

HOLLAND PARK

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7th June 2022

Dear Parents and Students of Holland Park School,

Last night the Governing Body of Holland Park School met to consider the results of the Stakeholder Engagement Process on future governance in order to make a recommendation to the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Minister for the School System.

The Stakeholder Engagement Process opened on 6th April 2022 so that the proposed future of the school, as set out by the Governing Body, could be commented on by members of the school community. The Governing Body's stated proposal was that the school should join a multi-academy trust and it said it had identified United Learning as its preferred partner. The process closed at 5pm on 31st May 2022. It was not a requirement under the statutory framework but the Governing Body was keen to hold a full and open Stakeholder Engagement Process to give all members of the school community ample opportunity to give their view. Governors would like to thank all those who took the opportunity to put forward their views, whether that was at one of the meetings we arranged, via email or via the online questionnaire. All parents were also offered the opportunity to speak with a Governor, either as part of a group or one-on-one.

In all, 186 responses were received via the online questionnaire while more than 70 emails or letters considered to be submissions were received via email to the [info@](mailto:info@hollandparkschool.co.uk) email address. These responses were from a mix of current and former students, parents and members of staff, as well as members of the wider school community.

This letter sets out the recommendation made by the Governing Body, and the reasons for it. It also explains the next steps in the process and sets out how you can express your support or opposition to the recommendations made.

I hope you will excuse the length of this letter but, as you know, these are important matters and I am keen that you are fully updated.

Recommendation and Next Steps

The recommendation of the Governing Body, having heard all views, and using our own judgement and experience, is that Holland Park School should become part of United Learning as soon as possible.

This final recommendation of the Governing Body will now be sent to the Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC), who will make her own decision, taking into account other advice she receives. Our understanding is that the RSC's decision will then be reviewed by the Minister, Baroness Barran, who will make the final decision on the school's future.

Reasons for the Recommendation

Each Governor made his or her decision after considering their own judgements and the different opinions expressed in the Stakeholder Engagement Process.

The overwhelming majority of Governors who preferred the United Learning option did so for the following main reasons:

1. Holland Park School has had many fine features and continues to have many excellent teachers and wider staff. However, it has also had serious problems which were identified by the Department for Education in its Notice to Improve; by the Local Authority; and in the report of the independent investigation into a large number of complaints about the school from past and present staff, pupils and parents. These Governors judge that the school is in a fragile state, not least because of the past over-reliance on a large and expensive senior leadership group, many of whom have left or are not currently in the school, with little or no middle leadership team, and a model of leadership that is not judged inclusive. These Governors recognise that while some members of the school community benefited from the previous regime, others definitely did not.
These Governors believe the significant challenges that were highlighted can only be safely addressed by the school joining an experienced and significantly sized schools group (a MAT) with a strong reputation and with the capacity to give Holland Park School the additional support and assistance it needs.
2. These Governors believe Holland Park School should retain its distinctive identity and be able to build upon its strengths. United Learning consists of a mixture of state-funded and independent schools, and has a tradition of allowing schools within its group to retain their independence and identity. This will include keeping the separate Holland Park School uniform, retaining two elected parent governors, and using Holland Park School's financial reserves for the school.
3. These Governors believe the United Learning approach to issues such as staff training and career opportunities will make Holland Park School a much more attractive school to teach in, and will help recruit and retain great teachers, as well as great support staff; and that it will help prevent the excessively high staff turnover of the past. The turnover of staff has already reduced considerably this academic year, despite the challenges the school has faced.

KAA and the Stakeholder Engagement Process

The Stakeholder Engagement Process showed there was significant support for the Governors to consider that Holland Park School should join a MAT with Kensington Aldridge Academy. Governors had considered this option earlier this year but had turned it down. However, during the Stakeholder Engagement Process, Governors met with the Chief Executive and Chair of KAA, and their views and submissions were considered at the Governing Body meeting, as was all feedback received as part of the process.

Governors consider KAA to be a very good school with good leadership and governance, and believe there can and should be great co-operation and collaboration between Holland Park School and KAA, as well as other local schools and other stakeholders. Until recently Holland Park School has not been open to this kind of collaboration, and we were grateful to KAA for being among the education organisations which came forward to provide senior staff when Holland Park School was short of senior capacity last month.

A majority of those who responded to the Stakeholder Engagement Process, whether by email, via the online questionnaire or commented at one of the meetings that were arranged, expressed support for an option that was not United Learning. Many wanted the KAA option. There was also a sizeable number who supported the United Learning option proposed by Governors.

Governors have a responsibility both to listen to stakeholder views and to make a decision, based on what they consider to be their own best judgement, in the interests of students, parents, staff and diverse communities, as well as the school itself. In the end the responsibility lies with the Governors, who are legally accountable for their decisions, to vote having reflected and considered using all their experience, as well as the different views from different stakeholders.

The clear majority of Governors decided that the KAA option would not be better than United Learning option for two main reasons:

1. KAA is not currently a MAT and it could take six months for it to form one. It was also considered that it is often some years before a strong MAT is established. It was considered that this would especially be the case given the challenges presented by Holland Park School. Additionally, KAA parents would need to be consulted, and it could not be considered certain that they would support this option, not least as their school would need to divert resource and time into "turning around" Holland Park School. Even if KAA became a MAT, and even if KAA parents supported it taking on Holland Park School, it is possible that KAA would not be allowed by the Department of Education to take on a school with Holland Park School's current weaknesses. All of these risks raised concerns as to the speed at which Holland Park School could receive the support it requires, in spite of the very best intentions and high quality of KAA.
2. While KAA is a high-quality school and maintains that it has the capacity to support Holland Park School, the majority of Governors considered that the school, or any other single partner school, would not provide the capacity and other support needed. KAA asserts it has the capacity but could not provide evidence of this because it is a Single Academy Trust (SAT), not a MAT. Over recent weeks, multiple schools and school groups have supported Holland Park School by lending staffing resource. Governors judge that United Learning has the required capacity to support Holland Park School, and quickly, while KAA does not.

Co-operation and Collaboration with Local Schools

Governors decided that in the future they want Holland Park School to play a more active role than in the past, and that it should engage positively with other local schools and with the local community more widely. During the Stakeholder Engagement Process, we heard many criticisms of Holland Park School for acting as something of an educational "island" in the past.

The Governors plan to consider what more can be done to open up Holland Park School to the local community, and we will be writing to Chairs of Governors of local schools to suggest meeting soon so that the scope for more local collaboration and co-operation can be fully considered. This will include Kensington Aldridge Academy. There is no reason why Holland Park School cannot work constructively with KAA and other local schools, whilst being part of United Learning, and we sincerely hope that this will be the case.

A Final Word

As you may know, I have decided to resign as Chair of Governors, with Vic Daniels voted in as the new Chair. He starts in the role today while I will remain a Member. As Governors, all of us carry out our roles on a voluntary basis and this has been challenging over the past nine months because of the range of challenges at the school. During my time as Chair, I have had to take many tough and sometimes controversial decisions. These have been difficult but, I believe, necessary for the good of the school.

I also believe that the school's foremost interests are now best served by having a new Chair of Governors who can move the school forward, from tackling the problems of the past, to instead focusing on planning and building for the future. I have no doubt that Vic will be able to lead a new chapter in Holland Park School's history, one founded on strong but inclusive leadership, robust safeguarding and an organisational culture that provides an outstanding education for all students, not just some, and that provides a much better working environment for all staff, as well as offering greater access to all parts of the community the school serves.

I understand why for many of you the last year has been difficult, and why the previous years have been even more difficult.

I fully recognise Holland Park School's strengths but I also feel strongly that we need to acknowledge the many serious flaws of the past, going back many years, which must be and which are being addressed. Dealing with these issues as volunteers, while also respecting the privacy of the independent investigation process, has been one of the most difficult things many of us have ever had to do.

This new chapter will provide real opportunities for Holland Park School to create a different dialogue, a better and more positive dialogue, and most importantly one that is focused on the students' experience of Holland Park School.

The school continues to be in a fragile state, but I believe we are now very close to resolving the problems of the past, and moving on to a tremendously positive phase in Holland Park School's history. I am strongly of the opinion that, working together, a school can be built of which everyone can be proud and which will serve all equally and fairly. Holland Park School has a great future for pupils, for staff and for parents.

I would like to finish on a very positive note, with a comment from the new Chair, Vic Daniels, who says: "Now is the time to come together and accept that a collaborative approach is required to ensure that United Learning Trust is quickly able to make a positive impact and achieve success for all Holland Park School stakeholders, especially students, parents, staff and members of the local community. The next stage in the school journey needs to be made to work for everyone, and that will require everyone to work together to make sure that it does."

This is a statement that I hope we can all get behind.

With all best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Jane Farrell', written in a cursive style.

Jane Farrell
Chair of Governors