
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF EDUCATION LEEDS

EXECUTIVE BOARD: 7 April 2010

SUBJECT: Outcome of consultation on the provision of girls-only education in Leeds

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

- 1.1 This report informs the Executive Board of the outcome of the city-wide public consultation on the future of the provision of government funded, girls-only, secondary education in Leeds.

2 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 At its meeting in January 2010, the Executive Board approved a public consultation on a proposal to stop providing girls-only education in Leeds. The Executive Board approved this consultation in response to concerns about closing the one remaining girls-only school in Leeds. The council wished to first determine the need across the city from parents for single sex education for girls.
- 2.2 The consultation ran from 7 January to 5 March 2010 and has been one of the largest scale public consultations on a single educational issue that Leeds has held in the last ten years. The consultation document set out:
- what the consultation was about;
 - why the council was proposing to stop providing girls-only education; and
 - how people could comment.
- 2.3 The context for this consultation is that at present, not enough parents in Leeds are choosing single sex education for their daughters. The number of first preferences for the one remaining girls-only school in Leeds has dropped from 127 in the 2003/04 academic year to 63 in 2009/10.
- 2.4 Education is the key to improving life chances for children and young people in Leeds. This means we need good, inclusive and improving schools. We have to make sure that every school is strongly supported and valued by parents, carers and its local community. At the moment, taking parental preference in Year 6 as the key data, parents and carers in Leeds are not expressing a strong preference for girls-only education.
- 2.5 During the consultation the following issues emerged:
- a significant number of respondents focused on the future of Parklands

Girls' High School. Executive Board is receiving another report at this meeting that considers those issues;

- the overall level of response city-wide was low with no significant demand for girls-only provision emerging as a result of the consultation;
- the quality of education is more important than single sex provision even when considering the faith perspective, although a choice is preferred;
- there were suggestions that in the future consideration could be given to providing a central location for any single sex provision which might make it more accessible to families in different parts of the city;
- there were concerns about the transition arrangements available to those families who have already specifically chosen girls-only education and these are considered in a separate report;
- a number of respondents commented on low attendance at the public meetings and perceived this as linked to insufficient promotion of the consultation to particular communities of Leeds.

2.6 **Conclusions**

2.61 This consultation has not exposed any new demand for girls-only education. Parents across the city who participated in the consultation emphasised that they preferred high quality provision. This supports the principle of ensuring good schools, improving schools and inclusive schools in Leeds.

2.62 Those who contributed to the consultation often held strong views that there should be some choice in their local area for those parents or carers who wish to express a preference for girls-only provision. The Executive Board may wish to consider whether long term feasibility work should be undertaken over the next eighteen months to assess any prospective viability in partnership with specific local communities such as the Muslim community.

3.0 **Resource Implications**

3.1 If the Executive Board decides to continue the provision of girls-only education in the city and decides to close Parklands Girls' High School and replace it with a co-educational academy, the council would need to consider how and where it would re-provide girls-only education.

4.0 **Recommendations**

4.1 The Executive Board is asked to:

- (i) note the outcome of the consultation to stop providing girls-only secondary education in Leeds.
- (ii) stop providing girls-only secondary education at Parklands Girls High School in Leeds.
- (iii) receive a further report as soon as possible on the feasibility of making single sex education available for girls in a more central location.

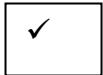
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Electoral Wards Affected:

All



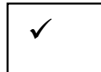
Specific Implications For:

Equality & Diversity

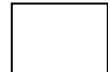
Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call-in



Not Eligible for Call-in
(Details contained in the Report)



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- 2.2 The consultation ran from 7 January to 5 March 2010 and has been one of the largest scale public consultations on a single educational issue that Leeds has held in the last ten years. The consultation document set out:
- what the consultation was about;
 - why the council was proposing to stop providing girls-only education; and
 - how people could comment.
- 2.3 The context for this consultation is that at present, not enough parents in Leeds

are choosing single sex education for their daughters. The number of first preferences for the one remaining girls-only school in Leeds has dropped from 127 in the 2003/04 academic year to 63 in 2009/10. More recent first preferences for 2010/11 totalled 49 indicating a long term decline in the need for girls-only provision.

- 2.4 Education is the key to improving life chances for children and young people in Leeds. This means we need good, inclusive and improving schools. We have to make sure that every school is strongly supported and valued by parents, carers and its local community. At the moment, taking parental preference in Year 6 as the key data, parents and carers in Leeds are not making a strong preference for girls-only education.
- 2.5 Details of the consultees can be found in Appendix 1. A total of ten public meetings were held in different venues across the city including two in the city centre.
- 2.6 In response to a request from the community, two additional community meetings were held during school hours for women-only. Young people were surveyed at both the Ice Cube in Millennium Square during half-term and at the Leeds Health and Wellbeing celebration on 24 February. A focused meeting with leaders of the Leeds mosques was held on 10th March at their request. (17 attended).
- 2.7 In total, attendance at the various meetings was approximately 167 people (some of these represent attendance at more than one meeting). Overall the participants included teaching staff, students, governors, parents and local residents, journalists, young people and leaders of the Leeds mosques. A total of 25 written responses were received, (including one petition with 1,079 signatures). Of the small number of responses received none were in support of the proposal to stop girls-only education, and all were against. However by contrast two surveys of the views of pupils were conducted in which 32 supported the proposal, 24 opposed it with 23 unsure.

3.0 THE MAIN ISSUES

- 3.1 The main issues have been identified from all of the meetings and written submissions.
- 3.2 During the consultation the following issues emerged:
- a significant number of respondents focused on the future of Parklands Girls' High School which is subject to a separate paper.
 - the overall level of response city-wide was low with no significant demand from across the city for girls-only provision emerging as a result of the consultation;
 - the quality of education is more important than single sex provision even when considering the faith perspective, although a choice is preferred;
 - there were suggestions that in the future consideration could be given to providing a central location for any single sex provision which might make it more accessible to other families living near or in the city centre;
 - there were concerns about the transition arrangements available to those families who have already specifically chosen girls-only education and these are considered in a separate report;
 - a number of respondents commented on low attendance at the public meetings and perceived this as linked to insufficient promotion of the consultation to particular communities in Leeds.

3.3 A full summary of the consultation responses is provided in Appendix 3. All responses can be found at www.educationleeds.co.uk/schoolorganisation. The meeting notes are not intended to be a verbatim account, but do represent the questions and views raised throughout the process, either in writing, or during the formal consultation meetings. Six main themes, are provided below.

3.4.1 **Quality**

The quality and standard of the education offered by a school was the main factor influencing parents' choice of a secondary school for their daughter. Parents cited the decline in academic standards at the one remaining girls-only school in Leeds as a contributing factor for not choosing girls-only education for their daughter. There was a small number of respondents who indicated that they had chosen to send their daughters to independent girls-only schools either in, or outside of Leeds as a result. Some, though not all, of these respondents had chosen independent faith schools for their daughters.

3.4.2 **Location**

The location of the only girls-only high school was cited as a factor in determining whether or not parents would make a preference for girls-only education for their daughter. The location was not considered to be accessible for all, particularly for families living in the south of the city. Some respondents raised concerns about the safety of girls travelling across the city to attend a girls-only school situated in the east of Leeds, particularly as they perceive transport links for that journey to be fragmented. There were suggestions that if the provision was located in the centre of the city, there might be a higher demand for girls-only education.

3.4.3 **Level of Interest from the community.**

Despite the scale of the consultation, the overall attendance at the public meetings was low. At five of the meetings there were no members of the public present, suggesting a lack of interest in the subject of girls-only education in those parts of the city.

The most well attended meeting was the one held at Parklands Girls' High School with the majority of the audience made up of students, staff, governors and parents connected to the school. The main topic of conversation was what was happening to Parklands High School rather than girls-only provision. The second most well attended meeting was the community meeting for women-only held at the Bangladeshi Community Centre facilitated by the Shantona Women's Centre in Harehills.

The level of interest at these two meetings would suggest that the main demand for girls-only education is coming from the community who live nearest to Parklands Girls' High School who choose the school because it is their nearest school; and the Muslim community who want the option of single sex education for faith reasons. It is important to the leaders of the Leeds Mosques for faith reasons that a large diverse city like Leeds provides the choice for parents of girls-only education.

3.4.4 **Supporting parental preference**

The majority of the girls whose parents/carers have previously expressed a preference for girls-only education and whose daughters are currently attending the girls-only school are from a white-British background and local to the school. Most of the respondents, including those from communities whose faith encourages single sex education, put quality first, above single sex education if they had to make a choice between the two. However, parents and carers would

prefer not to choose between their faith and high quality education for their daughters. Representatives from the Leeds' mosques and other leaders from the Muslim community expressed concern at the possible removal of choice of girls-only provision in the city.

3.4.5 **Advantages for girls**

Throughout the consultation period, a few respondents cited research that suggested that girls achieve more academically and socially in girls-only schools. While there is a body of research evidence that supports this view, there is also a body of research evidence that indicates that the key factors in determining exam success are pupil characteristics, socio-economic background and the quality of teachers rather than the gender of the schools intake. Furthermore there is no evidence in Leeds that girls are underachieving in co-educational schools. Indeed the views of pupils who surveyed also supported the proposal to stop girls-only provision.

3.5 **Conclusions**

3.5.1 This consultation has not exposed any new demand for girls-only education. Parents across the city who participated in the consultation emphasised that they preferred high quality provision. This supports the principle of ensuring good schools, improving schools and inclusive schools in Leeds.

3.5.2 Those who contributed to the consultation often held strong views that there should be some choice in their local area for those parents or carers who wish to express a preference for girls-only provision. The Executive Board may wish to consider whether longer term feasibility work should be undertaken over the next eighteen months to assess any prospective viability in partnership with specific local communities such as the Muslim community. This might result in future proposals. (see 5.1.2)

4. **IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNCIL POLICY AND GOVERNANCE**

4.1 Any decision to establish girls-only education on a site other than the Parklands site would change the priority areas for all of the surrounding secondary schools. Such changes would need to be reflected in the published admission arrangements for the year they were to be introduced.

5.0 **LEGAL AND RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 **Statutory implications**

5.1.1 The local authority has a duty to keep under review all educational provision to make sure that it is meeting the needs of children and young people. The principle of maintaining or ceasing to maintain girls-only provision is a decision which rests with the local authority.

5.1.2 However, if at any time the local authority chooses to establish or to continue to provide girls-only education on a new site then this would require further consultation and a statutory process around specific proposals, including a competition to determine who would run such provision.

5.2 **Resource implications**

5.2.1 There is no immediate resource implication of ceasing to maintain girls-only provision in Leeds apart from those outlined in the accompanying report on Parklands Girls High School. However if the Executive Board decides to continue

the provision of girls-only education in the city and decides to close Parklands Girls' High School and replace it with a co-educational academy, the local authority would need to consider how and where it would re-provide girls-only education.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The Executive Board is asked to:
- i. note the outcome of the consultation to stop providing girls-only secondary education in Leeds.
 - ii. stop providing girls-only secondary education at Parklands Girls High School in Leeds.
 - iii. receive a further report as soon as possible on the feasibility of making single sex education available for girls in a more central location.

7 BACKGROUND REPORTS

Executive Board January 2009 – The National Challenge and structural change to secondary provision in Leeds Progress Report

Executive Board March 2009 – The National Challenge and Structural Change to Secondary Provision in Leeds

Executive Board October 2009 - The National Challenge and Structural Change to Secondary Provision in Leeds

Executive Board January 2010 - The future of Primrose, City of Leeds, Parklands Girls' High Schools, and of girls-only secondary education in Leeds

Appendix 1 List of consultees

Schools	
All schools	Letter home to distribute, posters advertising meetings, copies of consultation booklet, request to advertise in all school communications
Parklands	Personal copy of consultation booklet for each pupil/family, member of staff and governor, meetings with staff, governors and public.
14-19 providers	Link to electronic copy of booklet
Young people	Survey of young people: 14-19 year olds at Ice Cube, Millennium Square, during half term 9-14 year olds at healthy schools celebration event
Wider community	
Public meetings	Ten public meetings distributed across the city
Women only meetings	Bangladeshi centre Hamara Centre
Faith groups	Circulated consultation booklet and request to promote consultation through many groups, including: Leeds Faith Forum, Concord Leeds, Leeds Association of Mosques, Leeds Voice, Hamara Centre Held separate meeting with councillors, representatives from Mosques across Leeds and of others representing Leeds Muslim community
All libraries	Booklets and posters
All community centres	Booklets and posters
All one stop shops	Booklets and posters
Local media/public	Media releases marking beginning of consultation period Generated widespread media coverage including Yorkshire Evening Post, BBC Radio Leeds, Guardian Leeds, Yorkshire Post and Radio Asian Fever, supplemented by: Display advert in YEP detailing public meetings Announcements advertising public meetings on Sunrise Radio
Education Leeds website and infobase	Details and consultation document uploaded on school organisation team's page News item – refreshed regularly throughout process
Leeds City Council website	News item at beginning of consultation period and refreshed throughout
Leeds City Council talkingpoint	Details of consultation
Elected representatives	
Ward members – directly affected wards	Verbal briefing Invite to public meeting Copy of consultation booklet and covering letter
Ward members – city wide	Copy of consultation booklet and covering letter
Local MP	Copy of consultation booklet Electronic copy to all MPs
Leeds City Council colleagues	
Corporate leadership team	Email and link to consultation document
Children's services leadership team	Email and link to consultation document
Children's services comms network	Email and link to consultation document, request to promote through organisations
Locality enablers	Link to consultation document and response forms
Area management team	Link to consultation document and response forms
Education Leeds	
All colleagues	Link to consultation document and response forms Email to all heads of service to disseminate
Board	Consultation booklet and covering letter
Leadership teams	Consultation booklet and covering letter
Other statutory consultees	
Neighbouring LEAs	Email and link to consultation document
Learning and Skills Council	Send link to details of consultation
Catholic Diocese	Hard copy of consultation document and covering letter

	Electronic link
Church of England Diocese	Hard copy of consultation document and covering letter Email and link to consultation booklet
Unions	Email and link to consultation booklet
Learning community	
Headteachers	Email and link to consultation booklet Article Headteacher update
Governors	Email and link to consultation booklet Article Governor update
Leeds race equality council	Email and link to consultation booklet
Chamber of commerce	Email and link to consultation document to president
Parents groups	Email and link to consultation document

Appendix 2 Summary of Respondents

Single Sex - Summary of respondents (letters and e-mails)	Total
Councillor	2
Local Resident	2
Parent	2
Parent/carer	2
Chair of Governors	1
Community Rep	1
Parent/governor	1
Staff	1
Unknown	13
Grand Total	25

Appendix 3 Summary of Consultation Responses

- 1 **Single sex**
About 150 people in total attended public meetings. There were 25 written responses all against the proposal and a petition of 1079 signatures
Two surveys asked young people if they thought there should be girls-only provision – the results were: Yes (24), No (32), Neutral (23). In addition there were 25 announcements on Sunrise Radio from 26/1/10 to 9/2/10 to publicise the consultation, in English, Urdu and Punjabi.
- 2 This summary is not intended to be a verbatim account, but does represent the questions and views raised throughout the process, either in writing, or during the formal consultation meetings. They have summarised and grouped, as a number of respondents, in several different meetings, asked very similar questions using slightly different words. In summarising the representations made, every effort has been made to reduce repetition without losing any of the points raised. Copies of the original responses and meeting minutes are available at www.educationleeds.co.uk/schoolorganisation. They are grouped into 6 main themes.
- 3 **Theme 1 Consultation issues**
 - 3.1 **Concerns that the public meetings were not well publicised and held at inconvenient times**
We publicised the consultation meetings through a variety of channels, (see appendix 1. In addition, the consultation received higher than usual coverage by the media. Public consultation meetings are normally held during the evening to encourage attendance from as many people who may have work commitments

during the day. We arranged a daytime meeting at a central location (Civic Hall) as part of the original schedule of meetings. In response to community requests, we arranged two further daytime meetings, one in the north and one in the south of the city, to hear the views of women with school aged children. Members of the public do not have to attend a public meeting to contribute to the consultation process. Their views are also accepted in writing, either by post or by email.

3.2 There should have been more consultation meetings in the Harehills area

We arranged the consultation meetings to cover a wide geographic spread across the city. In response to requests from the community, we arranged a further two meetings in Harehills at the Bangladeshi Centre.

3.3 The consultation is worthless as Education Leeds has already made up its mind

We are using the same process to conduct this consultation as we do for statutory consultations. This means that we consider all views before making a recommendation to the Executive Board who are responsible for making a decision.

3.4 Perceived shortcomings of the consultation document including misleading assertion that falling applications at Parklands equates to lack of demand for single sex provision

The information in the document is based on the data that is available to us from our co-ordination of Leeds school admissions. The admissions process gives us an opportunity to collect information about parental preferences for schools based in Leeds. Parents are asked to express a preference for named schools; parents are not asked to express a preference for either single sex or co-educational schools. As there is only one single sex school in Leeds we have included the data about that school's popularity amongst parents. The main reason for holding a separate consultation about single sex education for girls is to help us to understand the reason for the decline in parental preferences and whether or not any new or unmet demand for single sex education exists across the city.

3.5 The issues of girls-only provision and Parklands are inextricably linked

We recognise that for many respondents it may be difficult to separate the issue of girls-only provision and Parklands Girls' High School because Parklands is currently the only school providing single sex education in the city. However, the reason for holding a separate consultation is to help us to understand if there is a demand for girls-only education across the city, irrespective of whether Parklands Girls' High School exists. As the majority of the girls attending Parklands Girls' High School come from the area local to the school, it is reasonable to assume that parental preference is currently based on nearness to the school rather than the fact that it is a single sex school. We need to understand whether current or future parents in other areas of the city want girls-only education for their daughters.

4 Theme 2 Belief that single sex education is better

4.1 Assertion that girls generally do better in a single sex environment

The findings of research are mixed. There are studies which show that girls make better progress at girls-only schools, particularly girls with low results at Key Stage 2. However, it is difficult to isolate the fact that these are a self selected group who have deliberately chosen single sex education and have higher than average parental support. Many girls do equally well and better in co-educational schools. Other studies and opinions consider a wider view of education and suggest that girls from co-educational schools are better prepared to live and work in society, and cope with the pressures of life after school and in higher education. The

number of state schools where girls or boys are educated separately has fallen from over 2500 in the 1960's to about 400 today.

4.2 **Girls-only schools provide a safe environment, and are better for girls who suffer abuse or trauma**

It is extremely rare that a co-educational school does not provide a safe environment. They also have staff who are trained and very skilled at caring for and counselling young people. Schools are judged in their inspections on their ability to provide a safe environment and cater for special needs. Only one Leeds school is currently judged to need improvement in this area, and that is judged to be making good progress by Ofsted.

4.3 **Girls feel less pressure to conform, and are better able to fulfil their potential, or follow careers that have been seen as male-dominated**

We note this opinion. However, there is no evidence in Leeds that girls are underachieving or not fulfilling their potential in co-educational schools.

4.4 **Girls at Parklands are successful and confident**

We note this opinion. Girls at other schools in Leeds are also successful and confident.

5 **Theme 3 Parents should have choice**

5.1 **Belief that parents have or should have the right to send their children to single sex schools**

We note this opinion. There is no legal requirement for the council to provide single sex education. We are holding this consultation to help us to understand the level of demand for girls-only education across the city.

5.2 **The Every Child Matters agenda surely demands option of single sex provision**

We note this opinion. There is no legal requirement under the Children Act for councils to provide single sex education.

6 **Theme 4 provision should be accessible**

6.1 **A single sex school for the city should be accessible, ideally in a central site**

We are aware that the majority of parents expressing a preference for the daughters to attend the only single sex school are local to the school. One of the reasons we are holding the consultation is to help us to understand whether factors such as changed location of girls-only provision would increase its popularity amongst parents and girls in the city.

6.2 **The location of the current girls' school in a deprived area is believed to be a factor in low demand. Location in east of city virtually precludes it as an option for south and west of the city.**

Some of our most successful and popular schools are located in parts of the city that have the most complex social issues. Whether factors such as changed location of girls-only provision would increase its popularity amongst parents and girls in the city is a point we are seeking to test through this consultation.

7 **Theme 5 Religious/cultural arguments**

7.1 **If parent's religious beliefs prioritise separate education for girls, Education Leeds should provide it**

We note this opinion. There is no legal requirement for the council to provide single sex education on grounds of faith.

7.2 **Assertion that Muslim families in Leeds want single sex education**

We note this opinion. There is no legal requirement for the council to provide single sex education. There are more girls of the Muslim faith attending co-educational schools in Leeds than attend the one girls-only school.

8 Theme 6 Parklands and single sex education

8.1 Is the proposed closure of Parklands due to poor results?

The poor results of 2007 and earlier years brought the school into the government's national challenge and led to the unsatisfactory Ofsted judgement of 2008. This has contributed to the school's decline. Although the school has improved in the last two years this has been the result of considerable outside help and subsidy. It has a headteacher loaned by another school, an additional senior leader and a national leader of education to support and advise the school. This extra leadership is expensive and much of the cost is borne by the Local Authority and other Leeds schools. The continued decline in pupil numbers means that the school must lose more staff to be viable, and cannot generate a budget sufficient to provide a suitable curriculum.

8.2 Parklands has poor quality buildings, appears to be neglected and has had very little investment

There is money available to refurbish Parklands under the Building Schools for the Future Programme in Leeds. However, under government regulations the money could not be released while the school was judged to be performing poorly or not meeting government targets. As the school has been part of the National Challenge, it has received significant investment during the last two years to help it to improve standards.

8.3 Uncertainty around the future of Parklands has contributed to its loss of popularity

We note this opinion. There has been a significant decrease in the number of parents putting Parklands first when applying for a school for their daughters - from 127 in the 2003/04 academic year to 63 in 2009/10. This decrease predates the recent proposals for Parklands to close and become an Academy. The school was judged to be performing poorly by Ofsted in 2008 and was below the government floor target of at least 30% of girls achieving five GCSEs at grades A-C including English and maths (The National Challenge). Ofsted returned in 2009 and judged the school's performance to be satisfactory. The school also met the government's floor target in 2009. However both the Ofsted judgements and the school being part of the National Challenge are likely to have impacted on the number of applications for school places.

8.4 Parklands is a good and improving school, with excellent staff and a sense of pride.

We acknowledge that Parklands Girls' High School has significantly improved in the last two years and girls achieved the school's best outcomes ever in August 2009. However, this has been achieved by providing extra resources to improve leadership and a high level of external support. Pressure on the school budget is threatening the school's ability to retain staff and therefore puts these improvements at risk.