

Greenwich Free School

Greenwich Free School: Consultation Report to the Department for Education

March 2012

Contents

Executive Summary.....	3
Stakeholder Engagement Prior to the Formal Consultation Period	4
The Formal Consultation Process	4
Report on Consultation Events	6
Analysis of Formal Consultation Survey Feedback	7
Conclusion.....	10
Annexes (attached separately)	

Executive Summary

The vision of the proposer group

Greenwich Free School (GFS) believe that all students can achieve success if given outstanding teaching and pastoral care.

The Greenwich Free School will be a small, more personal secondary school, where teachers will get to know every student as an individual, and be able to challenge and nurture them. There will be just four forms of 25 students in each year group.

GFS will demand a lot, setting high standards for students and staff, with a “no excuses” approach to attitude, work and discipline. GFS also recognises the importance of students’ wellbeing, building their characters and skills, and developing young people who will truly flourish. GFS will have an extended school day, a wide range of daily extra-curricular activities, a more personalised and flexible curriculum and teachers who are given the time, training and management support to be truly outstanding.

The curriculum will focus on depth before breadth – mastering the most important stuff – with a concentration on English, Maths, Science, Languages and the Humanities. Our objective is to develop students who are happy at school, committed to doing the best they can, and who are all able to get to, and succeed at, University.

Life in the Greenwich Free School will be hard work, but truly engaging, exciting and fun.

The results

A variety of media were used to consult and engage key stakeholders. The formal consultation involved a combination of letters to stakeholders, open meetings, and an updated GFS website. The consultation was further supported by an on-line questionnaire to allow those stakeholders unable to attend a public meeting the opportunity to participate in the consultation process. Additional informal consultation took place through face to face meetings, telephone conversations, letters and emails.

Overall, the majority of responses to the consultation were positive (78% of the online survey agreed that the Trust should enter into the Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State). Some discrete issues of concern were raised, in particular the prospect of increased traffic around the immediate locality of the school. Having worked closely with local stakeholders the proposers will continue to work to mitigate the risk of this issue impacting upon both pupils and the local community. On this basis, the proposer group have resolved to enter into a Funding Agreement with the Secretary of State to operate the School and are content that the formal consultation process, as set out below, was both comprehensive and appropriate.

Stakeholder Engagement Prior to the Formal Consultation Period

The proposers undertook significant stakeholder engagement activities prior to the formal consultation period, which meant that at the initiation of formal consultation, on 16 January 2012, many community members were already aware of the Free School and the nature of the proposal.

The Greenwich Free School website was utilised throughout as a means of communicating dates of events and meetings and providing updates on key milestones to interested parties. There was a fortnightly diary before and during the consultation process called “Mr Faith’s fortnightly missive”.

The Formal Consultation Process

The formal consultation was undertaken in a six week period from 16 January to 26 February 2012. Multiple methods of consultation were deployed and a wide range of stakeholders was consulted. In order to set out this process as clearly as possible a detailed overview is provided in the table below.

Overview of the Formal Consultation Process (16 January – 26 February 2012)

Type of stakeholder	Why consult them?	How they were consulted
Potential pupils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They will be attending the school, consultation provides an opportunity to engage and enthuse them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> GFS website Via parents Attendance at public meetings
Potential parents / carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Core stakeholders as they exercise ultimate control over the decision-making process to select a school for their child(ren) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation letter to all interested parents on the GFS database School website updated with Free School plans, consultation questionnaire and FAQs; Open consultation meetings Adverts in local press (including links to the on-line questionnaire) Posters in community meeting locations (e.g. A4E offices) Extensive leafletting campaign and door-to-door visits in target residential areas
Community stakeholders (local groups, businesses, faith groups including churches, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong relationships with local groups will help embed the school in the life of the community A number of community groups may be users of the school's facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter to community groups and stakeholders School website updated with Free School plans, consultation questionnaire and FAQs; Open consultation meetings Adverts in local press (including links to the on-line questionnaire)
Greenwich primary schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The presence of GFS presents exciting opportunities to work together in the future (e.g. sharing of facilities, staff, etc.) Primaries may provide pupils for entry into GFS at Y7 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter to Chairs of Governors and Head teachers; School website updated with Free School plans, consultation questionnaire and FAQs; Adverts in local press including links to the on-line questionnaire. Follow up telephone calls Invitation to open consultation meeting
Greenwich secondary schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secondary schools near to GFS may be concerned regarding increased competition for school places; Opportunities for future co-operation, sharing of resources, etc. can be explored Secondaries may provide pupils for entry into GFS at Y12 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter to Chairs of Governors and Head teachers; Website updated with revised plans, consultation questionnaire and FAQs; Adverts in local press (including links to the on-line questionnaire) Follow up telephone calls Invitation to open consultation meeting
Greenwich Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening of the Free School may impact provision locally Greenwich will co-ordinate GFS's admission arrangements from 2013 onwards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letters to Councillors and individual meetings Letter to the Cabinet Member responsible for Children and Young People and personal meeting On-going dialogue with DCS Personal meetings and other on-going communications with local councillors
Surrounding Councils (Lewisham, Tower Hamlets, Newham, Bexley, Bromley, Barking and Dagenham)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opening of the Free School may impact provision locally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter to the Cabinet Member responsible for Children and Young People and individual meetings Letter to the Leader of the Council and follow up communications
Local MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They represent their constituents who may have concerns about GFS's plans The support of the local MP(s) may assist in securing Departmental approval for GFS (signing of the Funding Agreement) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter to local MP(s) requesting a face to face meeting Individual meetings with local MPs Meetings with other politicians and Government Ministers

Report on Consultation Events

In addition to the wide range of stakeholder engagement events held prior to the formal consultation period, three formal events were held during the formal consultation period. One was specifically advertised as an open consultation event on 8 February, while the other two were open events that were more targeted towards interested students and their families as part of the marketing and student recruitment campaign and held on 19 January and 2 February. These were open to all interested parties. The open events were well attended with approximately 50 at the first event and 60 at the second event with a large number of questions asked and positive feedback received. The main subjects raised at the open meetings were around the site, the admissions process, the extended day and requesting more information. The event on 8 February was advertised in the press and emails went to all interested parents from the database; despite this no one attended the event. The indications are that this was due to sufficient information being provided at the previous open events and a generally good level of awareness and support in the local community.

The table above shows the wide range of methods by which these meetings have been publicised. In addition GFS adopted innovative means of reaching the public such as having a GFS branded market stall in Woolwich at weekends to publicise the Free School and provide information and answers to questions and sent teams door-to-door to speak to prospective parents in target residential areas, as well as distributing flyers directing people to the school's website and providing information on the school's approach. The group also held a workshop with local students to involve them in developing a unique brand for the new school.

It was decided to hold further open events after the closure of the consultation to maintain the marketing momentum and maximise opportunities for students and their families to hear about the Free School and decide if they would be interested in applying to attend or to learn more about it. The first of these events was held on 25 February at Brook Hill Children's Centre and was well attended; this was deliberately held on a Saturday in order to reach those families who may not be able or willing to attend events during the working week. The second was held on 8 March at the same local Children's Centre and built on the relationships that the Principal Designate is developing with local parent and community groups. It was well attended by well over 100 people.

Further to the consultation events above in the week commencing 16th January, Lee Faith, the Principal Designate, met with the heads of local primary schools. He received positive feedback and offers of support. The key issue raised at these meetings was discussion of the potential site. The following comment has been provided by Richard Slade, Headteacher of Plumcroft Primary School:

"The team opening the [Greenwich] Free School really do know their business. [...] Lee has a very impressive background, the team behind this new Secondary Free School also has a very impressive track record."

GFS also met with Gillian Palmer, the Director of Children Services at Greenwich Council, local councillors and Councillor Roberts, Leader of Greenwich Council. Gillian Palmer offered to support GFS in engaging with the primary schools, particularly those which had been slow to engage with GFS to date. This support has proved to be helpful in the Principal Designate's on-going and developing engagement with the local primary schools.

Analysis of Formal Consultation Survey Feedback

Notes on relevant methodologies/assumptions

42 complete responses to the consultation survey were received. Both hard copy and electronic responses have been included in this total. Only responses offered during the formal period of consultation have been analysed.

For the purposes of categorising respondents all of those who offered no specific self-identification, but who did provide a Greenwich postcode, have been categorised as a 'community member'.

Information provided with the survey

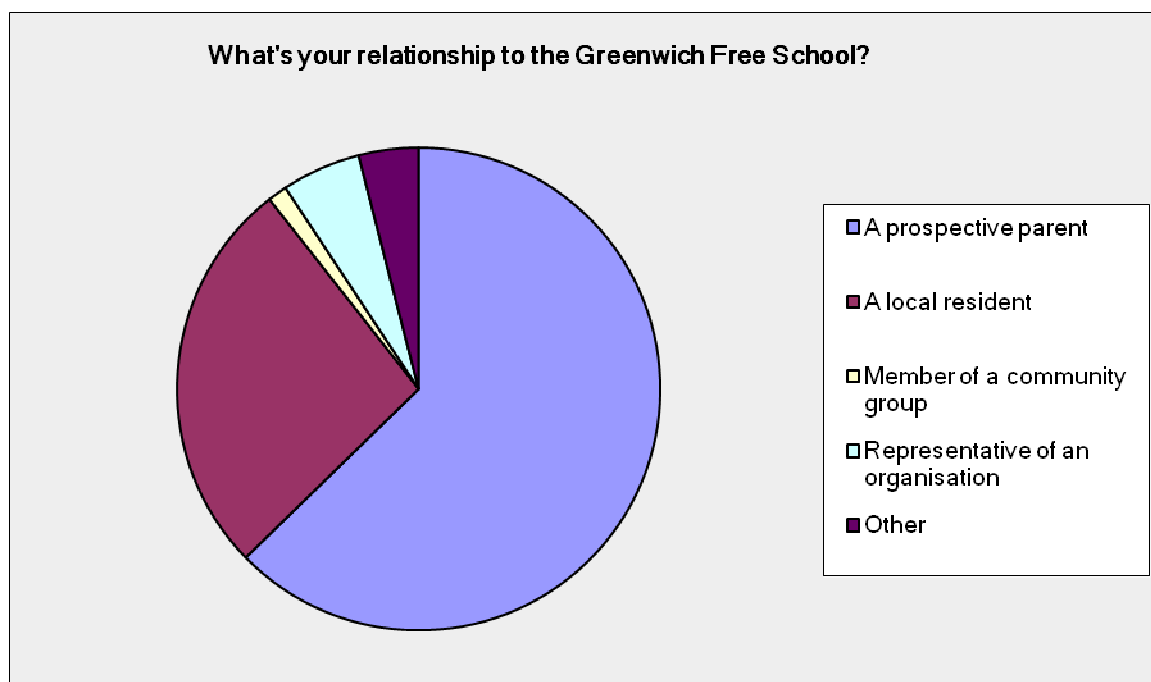
The proposer group were keen to ensure that all respondents were capable of making a fully informed decision prior to responding to the survey. In keeping with this, a comprehensive consultation document was distributed outlining the following key information:

- Vision and Ethos of the proposed school;
- Site and buildings plans;
- An outline of intended extended day and wrap-around provision (unique dimension of the proposal);
- Key policies outlines including curriculum model, behaviour and SEN.

(See http://www.greenwichfreeschool.co.uk/documents/GFS_statutory_consultation.pdf or Annex 1).

The survey questions

Ten survey questions were posed. The questions and the responses to these questions are analysed in turn below.



Greenwich Free School : Consultation Report

Do you think the Secretary of State and the Greenwich Free School should enter into a funding agreement and therefore allow GFS to open?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	78.6%	33
No	21.4%	9

Are there any specific changes that you think should be made to the Agreement before being finalised? If so, what are they?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	14.3%	6
No	85.7%	36

Do you think that Adair House is overall a good site for the Greenwich Free School?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	71.4%	30
No	28.6%	12

Do you think the site is well placed to serve the educational needs of Greenwich and its overall community?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	69.0%	29
No	31.0%	13

Do you believe the site is sufficiently accessible?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	76.2%	32
No	23.8%	10

Do you think the fundamental ethos and approach to education is right for the Greenwich Free School?

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	81.0%	34
No	19.0%	8

Do you think the planned approach to the curriculum is right?

Greenwich Free School : Consultation Report

Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	76.2%	32
No	23.8%	10

Do you welcome the plans for extended school day?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	78.6%	33
No	21.4%	9

Do you think the size of the school and its classes is right?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	78.6%	33
No	21.4%	9

Do you think we should make any changes to our approach to help ensure equality of opportunity?		
Answer Options	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	26.2%	11
No	73.8%	31

Positive responses

The information above demonstrates that the vast majority of respondents (particularly those of parents and carers) were strongly supportive of the Greenwich Free School's proposals. 78.6% of respondents believe that the Greenwich Free School should enter a funding agreement with the Secretary of State for Education. Many of the respondents also offered constructive comments. In particular they supported the benefits of a smaller school with smaller class sizes; they believed these benefits were not currently on offer in Greenwich. Respondents were particularly attracted by the curriculum's focus, the emphasis upon extra-curricular activities and the extended school day. Furthermore, many respondents (particularly parents) felt that the ethos and project as a whole provided a unique alternative to current provision which many felt was not sufficient in the area. Respondents were strongly supportive of Adair House as the site with many noting its excellent transport links and the value of its outdoor recreational space.

Alongside the strong positive responses were a small number of reservations and negative responses. The proposers of the Greenwich Free School will bear these concerns in mind and have set out their responses to specific points below.

Opposition to the principle of free schools

There were a number of individuals (approximately 6 of the respondents) who opposed the policy of Free Schools in principle. The proposers acknowledge the political debate over legislation permitting

Greenwich Free School : Consultation Report

the establishment of Free Schools but note that a strong majority of respondents are in favour of the opening of this proposed school.

Impact on other secondary schools in the area

A minority of respondents worried that a new school would put pressure on current schools in the local area. The proposers intend to continue to cooperate with the Local Authority to ensure that the school complements existing provision. Furthermore, the proposers noted the opinion of many respondents that the Greenwich Free School offers a unique prospect for pupils which is not currently available in the local area. They further noted the concerns of many respondents that at present there are not sufficient places in Greenwich nor were there schools of the type similar to the Greenwich Free School.

Traffic and congestion at Adair House

A minority of respondents raised concerns about increased traffic in the vicinity of Adair House noting its potential impact on pupils and local residents. The proposers have noted these concerns and will continue to liaise with the Local Authority on this matter, but consider that these responses are outweighed by positive responses about the school's location. Many respondents thought the proposed school well situated to allow access to public transport from all across the borough and that it provided easy access for both pupils and parents.

Equality and access in admissions

A minority of respondents raised concerns or questions regarding equality and access in admissions. Some seemed concerned that the school was designed to provide education to a narrow social elite or to simply provide a school for the children of current supporters. The proposers were of the view that the existing Admissions Policy adequately addresses these concerns, and that the consultation highlights the need to publicise and explain the policy clearly.

Conclusion

The proposers have considered, in detail, the responses received from the consultation exercise. The proposers have determined that, following the statutory consultation process, they wish to enter into a Funding Agreement with the Department for Education. In making their decision, the proposers were mindful of the concerns raised by a minority of respondents and will publish both this report and any consequent amendments to the educational plan and site plans on the consultation section of their website.

Annexes (attached to paper copy; online for electronic copy)

1. School prospectus
2. Consultation document