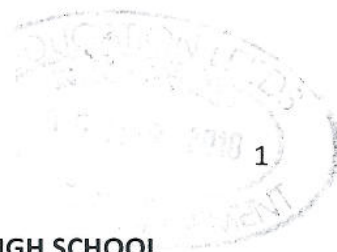


Appendix 4

Copy of Alternative Proposal from Governing Body



RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION OVER THE FUTURE OF PRIMROSE HIGH SCHOOL

This document is prepared on behalf of the Governors of PHS (currently part of the Central Leeds Learning Federation).

A compelling proposal for an alternative structural solution to the future of Primrose.

Over the last few years Primrose has undergone significant changes which have impacted on its capacity to make significant improvements:

- A new PFI build 4 years ago left the school with a legacy of difficulties not of its own making. The build was handed over with significant deficiencies that hampered effective curriculum delivery and basic management functions. There was initially no ICT provision which constrained introduction of effective records of student progress, as well as the development of their ICT skills and use to support research studies. It prevented the school from keeping accurate attendance figures for example and monitoring student performance effectively. It also created a budget deficit as monies had to be found to provide the school with basic ICT systems and equipment.
- The school faced numerous initial teething problems, the most significant of which eventually led to repeated school closures due to flooding and roof defects which clearly hampered pupils' academic progress. Without CCTV or equivalent internal monitoring system or with rooms lacking locks, behaviour deteriorated. The incidence of theft was very high, and the insurance cover provided through PFI did not cover the theft of many items, including lap tops, resulting in a further increase to the deficit budget, and significantly hampering the schools ability to teach using these essential resources.
- The planned provision for the new school was 750 students but the roll rapidly increased to 889. This was to accommodate students from neighbouring schools which closed as well as a number of new entrants who were new to the country and in many cases had very little English. A further issue related to the opening of a new Academy in the vicinity which instituted a policy leading to very high exclusion figures. Primrose High School was required to take many of these pupils at a time when it was coping with exceptionally challenging circumstances. Many of these pupils had challenging behaviour and a limited and varied educational history.
- The school entered into a Federation with City of Leeds School. This then led to significant changes in the structure of the staffing, which took years to first reach a consensus and then implement, with staff taking on federation wide responsibilities. Although this provided some benefits it meant that Primrose students did not always have the presence on the ground of the same senior leaders to whom they were accountable. Whilst the restructure was taking place, the focus was taken off the core responsibility of school: standards and whilst staffing collaboration was beneficial, as was the wider curriculum that could be

offered, it has now been recognised by Education Leeds that it may have been better to have partnered PHS with a school that was not facing many of the same challenges.

- The school/Federation has also suffered with sickness and ill health and reduced capacity in senior leadership.

Against that background it has taken the school several years to bed down and this in part explains that progress may not have been as rapid as the Council, or the school, may have liked.

However the school has recently made significant changes and improvements to the senior leadership team and is benefitting from support from a national challenge adviser, school improvement partner and leadership partner. In the last year the school has demonstrated some significant improvements in all aspects:

- The leadership team has been strengthened and is now acting effectively. The National Challenge adviser reported in December that *"The new Headteacher joined the school as an additional Deputy Head to provide increased leadership capacity. She became Associate Head in April 2009 and has made significant improvements."*
- Further in January reports indicated that, *"the restructure of leadership responsibilities is beginning to have an impact."*
- The quality of classroom practice has shown a significant improvement in the last year. A rigorous system of evaluation of teaching and learning standards implemented by the current leadership shows that the number of lessons judged to be satisfactory or better has increased by 12% in the last year.
- Data is now used effectively as a tool to drive up standards. Again National Challenge reports *"The use of data within the school has improved and the school now has better mechanisms for monitoring the progress of student groups."*
- Recent monitoring visits by Regional National Strategies officials have endorsed significant improvements in the standards of behaviour in school.
- Attendance despite the outbreak of swine flu which hit the school and the severe weather in January is at its highest level and continues to improve.
- Wide ranging intervention strategies have been introduced by the current leadership, which are impacting on standards. Close monitoring indicates that the school will have record results this year and is on track to achieve the 2011 National Challenge targets.

All these improvements are likely to continue and accelerate if the school is granted a period of stability. A further substantial change like an academy would mean that yet again staff will be distracted from the main thrust of school improvement.

This is not to say that the school is complacent. It is very keen to work with new partners and sponsors in areas of teaching and learning, leadership, curriculum and improving attainment including the co-operative group and Leeds City College and Leeds Metropolitan University. However, the school as it is currently enjoys the support of its local community and is full. It has had satisfactory OFSTED reports and has never been placed in special measures or any like category. It is acknowledged that whilst behaviour was raised as a concern last year rapid and significant improvements have been made to behaviour and attendance at the school and these need to be continued.

It is submitted that there is no compelling reason to close the school and replace it with an academy. Indeed such a change would only be detrimental to the ongoing school improvement that is taking place.

The co-operative group have a strong and positive ethos but are offering no money to the school and have as yet no proven track record in running an academy or indeed any educational establishment.

No one from the community as yet spoken in favour of an academy and if this change goes ahead it is likely the Academy would lose the support of the community. It will also be detrimental to parental choice as parents in the centre/east regions of Leeds will only have academies to choose from. During the public consultation meeting it became apparent that this was a big issue for parents and the Government's stated objective is that the UK school system should become more diverse.

It is also noted that Shakespeare Primary school is a significant partner with Primrose and we benefit from sharing the building/campus and the through school style transition classes we are able to offer. That risks being damaged or destroyed by a change to Academy status as the Academy partners have no proposals for a through school or indeed any arrangement with Shakespeare. There are significant practical obstacles in the way of changing Primrose into an Academy. The school is a PFI build and is not owned by Education Leeds. Money spent on the legal fees required to disentangle the Education Authority from the 20+ year contract with the private contractor, as well as the cost of buying the premises, would be better spent on the education of the students. It is difficult to conceive of the site easily being split into 2 separate owners particularly when the management of Shakespeare Primary School and the Children's Centre is carried out from the MITIE premise within Primrose.

It is submitted that the school should be allowed to grow as an extended school and continue to develop its partnership with primary and other secondary schools, as well as Leeds City College and, if they still wish to offer professional help and support then such support from the Co-operative Group would of course be most welcome. The school still has plans to bid for specialist status. (the application was completed but has been held up due to the possible change in status of the organisation, thus funding from this source has not been available constraining spending on further improving teaching and

learning and raising standards.) It is believed that support that is welcomed and received from the ground up is likely to be more successful where it is invited by the community, than if it is 'imposed' under the umbrella of an Academy that will, as has become rapidly apparent, not be welcomed by the local community.

However, our alternative proposal whilst calling for stability is not about the status quo. Structural solutions put forward by both Education Leeds as well as alternative proposals from the Governors and stakeholders all necessitate the dissolution of the Federation. This would then in turn mean a requirement for a new governing body for Primrose, possibly as a Trust School. That governing body should however, in line with the wishes of the community, continue to include representatives of local councillors, parents and community groups – but we would also welcome a stronger presence from supporting partners on the governing board.

In short it is not seen that the imposition of an Academy will bring with it anything that cannot already be achieved by building partnerships alongside the existing management of the school, which ensure sustained school improvement.

This plan is commended to Education Leeds and the Executive Board of the Leeds City Council.

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To:
The Chief Executive,
Education Leeds,
FAO: School Organisation Team
9th Floor West
Merrion House
110 Merrion Centre
Leeds
LS2 8DT.

educ.school.organisation@educationleeds.co.uk

Any questions about this proposal should be addressed to the Chair of Governors
c/o Primrose High School