

SOUTHWARK COUNCIL

COUNCIL ASSEMBLY

(ORDINARY MEETING)

WEDNESDAY 10 JULY 2013

URGENT QUESTION

1. URGENT QUESTION TO THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL FROM COUNCILLOR ANOOD AL-SAMERAI

Does the Leader welcome the commitment of Education Minister, David Laws MP, to new primary and secondary schools in Southwark? What has he personally done to ensure a new school is built on the Dulwich Hospital site?

RESPONSE

I welcome any interest that Ministers show in the provision of schools in Southwark. However, the Minister has not informed the Council of any new commitment and so I am asking officers to seek clarification from the department about whether or not there is any new commitment.

I am disappointed that we as a local authority are not in a position to build and open our own new schools. David Laws' and Michael Gove's obsession with free schools as the only solution to problems with school place provision is about their commitment to conservative ideology rather than what is in the best interests of children and the educational needs of boroughs like Southwark. While I recognise that free schools can be part of a solution, they should only be part of a solution, and I would encourage Liberal Democrat Councillors to use any influence they have with David Laws to enable Southwark to build and open our own schools.

There is an urgent need for an additional 420 primary places (or 14 forms of entry) by 2015. How we will respond to this is set out in the Council's primary investment programme which is coming to Cabinet next week. This is in addition to the 1080 additional places which we have already created between 2009 and 2013.

With limited capital funding allocated to Southwark from central government we are working creatively with popular and successful schools to enable them to expand, as well as actively sourcing opportunities for new schools. Tonight, I am pleased to announce that governors and staff at Ivydale Primary School in Peckham Rye have been working with officers to expand the school onto a new site, in an area where we know there is a shortage of high quality local places for local families. Brand new provision on the Bredinghurst site means that more children will have access to this popular community school.

In addition we will shortly come forward with plans to reopen the Old Bellenden School site as part of an expansion of an existing primary school. We are also working to find a suitable site for the Southwark Free School and are bringing the Galleywall School back into use once the Southwark Park School go back into their refurbished buildings.

Our forecasts are that with new secondary schools planned to open in the borough in September 2013 (Ark All Saints academy in Camberwell and Compass academy in

Rotherhithe) and in September 2014 (the University Engineering Academy South Bank in Walworth) there should be sufficient secondary places available in the short term. The forecasts show continuing demand for secondary places and suggest that in the medium term from 2016 additional secondary places may be needed in the borough. We will be keeping this under careful review including working with our existing secondary schools.

In terms of the Dulwich Hospital site, I have been regularly briefed and updated on the potential uses of the site and have given my full support to the recognition of the site as suitable for a school. The Dulwich SPD, due to be adopted by Cabinet next week, sets out that the use of part of this site for a school would help to meet the requirements of the planning brief and Cllr Fiona Colley and Stephen Platts, Director of Regeneration, have met with NHS Southwark Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to confirm our support for this use on the site.

Schools and school places remain critical for not just Southwark, but all of London. The best way to address this is to take an all of borough approach, ensuring that places are available in the right places and meet the needs of our growing population. Whilst the Liberal Democrats focus on one school on one site in one part of the borough, we are working hard to ensure that all children in the borough have access to the best schools. I am confident that Southwark has one of the most robust plans in place to deal with the future shortage of places to ensure that all children get access to a good local school.