

Responses to the initial consultation process carried out in March 2011

- 1 There were 86 responses to the initial consultation process.
- 2 56 responses from the two schools' community of parents, staff and governors in favour of the amalgamation for the following reasons:
 - Staff from the two schools are already working well together with a shared curriculum and providing mutual support.
 - The governors at Alma have unanimously voted in favour of this option.
 - A Change Team has been established to work out what problems will be faced by the merging of the two schools and ways to solve them.
 - Alma school has plenty of space which will benefit St James'.
 - Both schools draw from the same local intake, with the background of the children in both schools more or less identical.
 - The enthusiasm of the executive head and her strong commitment to both schools will play a significant part in ensuring the success of the amalgamation.
 - Both schools share a similar ethos. The amalgamation will serve the local community well and will provide an opportunity for twice the number of children to experience education in an outstanding school.
 - Excited about the enhanced prospects, every child will have the opportunity to learn, why not make it the best possible.
 - Good for Bermondsey pupils, benefits for both schools, there will be more space for St James' pupils with the Alma building and good for Alma - opportunity to reorganise itself with a new management that can deliver high standard of education; this proposal should have been made some years ago.
 - Support but the new school should have 10 denominational places and 50 community places, as the proposed ratio would unfairly reduce access to education for all when compared to the current situation. *(Officer comment: St James CE school current admission policy is for Looked after children and then Church affiliation. As it stands children from families who are regular at Church get first call. Spare places are then given to siblings and on nearness to school. Alma school provides 30 community places. St James school agreement to providing 20 denominational and 40 community places when the school is enlarged to 2FE would formally provide more community places than at present.)*
 - Some concerns about the Alma building – dark inside, poor library and meals more expensive. *(Officer comment: A review is being undertaken of the Alma building with a view to investment in the site to ensure that it will provide the appropriate environment for the pupils at the school.)*
 - In principle supportive but need more written information on the proposal and how the two schools will be integrated to make a decision; nothing to reassure that Alma's gain is not St James' loss. *(Officer comment: The two schools will be integrated into one outstanding school. The younger children will remain on the St James site and the older children will move to the Alma building, which because of its size and scale will be more suitable for their education. The staff team will continue to work to achieve high standards for all the children within the school community.)*

- 3 21 responses from the schools' community of parents, staff and governors against the proposed amalgamation because
- St James' is a small school with a close knit community and this could be lost in the amalgamation; smaller schools with fewer pupils work better than larger ones; enlarging the school to 2 FE is regressive and will impact negatively on St James' children. *(Officer comment: It is the intention that the new amalgamated school would continue to provide the same support to the pupils at the enlarged school as is the case at the current St James'. The Council's Primary Strategy for Change supported the principle of 2FE Primary Schools on the basis that they are the most appropriate size for school organisation. There is no evidence that larger schools do less well than smaller schools. The new school would continue to be on two sites and the focus will continue to be on every individual child.)*
 - It will bring the standards down; don't want to see standards drop; amalgamating an outstanding school with a failing school will result in both schools failing. *(Officer comment: Again evidence does not support this; there are already indications that joint working has benefitted the Alma school pupils and not disadvantaged the St James pupils. St James is a very successful school due among others to the school management and the quality of teaching, which it is the intention would continue in the new enlarged school. Good systems and focused learning will achieve the transformation to one outstanding school. The staff team will work with the parents and children to achieve high standards for all children within the school community)*
 - Like the church ethos and fear it will be lost in the amalgamated school. *(Officer comment: the enlarged St James school will continue to have its church ethos but will offer places to the wider local community to share in that ethos)*
 - It will be unsettling for existing pupils to go to two sites, and it is not easy to get between the two. *(Officer comment: it is not planned that the pupils would be travelling between the two sites rather that each site would accommodate a separate phase with the younger KS1 pupils on the existing St James school site and the older KS2 pupils on the larger ex-Alma school site. The two sites are some quarter of a mile apart. The Change Team is looking at how to ensure the most effective operation of the amalgamated school including a walking bus and possibly a staggered start time to ensure parents with children in both phases can deliver and pick up their children easily.)*
 - It will be too much upheaval for St James pupils for the sake of saving Alma from closure. *(Officer comment: while it is recognised that there would be a period when the two schools will be formally joining together, the two schools already have experience of working together in a soft federation. The Change Team is working to ensure that any upheaval would be kept to a minimum.)*
 - Concerned that it will unsettle the children and that parents with children in two different key stages will have to take the children to two different sites and that it will be difficult for children with confidence problems and special needs to move between school sites. Also one parent concerned that Alma has a bad reputation in the Bermondsey area. *(Officer comment: every effort will be made to avoid unsettling the children. Parents with pupils in the different key stages would need to travel to the two sites to pick up their children, but they are only a quarter of a mile apart and the school will operate a walking bus to get children between the sites and are looking at a*

staggered start time. Consideration will continue to be given to the special needs of pupils. There are already indications that joint working has benefitted the Alma school pupils; Alma school would be closed as part of the amalgamation process.)

- The current children at St James will suffer as a result of the staff concentrating on the Alma children; the existing children should not suffer to help a failing school. Why not disperse the children from Alma to other schools around Southwark? How will parents arrange for children in different years to get to two different sites in time for school each day? *(Officer comment: again evidence does not support this; there are already indications that joint working has benefitted the Alma school pupils and not disadvantaged the St James pupils. Staff will continue to focus on every individual child. Alternatives to amalgamation were considered but would be more radical and would not offer the local solution currently being pursued. The Change Team is considering staggered starting times to make it easier for parents with children at both sites.)*
 - The consultation process is a token gesture; no other alternatives have been offered; more information needed on the structure of the new school; *(Officer comment: the consultation process is not a token gesture as it involves the circulation of a letter to all parents asking for their views and parents and Change Team meetings at both schools. Alternatives to amalgamation were considered but would be more radical and would not offer the local solution currently being pursued. The Change Team has been established and is working with parents to establish what problems will be faced by the merging of the two schools and ways to solve them.)*
 - It does not matter what parents think; you are going to go ahead with it anyway. Dismayed by the way the whole process has been handled – little consideration being given to the pupils and parents. *(Officer comment: this is not a foregone conclusion because there is a two stage consultation process the outcome of which will be considered by the school governing bodies and Council's elected members before final decisions are made. It is not true that little consideration is being given to the pupils and parents; the consultation letter, parents' and Change Team meetings are all evidence of real consideration being given to parents' and pupils' views)*
 - There should have been an initial newsletter circulated to all parents asking for their view on amalgamation as it will not be possible for the majority of parents to attend the meetings and the resounding response would have been no. *(Officer comment: There has been a lot of consultation including through the Change Team. The consultation process has shown differing opinions but the majority who have responded are in favour of the amalgamation.)*
 - Now getting contrary responses to issues raised at earlier consultation meetings - is it now proposed that classes will be a mixture of St James and Alma pupils? Is it now proposed the school will have a new name? Is it now proposed that there will be a change of uniform? *(Officer comment: it is not proposed that classes would be a mixture of the two schools pupils. The Change Team is working on the questions of whether to have a new name or school uniform, they are working with the pupils, parents and staff to come up with the best solutions for the amalgamated school.)*
- 4 1 response critical of consultation process - why are you lying that you are consulting when the decision has already been made? *(Officer comment: again this is not true; the consultation process is being undertaken to establish the views of the local community before decisions are taken)*

- 5 4 Southwark headteachers in favour; one qualifying in their response that the amalgamated school should offer 30 denominational places as a minimum, not 20. *(Officer comment: see above)*
- 6 4 Southwark Chairs of governors in favour; one qualifying that having the school on two sites could be problematic. *(Officer comment: see above)*
- 7 At the two school meetings the following issues were raised. There was support for the amalgamation with comments such as loved atmosphere at Alma; outstanding school taking lead but maintaining ethos of small school; reassuring that children will stay in same classes; Change Team has been established to support the transition and is looking at simple solutions to operating on two sites like staggered start and finish times; good that 400 children can have what 200 children have – but the two sites community will stay the same as there will be similar numbers of children as now; in future schools will need to group together more anyway.
- 8 There was also concern about the proposed amalgamation; that it would mean that a small school would become larger; that parents were not being listened to; that there would be a loss of church places from 30/30 to 20/40; that this change is being done for the government not the children; it is being rumoured that Alma staff will have to reapply for their jobs; difficulties of operating on two sites; if same staff and same pupils how will standards rise? If both sets of parents say no what then? It will happen whether we like it or not. Will classes be mixed with pupils from Alma and St James'? Will Alma governors remain? What will happen to uniforms? Will the school be renamed? *(Officer comment: many of these issues are considered above – staff will be protected initially by TUPE and there will be a separate consultation process for them; the Alma school governing body would be dissolved but there would be scope for governors to serve on the amalgamated school governing body. The Change Team is considering issues such as school uniform and name and will look for solutions that can be supported at a local level)*