

## Outcome of re-opened consultation at Sparkenhoe Primary School

In January 2019 the Governing Body at Sparkenhoe Primary School received a complaint about the adequacy of the public consultation which had closed on 19 October 2018. After investigation and consideration by an independent panel of governors from other schools, the Governing Body found that a significant minority of parents without strong English language skills had not been able to access the consultation (other elements of the complaint were dismissed by the panel). The Sparkenhoe Governing Body re-opened their consultation in order to ensure that, so far as reasonably possible, those parents without strong English language skills were able to access the information and provide their views.

The project Steering and Interim Board for the four schools considered whether similar issues of access for those without strong English language may have affected the consultations at the other schools, but noted that live translation during all of the meetings at the other schools had been more successful than at Sparkenhoe.

The following is a summary of the re-opened consultation:

### Re-opening of the consultation

A brief note was sent home to all parents of Sparkenhoe School on 29 January 2019 informing them that the consultation had re-opened and confirmation of the date and times of the parents' consultation meetings. This was translated into English and 5 home languages. A fuller consultation letter and frequently asked questions (FAQs) was sent to all parents again in English and 5 home languages on 01 February 2019.

The consultation re-opened on 29 January and closed on 15 February 2019.

### Re-opened consultation - Pre-meeting communications

Between 01 February and 08 February staff at the school spoke to parents who the school had identified as parents who may not be able to access English at school drop off and collection times. This was done to confirm they had received the letters and information, understood its contents and to clarify attendance at either of the meetings or address any queries they raised at that time. The following summarises this engagement and the feedback gathered;

- 320 families (592 parents) received the invitation - 86 reply slips were returned of which 48% expressed an interest in attend one or both meetings and 50% did not wish to attend a meeting
- The school identified those parents with little or no English and those who could possibly struggle to read English. Their home languages are: Bengali, Urdu, Gujarati, Hindi and Punjabi. Where these parents had not returned a reply slip they were approached and spoken to in their home languages to confirm receipt of the information and interest in attending a meeting and the opportunity to raise questions or concerns. Their responses were recorded. Most parents had no concerns or worries. One parent gave written feedback.
  - 36 parents were approached in home language:
  - 69% gave positive feedback;
  - 11% indicated they would attend the meeting,
  - 11% said they did not want to attend,
  - 8% were either unsure, gave written feedback or had attended the meeting at school and the church
- Three parents approached the head teacher to ask for more information before the meetings. Two gave written feedback, one then attended the meeting.

## Re-opened consultation – Parent consultation meetings

Two parents' consultation meetings ran on Mon 11 February at 8.45 am and 5.00 pm. The following summarises this engagement;

### Parent's consultation meeting – morning

There were 36 attendees. This was a mix of those who had indicated they would attend and those that had not.

Information was presented by the head teacher. Translations were conducted after each slide and additional comments or information the headteacher added were translated. This was followed by discussions at tables and opportunities for parents to ask questions to senior leaders, the chair of governors, the CEO designate and the solicitor to the trust. Questions and answers were translated where required.

There were 5 table discussions. Parents accessed translators in Somali; Bengali; Gujarati; and Urdu.

There were questions on the following areas;

- regarding any changes to the daily running of the school, e.g. uniform etc.
- concerns regarding teachers being made to move to other schools and changes that had been seen at another local academy.
- regarding the funding and concerns that the school would have to give their money to other schools.
- about the CEO and DFO salaries and them being given big pay rises in the future and questions about accountability.

The majority of parents were happy with responses and any extra information given to the questions and concerns raised.

Some questions which had not been asked on all tables were then shared with everyone at the end.

On four tables the general feedback was all positive and parents felt their questions had been answered and concerns addressed.

On one table feedback was negative.

### Parent's consultation meeting – evening

There were 14 attendees. This was a mix of those who had indicated they would attend and those that had not.

Information was presented by the head teacher and translation was given during the presentation. This was followed by discussions at tables and opportunities for parents to ask questions to senior leaders, the chair of governors, the CEO designate and the solicitor to the trust. Questions and answers were translated where required.

There were 4 table discussions. One parent accessed a translator in Bengali.

There were questions on the following areas;

- about CEO and DFO salaries
- about the potential for savings
- about the member and trustee recruitment process and the skills of the trustees and members.
- concerns were raised about if things go wrong and about unqualified teachers.

On three tables the general feedback was all positive.

On one table feedback was negative.

**Re-opened consultation – Feedback gathered following the above consultation events**

Following the two additional consultation meetings written feedback was received from 19 parents.

- 89% gave positive feedback;
- 11% were opposed to the proposal.

Additionally:

- Two parents gave written feedback following requests for meetings. Both were positive.
- One gave written feedback after being spoken to in Urdu. This was neutral.
- An email opposing the proposals was sent to 2 Sparkenhoe governors and as a letter to 6 Sparkenhoe governors and 2 associate members from a parent.
- An email opposing the proposals was sent to four Sparkenhoe governors from a parent.
- A petition was delivered to the school at 6pm on the evening of Friday 15 February. It contained 120 signatures. However, on close inspection c.10 of the names/signatures were duplicated and a further c.10 were not parents of children at the school. Those signatures that were from parents equated to about 17% of the total parent numbers.

**Local targeted anti-academy campaign and parental concerns**

During the consultation meetings above the school became aware of an ongoing anti-academy campaign which appeared to be led by a very small number of parents and backed by the anti-academies alliance. Their activities included:

- During the morning consultation meeting, parents were openly invited by those leading the anti-academy campaign to an alternative meeting straight after the consultation meeting where there would be speakers from organisations including the anti-academies alliance.
- Parents were targeted every day during the week beginning 11 February 2019, some repeatedly, both on the school premises and outside school and were asked to sign a petition against the academy plans.

A number of concerns were raised with the school by parents about the petition and the anti-academy campaign:

- One parent gave written feedback which detailed concerns about being approached about the petition.
- Feedback has been received from staff and parents about their concerns about being approached about the petition.
- Other parents have approached members of staff both before and after the meeting to express concern regarding the petition and anti-academy campaign. Feedback has been collated by the members of staff who were spoken to by parents concerned.

**Re-opened Consultation outcome**

The re-opened consultation closed on 15 February 2019. An extraordinary governing body meeting was held at Sparkenhoe School on the morning of 26 February 2019 to fully consider the consultation outcomes before considering whether to move forward with their conversion and join the Attenborough Learning Trust.