



Council

Motions

Date: 17 May 2023

Class: Part 1

Contributors: Head of Governance and Committee Services

Outline and recommendation

To receive motions from Members of the Council.

MOTION RE PROPOSED ACADEMISATIONS OF THE LEATHERSELLERS' FEDERATION AND CONISBOROUGH COLLEGE

Proposer: Councillor Stephen Penfold

Seconder: Councillor Sian Eiles

It is noted that:

1. Members of Lewisham Council were elected 2022 with a pledge to

“build an inclusive and high-achieving system of local comprehensive schools trusted by our community, and in which all children can succeed”.

In order to achieve that aim, Lewisham Council is committed to an approach where schools work together and with us, within a framework of shared values and common goals. This is what the evidence tells us is effective in improving schools. We are pleased to note that all Lewisham schools, whatever their governance status, have joined us in adopting a new education strategy, committing to working together in partnership. This approach is delivering for local children: since 2019 the proportion of local schools rated good or outstanding has risen from below 90% to 98% - above national and London averages. Not a single Lewisham school has been rated inadequate since 2016, again far better than the national picture. Exam results have markedly improved. On the Government's own measure of progress, Lewisham secondary schools are doing better than most across the country.

2. Given the above, it is disappointing that The Leathersellers' Federation Governing Board voted on 3 May 2023 to apply to the Department for Education for academy orders for the three schools within The Leathersellers' Federation, with a view to becoming a multi-academy trust by September 2023 and despite the response to the statutory consultation, conducted between 20 February and 31 March 2023, running at more than 10 to 1 against academisation.
3. This decision has caused significant concern in the schools' communities and led to strike action that is seriously disrupting the schools.
4. There are further talks planned between the unions and The Leathersellers' Federation Governing Board at the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service.
5. It is clear that if The Leathersellers' Federation becomes a multi-academy trust this will be the first part of the process as The Leathersellers' Federation clearly envisage Lewisham primary schools joining the multi-academy trust in due course.
6. It is also disappointing that the Department for Education has issued an academy order in respect of Conisborough College that will force Conisborough College to join a multi-academy trust against the wishes of the school, the community and the Council.
7. The Council works closely in partnership with all the existing academy schools within the Borough, and that partnership serves the Borough's children well. It remains our view that schools joining multi-academy trusts is not generally the best option, for them or the wider community of schools. That is even more the case where academisation is forced upon schools without regard to the views and needs of a school's pupils, parents or staff, and the wider school community.\
8. Academisation is a "one-way street"; once a school or schools become an academy they cannot return to the local authority. There is a greater risk of disruption to important local and community links, and the future of local schools becomes more likely to be controlled by central government, which has shown little understanding or concern for the needs of Lewisham's young people.
9. Academisation can reduce local accountability and scrutiny.
10. Nevertheless, our commitment to a strong partnership with all local schools remains, with the guiding principle being to secure the best possible educational opportunities for Lewisham's children and young people, whatever school they attend.

Accordingly this Council resolves:

1. To immediately write to The Leathersellers' Federation Governing Board and the unions involved to express our concern at the current situation and to urge the Board and the unions to negotiate, urging both parties to be flexible, so that a negotiated settlement can be reached and to offer the good officers of the Council to assist with negotiations between the Board and the unions;
2. To re-emphasise in our communications the importance of the education strategy that all our schools have adopted, and that while we might have disagreements

about governance, we and Lewisham schools remain committed to a partnership delivering for our children;

3. Alongside the secondary school application process, to use the first anniversary of the education strategy and the recruitment of a new Head of Lewisham Learning to publicise the successes being delivered by the strategy;
4. To use all avenues of communication and influence, with the Department for Education and others, so far as possible, to ensure that, if it is to join a multi-academy trust, Conisborough College is able to join a multi-academy trust that shares the values of our local school system, is committed to working with Lewisham Council and community, and can continue to work within the structure of partnership that Lewisham schools have established; and that no further schools within Lewisham are made subject to compulsory academy orders.