

Notes from the Archer Academy Trust's Public Meeting, 11 January 2016

Please note, this is not a transcript of the meeting, nor is it a formal set of minutes. It is, as we stated at the time, a set of notes taken by a volunteer to capture the essence of what was said, to support the decision making process once the consultation has closed. Questions and answers are paraphrased, not written word for word.

Key points of welcome speech: Lucy Harrison, Headteacher

- The school opened in September 2013 to a pioneer cohort of 150 students and has expanded by a year group each year.
 - Now full as a lower school, set to become a campus school in September 2016.
 - First two years and a term very successful due to the determination of committed teachers, governors, parents and students to realise the potential of students and school community.
 - Consequently the school is heavily oversubscribed and struggling to meet the demand for places.
 - The Trust is committed to reviewing admissions annually; 2014-15 admissions window left them reflecting on whether alternatives might be required.
 - The Trust and school team understand what a powerful and emotive issue it is and that everyone wants the best for their child.
 - Reminder that it is a consultation, that no decision has yet been taken and that no suggestions for change have been taken lightly.
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Key points of introduction speech: Martin Bright, Meeting Chair and Parent Governor

- The meeting has been arranged to allow members of the community to hear about the proposed changes, ask questions about the proposals and to express opinions.
- It is part of the two month consultation which ends on January 31st after which the Trust will consider the responses and decide what, if any, changes should be made.
- The Trust is the overarching body with responsibility for admissions and it is this group, rather than the governing body, who are charged with overseeing the application of our admissions policy and considering how the school is, in practice, adhering to its founding vision and ethos.
- All members of the Archer Academy Trust are present and ready to answer questions
- In the three years since it has opened the Archer Academy has become a very popular school.
- For the September 2015 intake, there were more than 850 applications for 150 places. The proposal by the Trust has been drawn up in response to the shrinking catchment area.
- Some present will remember that the school was established to serve families within N2, N3 and NW11, however, in just a few short years the data shows that children from N3 and NW11 are increasingly disadvantaged to those living closer in N2.

- We are aware that feelings are running high on all sides, and whilst we understand many will have come here this evening with strong feelings it is clear to us that there is quite a lot of misunderstanding about the implications for the proposed change.
 - Please listen to the members of the Trust as they explain the rationale behind the proposal. There will then be ample time for questions and we intend to take as many as we can before we finish.
 - We are all neighbours, so would ask people to remain civil in their comments and questions and resist any temptation to make personal comments or descend to abuse.
 - Microphones will be available for questions. Please keep comments brief to give as many people as possible the chance to speak. It would be helpful if people could say who they are, but there is, of course, no obligation to do so.
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Key points of background and context speech: Avis Johns, Trust Member

- Shortage of places has been well known for many years – Barnet currently predicting a shortfall of 600 Year 7 places by 2019.
- Many people voiced their concern over the lack of secondary provision but they were just words until we had the opportunity to open the Archer Academy.
- Initial personal motivation was my own child who had no chance of a comprehensive education.
- It soon became clear that it was a bigger, borough-wide problem and the campaign grew and grew.
- About a dozen people took on the mantle of the challenge. Those 12 people drove the process from a few initial meetings to the school we are sitting in today.
- Our original application was put in to serve three postcodes, based on the support we had received, but at the time we didn't know where the school would be located.
- The Education Funding Agency (EFA) were looking at properties within a five mile area. The EFA were responsible for site acquisition; our role was to be clear about where the demand came from and therefore the area in which the school needed to be located
- We are just one school and cannot solve the problem of secondary provision in this area.
- For September 2015 we had over 850 applications, over 450 of which came from our priority postcodes.
- It is becoming clear that NW11 and N3 are starting to miss out. Parents in these postcodes began lobbying their councillors and contacting us.
- At our annual review we looked at the data and concluded some areas would miss out unless we did something.
- We modelled a range of solutions, but no single solution can please everyone, and so we have to decide what solves the greater need from our three postcodes.
- We concluded that feeder schools was the fairest proposal we could make.
- Huge pride in the 12 governors who have put their lives on the line to create this school and the fantastic staff who are delivering our vision.
- We are really sorry that we can't fulfil everyone's needs and I am angry that Barnet haven't addressed the issue.
- We feel a duty to serve all parts of the wider community that we have committed to.

- And unless we do something about the admissions criteria we run the risk of this catchment shrinking to extent that only those who live right next door will get in.
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PowerPoint presentation – Sanjay Maraj, Trust Chair

Current situation

- Over 850 applicants for 150 places for September 2015 – and rising.
- Over 1,000 people completed a survey saying they would send their child to our school. Around 90% came from N2, N3 and NW11.
- ‘Local Schools for Local Children’ has always referred to N2, N3 and NW11, but families in N3 and NW11 are increasingly being excluded.
- We cannot give a place to everyone who wants one.
- We have an obligation to fulfil our founding commitment to families in all three priority postcodes.

Supporting graphs (these are available on our website within the PowerPoint presentation in the Consultation tab)

- Postcode graph showing how admission from N2 has risen and from other postcodes has reduced
- Bar chart showing catchment shrinking year on year – 5.5 miles down to just over 1 mile.
- Graph of admissions from 2013 to 2015

Our proposal

- The Trust looked at the evidence and considered a range of options including the removal of sibling priority, ballots and feeder schools, as well as the consequences of doing nothing.
- We concluded that allocating some places to feeder schools across the priority postcodes was both the fairest way and the best way to ensure our vision and ethos is sustained in future.
- We are proposing to allocate just 55 places to feeder schools, with the initial 95 places being allocated under the current criteria.

The 55 feeder school places would be allocated as follows:

- Martin Primary School (15 places)
- Brookland Junior School (15 places)
- Garden Suburb Junior School (15 places)
- Manorside Primary School (5 places)
- Tudor Primary School (5 places)

We propose to allocate 5 places for each permanent Year 6 class.

The feeder schools are all:

- Local, within 1.5 miles of the Archer Academy.
 - Based within (and offering a spread across) our priority postcodes.
 - Share the Archer Academy's ethos of non-denominational, non-selective, co-educational schooling.
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Answers to some frequently asked questions (PowerPoint presentation with added narrative): Jon Hindmarsh, Trust Member

“Won't the feeder schools take all the places?”

- Our proposal strikes a balance between representing our three priority postcodes and retaining a role for proximity.
- Only 55 out of 150 places would be allocated to the feeder schools
- The initial 95 places would be allocated under the current admissions criteria, which includes children with a statement of special educational needs, siblings and proximity.
- We anticipate that around a quarter of our places each year would be allocated on the basis of proximity.
- We will continue to review our admissions policy each year to ensure that we are serving the whole community.

“Are you discriminating against children at faith schools?”

- One of our founding principles, which we took to the government and the community, was to create a school which is non-selective (not selecting by ability), non-denominational (not selecting on the basis of faith; embracing children of all faiths and none) and co-educational (not selecting on the basis of gender)
- If we are to retain this principle, we cannot include as a feeder school one that selects on the basis of gender, ability or faith
- We are neither excluding children from faith schools nor actively favouring them – they would have the same chance as children from other non-feeder schools to get one of our 95 initial places.
- Our modelling indicates that around a quarter of our places would be allocated based on proximity. So if students are at a school which is close by, they would remain likely to get in on that basis.
- The intake at our proposed feeder schools is highly diverse – reflecting our community – and includes a wide range of different backgrounds, including many different faiths. Our own intake is similarly diverse.

- Children of all faiths, and none, have always been and will continue to be welcome at the Archer Academy.

“Do you agree you have taken our community land and then excluded us from your school?”

- Our nearest neighbours would still have the opportunity to come to our school through our initial 95 places. No one is being excluded.
- The land at Stanley Road was under dispute for many years; long-neglected and under permanent threat of housing development.
- It is now being used by numerous groups every week in the evening and at weekends, and we are proud to have been able to make this possible.
- We have brought in £12m of investment, created sports and recreational facilities for the whole community and legally protected the site in perpetuity for community benefit.
- Our purchase of the site was supported by Sport East Finchley, who campaigned to save it from development, and who support us still.

“Why can’t you just make the school bigger?”

- We were given permission by the DfE to open a school with 150 children in each year group, and we are funded on that basis.
 - We set this size initially based on the optimal size to deliver our vision and ethos.
 - Both sites have been developed to a maximum capacity of 150 per year group.
 - There is simply not the space at either site to accommodate additional numbers.
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Questions from the floor: answered by Trust Members

Please note: these do not necessarily appear in the order that they were asked but are grouped by subject.

A number of questions were asked about the non-inclusion of faith schools as feeder schools:

Would you say your current policy is non-denominational?

Our current policy is non-denominational, as is our proposed policy. We have been advised that we are acting within the requirements of both the Admissions Code and the Equalities Act.

How can you say you are ‘non-selective’ when you are proposing to introduce feeder schools?

We use the phrase ‘non-selective’ to refer specifically to not selecting by ability, just as the phrase ‘non-denominational’ refers specifically to not selecting based on faith. All oversubscription criteria

are selective in one way or another, as they are prioritising groups of children over other groups – the same is true for all schools and all oversubscription criteria.

Your funding agreement said it was to serve a shortage of places in N2, N3 and NW11, in particular a shortage of places for girls. Nowhere did it say you would exclude faith schools. You have no right to exclude Holy Trinity, and the DfE says you cannot do so.

Our proposals are not unlawful; we have been advised that we are acting within the requirements of both the Admissions Code and the Equalities Act.

It isn't true to say we are excluding children at faith schools. We are simply choosing feeder schools which don't make selections by faith, ability or gender at primary level, to avoid introducing selection on these bases into our own admissions.

Children who are at faith schools who are close neighbours could still get a place based on proximity and we anticipate around a quarter of our places would be allocated on this basis each year.

Our child didn't get into a state primary school/non-denominational primary school and now we are being punished twice. Not everyone has chosen to send their children to faith primary schools.

We are very sympathetic to this issue, and are sorry that we can't meet the demand for places at our school. It's worth remembering that at this stage, this is a proposal not a done deal, and we will consider this point, along with other feedback, when the consultation closes.

However, our priority has to be the long-term and strategic interests of the school's vision and ethos, our students and the wider community. We have to look at the non-denominational issue at school level, not child level, and it is not appropriate for us to include a faith school as a feeder school for a non-denominational school.

We haven't made this proposal lightly but as we can't give a place to everyone who wants one, we had to make some tough decisions and with every scenario some people will miss out. The failure here rests with Barnet; we are only one small part of the solution.

Faith schools are not monolithic entities. For example, Eden and Alma are inclusive faith schools – you don't have to be Jewish to go there. Issues about inclusion and proximity are complicated and need to be taken into account.

We recognise that we live in a mixed community, in which lots of children from all faiths and none go to lots of schools. However we have to look at what we need to do to protect the founding vision of our school.

We understand that feelings are high. But once again, we can't give a place to everyone and so need to make some choices. We have chosen schools which reflect our ethos of non-denominational, non-selective and co-educational schooling. We can't have a school which selects by faith as a feeder school to a non-denominational secondary as that would introduce an element of faith-based selection into our own process.

We have taken proximity into account and tried to retain a balance between our need to fulfil our founding commitment with a role for proximity within our proposals.

Audience member response:

From the figures mentioned, 1 ½ classes will still be allocated on proximity, and so N2 parents still have considerable advantages. So practically you don't need to be quite as concerned as you are.

In most cases people who chose faith schools for their children have to prove attendance at religious institutions or demonstrate commitment to that faith. If you have used the admissions policy to support the school's ethos in this way, you must allow other schools to use their admission policy to support their ethos.

A number of questions were asked about whether feeder schools is the best solution:

I understand that you're worried about other postcodes – surely the answer is to do quotas by postcode?

We have looked at a range of options in order to find a solution that is best for the children who come to the school as well as for the community. We don't feel that quotas are the best solution because of the uncertainty they create for everyone concerned.

When we modelled the numbers based on using quotas for each postcode, it was clear that N2 would be worse off than under the current proposal. Under the current proposal, more places would go to N2 than any other postcode, as we balance the need to serve all three postcodes with a consideration for proximity.

We realise that we can't please everyone and, because of the numbers involved, we will frustrate three-quarters of people whatever we do. However, if we feel at the end of the consultation that there are compelling reasons to change our proposals, we will.

There is a big issue my child's primary school about people abusing the sibling policy – moving in to get their child in and then moving back out. There are rules in place but they are ignored.

We are aware that this can be an issue; as you may know Haringey are currently consulting on dropping sibling priority. This issue has caused us concern and we have considered whether it should be part of our proposals.

Feeder schools do remove some of the incentive to move in for school places, as you can't move in for these places in the same way that you can for proximity places. We are also mindful that some families, especially those in social housing, may not have a choice about moving home.

However we will continue to review this as part of our annual admissions review and consider whether the sibling policy is compromising our admissions policy's support for our visions and ethos.

There is a danger that the feeder schools policy sets parents against each other – dividing the community and leaving a hole in the community.

We do understand that the issue of schools provision can divide communities – that was true before we came along, and is part of what drove us to set the school up in the first place.

We have never considered or described our community as just N2; many people in our wider community are very unhappy with current situation. People who live very near to the school may be happy with the status quo but many others think it's not fair and not working.

We have always said we would serve N2, N3 and NW11 and we will listen to all opinions, including those who are less vocal and vociferous in expressing their views. We will not be unduly influenced by how loudly people shout as that could discriminate against those whose voices are traditionally overlooked.

Feeder schools haven't worked in other schools like JCOSS – why do you think they will work for you? Do you think it is right that schools work in isolation?

Many schools use feeder schools, both locally and nationally. One or two local schools have recently made changes to their feeder school allocations as, presumably, they felt their approach was not supporting their founding vision and ethos. That does not make the use of feeder schools inappropriate; it simply means it wasn't right for them.

We don't think it is appropriate to talk about what specific other schools may or may not be doing. We are proposing feeder schools because we feel it is the fairest way to stick to our founding commitments to all three priority postcodes.

Questions were asked about whether there is really a need to provide places for N3 and NW11, along the lines of:

- **NW11 and N3 understand that the admissions are based on catchment and that they are further away and less likely to get places.**
- **If the school had been based in either of those postcodes, N2 would have accepted the situation.**
- **There is no logic in retaining your obligation to all the people who supported it. How long will you continue to do so?**

We dispute that that people in N2 would have happily accepted us ignoring them if the school was based in N3 or NW11, and we don't agree that NW11 and N3 people should just have to put up with it. It's clear that if we are to meet our founding commitment we need to find a system that will serve the need.

We created a school based on the support that all three postcodes gave us. It's never been solely about proximity; for example, N6 have been lobbying us to ask why they are outside our priority postcode area, and the answer is because they did not demonstrate the demand that we had to prove to the Department for Education.

So it has always been about priority postcodes, but if we don't make a change to our admissions policy the trends clearly show that it won't be the school we were approved to set up.

The school is still in its infancy and we do not feel it is legitimate at this point to ignore the areas who supported us from the outset. We have spent huge amounts of time examining the data and attempting to find the best possible solution which allows us to keep to our founding commitments (whilst retaining a consideration for proximity). This may not continue in perpetuity; the Trust will continue to monitor the data to assess whether it is still appropriate to do so.

We are aware that whatever we do (or if we do nothing), it will be unpopular with lots of people, because the demand significantly outstrips what we can provide. We can't please everyone, but we have to try and be as fair as we can.

Audience member response:

Henrietta Barnet is on the doorstep for people in NW11, but they don't want us. Garden Suburb School has supported the Archer Academy from the beginning, we came to the meetings and lobbied for the school and shouldn't just be discounted.

Audience member response:

My children are at Squires Lane Learning Federation (Manorside/Tudor primaries) and we are very grateful that you are considering changing your admissions criteria. Our pupils are slipping through a hole in the admissions system and would struggle to get a place without the change.

Response from the Chair of Governors at Garden Suburb School:

Parents at Garden Suburb have been behind the plans for a new school since the beginning as there is a real lack of places in NW11, especially for girls. Our parents filled out surveys and went to meetings, and around 30 of our students went to the school each year in the first two years.

However the numbers of children getting places at the Archer Academy has dramatically decreased as the catchment has shrunk. We predict that just one or two students would get in based on proximity in future years if the problem is not addressed now, and we would feel very let down by that.

The options are very limited in our area. Only 34% of our school leavers found local school places in 2014, excluding the Archer Academy, so without a change being made, around 60% would have to find alternative options in future years.

Questions were asked about the number of places given to feeder schools:

- **Compton only gives 30 out of 210 feeder places, why are you giving more?**
- **10 places for N3 is not enough**
- **5 places per class is not enough**

We cannot meet the entirety of demand within our community. We set out to provide options for people who didn't have options, but we are not able to solve that problem entirely. The numbers we have chosen are a compromise – we're trying to get representation from N3 and NW11 at a sufficient level whilst still retaining a role for proximity.

If you don't think we have the balance right, use the survey to tell us. We will listen to what everyone has to say. But again, we can't please everyone.

It seems that you are giving more places to NW11 than to N2. It also feels like you are trying to exclude poorer areas of East Finchley with these proposals.

The N2 allocation would not just be the 15 places at Martin Primary; our modelling shows that around a quarter of places each year would be based on proximity, which are likely to be from N2. Brookland Junior serves N2 as well as NW11 so N2 is also being served that way. We expect a significant proportion of places to go to children in N2 under the proposals.

We are trying to ensure that the demographic at our school is mindful of the demographic of our area. There is no suggestion from our modelling that the more socio-economically deprived areas won't get places, and our proposals have been designed with a need to ensure that the intake continues to be mixed.

A number of suggestions were made about increasing the size of the intake:

- **Increasing class sizes from 25 to 30**
- **Scrapping plans for 6th form and adding an extra class to each year group**
- **Opening satellite schools across the borough**

Our school buildings have been designed around having 25 in a class, based on our original approval from the DfE, and so we physically don't have room to increase our class sizes. Neither do we have room for a 6th form on either of our current sites – our 6th form will need to be located elsewhere.

We don't agree that we should scrap plans for a 6th form as we have a duty to the children who are currently at our school.

We aren't in a position to open satellite schools across the borough as we are working hard to ensure that the school we have is the best it can be. However we are happy to work with and support others who might want to set up another school.

A range of other, non-linked questions were asked, as follows:

Your assertion about the number of places available on proximity is wrong – Barnet says 56 siblings are coming in September which would equal 90 siblings by the time the school is full.

The figures that Barnet have given you are not based on actual offers and the figure have not been verified. We cannot comment on these until the applications have been checked. Additionally, they don't take preferences into account.

We have benchmarked against comparable schools in the area, and broadly a third of places are allocated to siblings once a school is at steady state (for us, in the early years, the numbers have been lower for obvious reasons).

Once at steady state, the number of siblings does not keep growing, and so it should remain around a third each year. So there is no suggestion in our modelling or in the experience of other schools that sibling numbers will reach 90.

On that basis, and assuming other criteria such as looked after children stay broadly similar, we anticipate that once we reach a steady state, around a quarter (38) of all places would continue to be allocated on the basis of proximity each year. This figure is in addition to other places offered to children in the immediate area through other criteria such as siblings and feeder school allocations.

However as we have said we are committed to reviewing the data every year. If our projections prove to be inaccurate, we would take that into account as part of our annual review and propose any changes that we felt necessary.

How many responses have you had so far and what % are for and against?

We have had over 600 responses so far and we have another few weeks to go. We are committed to being fully transparent about the consultation process and we will publish a report setting out the responses received and our conclusions along with our decision.

You have said you will review your admissions policy each year but that's too late for the current year 5s. One meeting isn't enough to tackle all these issues.

We are going well beyond what is required of us by statutory regulation. We are not required to hold a public meeting nor are we obliged to review our admissions criteria each year. However we are committed to doing so because it is important to us to ensure we are continuing to serve the whole community who supported the school as best we can.

We're making a proposal based on hard evidence, data and modelling which indicates that a quarter of places would be given on proximity in the years ahead.

Regarding the priority given to teachers' and support staff's children – how many people take it up and if so why can't they go where they live?

It's very common to give staff children priority as a way to help recruit and retain excellent staff. No staff members' children have come to the school to date, and we believe it is unlikely that there would ever be significant numbers of places allocated under this criteria.

There are two schools closer to Garden Suburb School than the Archer Academy: Whitefields and Hendon, and so those schools should serve Garden Suburb pupils.

A member of the audience disagreed with this statement, and had a map in hand to demonstrate her position. However the Trust did not answer this point and do not feel this is appropriate for us to do so; we cannot comment on how near individuals live to other secondary schools. We would simply reiterate our commitment to serving the three postcodes who supported the creation of our school.

It has always been clear that the Archer Academy would be oversubscribed year on year. If your admissions policy was good enough in the beginning, why propose a change now? Nothing has fundamentally changed in this area.

What has changed is that children are now coming from a much smaller area. Furthest distance has gone from 5 miles to a mile, which is a big change that is leaving parts of NW11 and N3 excluded. The direction of travel suggests that the catchment area would continue to shrink over future years if we did not act to address this.

I hope this is a genuine consultation, and not a fait accompli.

We have been clear throughout that this is not a done deal, and we are listening to all responses from all parts of our wider community. Please make sure you fill in our formal survey.

Conclusion: Avis Johns, Trust Member

We understand more than most that the issue of school places creates huge angst for parents. That is what drove us to set the school, drove me to give up my job for 2 ½ years and drove other founders to work as volunteers for 1-2 days per week for 3 years.

This problem of a lack of school places has been going on for decades, and we would ask you to ask your elected members – some of whom are here – and Barnet Council what they will do about it.

We are just one school and we cannot solve a problem of this size; we hope you sympathise with the difficult set of decisions that we are facing. We know that not everyone will be happy and that's why we are committed to reviewing our policy year on year.

Some schools in our area not oversubscribed – ours is because we have worked so hard, for so long, to build a fantastic team and make it the best it can be. Turn your questions towards Barnet, to ask them why they have not dealt with this issue.

Next steps: Sarah Pearce, Trust Member

- The Trust is actively seeking views on our proposal via a survey on our website.
- The consultation process lasts until noon on 31 January 2016.
- The Trust will consider all the evidence, including admissions data and our survey responses, both qualitative and quantitative, before making a decision.
- We have the option of making amendments to our proposal if we feel there are justifiable reasons to do so.
- The decision, the rationale behind it, and our determined admissions arrangements will be published on our website in the spring.

END