

Report on responses to consultation paper on foundation status

Following a decision reached on 13th June, the Governing Body has now published a statement of intent towards becoming a foundation school with effect from 1st September 2007. This means that we have now entered a formal statutory 4-week consultation period after which the Governing Body will take a final decision. In this report we address the key concerns raised during the informal consultation held in April-May. Many thanks to all who participated in the informal consultation through letter, email or attendance at the surgeries.

During the informal consultation period, 6% of the parent body responded, 70% of whom expressed concerns, as might well be expected for such an important issue. In addition, 13 responses were received from prospective parents, 10 from former parents, and 66 from others. We are also aware that significant numbers of staff are not in support of foundation status. We have examined all the concerns very carefully and believe that either they can be addressed in an acceptable way or are not borne out by the facts. We have had to be mindful of the fact that 94% of the parent body has not expressed a view.

Concerns about selection

The name used by the principal group who have voiced opposition to foundation status, "Keep Fortismere Comprehensive", suggests that some people have equated foundation status with selection and discrimination against less able children. *It has never been the intention of Fortismere's governing body or the Head that the school will become selective or discriminate against children with special education needs. Furthermore, foundation status does not give us such powers.* All schools are required to abide by the statutory Admissions Code. The only way that schools are permitted to select – other than through banding, which the Governors have expressed their opposition to - is through specialist school status. These specialist schools, whether foundation or community, can currently apply for the right to select a small percentage (up to 10%) of pupils by aptitude relating to their specialism. Even this is difficult and *we have no plans to do it.* Under the Admissions Code, the only oversubscription criterion the Governors could propose to change if they became the Admissions Authority would be the fourth criterion of proximity to school (the three first priorities being; children with Statements of Special Educational Needs, Looked After children and siblings); we have made absolutely clear that we want to *retain* that fourth criterion as we feel it is the appropriate one for the local community. Community or foundation, Fortismere will remain a *comprehensive* school for the local community. With respect to children with special needs, we are delighted that Ofsted found that SEN provision at the school has improved in the last twelve months; this is a result of hard work by the staff which will continue.

Concerns about staff issues

Under foundation status, the governing body becomes the direct employer of staff, and, understandably, this is the main area of concern for our staff. We have looked into this carefully, and believe that foundation status would bring extra flexibility which could benefit the school and the staff without detriment to the current and future staff. The Governing Body would be bound by national agreements for teaching staff and would follow existing best practice for support staff. We have no desire at all to undermine the excellent work that the whole staff provide and which has resulted in the progress reflected in our recent Ofsted – we are proud of what has been achieved and wish that to continue and grow. Interestingly, over the last year staff turnover has gone down in relation to previous years. Existing staff will have their contracts fully protected, and we now want to have the flexibility to retain and continue to recruit the very best staff.

Concerns about ownership of assets

Foundation status was first raised in the period of the interim head (2005-6) as a possible way forward on land and buildings issues. Foundation status will mean that the governing body itself owns the land and buildings. What the governing body intends to do with these powers was another concern for respondents. Under the current system, the local education authority has the power to sell off land. As a Foundation school, these decisions are in the school's control, although as the assets are community assets, should any disposals be considered, this must be done with the agreement of the local authority and there are third party referral procedures in the absence of agreement. We believe it is better for the governing body to be able to decide what it wishes to do with its assets. We have no intention of selling off land and foundation status would ensure that no one else could make such a decision. In addition foundation status will bring the great advantage of making our negotiating position stronger with Jarvis, the school's PFI contractor.

Concerns about separation of the school from other schools

Foundation status for schools is becoming increasingly common, as is the case for hospitals. The DfES has told us that it is a central plank of government policy that all schools should move to self-governing status over the next 5-10 years. Most local education authorities accommodate the change without great concern: foundation schools sit happily, and actively, within the wider community of borough schools. In Cambridge a high achieving school which became a foundation school two years ago has taken on responsibility for the development of a poorly performing local school. In Brent, all the schools have become foundation schools and attainment has improved. The Governing Body want to make it clear that neither they nor the senior management team of Fortismere wish to retreat from the close links that exist with Haringey's community of schools – quite the contrary, we are eager to make them more effective.

Concerns about process

Some respondents have concerns about the process. We are sorry that our consideration of this issue has caused so much anxiety in the school

community. As governors we have tried hard to be transparent and sufficiently explanatory of our thinking: obviously, for some parents, we have not succeeded. As requested by Ofsted in our recent school inspection, the school plans to improve its relations and communications with parents, as do the governors. If you have suggestions for good communication, we would be very grateful to hear from you.

It is unusual for foundation status consultations to be as contentious as ours has been. As governors, we have tried to disentangle concerns about other changes at the school from actual concerns about foundation status. Against this very tense background, we have had to fulfill our duty to do the best for the school – its pupils and staff. The governing body believes that foundation status is the optimum governance model for the school, one that will enable the Head to achieve the school's vision more easily, and has voted by a two-thirds majority to continue down this path.

No final decision has been made but we do wish to draw this consultation process to a conclusion. I encourage all of you, over the next four weeks, to inform us of your views on our proposal. You can write to us, at the school, from which you can also obtain a full copy of the statutory proposal. Please ensure we receive your views, in writing, to The Fortismere Governing Body, Fortismere, Tetherdown, London N10 1NE by no later than **16th July 2007**. The governing body will meet at the end of the term to decide whether to action the proposal, giving consideration to the views we have received during the next four weeks. Further information is available on the school website at www.fortismere.haringey.sch.uk.

Jane Farrell, Chair of Governors