keep a strong sense of community within the school, then it remains.

It all seems to depend upon the commitment of the leadership in the school and the school's Governing Body. Working together with the Headteacher the Governors form the strategic direction of the school and maintain and foster its ethos. Here at St Mary's we are all fully committed to maintaining what is special about our school.

Q2) Will there be any impact on general academic standards?

A2) There does not appear to be any evidence at all to suggest that there will be a negative impact on standards.

In fact the opposite could well be true. Secondary teachers have fed back that children from single form entry primaries can find the move to secondary schools particularly difficult. This

worries us as we want to prepare our children so that they can do their best at secondary school and so that they can go on to be productive, faith-filled members of society.

Our focus is on educating the whole child in doing their best across a range of subject areas not rehearsing children in doing tests.

Existing successful teaching and learning strategies would be carried forward as we expand. We are not solely focused on SATs results or league tables – but rather wish to enable children to do their best across the whole curriculum. At St Mary's we do not cut out non-core subjects in upper Juniors in order to focus solely on maths and English nor do we start the preparation for the tests by using past papers early in the year. There is some preparation but this is not usual until after the spring term of Y6.

Q3) Will there be any reduction in facilities as there

will be more children using the facilities?

A3) We will work to ensure that any plan has the exact opposite. We want to use this opportunity to build for the best so that we can provide more facilities for the children and this is one of the very exciting issues about the project. Expansion will greatly enhance our facilities and indicators are that the school will have considerably enhanced facilities.

Although there are no concrete plans at present it is our intention to ensure that the needs of all of the children are at the centre of the proposals.

Q4) Admissions: this has always been a real problem for the school and how will expansion affect this situation?

A4) One of the core reasons for this proposal is the unacceptable level of over subscription that we now face.

Year on year practicing Catholics have not been

able to get places in our school. Our founding documents state what we serve and offer places to Catholic children living in the parishes of Our Lady of Sorrows and St Bridget's, Isleworth, St Vincent De Paul, Osterley and St Margaret's, Twickenham. Over recent years we have been frustrated to not be able to offer places to children who do not live on the doorstep of the school.

There is a considerable shortage of Catholic primary places in Hounslow and this means that large numbers of Catholic children have to go to community schools. As a Catholic school, and part of the Church, we are assigned responsibility to our Catholic community to support their Catholic school:

“The sacred Synod (Vatican II) earnestly exhorts the pastors of the church and all the faithful to spare no sacrifice in helping Catholic schools to become increasingly effective, especially in caring for the poor, for those who are

without the help and affection of family and those who do not have the Faith.”

Documents of Vatican II vol.1: Christian Education: Gravissimum Educationis pp.734-735

As Governors we recognize that Church schools have an important role in bringing all people (children and parents) back to faith. At the moment we are not able to offer places to any child who is not baptised and who does not go to Church already.

Q5) Couldn't the London Borough of Hounslow or the Diocese build a new Catholic school?

A5) Unfortunately there is a sizable number of people who are against faith-based schools and in particular Catholic schools. This is evident from the 20 year + struggle that this still ongoing in Richmond. There the Catholic community is coming to the end of an incredibly long process and

a new secondary and primary are being built.

In addition, under new Government laws, any new school must be an Academy or Free school. It must also take 50% of its children from outside the faith community. This ruling means that the Archdiocese of Westminster trustees are not able to authorise any new schools – even if funding were available.

Q6) Are there any financial considerations to be taken into account?

A6) Though we have managed to survive financially in the past (this has mainly been due to additional financial support from the PTA) we are, as a one form of entry, in a precarious position.

Due to the way in which schools are funded, a school of more forms of entry is a far more economically viable proposition. Expansion will secure the future of the school and the future of Catholic education in our area.

Q7) Will we still be able to attract staff of the highest calibre?

A7) There are considerable advantages regarding staffing if we move to a school of two forms of entry.

These are due to the following:

As more and more schools become at least two forms of entry, then more aspiring teachers will look to work in a school of at least two classes per year group. This will prepare them for the next stage in their career.

It will be easier to retain staff if we are a school of two forms of entry as there will be greater opportunities for career development within the school. We have lost some outstanding teachers in the past because of our limitations in terms of career enhancement.

Year group teachers would plan together and

many staff feel this is a very positive move.

Q8) As my child moves through will they stay in the same class every year or will classes be regrouped?

A8) For many members of the community this question will not apply as we intend to grow by taking the extra classes only in Reception. Hence, this will not apply to current children from Reception class onwards.

However, it will be our intention to retain the possibility of moving children from class to class only if we feel this is in the best interest of the child.

Q9) Will the classes be streamed?

A9) We will not stream the classes but we will be able to group children with other children of similar need.

Q10) When will the nursery be going to two forms of entry?

A10) It does make sense to move Nursery to two forms of entry but as yet we have not agreed a time scale to this. We will be looking at this soon.

Q11) My son/daughter is in the Nursery. When they move to Reception, will they be mixed between different classes or will they be with the same children as last year?

A11) It will be our intention to mix the children and this decision will be made by the Headteacher and our Early Years Co-ordinator – Mrs Bedell in consultation with the Nursery teacher – Mrs Hurley.

Q12) How will expansion affect the playground?

A12) We already stagger playground time and this would continue. Any expansion will include new building work positioned so as not to take up existing play space. In fact we hope

to gain play space by removing huts. However, there are no plans at the moment and so we are not able to go into more details.

Q13) What will the level of disruption to the site be during the building process?

A13) Our intention is to minimise disruption and the vast amount of work will create a new buildings and hence, not affect the existing provision. However, there will always be disruption to a site during such a process but we are confident that this will be kept to a minimum. Headteachers who have been through this stage of development, state that it has little impact upon the children. It is amazing how resilient children are and how a building project can be brought into learning.

We do hope that you have found the above helpful. We realize there are likely to be many unanswered questions and I

look forward to hearing them in the weeks ahead

It is highly likely that you will think of issues that we have not and hence, please raise as many points as possible.

With such projects there will always be to a less or greater degree, a leap of

faith. However, we are absolutely sure that if we approach this as a united community, all working together, then we will ultimately be able to provide twice the number of children with an outstanding education - an education that will set children up for life and one that will be delivered in an overtly and

distinctly Catholic Christian context. An exciting prospect indeed!

As always, please do not hesitate to ask any question you wish concerning this matter. Thank you.

Jacqui Corley

Chair of Governors

