10th January 2017

Dear Parents/Carers,

Important Consultation – Proposed Mixed Entry to Plumstead Manor from September 2018

I was delighted to be able to write to you before the recent school holiday about the very clear judgement from Ofsted that we are taking the school forwards in the right way and having a clear impact on the outcomes and standards for our young people. All the staff and I are utterly dedicated to providing the world class education your children deserve and our clear focus on excellence and justice. The development of successful young people while promoting a harmonious community and society are things we hold dear. This letter sets out an important question we all need to consider together so that we can maintain and continue the improvements we’ve started.

As a Local Authority School we are dedicated to serving the local community - the parents, carers and young people of Royal Greenwich. With a rising population of secondary aged students, the Local Authority are currently having to consider the number of places available across secondary schools in the Royal Borough. You may be aware that during the Autumn Term 2016, the Department for Education gave the go ahead for a new girls’ free school to open up in Thamesmead from September 2018. This new school will be 8 form entry and proposes to start recruiting girls for Year 7 from Autumn 2017. It will be located in Thamesmead, and will recruit girls from across Thamesmead, Abbey Wood, Woolwich and Plumstead. This is the same catchment area as Plumstead Manor.

As a result the Local Authority approached the Governing Body of Plumstead Manor last term and asked us to consider taking a mixed intake of boys and girls from September 2018. We have agreed to undertake a consultation about this, the informal stage of which begins this month.

We are enormously proud of the fact that a girls’ school has stood on the site of our current school for over 100 years. However, we have to consider the future success and health of the school, and ensure that we are part of providing enough school places for the entire population of the Royal Borough. This is why we have agreed to begin to collect the views of different stakeholders about possibly taking a mixed intake from September 2018.

Attached to this letter is a document that sets out the background and detail of this. It also includes information about how you can have your views heard. We currently plan two face to face meetings and will hand out surveys at these meetings where you can provide clear and direct feedback about what you think. The first of these is the planned parent forum on 11th January 2017 at 6pm. We will run a further meeting on 31st January 2017 at 7pm which is also open to parents and carers of children of primary school age and other members of the wider community. Should it become clear that we need to hold more meetings we are more than happy to organise these – but we would urge you to have your views heard so that they can inform the decision that ultimately the Local Authority will take.

This is an important question for the future of our school and it’s vital that you have your say. I look forward to meeting with you and discussing this important matter soon.

Yours sincerely

Douglas Greig
Head Teacher
Plumstead Manor School

Consultation on the Local Authority Proposal for a co-educational entry to Plumstead Manor from September 2018

1. Introduction

The Royal Borough of Greenwich has a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient school places for all residents who apply for one. This means that at secondary level it is important that there should be a high quality, balanced and reliable provision across the borough for both girls and boys.

As part of the Council’s strategy to ensure there are sufficient high quality secondary school places, where and when they are required, the Royal Borough of Greenwich and the Governing Body of Plumstead Manor School, Old Mill Road, Plumstead, SE18 1QF, would like to consult you about a proposal to change the school from a single sex girls’ school, to a co-educational school, with effect from September 2018.

This is the first stage of the consultation process and the purpose of this document is to set out, for your consideration, the information relevant to the proposal. A questionnaire is attached and you are invited to tell us your views on the proposal by completing the questionnaire and returning it to the address provided.

2. Why is there a proposal to change the school from girls only to mixed provision?

Background

There are currently 15 secondary schools within the borough, of which one is a boys only school, and 3 are for girls only. In addition, there are plans in the pipeline for a new Free School for girls in the north-east of the borough which is scheduled to open in September 2018 (possibly 2019).

Demand for secondary school places has risen significantly in the last three years. In addition to a rising number of pupils transferring from the primary phase, other significant contributory factors include new housing developments attracting inward migration, changing parental preferences in favour of Royal Greenwich secondary schools, cross border movement and the high numbers of applications from pupils from neighbouring boroughs. This combination of factors means that demand for secondary school places is anticipated to continue to rise each year into the next decade. The Council is taking steps to meet this demand. However, the current gender imbalance of provision means that there is greater pressure on school places for boys, than is the case for girls, which means that some have to travel greater distances to attend a suitable school. Changing the school from single sex to mixed provision would contribute to a more balanced offer of places across the borough.

Benefits of the proposal for Plumstead Manor School

The DfE granted permission for a new Free School for girls to open from September 2018 (this may become 2019) in Thamesmead which will be linked to an existing outstanding school and will draw pupils from the same catchment area as Plumstead Manor School. There is therefore a strong
argument that it would be advantageous for Plumstead Manor School to widen its scope for admissions and admit both girls and boys in the future. This would have the effect of increasing the range of possible applications for the school from the local community, allowing the school to strengthen its financial position and to continue to extend the educational opportunities available to its pupils.

The School’s Values and Ethos

The school’s current vision places excellence, justice, success and harmony at its core. This places a premium on offering young people an environment and curriculum that fosters academic excellence and promotes the highest standards in personal development, behaviour and well-being. The school’s focus on academic excellence equips young people with the knowledge and skills to maximise their potential, and realise their ambitions. The high expectations for behaviour and conduct across the community, mixed with a close attention to scholarship and the rigour of a broad and balanced curriculum, provide the foundations for a world class education. The school’s focus on these areas and values are therefore an important part of a broad and reliable education service and are not gender specific.

It is clear that in the next 2 or 3 years there is going to be a new girls’ school in Thamesmead, and Plumstead Manor will face increased competition to recruit students into Year 7 from Autumn 2017. Given that there is a rising population of secondary aged pupils, Plumstead Manor School could continue to thrive and benefit by providing a co-educational alternative in the north-east of the borough, reducing the impact of the competition from the neighbouring girls’ school.

In this consultation process it is important to recognise the history and pedigree of the school, at the same time as acknowledging that the context it finds itself in has changed significantly. With the current vision and purpose of the school in mind, the possibility of becoming a mixed school opens up a number of opportunities:

- The school’s current location and context means it serves a community rich in diversity and culture.
- Its safe, happy and diverse student population is a hallmark of the local community, and reflects the rich tapestry of people living in the area.
- There is already a mixed Sixth Form and thus, the school would be able to cultivate and recruit more young men into the Sixth Form directly from its own cohorts.
- The school is demonstrably on a path of improvement. It remains committed to serving the local community and to providing a high quality comprehensive education to meet the needs of all learners, including those most able students as well as those who need more support and guidance. The school is an engine of social mobility and justice for the young women and men in the local community and this consultation allows the school to assert this.
- The school has a long pedigree in successfully educating girls in a single sex community, and in promoting their engagement and progression in subjects and areas traditionally seen as a male preserve. It has strong recruitment in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths subjects as well as offering a fully balanced curriculum complemented by the arts, humanities, modern languages and physical education. It would continue to offer this and would transfer those elements of single sex education and continue to make the most of them in a new school provision.

One of the greatest risks to the school is maintaining a stable intake of students in order to retain the quality and breadth of what it currently provides. The local demographic trend is forecast to see the population of secondary aged students rise. At the same time the school will face an increased level of competition for the recruitment of girls with the opening of another girls’ school in its catchment area. Therefore, the school needs to carefully consider the best course of action to ensure stable
recruitment of 240 students into each year group to secure its health and viability as an education institution.

3. The proposal

To ensure there is the right balance of secondary school provision, and to widen the scope of applicants eligible to apply to the school in the school’s catchment area, the Governing Body of Plumstead Manor School and the Royal Borough of Greenwich are proposing that the school provides co-educational provision from September 2018. This will align the school’s key stage 3 and 4 provision, with its sixth form which already caters for both girls and boys. If the proposal was implemented, the balance of girls and boys within the school would change gradually over a period of five years, after which they would be broadly the same.

This proposal would not affect the existing admission arrangements, other than that the school would admit both girls and boys.

If this proposal is agreed, it is not expected to have any detrimental impact on the pupil roll of other schools in the local area, due to anticipated future demand.

4. How will the proposal impact on young people already at the school

During an inspection by Ofsted in March 2016 Plumstead Manor School was judged to be a school that “Requires Improvement”. However, the Governing Body and the Royal Borough of Greenwich are confident that the school has the capacity and leadership to manage the change successfully. A recent routine monitoring visit by HMI following the previous inspection found that the leaders are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement. A move to co-educational provision would increase the demand for places at the school and secure its future financial viability for the benefit of both the school and its pupils.

5. Will the proposal require any building work for new accommodation

There are currently no plans to increase the capacity of the school, so major building works will not be necessary. However, the school and the Council will review the school’s current facilities, and the Council will arrange for any necessary work to be carried out to ensure that the school has the facilities in place that are appropriate for co-educational provision.

6. Responding to the Proposal and Next Steps

The Governing Body and the Royal Borough of Greenwich would like to hear your views on the proposal above. To do this, please return the attached questionnaire form to the school office by 10th February 2017 (there will be a drop-in box for completed questionnaires in the school’s reception area). Alternatively, send your response to Philip Watson, Royal Borough of Greenwich Children’s Services, 1st Floor, The Woolwich Centre, Wellington Street, Woolwich SE18 6HQ (email: philip.watson@royalgreenwich.gov.uk).

We will take your comments on board before undertaking a four week statutory consultation. This will involve publication of the proposal and a formal notice period, beginning in March 2017, in which representations may be made to the Council.
At the end of the period for representation, the Council will make the final decision as to whether or not to implement the proposal, taking into account comments and views expressed during the consultation and representation periods.

7. Further information

There will be a consultation meeting at the school on 11th January 2017 starting at 6pm (and finishing no later than 7pm) for Parents and Carers of students currently at the school.

There will be a further consultation meeting on 31st January 2017 for members of the wider community, including parents and carers of children of primary school age but who do not currently have children at the school. This meeting will start at 7pm and end no later than 8pm.

School and Council representatives will be present at both meetings and each will provide an opportunity for you to discuss the proposal if you wish to. Alternatively, if you require further information or clarification about the proposal please email:

philip.watson@royalgreenwich.gov.uk.

We look forward to hearing your views.