

Children's Services  
222 Upper Street N1 1XR

Report of: Executive Member for Children, Young People and Families

Meeting of: Executive

Date: 9 February 2023

Ward(s): Barnsbury and Caledonian

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## Subject: Proposal on the Future of Copenhagen and Vittoria Primary Schools

### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Following the Executive approval on 13 October 2022 of the School Organisation Plan which sets out how the council will manage the high levels of surplus capacity in our schools to ensure the best outcomes for children; and as part of this the decision to make a proposal to amalgamate Copenhagen and Vittoria primary schools, officers undertook a detailed first stage consultation between 3 November and 16 December 2022.
- 1.2. 116 parents, carers and members of the community attended a series of consultation events held throughout the consultation period, 11 emails were received to the consultation mailbox and there were 38 respondents to the online consultation form.
- 1.3. Main themes from the consultation related to the identity of the school; the impact on staffing; how the proposed amalgamated school would operate and be financially viable; and an understanding that to “do nothing” is not an option given the decline in pupil numbers at both schools.
- 1.4. Several important considerations were raised that can and will be explored and developed by the Governing Board and school leadership in more detail with the school community if the proposal is agreed. This will help to ensure that the best educational provision for children and strong parental engagement are at the centre of the amalgamated school proposed.
- 1.5. It is recommended that the council proceed with the proposal to amalgamate Copenhagen and Vittoria Primary schools and follows the next stage of the prescribed process, which is to issue a statutory notice.

## 2. Introduction

- 2.1. Birth rates in Islington have reduced significantly and this decline is projected to continue. This is leading to falling rolls and a high level of surplus capacity in Islington's primary schools with vacancies in reception at 20% in October 2022.
- 2.2. The School Organisation Plan sets out the approach as to how we will confidently manage this surplus capacity in our schools to ensure the best outcomes for our children and young people and sustainability of schools. The plan sets the strategic direction for pupil place planning across the borough and has been developed alongside the Education Plan to ensure that the principles applied to managing our school estate reflect our corporate and political commitment to driving educational excellence through inclusive and sustainable schools and supports the delivery of a quality educational experience for all children and young people through a diverse curriculum offer.
- 2.3. We have a duty to ensure that sufficient schools are available at primary and secondary stages of education in the local area, and for children with special educational needs. Decisions to change the organisation of Community and Voluntary aided schools are made by the Council, and for academies, by the Secretary of State, advised by the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC).
- 2.4. Reducing the number of school places in a planned way will support schools to manage change within their national funding formula allocations. Department for Education (DfE) guidance on school closures includes a presumption not to close. Therefore, all options have been exhausted to avoid school closure although, where there is no alternative, long-term option, this does have to be considered.
- 2.5. The specific proposals of the School Organisation Plan are to reduce the Published Admission Numbers of Highbury Quadrant, Pooles Park, Montem and New North Academy primary schools and to amalgamate Copenhagen and Vittoria Primary schools. We consulted on reducing the Published Admission Numbers throughout November and December through the Admissions consultation and undertook a detailed first stage consultation between 3 November and 16 December 2022 on the future organisation of Copenhagen and Vittoria primary schools.
- 2.6. This report provides the detail of the consultation on the proposal to amalgamate Copenhagen and Vittoria Primary schools and the responses to the consultation. The outcome of the admissions consultation will be reported on separately.

## 3. The Proposal

- 3.1. We are proposing to amalgamate Vittoria and Copenhagen primary schools to a single school on the Copenhagen site to make best use of the staff expertise and so that the new school is financially viable.
- 3.2. Technically, based on Department for Education guidance, this is seen as a closure of one school. However, in practice, the proposal would see Vittoria school move to the Copenhagen site keeping the Vittoria school name so that the strong community identity of both schools would not be lost. This proposal would therefore allow both schools to continue together, albeit as one amalgamated school.

3.3. The schools are part of a 'hard federation', which means they share an executive governing body, and staff have worked across both school sites. Should the amalgamation go ahead, these informal arrangements would be strengthened. The amalgamated school will have space for 45 new pupils per year, with a total capacity of 315 from reception through to year 6, and additional capacity for nursery provision. Current Copenhagen and Vittoria pupils would continue their education at the amalgamated school with a familiar staff and curriculum and their friends.

## 4. The reasons for the proposal

- 4.1. School places are planned by dividing Islington into six different planning areas. Copenhagen and Vittoria Primary Schools are in Planning Area 4 (Barnsbury). This planning area has the highest vacancy rate in the borough with 260 places in reception across seven primary schools, with 76 places currently unfilled in October 2022, a vacancy rate of 29%.
- 4.2. The pupil number projections show that this vacancy rate will increase further in the coming years at both reception and for all year groups.
- 4.3. Copenhagen and Vittoria schools both have high levels of spare school places, with pupil numbers set to fall further still in the coming years. As a result, both schools are expected to experience budget deficits, which could lead to a decline in the educational offer if it is not addressed. The declining number of pupils on roll at the two schools is shown table 1 and table 2.

Table 1: Number of children in Reception

School	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Copenhagen	17	11	13	26	16	17
Vittoria	23	18	23	19	23	12
Total of both schools	40	29	36	45	39	29

Table 2: Number of children in whole school including nursery

School	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Copenhagen	185	172	162	162	152	135
Vittoria	220	215	199	183	181	156

School	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Total of both schools	405	387	361	345	333	291

4.4. Preferences show how many parents each year choose a school as their first choice for their children starting in reception. Table 3 shows how many chose either Copenhagen or Vittoria as their first choice. From this, we can see that both schools have a lower number of first choice preferences than their capacity and have been under-subscribed for the last six years.

Table 3: First choice by year

School	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Copenhagen	13	10	8	22	7	13
Vittoria	18	14	18	17	15	9

4.5. As set out in the School Organisation Plan and in line with Department for Education Guidance all possible options were explored before making the proposal to amalgamate the two schools. These are as follows:

#### 4.6. Reduce the Published Admission Number (PAN)

4.6.1. Both schools are currently operating as one Form of Entry (one class a year) and cannot reduce their size any further as this is the legal minimum size and the minimum size at which a maintained primary school is financially viable.

#### 4.7. Maximise the pupil numbers

4.7.1. Both schools have sought to maximise their pupil numbers, however falling births in the area means there are not enough pupils to fill either school.

#### 4.8. Make better use of spare building capacity

4.8.1. Copenhagen has spare capacity which has been maximised over the last two years by using a whole floor with separate entrance as the spare space for other schools to use when capital works are taking place. However, this use is not sufficient to address the future budget shortfall.

## 4.9. Including children with SEND

- 4.9.1. Copenhagen and Vittoria have a higher proportion of pupils with SEND Support than the borough average and Copenhagen has the fourth highest proportion of pupils with an EHCP in the borough and so are already doing this.

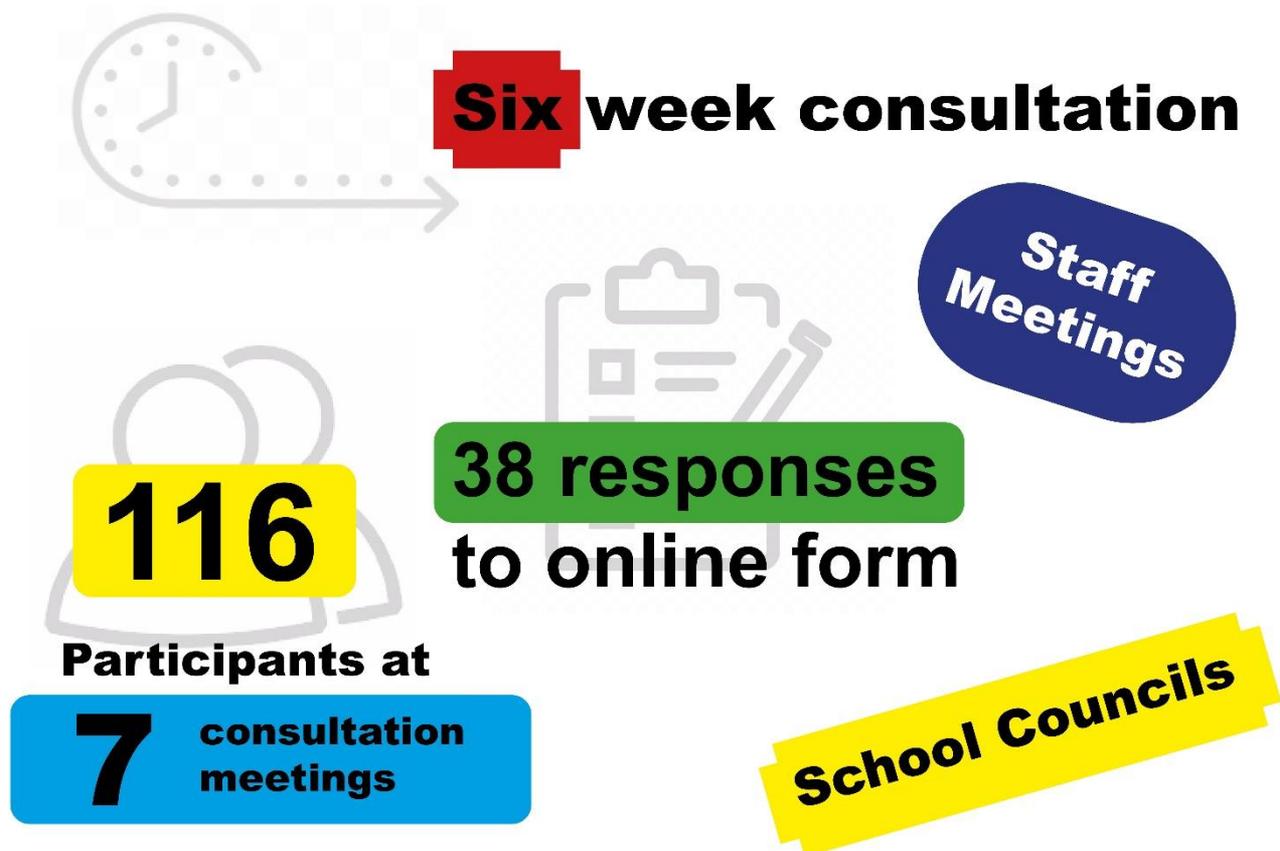
## 4.10. Collaboration and Federation to achieve economies of scale

- 4.10.1. Copenhagen and Vittoria are already part of the Islington Futures Federation with Elizabeth Garret Anderson and Beacon High. There are shared staffing posts across several areas, shared events and resources and they have completed a series of cost reduction measures. Over recent years, both schools have put cost saving measures in place to help tackle the financial difficulties facing many London schools and feel that continuing to cost cut within the individual schools would be to a detriment to the childrens' learning experience.

# 5. The Consultation

## 5.1. The consultation process

- 5.1.1. We carried out a consultation from 3 November to 16 December 2022 on the proposal to amalgamate Copenhagen and Vittoria primary schools in line with Stage 1 of the statutory guidance on Opening and closing maintained schools.
- 5.1.2. Officers supported several consultation meetings for parents, staff and the wider community. The consultation was also shared at headteacher and governor briefings with all Islington schools. The two schools spoke with their individual school councils to capture the pupils' views on the proposal.

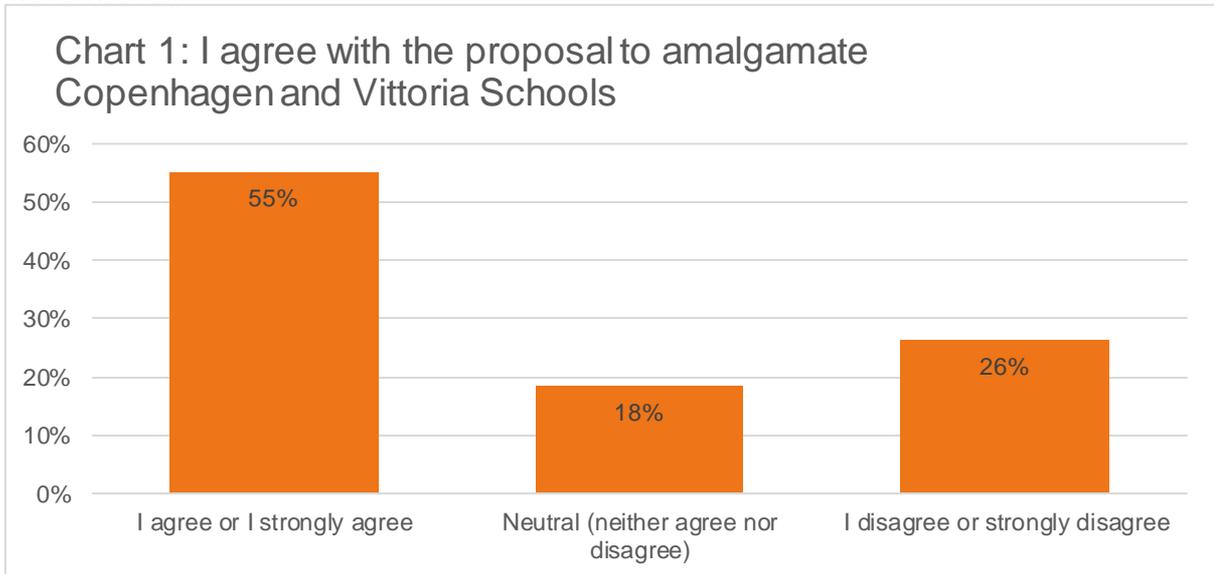


- 5.1.3. The consultation booklet and questionnaire were also translated to Arabic, Bengali, and Somali: the three most common second languages spoken at both schools.
- 5.1.4. All documentation was shared with statutory consultees including parents, local schools, admission authorities, MPs, and other interested organisations. All the documentation was published online at a dedicated webpage. The council issued a press release and the consultation was reported on in the local press.
- 5.1.5. The consultation document that was both printed and shared electronically is at Appendix A.
- 5.1.6. A set of questions and answers were published online at the start of the consultation and were added to during the consultation as more questions were raised.
- 5.1.7. 116 people attended the parent and community meetings where they asked questions and fed back their views and concerns.
- 5.1.8. 38 people completed the consultation questionnaire online. Respondents to the questionnaire were able to make additional comments. 25 respondents chose to leave additional comments.
- 5.1.9. We also invited respondents to send their comments to us by email to a dedicated mailbox. Seven people emailed their comments and a written document was sent to us on behalf of parents of Copenhagen Primary school.

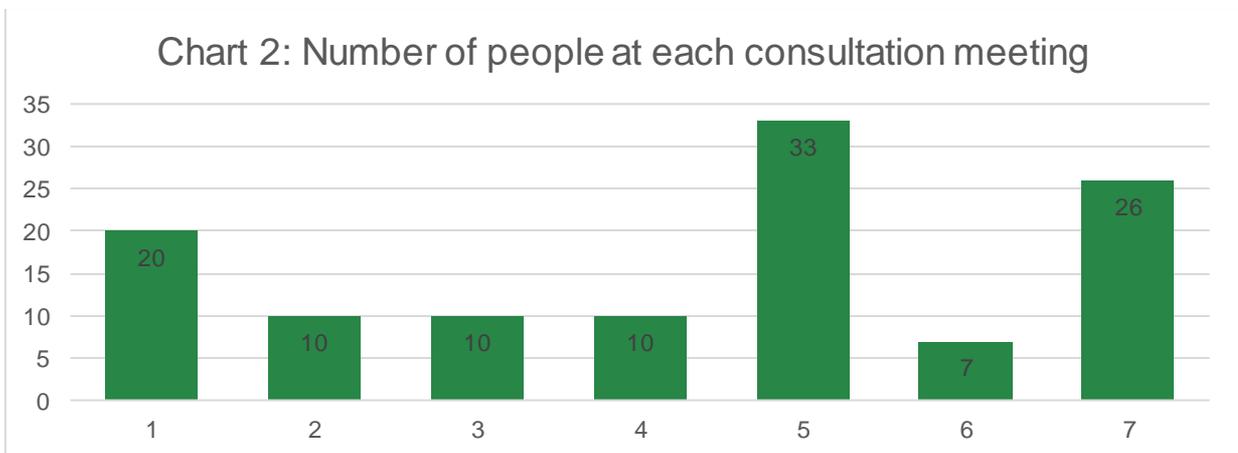
5.1.10. The two schools spoke with their individual school councils to capture the pupils' views on the proposal.

## 5.2. Main themes from the consultation

5.2.1. 38 respondents completed the online consultation questionnaire: 55% agreed or strongly agreed with the main proposal, 26% disagreed or strongly disagreed and 18% were neutral.



5.2.2. 116 people attended the consultation meetings.



5.2.3. The responses to the consultation are provided at Appendix B to this report. From these, the main themes that resulted from the consultation and the council's responses to them are below.

## 5.3. The identity of the amalgamated school

5.3.1. Both schools are highly valued by their communities and concerns were expressed that the amalgamation could lead to a loss of identity of each school and, by expanding and moving Vittoria school to the Copenhagen school site the identity of Copenhagen would be lost. The name of the school is an important reflection of its identity to the

community and parents suggested that if the proposal goes ahead the amalgamated school should have a new name or a name that combines both schools' names.

### **5.3.2. Council Response**

The Council recognises how important the name and identity of the school is to parents and the community and has listened carefully to the concerns of parents regarding this. Particular consideration was given to this and specifically on the use of a "working title" for the amalgamated school such as Vittoria and Copenhagen Community School. The Council is very supportive of the views expressed that the name of the amalgamated school should reflect the identity of both schools. However, the legal advice says this can not be adopted at the current stage in the process as the Department for Education guidance does not permit a name change for school amalgamations of this nature. A name that combines Vittoria and Copenhagen could be agreed if the amalgamation goes ahead. This would happen after the amalgamation and would be proposed by the Governing Body. The Governing Body has committed to work with parents and carers to arrive at a name that is meaningful to both communities should the amalgamation go ahead.

## **5.4. Concern for the retention and security of employment for staff at the two schools**

5.4.1. Parents were concerned about the impact on the staff of both schools; both staff and parents would have liked more information about what will happen in relation to staff and concerns were expressed about the timelines for the process.

### **5.4.2. Council response**

5.4.3. We appreciate that more information would be welcomed by staff and parents in relation to the future of staff and that this proposal has created uncertainty for staff. However, it is too early to say as formal staff consultation can only take place if the decision is taken by the council's Executive to agree the proposal. We will, however, seek to protect employment as far as possible for staff currently working at Vittoria and Copenhagen. We also understand that staff would have appreciated earlier notice of the proposals given the position of the two schools was known well in advance of the consultation being issued. It has been important that all other options were fully explored and carefully considered to keep both schools open before making a proposal to amalgamate the two schools and the timeline we are working to has been planned so as not to create long term uncertainty for the schools and their communities.

## **5.5. Clear understanding that "doing nothing" is not an option**

5.5.1. Respondents generally understood the position of the two schools and why the proposal is being made. They acknowledged that taking no action was not an option for the Local Authority and that something had to be done given the low numbers at both schools. Parents shared a range of ideas on how to bring the two schools together as effectively as possible involving both themselves and children in the process.

## **5.5.2. Council response**

5.5.3. We welcomed the engagement with parents and carers through the meetings and held additional meetings in the process at the request of parents to explore issues, one of these was to hold a joint parent meeting for both schools together and another was to meet with a group of representative parents of Copenhagen school to better understand and respond to their concerns. If the proposal is agreed, the Executive Headteacher supported by the Local Authority is keen to formally establish working groups of parents to build on the active engagement of parents in this process to support a successful transition. If the proposal is agreed many aspects of the amalgamated school would be co-designed with parents to allow a new culture to thrive.

## **5.6. Class sizes, future operating model and financial sustainability of a 1.5 Form Entry School**

5.6.1. Parents and carers sought clarification on how a 1.5 Form of Entry school would operate and assurance on class sizes. They further questioned the financial viability of the proposed amalgamated school going forward given the current low number of pupils in reception of the two schools combined and the future projections.

### **5.6.2. Council response**

5.6.3. There are several 1.5 form entry schools in Islington and models of good practice that will be used to support the development of the operating model of the amalgamated school should the proposals be agreed. The Executive headteacher and headteachers are committed to creating the best possible educational offer for children by bringing the two schools together and operating as a 1.5 Form of Entry school. In relation to the financial sustainability of the school the council acknowledges that it will take time to develop and promote the newly amalgamated school after this change process should the proposal be agreed and is committed to supporting the school over a sustained period to ensure its long term viability.

## **5.7. Other Comments**

5.7.1. There were many comments and questions about how the amalgamated school would operate in the future including matters relating to culture, diversity, and behaviour; educational attainment; before and after school provision; and school uniforms. These are all important considerations that will be explored and developed by the Governing Board and school leadership in more detail with the school community if the proposal is agreed.

## **5.8. Comments from the pupils on the School Councils**

5.8.1. Pupils of the two school councils were asked to feedback on the proposal with both school councils sharing balanced views with positive feedback expressing excitement about making new friends; having more pupils for sporting activities and social events; more money and fundraising; having a full school; already having friends at the other school and a view that “the more children the better, we can be a stronger school and definitely stronger at sports”.

5.8.2. Pupils' concerns were about being worried if everything changed; having enough school meals, enough teaching and learning resources and enough space; whether their friends would still come to the amalgamated school and what would happen to the Vittoria school building.

## 6. The next steps

6.1. Based on the feedback received during the consultation it is recommended that the Council proceed with the proposal to amalgamate Copenhagen and Vittoria Primary schools and follows the next stage of the prescribed process. This is to issue a statutory notice of a formal consultation. The draft statutory notice is shown at Appendix D.

6.2. The timeline recommended to proceed with the next stage is as follows:

Stages	Process and time required
Issue statutory notices	Following consideration of this report by Executive formal publication of notices stating council's intent to implement proposals
Formal Consultation	Four-week statutory representation period if the proposal is agreed to take place from Thursday 23rd February to Thursday 23 March.
Determination	Executive to consider public report of the response received during the representation period.
Implementation	September 2023

## 6.3. Impacts and risks

6.3.1. Islington has a statutory responsibility to manage and make appropriate offers of education, within a reasonable distance, to all children affected by changes at their schools.

6.3.2. We would need to do this in a way that safeguarded access to high quality education especially for vulnerable pupils and communities and those pupils with special educational needs. We will identify the needs of the existing cohort, especially for those pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and identify appropriate mitigation to ensure that the right levels of support are in place and aid a smooth transition. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed and is at Appendix C.

