



FOREST HILL SCHOOL

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

SPECIALIST SCHOOL IN THE PERFORMING ARTS

Forest Hill School Proposed Reorganisation

I understand that as a parent or carer you want your child to receive the very best education possible at Forest Hill School, and that any risk to this will cause you great concern. I want to assure you that securing the highest quality of education for all our students is the single most important priority for the school – particularly as we go through this financially challenging period.

As Headteacher, I am confident that the proposed reorganisation will safeguard the quality of provision our students receive. Albeit that our current situation is one that I inherited, I remain fully committed to leading the school through this change, so that it emerges stronger and fitter to face significant short and medium term challenges. I would also like to reassure you that the school and Governing Body are working closely with the London Borough of Lewisham to jointly address our financial situation.

We have kept parents and carers informed as we move through this reorganisation process, to ensure that accurate and appropriate information is communicated. However, there is now information in the public domain, some of which is inaccurate and misinterpreted from confidential consultation documents. This is, understandably, causing concern among pupils and parents. I would like to address this and reassure you about the actual situation. If you have questions or require further clarification, I am more than happy for you to get in touch with me.

The nature of the internal reorganisation consultation process

Please allow me to clarify the nature of the consultation process I have referred to in the two letters sent to parents this term. This is an internal employer-employee consultation which follows set guidelines regarding its structure and timeline. It is a procedure which must be followed by any organisation proposing to reorganise its staffing. The professional associations which represent staff have been fully involved in the consultation process, and have been able to make their own suggestions about the shape of the reorganisation, as has any individual member of staff. There have been valuable suggestions from staff about the new structure. At the end of the process a final reorganisation structure is taken forward for implementation. The Full Governing Body is also fully involved and must ratify any proposed reorganisation before it is taken forward. As stated in my letter of 1st March, I will share the outcomes of the consultation with parents before the Easter break.

Forest Hill School's financial situation

It is the school's responsibility to manage its budget and spending decisions. In common with other schools Forest Hill has seen a reduction in income in various funding streams over the past few years. Additionally there have been increased unfunded costs, particularly those related to employer pension and National Insurance contributions.

Historically, the school's budget monitoring procedures were insufficiently robust and spending decisions were taken that, with hindsight, were not financially prudent. As a result there has been significant overspend in certain areas (particularly staffing) and we are now dealing with the consequences of this. It is quite right that we take ownership of this situation and do what needs to be done to bring about a resolution.

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The Chair of the Governing Body and I are new in post. We are determined to put Forest Hill School back on a firm financial footing. We will do this without risking the education of our students and ensuring that you, as parents, are fully aware and involved as we move through this difficult time.

Can the school cope with these cost cutting measures?

Every proposal made as part of this reorganisation has been carefully scrutinised in respect of value for money, sustainability and impact on teaching and learning. We are confident that all proposals made, including those that some may find difficult to accept, are right and will lead to a strong and secure future for Forest Hill School.

Reduction in staffing

In any reorganisation designed to cut costs, there will inevitably be staff reductions and this is the case for Forest Hill School. We have sought to minimise these as far as we can and to ensure there is no adverse impact on students' experience. An absolute priority through the process has been to seek to avoid compulsory redundancies wherever possible and this continues to be the case.

There have been no compulsory redundancies for midday meals supervisors. Duty hours were aligned to the 45 minute lunch break. A number decided not to continue working the reduced hours. Currently the school employs four midday meals supervisors working alongside other school staff to provide supervision for pupils at lunchtime.

The number of teaching assistant posts remains unchanged. Their working hours have been rationalised in order to provide more effective support to our SEND students.

The school administration team was reorganised in November 2016. The number of posts remains at twelve, with changes in the roles and responsibilities of some staff.

Curriculum offer

No subjects are being cut from the curriculum. We are proposing to remodel the KS4 offer by moving from four to three options. This was already under consideration for reasons other than securing financial savings. The new generation of GCSE qualifications has significantly expanded content which, we believe, will make it extremely challenging for most students to successfully tackle ten GCSE subjects (which would be the case with four options). This was borne out by the performance of middle ability students in GCSE examinations last year. The majority of students will therefore choose three options, giving them nine GCSE subjects. This is more than sufficient to ensure access to good post-16 progression routes. The most able students will be able to complete ten GCSEs, should they decide to pursue Triple Science. This brings us in line with an increasing number of similar schools.

I can reassure you that no Year 10 student currently studying for GCSE will be required to drop subjects from September 2017. It may be possible that, in the transition to a new curriculum structure, one GCSE subject is studied outside of normal curriculum time for Year 11 students next year.

A full and broad curriculum is on offer to all KS3 students including our continuing commitment to the Performing Arts.

Support for EAL and SEND students

Support for students with EAL and SEND needs will continue to ensure that they can effectively access our high quality curriculum. As stated earlier, the number of teaching assistants will not change, in order to meet the needs of our SEND students. Additional provision has also been made available to allow SEND teachers to better support individual students. To ensure support is provided for pupils for whom English is an additional language, there will be dedicated curriculum periods for EAL pupils of different competencies. These will be delivered by MFL specialists with support from Higher Level Teaching Assistants. Where appropriate, EAL students will continue to be prepared and entered for the English as a Second Language (ESOL) qualification.

Teacher workload

Classroom teachers with no other responsibilities will be timetabled to teach 22 out of 25 lessons per week. This constitutes a loading of 88% which is below the statutory maximum of 90%. We are, of course, looking into system change which will allow us to reduce teacher workload as far as we can. This is something which is extremely important to me as Headteacher.

Resources for students

While we are dealing with a significant budgetary challenge, I can assure you that we will do everything possible to ensure that the measures we take to put the school back on a secure financial footing do not negatively impact students' education in terms of textbooks, ICT provision and specialist equipment available.

Extra-curricular activities

Activities outside the classroom are a key part of our students' learning. While there will inevitably be some changes, our approach will seek to ensure continuance of a balanced, varied and appropriate range of extra-curricular activities reflecting the needs of our students.

As we work to resolve our historical budget issues, there are additional external factors that will make the school's future financial position equally challenging. You will be only too aware that schools in London and across the country are facing substantial Government cuts in funding over the next few years. Forest Hill and many other schools in Lewisham will be hit hard by these. The Department for Education is currently consulting on this until 22 March. I know you care about Forest Hill School and if you feel strongly about the funding implications of the National Funding Formula, I would encourage you to complete the consultation survey which can be found here:

<https://consult.education.gov.uk/funding-policy-unit/schools-national-funding-formula2/>

I trust the above facts have helped to explain and accurately clarify the position in regard to our current situation. You have my assurance that we will continue to strive for the best outcomes for all our pupils, despite the challenges we face, and their achievement remains at the heart of what we do.

Response to the NUT press release regarding strike action at Forest Hill School

You will be aware from my previous letters home that the National Union of Teachers has regrettably decided to take localised industrial action with a series of one day strikes (21st; 29th & 30th March 2017) resulting in the unavoidable need to partially close the school on those days for reasons of health and safety.

I would like to take this opportunity to clarify information circulated in the recent NUT press release which I consider to be inaccurate and somewhat misleading.

Events leading to strike action

Over the past two weeks the school has been involved in negotiations with NUT representatives (London and Lewisham) to seek to avoid strike action. These have been conducted in a professional and positive manner. In a meeting on Wednesday 15 March, the school put forward several proposals to respond to NUT demands which were their prerequisites to the avoidance of strike action. It was agreed that these proposals would be put to a meeting of the Forest Hill School NUT membership later the same day.

Following this meeting, we were informed by the Lewisham NUT representative that the school membership had not found the new proposals sufficient to avoid strike action, and that a decision had been taken that the strike would go ahead. At this point I decided that parents should be informed in order to allow them good time to make any arrangements necessary for childcare on the affected days.

At no point did the school break off negotiations with the NUT and we remain willing to reach a negotiated settlement in order to avoid damaging strike action. I am aware that the NUT London representative is in correspondence with officers at the London Borough of Lewisham regarding NUT demands for action on their part. The school has no part in this correspondence and cannot influence the outcomes of it. This correspondence was not part of the NUT negotiations with the school.

'Cancellation' of a parent meeting

I should clarify that a meeting with parents was not cancelled as claimed in the press release. On Tuesday 14 March a group of parents came to main reception expecting to meet with me straight away, although they did not have an appointment. As I am sure parents/carers will appreciate, in an organisation as large and complex as our school, an appointment system operates for meetings with the Headteacher to ensure effective use of time and fair access for all stakeholders.

As would be the case in any such situation, the parents were asked to make an appointment through the usual channels, and I can confirm I have now met with most of them to discuss at length the issues they were understandably concerned about. Naturally, I am always keen to meet with parents to discuss matters relating to their children's education, provided the correct protocols have been followed.

In the interests of clarity, I am pleased to have the opportunity to correct some of the misinformation that inevitably finds its way into the public consciousness in such situations.

Mike Sullivan
Headteacher