

**NOTES TAKEN AT THE SPECIAL MEETING HELD AT  
CONNAUGHT SCHOOL FOR GIRLS' ON THE 10<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2007  
IN CONNECTION WITH THE  
CONSULTATION DOCUMENT ON  
THE BUILDING SCHOOLS FOR THE FUTURE PROGRAMME  
IN  
LEYTON, LEYTONSTONE AND CHINGFORD**

The Meeting commenced with Ann Betts, Headteacher from Connaught School for Girls' introducing herself, thanking everyone for the excellent attendance of parents, pupils, governors, members of the local community and outlining the purpose of the Meeting.

The Headteacher explained the purpose of this meeting – to provide and discuss the Consultation Document issued in June 2007. This sets out future aims to mainly raise achievement in all six schools: Lammas, Norlington, Connaught, George Mitchell, Leytonstone and Tom Hood. This national programme will take 10 to 15 years to complete and these six schools would be the second group of schools in the Programme. The aim is to provide a better standard of education for all pupils with two 4 form entry schools within the group.

There would be one single Campus comprising of six schools offering different subjects available to all pupils.

There would be two transition processes – 11-14 yrs and 14-16yrs.

Mrs. Ann Betts advised everyone that if Connaught School for Girls' entered this Partnership it would seriously affect the school as follows:-

- It would damage the school's ethos.
- The single-sex status would be lost
- Pupils would be unsafe moving from one school to another within the Borough.
- Movement would create uncertainty and valuable learning time would be lost.
- Achievement would be affected.
- Connaught School for Girls' high achievement and successful results record would be absorbed into the low achieving schools' results within the Partnership.
- Connaught School for Girls' has never had a deficit budget.

It was also noted that the School's current thinking is that entering such a Partnership is not necessary and there were issues that needed to be addressed.

- Connaught School for Girls does have ideas for the future and one of these is to raise achievement.

- More personal learning would be made available.
- Connaught School for Girls' intend to build on Foreign Languages.
- There is also a requirement to collaborate with Sixth Form Colleges.
- Extended School status would be developed to include evenings and weekends.
- ICT is the main way forward.

Finally, why dilute a successful school?

The audience showed their appreciation of the Headteacher's address.

Mr. Nigel Patterson, Chair of the Governing Body, thanked the Headteacher for her introduction and then proceeded to introduce Mr. Chris Kiernan and Mr. Simon Newland, representatives from the Borough involved in the Building Schools for the Future Programme (BSF).

Mr. Chris Kiernan addressed the meeting by thanking Ann Betts, the Headteacher, for the chance to give parents information about the council's wave 5 building schools for the future (BSF) Programme. He expressed his disappointment that Connaught School for Girls' were against the ideas set out in the Consultation Document. He then addressed the audience by explaining the object of the Network Learning Community and the following points were highlighted:-

- The Network Learning Community proposal, and its main purpose has the support, in principle, of five headteachers out of the six secondary schools in the area, and of the principal of Leyton Sixth-Form College;
- It would be in the pupils' best interests for Connaught Girls' School to be a part of the Network Learning Community.

### **The Network Learning Community and its main purpose:**

1. Consultation, in principle, is currently in progress relating to the wave 5 proposals for Leyton, Leytonstone and Chingford.
2. The Borough is required by the government, which fund the programme, to produce a document called the 'strategy for change'. This paper outlines the expectations the government and the council have of transforming learning opportunities for young people in the area.
3. There are several purposes the council are seeking to achieve through their proposals for Leyton and Leytonstone, including ensuring that there are sufficient pupil places for secondary education. However, the following points were focussed on the main purpose that has proved controversial with Connaught Girls' School's Headteacher and Governors.
4. The proposal to transform the learning experiences of young people in Key Stages 4 and 5 – Years 10, 11, 12 and 13. The Borough is consulting presently about doing this through:-

- Providing the opportunity for ALL pupils in the area to study any of the 14 new diplomas, in line with the requirement of the 2006 Education and Inspections Act;
  - Offering all pupils the opportunity to do this at a pace suiting them (in other words, one pupil might spend more time doing GCSE's another might start AS Levels in Year 10 and
  - More vulnerable pupils being able to stay at their school after the end of Year 11.
5. In order to create the opportunities outlined above, schools in Leyton and Leytonstone will need to:-
- Work together and co-ordinate timetables to allow for the movement of pupils between schools and colleges;
  - Offer their expertise – usually, although not exclusively, in their specialism – to pupils from other schools who are interested in the subject; and offer facilities, or staff, for post-16 provision in the area: in other words, participate in KS5 or Years 12 and 13 (currently no schools in the area do this).
6. To support schools, the council will direct *building schools for the future* capital investment towards what is required to make this system work. The council will also be consulting on major changes to the revenue funding formula for schools, to provide more resources on a per-pupil basis, and more directed towards the needs of 14 to 16 year olds. To provide this money the council will consult on removing the small school protection, split site allowance and management cost allowance.

### **Issues arising for the Connaught Girls' School Community**

7. Mr. Chris Kiernan stated that it was his firm view that it would be absolutely in the school community's best interests to become part of the proposed network learning community in the area.
8. In view of this, the question that Chris Kiernan posed to the School's Governors is not 'do you wish to be a part of the Network Learning Community' but rather 'what are the conditions under which you would be prepared to consider participation'.
9. It was thought that there would be huge advantages for Connaught Girls' School, their parents and staff, some of which have been already outlined. Others are:
- The opportunity to maximise the capital investment in the school, through the BSF Programme;
  - Opportunities for easier access of pupils to a wider range of specialist facilities and a wider curriculum offer; and
  - The possible opportunity to stay at school post-16 for those not yet ready to move on.

10. Being a part of the Network Learning Community **does not** mean the school has to move away from being a single-sex school. However, whether the school participates or not, girls at the end of Year 9 might choose subjects that are not available at Connaught and seem to move to a school or college that did. This is a great opportunity for those pupils but may also pose the school some problems.
11. This is a risk for the school, as, if were not a party to joint time-tabling, leaving the school might be the only means of a pupil at Connaught pursuing a subject choice she prefers. Within the Network Learning Community, of course, this would not cause a conflict – a girl might pursue a specialism one day a week, whilst remaining on roll at Connaught School for Girls.
12. Finally, the changes in schools' funding that the Council will be consulting upon will mean that a larger share of funding will be directed towards the needs of 14-16 learners. If Connaught is not part of the Network Learning Community, then the school may not gain from this as much as it could but at the same time will lose substantially from the abolition of small schools and management cost allowances.

*At this point of the Meeting a Question and Answer session took place.*

Q: A parent expressed her concern regarding the safety of the children moving from one education establishment to another. Waltham Forest was considered to have a very high crime rate and this would present problems.

A: Mr. C. Kiernan replied by saying that he agreed the management of safety is a serious issue and stated that travelling around the Borough would not be unsafe in any way.

Mrs. Ann Betts added that only last week a Year 10 pupil from Connaught School for Girls' was attacked and injured with a weapon and the Borough **was** considered unsafe.

Q: A Governor stated that the School has a duty to look after pupils and ensure their safety at all times. There seemed to be a conflict of interest of what the School want and what the Borough wants.

The Examination Results are above the national average. Connaught's excellent reputation has been built upon over years and years of hard work and time of everyone. There was obviously a difference in achievement in pupils at other schools and Connaught Schools' success would be dissolved and lost. By moving to mainly vocational subjects would involve pupils' results would be less academic.

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan replied by saying that he absolutely understood everyone's anxiety to change and that he had written to the Headteacher to congratulate her on her results. However, the trend is that the Borough is still below average nationally. The national figures were still to be presented. It is still believed that the Network Learning Community can increase prospects for pupils.

Q: A Parent/Teacher asked how the 'movement' between establishments would work.

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan replied stating that the pupils would attend particular establishments in whole days. This would be possible by travelling via the bus routes in this particular area. He considered that attacks on pupils were rare.

A parent stated that there had been endless attacks on the streets this summer and this would not be acceptable.

Q: A parent stated that she had chosen Connaught School for Girls' as a first choice for her child due to the fact that she could walk to school which was healthier, the school had an excellent ethos and the small culture was better for her. The proposed Network Learning Community Programme would not give parents the right to choose a particular establishment. The subjects offered would be scattered across the six schools in the Borough.

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan expressed that it is so valuable to have these meetings to air views and build up a picture of what parents and the community require. He could not see any reason why a pupil cannot stay at their choice of school – this would be acceptable. However, other pupils may want to travel and will do otherwise. This Consultation purely offers opportunities for pupils in the future. No school in Waltham Forest has the capacity to offer 14 Diplomas. This needs to be so to increase attainment generally.

Mrs. Ann Betts referred to Curriculum Choices and stated that the Diploma Courses would be on board at the Colleges and Connaught School for Girls' do intend to collaborate with Leyton Sixth Form College and the low achievers at Connaught School for Girls' would do their day at the College to gain their Diploma.

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan added that this would be the same idea as the proposals set out in the Consultation Document. All the Borough was asking of Connaught School for Girls is to join the Partnership to the extent that the school feels comfortable with.

Q: A parent stated that this was hard to believe – if Connaught School for Girls' did participate what guarantee do they have that the Borough would keep their promise to let Connaught School participate in the ways they wish to be involved?

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan advised everyone that he believed the Partnership could work with joint timetabling amongst the six schools. The School would still have their own separate Governing Body and they would still assist in the running of their School. Pupils of all ability ranges would have extra opportunities. The School Results are shown as a combined Borough figure anyway.

Q: The travelling between establishments was still considered an issue. Plus the fact of time taken to travel to After School Clubs would be an issue.

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan stated that this would be an issue to work out between the establishments. Parents may have to assist students to attend their After School Clubs.

Q: Surely it would be a better idea to try this Partnership under a pilot scheme?

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan replied that this would not be possible as a timescale has been set by the Government of April, 2008. It would be impossible to organise a pilot scheme within this time frame.

A: Mr. Simon Newland added that this Programme is being piloted elsewhere in the country. He did not see any reason why this should threaten the ethos of Connaught School for Girls. All the Borough was trying to do was to create more choice for 14 year olds and he understood that Mrs. Ann Betts accepted that pupils from Connaught would benefit from this opportunity.

We all agree in principle of what the Borough was trying to achieve. None of us deny the problems of transport and behaviour of pupils but these obstacles would have to be overcome.

Q: A parent stated that they could not see how Connaught School for Girls could keep their single sex status especially in view of pupils in Year 10 mixing sexes to study some subjects required.

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan reassured the audience that the School would have to decide on their involvement and the school could still participate on a single sex basis.

Q: Mrs. Ann Betts advised that the School have a Behaviour Policy and it would be very difficult to maintain consistency for six schools!

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan replied that there would be a single Policy and that common systems of behaviour were possible. The six schools would have to liaise together and create one policy.

Q: A parent referred to the threat of the cut in funding should there be non participation in the Programme. How can you cut funding for our children's' education?

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan replied that there would be a need to create more funding for a broader range of Key Stage 4 subjects. The Schools' Forum would consider this aspect and decide on the formula of funding. This was not a 'threat' but there was a need to explain to schools on the possible implications should the Programme be put into place. Schools would certainly benefit from the Programme. The Borough would not hold the School to ransom in any way.

Q: A Teacher stated that the new Prime Minister has not mentioned any criteria on specialist diplomas. There has been no research in the UK and a great deal of money would be squandered on specialist diplomas.

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan replied by stating that no one knows how specialist diplomas will go. However, London Borough of Waltham Forest is well behind other Boroughs and there is still an issue for 33% of pupils to obtain an employability status.

Mrs. Ann Betts stated that Connaught School for Girls is a Language College and felt that they could still offer a great deal for their pupils if they decided not to participate in the Programme.

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan stated any school cannot do any better now. This is merely an opportunity for schools to meet the aspirations of low achieving pupils. This Programme is merely a framework not a straight jacket.

It was noted that there was great concern that pupils would not be allowed to move forward. Connaught School for Girls' can make representation to the Schools' Forum.

Q: Mrs. Ann Betts informed the audience that behaviour at Connaught School for Girls' is very strong and within a Partnership this would be difficult to maintain.

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan replied that there were detailed ways of working things out. From previous Ofsted information KS3 and KS4 classroom behaviour is generally very good. However, it would be straightforward to deal with pupils from other schools should their behaviour decline. The School can deal with this situation quickly and easily by refusing to accommodate the offending student in their establishment.

Q: It is considered in appropriate for pupils to apply for a school place at 14 years and again at 16 years.

Q: A student expressed her concern regarding the mixing of pupils at other schools. Pupils from other schools bear grudges against other schools and this would affect pupils' safety in general.

There would also be a lack of communication between pupils and teachers. Pupils would not be readily available to liaise with if they were situated at another site. Pupils would not be confident with stranger teachers at other schools.

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan agreed that meeting with Year 11 Pupils to discuss various issues would be advantageous. He appreciated the shyness of some pupils. However, he felt that for some the anxiety is outweighed by their wish for a broader curriculum.

A: We require choice and opportunity for 14 year old pupils. The School will still have its separate identity. 120 pupils will be admitted in Year 10. Year 9's can stay or move on elsewhere. Pupils would only come to Connaught School for Girls' if there was a vacancy.

Q: Who would be responsible for the Pastoral Care?

A: There would be one uniform for the six schools. The school hosting the pupil for a particular day would be responsible for that pupil. A register would be taken for that day at the 'offsite' establishment and given to the 'home' school to keep a record.

Q: A parent stated that she was horrified at the Proposals listened to this evening and did not expect to talk about NVQ's. Personalised Learning would be difficult to achieve under the new conditions and teaching would be very hard work with many pupils walking through many doors.

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan stated that the Proposals are very flexible to accommodate all pupils. Agreements with the Colleges would be made as to exactly what the proposals would be.

Q: A Governor referred to recent research in the USA. The campus idea had been rejected due to decline in pupil behaviour and ethos. Surely the Borough should take heed of this research!

A: Mr. Chris Kiernan stated that the Connaught School for Girls' site is a restrained site and is currently a 4 form entry which could remain so if the majority wished. However, 4 form entry schools do not achieve results. 6 form entry would be more favourable in Waltham Forest as 8 form entry is not a favourable idea. However, there are no proposals to make Connaught School for Girls' larger.

A parent/staff member wished to congratulate the Headteacher, staff and pupils at Connaught School for Girls' for choosing to be a

Language and Science College and stated that they had done amazingly well.

Simon Newland stated that he was looking forward to receiving the results and comments resulting from the Consultation Document.

Mr. Nigel Patterson, Chair of Governors, thanked everyone for attending the meeting this evening. He reiterated to everyone that concerns need to be submitted by the 14<sup>th</sup> September, 2007.

He also stated that although everyone appreciated the Borough's best intentions to provide more opportunities for pupils to achieve, staff, pupils, parents and the community could not see the logic of how this could be done from the Proposals submitted. In view of this, feedback would be considered of paramount importance as opinions do influence the planning of such programmes.

*The Headteacher thanked everyone for attending the meeting this evening and the meeting closed at 8.50pm.*