

## **FREE SCHOOL STATUS**

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FROM PARENT RESPONSES TO CONSULTATION QUESTIONNAIRES**

#### **1. If Rivington Park becomes a FREE SCHOOL this will enable the school to be open to all pupils in the area and naturally lead to larger class sizes. What assurance is there for parents that class sizes will remain at 14-15 pupils?**

This is understandably the most commonly asked question. We have always committed to parents that the small class size was the heart of the school. The ability to tailor the curriculum to each child depends upon the small class size and a great deal of our community ethos and family atmosphere derives from having small classes.

- The commitment to these small classes is one of the defining characteristics of our provision. It is central to any application and becomes a feature of the school that is stipulated within our Governance documents. Government does not have the power to dictate our class size as we are an independently constituted and Governed Company.
- As a school we do not need to increase the class size beyond 14 children. This is economically a very viable number for us because our costs per head are fundamentally lower than a larger state school.
- We would move over a five year period to 1 class of 14 children for every year group. Capital funding is available to help support some of the costs of changing and extending areas to accommodate this growth, for example, new dining hall, sports areas. This releases sufficient class spaces to create 1 class per year group.
- Our classes could not physically accommodate more children than this in the class spaces that we have. The school on this site could not therefore move to larger classes without huge capital rebuilding costs. This is not therefore just a choice but also a physical capacity limit.
- Everything that we as a staff team seek to achieve in evolving the educational model for your children depends upon maintaining small class sizes. It will not be changed.
- This represents a fundamental restriction in terms of staff and management objectives for school, Governance oversight and restrictions within the founding terms of the school added to the a lack of any financial need to increase classes makes any move towards larger class sizes inconceivable.

#### **2. What happens if the Government changes its policies and the funding is cancelled?**

This is a really good question. Academies were set up under the Labour administration and this is an extension of that programme. It is hard to see a move

to abolishing something when so much taxpayer money has been invested in refurbishing and developing these academy assets.

In addition Government is only paying the same funding cost per head that it pays to state schools. There is no financial motive or saving to be made by reversing this policy. The costs of getting the schools up and running is where investment has to be made by Government. It is quite hard to envisage a justification for writing off this taxpayer investment to provide parents with extended choice only to remove it later. I suspect that each year where qualitative results are generated by successful schools will make this politically even harder to do.

The school enters into a funding contract which buys some guarantee of medium term funding. Changes to this would have considerable lead time before affecting the school. Ultimately, if the school did find itself in the position of funding being removed then it would have received the benefits of all the investment and development achieved up to that point and could revert to fee paying status.

### **3. How will the school decide on admission to school?**

We can define our admissions criteria within certain constraints. The Government is currently simplifying the law in relation to admissions for 2013 however in the meantime we have to work within the 2010 regulations. Therefore our admission policy will be based upon: -

- I. A CAPACITY admission number of 14 children into RECEPTION. And a maximum capacity of 14 in a class and 1 class in a Year group between Reception and Year 11.
- II. Statutory priority for looked after children or children with SEN with a statement naming Rivington Park where this has been agreed with the school.
- III. Siblings in school
- IV. Attendance at Rivington Park Nursery
- V. Geographical proximity to the school

A draft Admissions policy can now be downloaded from the new FREE SCHOOL page on the website.

### **4. I have already enrolled my child into school for admission in 2013 or later years. What happens to my child's application?**

All existing pupils can transfer into the new school. Any child registered for admission into school, for future years, prior to the adoption of FREE SCHOOL status is automatically accepted.

In the first year 2013-14 we do not participate in the Local Authority admission process although we will do for the following academic year. The tie break and other criteria for admission will apply but registration and application is direct to school.

**5. Are there plans to make a classroom for every year group?**

Yes. School will evolve into one class of 14 for each year group. It is possible to accommodate this through some extension work to the school subject to planning. This can be managed through the summer holidays and through phased construction work as we grow for the initial two year cycle.

**6. How would the school safeguard against accepting children with a tendency to be 'troublesome'?**

Behaviour and good conduct are absolute expectations of all pupils and will be defined in the home-school agreement. In a small school it is possible to manage behaviour and conduct very closely. This would be especially the case with the expansion of our teaching team and support infrastructure. We are good at behaviour management and will enforce acceptable conduct. Failure to comply ultimately will result in exclusion subject to normal school discipline and sanctions procedures.

**7. Will the school specialise in a specific curriculum area?**

The school intends to deliver excellence in every area and enjoys a heavily enriched primary curriculum as it is. This will continue to be developed and we are currently evaluating the advantages of declaring a specialist area.

**8. How many statemented children will the school be forced to accept?** None.

The school is never forced to accept a statemented child. Discussions always take place to establish whether the school can meet the needs of individual children or not and school has traditionally had considerable say in whether or not it is named on a statement. We have had statemented children in the past and met their needs highly effectively. The school has slightly above the National Average in terms of children with SEN and it is unlikely that this proportion would change.

School already caters highly effectively for a very wide spectrum of ability including a significant number of Gifted and Talented Children. The resources that would be available with the FREE SCHOOL funding will enable greater support for children at all stages of the SEN spectrum.

**9. How does the access to Government funding effect curriculum flexibility?**

It doesn't. We retain full control over our curriculum or we would not have considered this step.

**10. What impact will the new school structure have on the nursery?**

It doesn't. Nursery remains entirely separate in terms of management and ownership. However parents in nursery will have priority for admission should they wish to exercise this.

Day to day use of the site and sharing of resources will be governed under an operational agreement between the school and Nursery Management.

**11. What about the holiday club and afterschool care?**

The holiday club and after school care will continue to operate under the management of the nursery/ out of school provider.

*This is an initial response to the commonly asked questions raised in the consultation reply document.*